

- o Kristie M. Betts
- o Liz Brent
- o Bradley Allen Capps
- o R. T. Castleberry
- o George L. Chieffet
- o Andrea Defoe
- o Larry Desautels
- o Peter Dichsen
- o Margarita Engle
- o Carol Frith
- o Dennis Fulgoni
- o Carol Hamilton
- o Peter Layton
- o Julie Lechevsky
- o Lyn Lifshin
- o Irene Eberling Marsh
- o Sid Miller
- o B. Z. Niditch
- o Joyce Odam
- o Patrick O'Neill
- o C. D. Panell
- o Simon Perchik
- o Shelly Reed
- o Michael D. Riley
- o Geri Rosenzweig
- o Cher Smith
- o Spiel
- o Mark Taksa
- o Keith Taylor
- o Susan Wilde
- o Saint James Wood

ISSN 1043-3325  
\$9.00



parting  
gifts  
winter 2004 volume 17 number 2

blank page



parting  
gifts

winter 2004 volume 17 number 2

# Index by Author

Copyright © 2004 March Street Press  
3413 Wilshire Dr.  
Greensboro NC 27408  
All rights revert to the authors upon publication.  
ISSN 1043-3325  
url: <http://www.marchstreetpress.com>  
To get on our email list or subscribe or order books  
email: [rbixby@aol.com](mailto:rbixby@aol.com)  
Indexed by  
• The Index of American Periodical Verse  
(Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press)  
• American Humanities Index  
(Albany, NY: Whitston Publishing)  
Edited and published by Robert Bixby

Ropes/Kristie M. Betts/9  
The Gravestone/Liz Brent/65  
Living Together/Liz Brent/8  
The Magic Spell/Liz Brent/6  
The Station Wagon/Liz Brent/7  
Today/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
Truce/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
Unity/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
The Angel of Listlessness/R. T. Castleberry/54  
Not Mine to Remember/R. T. Castleberry/54  
Now, in Silence/R. T. Castleberry/73  
A Season of Calculations/R. T. Castleberry/72  
Defending The Home Island/George L. Chieffet/62  
Dream at the Natural History Museum/George L. Chieffet/64  
Lost in a Painting/George L. Chieffet/11  
A Season for Mordecai Book (19231943)/George Chieffet/12  
the day I almost drowned/Andrea Defoe/19  
Let these things swim away/Andrea Defoe/19  
Ode to an Earthworm/Andrea Defoe/20  
A Photo of Chicago/Andrea Defoe/19  
A Poem for My Daughter/Andrea Defoe/20  
Stutter/Andrea Defoe/19  
At the Poussin Exhibit/Larry Desautels/53  
A Conscious Fancy/Larry Desautels/21  
Aubade/Peter Dichsen/49  
ByeBye, Baby, GoodBye/Peter Dichsen/22  
Country Western Riff/Peter Dichsen/23  
Gridlock/Peter Dichsen/48  
Abundance/Margarita Engle/68  
Expatriates/Margarita Engle/66  
Moonblink/Margarita Engle/5  
Pair of Nudes/Carol Frith/47  
Four Horizons/Carol Frith/46  
The Singing Bride/Carol Frith/28  
Straw bed./Carol Frith/45  
Yellow/Carol Frith/46  
Heavyweight/Dennis Fulgoni/52  
February Daffodils/Carol Hamilton/50  
Listing of the Latest Names/Carol Hamilton/24  
Pikes Peak/Carol Hamilton/50  
Snow Cat/Carol Hamilton/23  
dwell/Peter Layton/69  
pit wells/Peter Layton/55  
sand, dry sage./Peter Layton/69  
Untitled/Peter Layton/69  
Bronzed/Julie Lechevsky/16  
Lunch/Julie Lechevsky/16  
November/Julie Lechevsky/57  
Wish/Julie Lechevsky/57  
Cold Men, Snow Men/Lyn Lifshin/10  
Getting the Email/Lyn Lifshin/61  
Icy/Lyn Lifshin/13  
Not Seeing Your Screen Name Tho/Lyn Lifshin/13  
Stray/Lyn Lifshin/60  
Alexis/Irene Eberling Marsh/36  
Althea/Irene Eberling Marsh/34  
Second Husband/Irene Eberling Marsh/53  
Tootsie/Irene Eberling Marsh/20  
Elements of Night/Sid Miller/26  
Human Salamander/Sid Miller/47  
Meaning to Tangle/Sid Miller/47  
Boston Common/B. Z. Niditch/16  
The Day River Phoenix Died/B. Z. Niditch/17  
Esplanade/B. Z. Niditch/16  
Frog Pond/B. Z. Niditch/64  
Insomniac Poet/B. Z. Niditch/15  
July/B. Z. Niditch/57  
Louisiana/B. Z. Niditch/57  
Point Judith/B. Z. Niditch/56  
The Restless One/B. Z. Niditch/56  
Sanctuary/B. Z. Niditch/15  
Book/Joyce Odam/34  
Dream: The Pitcher/Joyce Odam/35  
The Dream of Being Elsewhere/Joyce Odam/38  
The Haunted Meadow/Joyce Odam/33  
Mother in Figment of Time and Self/Joyce Odam/39  
My Old House/Joyce Odam/39  
Nursery Poem/Joyce Odam/37  
The Path/Joyce Odam/35  
Persuasion/Joyce Odam/35  
Saturation/Joyce Odam/40  
Cuttlebone/Patrick O'Neill/59  
Guests/Patrick O'Neill/58  
An Old Logger's Retreat/Patrick O'Neill/14  
Cling to Being/C. D. Panell/4  
Leaving/C. D. Panell/4  
D46/Simon Perchik/17  
D114/Simon Perchik/18  
D183/Simon Perchik/18  
Barcelona/Shelly Reed/45  
Napping in Madrid/Shelly Reed/50  
San Sebastian/Shelly Reed/25  
Chinese Lanterns/Michael D. Riley/31  
Melanoma/Michael D. Riley/32  
Nostalgia/Michael D. Riley/42  
Sycamore/Michael D. Riley/32  
The Empty Shore/Geri Rosenzweig/38  
Give Me Back My Distance/Geri Rosenzweig/38  
In the Dark, Unafraid/Geri Rosenzweig/36  
The Pale Grasses of the Field/Geri Rosenzweig/37  
The Sheets I Slept on Over There/Geri Rosenzweig/36  
Untitled/Cher Smith/69  
delayed cease/Spiel/4  
Radio/Spiel/3  
Into the Hushed Kingdom/Mark Taksa/71  
Portable Sanctuary/Mark Taksa/2  
Rusty Constitution/Mark Taksa/70  
Spaceship in the Driveway/Mark Taksa/1  
Stone Light/Mark Taksa/71  
What Lasts After the Junk Bonds/Mark Taksa/70  
The Cost of a Thing/Keith Taylor/51  
Poppawood/Keith Taylor/22  
This Fall's Murder/Keith Taylor/51  
Downgrade/Susan Wilde/41  
on the way to F&H/Susan Wilde/41  
stunned by the fast slice of sorrow's fall/Susan Wilde/40  
I Got a Guitar/Saint James Wood/43  
It was midnight/Saint James Wood/30  
Santa Antarctica/Saint James Wood/44  
Savage Dog Storm Ballet/Saint James Wood/29  
When It Crashes/Saint James Wood/44

# Index by Title

Abundance/Margarita Engle/68  
Alexis/Irene Eberling Marsh/36  
Althea/Irene Eberling Marsh/34  
The Angel of Listlessness/R.T. Castleberry/54  
At the Poussin Exhibit/Larry Desautels/53  
Aubade/Peter Dichsen/49  
Barcelona/Shelly Reed/45  
Book/Joyce Odam/34  
Boston Common/B. Z. Niditch/16  
Bronzed/Julie Lechevsky/16  
ByeBye, Baby, GoodBye/Peter Dichsen/22  
Chinese Lanterns/Michael D. Riley/31  
Cling to Being/C. D. Panell/4  
Cold Men, Snow Men/Lyn Lifshin/10  
A Conscious Fancy/Larry Desautels/21  
The Cost of a Thing/Keith Taylor/51  
Country Western Riff/Peter Dichsen/23  
Cuttlebone/Patrick O'Neill/59  
D46/Simon Perchik/17  
D114/Simon Perchik/18  
D183/Simon Perchik/18  
the day I almost drowned/Andrea Defoe/19  
The Day River Phoenix Died/B. Z. Niditch/17  
Defending The Home Island/George L. Chieffet/62  
delayed cease/Spiel/4  
Downgrade/Susan Wilde/41  
Dream: The Pitcher/Joyce Odam/35  
Dream at the Natural History Museum/George L. Chieffet/64  
The Dream of Being Elsewhere/Joyce Odam/38  
dwell/Peter Layton/69  
Elements of Night/Sid Miller/26  
The Empty Shore/Geri Rosenzweig/38  
Esplanade/B. Z. Niditch/16  
Expatriates/Margarita Engle/66  
February Daffodils/Carol Hamilton/50  
Four Horizons/Carol Frith/46  
Frog Pond/B. Z. Niditch/64  
Getting the Email/Lyn Lifshin/61  
Give Me Back My Distance/Geri Rosenzweig/38  
The Gravestone/Liz Brent/65  
Gridlock/Peter Dichsen/48  
Guests/Patrick O'Neill/58  
The Haunted Meadow/Joyce Odam/33  
Heavyweight/Dennis Fulgoni/52  
Human Salamander/Sid Miller/47  
I Got a Guitar/Saint James Wood/43  
Icy/Lyn Lifshin/13  
In the Dark, Unafraid/Geri Rosenzweig/36  
Insomniac Poet/B. Z. Niditch/15  
Into the Hushed Kingdom/Mark Taksa/71  
It was midnight/Saint James Wood/30  
July/B. Z. Niditch/57  
Leaving/C. D. Panell/4  
Let these things swim away/Andrea Defoe/19  
Listing of the Latest Names/Carol Hamilton/24  
Living Together/Liz Brent/8  
Lost in a Painting/George L. Chieffet/11  
Louisiana/B. Z. Niditch/57  
Lunch/Julie Lechevsky/16  
The Magic Spell/Liz Brent/6  
Meaning to Tangle/Sid Miller/47

Melanoma/Michael D. Riley/32  
Moonblink/Margarita Engle/5  
Mother in Figment of Time and Self/Joyce Odam/39  
My Old House/Joyce Odam/39  
Napping in Madrid/Shelly Reed/50  
Nostalgia/Michael D. Riley/42  
Not Mine to Remember/R.T. Castleberry/54  
Not Seeing Your Screen Name Tho/Lyn Lifshin/13  
November/Julie Lechevsky/57  
Now, in Silence/R.T. Castleberry/73  
Nursery Poem/Joyce Odam/37  
Ode to an Earthworm/Andrea Defoe/20  
An Old Logger's Retreat/Patrick O'Neill/14  
on the way to F&H/Susan Wilde/41  
Pair of Nudes/Carol Frith/47  
The Pale Grasses of the Field/Geri Rosenzweig/37  
The Path/Joyce Odam/35  
Persuasion/Joyce Odam/35  
A Photo of Chicago/Andrea Defoe/19  
Pikes Peak/Carol Hamilton/50  
pit wells/Peter Layton/55  
A Poem for My Daughter/Andrea Defoe/20  
Point Judith/B. Z. Niditch/56  
Poppawood/Keith Taylor/22  
Portable Sanctuary/Mark Taksa/2  
Radio/Spiel/3  
The Restless One/B. Z. Niditch/56  
Ropes/Kristie M. Betts/9  
Rusty Constitution/Mark Taksa/70  
Sanctuary/B. Z. Niditch/15  
San Sebastian/Shelly Reed/25  
sand, dry sage,/Peter Layton/69  
Santa Antarctica/Saint James Wood/44  
Saturation/Joyce Odam/40  
Savage Dog Storm Ballet/Saint James Wood/29  
A Season for Mordecai Book (19231943)/George Chieffet/12  
A Season of Calculations/R.T. Castleberry/72  
Second Husband/Irene Eberling Marsh/53  
The Sheets I Slept on Over There/Geri Rosenzweig/36  
The Singing Bride/Carol Frith/28  
Snow Cat/Carol Hamilton/23  
Spaceship in the Driveway/Mark Taksa/1  
The Station Wagon/Liz Brent/7  
Stone Light/Mark Taksa/71  
Straw bed,/Carol Frith/45  
Stray/Lyn Lifshin/60  
stunned by the fast slice of sorrow's fall/Susan Wilde/40  
Stutter/Andrea Defoe/19  
Sycamore/Michael D. Riley/32  
This Fall's Murder/Keith Taylor/51  
Today/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
Tootsie/Irene Eberling Marsh/20  
Truce/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
Unity/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
Untitled/Peter Layton/69  
Untitled/Cher Smith/69  
What Lasts After the Junk Bonds/Mark Taksa/70  
When It Crashes/Saint James Wood/44  
Wish/Julie Lechevsky/57  
Yellow/Carol Frith/46

# Contents

Spaceship in the Driveway/Mark Taksa/1  
Portable Sanctuary/Mark Taksa/2  
Radio/Spiel/3  
Cling to Being/C. D. Panell/4  
delayed cease/Spiel/4  
Leaving/C. D. Panell/4  
Moon-blink/Margarita Engle/5  
The Magic Spell/Liz Brent/6  
The Station Wagon/Liz Brent/7  
Living Together/Liz Brent/8  
Ropes/Kristie M. Betts/9  
Cold Men, Snow Men/Lyn Lifshin/10  
Lost in a Painting/George L. Chieffet/11  
A Season for Mordecai Book (1923-1943)/George Chieffet/12  
Icy/Lyn Lifshin/13  
Not Seeing Your Screen Name Tho/Lyn Lifshin/13  
An Old Logger's Retreat/Patrick O'Neill/14  
Sanctuary/B. Z. Niditch/15  
Insomniac Poet/B. Z. Niditch/15  
Boston Common/B. Z. Niditch/16  
Esplanade/B. Z. Niditch/16  
Lunch/Julie Lechevsky/16  
Bronzed/Julie Lechevsky/16  
The Day River Phoenix Died/B. Z. Niditch/17  
D46/Simon Perchik/17  
D114/Simon Perchik/18  
D183/Simon Perchik/18  
the day I almost drowned/Andrea Defoe/19  
Stutter/Andrea Defoe/19  
A Photo of Chicago/Andrea Defoe/19  
Let these things swim away/Andrea Defoe/19  
Ode to an Earthworm/Andrea Defoe/20

A Poem for My Daughter/Andrea Defoe/20  
Tootsie/Irene Eberling Marsh/20  
A Conscious Fancy/Larry Desautels/21  
Poppawood/Keith Taylor/22  
Bye-Bye, Baby, Good-Bye/Peter Dichsen/22  
Snow Cat/Carol Hamilton/23  
Country Western Riff/Peter Dichsen/23  
Listing of the Latest Names/Carol Hamilton/24  
San Sebastian/Shelly Reed/25  
Elements of Night/Sid Miller/26  
Meaning to Tangle/Sid Miller/27  
The Singing Bride/Carol Frith/28  
Savage Dog Storm Ballet/Saint James Wood/29  
It was midnight/Saint James Wood/30  
Chinese Lanterns/Michael D. Riley/31  
Melanoma/Michael D. Riley/32  
Sycamore/Michael D. Riley/32  
The Haunted Meadow/Joyce Odam/33  
Book/Joyce Odam/34  
Althea/Irene Eberling Marsh/34  
The Path/Joyce Odam/35  
Dream: The Pitcher/Joyce Odam/35  
Persuasion/Joyce Odam/35  
The Sheets I Slept on Over There/Geri Rosenzweig/36  
In the Dark, Unafraid/Geri Rosenzweig/36  
Alexis/Irene Eberling Marsh/36  
The Pale Grasses of the Field/Geri Rosenzweig/37  
Nursery Poem/Joyce Odam/37

The Empty Shore/Geri Rosenzweig/38  
 Give Me Back My Distance/Geri  
 Rosenzweig/38  
 The Dream of Being Elsewhere/Joyce  
 Odam/38  
 Mother in Figment of Time and  
 Self/Joyce Odam/39  
 My Old House/Joyce Odam/39  
 stunned by the fast slice of sorrow's  
 fall/Susan Wilde/40  
 Saturation/Joyce Odam/40  
 Downgrade/Susan Wilde/41  
 on the way to F&H/Susan Wilde/41  
 Nostalgia/Michael D. Riley/42  
 I Got a Guitar/Saint James Wood/43  
 When It Crashes/Saint James Wood/44  
 Santa Antarctica/Saint James Wood/44  
*Straw bed*,/Carol Frith/45  
 Barcelona/Shelly Reed/45  
 Yellow/Carol Frith/46  
 Four Horizons/Carol Frith/46  
 Human Salamander/Sid Miller/47  
 Pair of Nudes/Carol Frith/47  
 Gridlock/Peter Dichsen/48  
 Aubade/Peter Dichsen/49  
 February Daffodils/Carol Hamilton/50  
 Pikes Peak/Carol Hamilton/50  
 Napping in Madrid/Shelly Reed/50  
 The Cost of a Thing/Keith Taylor/51  
 This Fall's Murder/Keith Taylor/51  
 Heavyweight/Dennis Fulgoni/52  
 Second Husband/Irene Eberling  
 Marsh/53  
 At the Poussin Exhibit/Larry  
 Desautels/53  
 Not Mine to Remember/R.T.  
 Castleberry/54  
 The Angel of Listlessness/R.T.  
 Castleberry/54  
 pit wells/Peter Layton/55  
 Point Judith/B. Z. Niditch/56  
 The Restless One/B. Z. Niditch/56  
 Louisiana/B. Z. Niditch/57  
 July/B. Z. Niditch/57  
 Wish/Julie Lechevsky/57  
 November/Julie Lechevsky/57  
 Guests/Patrick O'Neill/58  
 Cuttlebone/Patrick O'Neill/59  
 Stray/Lyn Lifshin/60  
 Truce/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
 Unity/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
 Today/Bradley Allen Capps/61  
 Getting the Email/Lyn Lifshin/61  
 Defending The Home  
 Island/George L. Chieffet/62  
 Dream at the Natural History  
 Museum/George L.  
 Chieffet/64  
 Frog Pond/B. Z. Niditch/64  
 The Gravestone/Liz Brent/65  
 Expatriates/Margarita Engle/66  
 Abundance/Margarita Engle/68  
 Untitled/Cher Smith/69  
 Untitled/Peter Layton/69  
 dwell/Peter Layton/69  
 sand, dry sage,/Peter Layton/69  
 Rusty Constitution/Mark Taksa/70  
 What Lasts After the Junk  
 Bonds/Mark Taksa/70  
 Into the Hushed Kingdom/Mark  
 Taksa/71  
 Stone Light/Mark Taksa/71  
 A Season of Calculations/R.T.  
 Castleberry/72  
 Now, in Silence/R.T. Castleberry/73

## Now, in Silence

### R.T. Castleberry

On the phone from Los Gatos  
 I hear the sigh in Judah's tender,  
 laughing voice.  
 I've offered myself as a messenger, I  
 tell him.  
 I'll leave when the sparrow's feather  
 falls.  
 "Faith is a shroud," he says. "It's white  
 horses and a hearse.  
 I don't mean to seem impatient.  
 I warn you, as a foreigner freed from  
 any duty:  
 The next war is sailing on the  
 weekend tide."

As wraiths, as guides to grieving  
 families  
 dead mothers climb the desert roads.  
 They are ghost stories to their  
 neighbors.  
 Their last blindness bears a fire,  
 a celebration of flame upon skin.  
 Their children lay stilled in dreams,  
 fingers curled to fists beneath their  
 heads.

Glinting white as shore and sky,  
 the frost of another day  
 marks the harbor trails to the Plaza  
 San Pietro.

Carillon bells clatter like stumbling  
 heels on stone.  
 Steam spirals in greasy tendrils of  
 grey and black.  
 Strikers burn in the square,  
 petitions for relief, peace,  
 compensation  
 heaped as tinder for the pyre.  
 Their flayed skin will make a frame,  
 their ashes mixed as paste  
 for photos of the amnesty arrests.

After the Sabbath contritions,  
 after we read from  
 a new edition of the Protocols  
 I walk to my room.  
 To the south  
 I can see the temple searchlights  
 scanning arroyos and the river.  
 I sit in the dark  
 with the telephone off  
 and the voice of Judah's  
 disappearance in my ear.  
 I'm drifting to death.  
 The frontier bridges and the road  
 east to Sebastian's Point are open.  
 Morocco calls. Korea calls.  
 Either journey clears me from this  
 country.

# A Season of Calculations

R.T. Castleberry

In the Western narrative that is shelter,  
space and silence  
we take freeways, elevators,  
hours in planning to see each other.  
We make what we can from  
the cleverness of nights stretched past  
dawn.

Before I leave my car  
I study a list of seven questions  
that can't be asked.  
I am allowed what I can gather from  
proximity,  
my cock, your climax.  
Rain glistens on the sidewalk.  
You stand in your doorway, backlit  
and lean.  
Sly, smiling, you extend an umbrella  
while your arm curls mine in lazy  
caress.  
I know these rooms, this greeting.

*No day uncorrupted, none without fear  
I have no childhood memories beyond  
these:  
drunks, dirty clothes,  
a sleepwalker hovering at the head of  
the stairs.  
The heaviness of hunger is a tactic, a*

*lesson learned.  
I remember dreams in three's:  
years abandoned, evictions, shots  
tired.*

In your keeping  
travel absence, pages in a book,  
the breath of a kiss  
signify what we share.  
As you rise, slipping from me,  
the inevitability of Tucson asserts  
itself.  
Flight is habit, like unhappiness and  
appetite.  
We have language for it:  
terse terms of email and instant  
message,  
pet phrases for our fucking.  
Like Bertolucci's lovers in a loft,  
we trade the task of naming  
ourselves  
for alarm and ambiguity,  
the luminous motion of bodies  
coiling, side by side.  
We are in sight of what we want  
and passive within its view.

# Spaceship in the Driveway

Mark Taksa

The cab of the lavender and white sport car  
is the cockpit of a spaceship. Metallic  
against rain dripping from leaves, the auto pauses  
between same houses that rot.

In the silence of the dreaming house, my friendships  
are with the woman who stops by my blanket  
and talks about the sun in our bones  
and neither of us competes to own the beach.

And to the man who makes wine among sunflowers  
and comes to my farmhouse where we talk  
about the ingredients, I mention the many  
pavements that led me to the hills.

Without luggage, I wait for the neighbors  
to rush to the steering wheel,  
escaping to eternal wood before the lavender stripe  
drops from the spaceship rusting to rise.

## Portable Sanctuary

Mark Taksa

The Torah rises over the singing  
and drowns out the screech of the train  
that rattled to Wall Street. I was squashed by snow  
soaking in coats carrying Christmas gifts and nooses.

If a terrorist knifed me over those clanging wheels,  
a commuter might reach through my wound and into my pocket;  
the use of the noose would be redundant.

Here someone would wrap a prayer shawl over my wound.  
Not among those coats, this woman  
who holds the Torah is riding that subway in my mind.

My breath gets wobbly as our crossed vision  
forms a path to a beach. From the ocean,  
I walk toward her with brave knees.

The Torah in her embrace is a glass of champagne.  
She salutes my muscling of the waves.  
We are swaying on the waves of the train.  
and I am swimming in her mood.



## Into the Hushed Kingdom

Mark Taksa

The curb awaits the smack  
of the newsboy's news. Branches are eyebrows  
over the window above my neighbor's grass.  
The light is a beast's eye winking.

Before her dog sprints beyond its paws,  
and her son cooks curry and dreams of a soft floor,  
the neighbor joins suits in the shadows by the bus sign.

She witnesses a tire roll up the street and fall.  
No flag proclaims her private rebellion  
when she tells her boss she refuses to be that tire.  
Through the smoke of her tea, she watches

the lawn and rejoices that she can never  
cut it low. Over paw prints in grass  
rising to hide the fence, our eyes meet  
and she, too, is a child riding a lion.

## Stone Light

Mark Taksa

A tourist eats the narrative  
about a queen who begs a knight  
to stab her husband and his lover.  
Her brother hires the knight, who is familiar  
with the queen's sheets, to stab this sister.

The lecturer is as close to history  
as the tramp chewing a crust  
while looking through a window at a family  
in the candle light of a festival table.

He knows the story of every cathedral crack  
and has waited for a tourist who carries light  
he has seen from every angle of the sun.  
The history talker shines a flashlight  
at a mosaic. Celebrity is light.

# Rusty Constitution

Mark Taksa

Waves shout. Blue as uniforms carrying rifles  
on the beach, a helicopter cuts the sun.

Newspapers promise. Under the headline,  
the governor leaves his limousine  
to feed the weak with the deceit of cake.

Under the grind of the helicopter,  
the blanket vender sings about the baker  
who promises he votes for the party while he sneaks  
poison and chocolate on to its leader's plate.

The singer wishes for waves to eat the helicopter.  
Helicopters are a rusty constitution.

# What Lasts After the Junk Bonds

Mark Taksa

The broker drapes her suit  
over a fountain sculpted to be the city  
where she brings the whims of the buyers  
close to the voices of the sellers.

If all those who danced around the money  
moved to a monastery where they sat silent  
and shared rice, she would not know  
the face of her best buyer.

She bends among orchids and bathes in sweat.  
Her complaint is an unwrinkled sheet.

She wants a lover in the opera.  
Into the garden, she thrusts voices  
bonded by junk's high yield.

# Radio

Spiel

*It's that magic moment on the radio when the tall skinny  
guy hits the perfect high note, the applause mounts, body  
heat rises, and the skinny guy wins.*

Phillip sees himself right there, in that place—& he's  
just about to cum

The damn phone rings. Doris shoves Phillip  
off her face. Edges out from under him.  
Groans: she thinks it's her mother.  
Phillip's penis droops. He spits on it—  
pictures Roth's hot nuts in his mouth.  
Wishes September would vanish so Roth  
would be home from his European sabbatical.  
Phillip overhears Doris' mother's voice. It  
sounds like a rusty wrench ratchet. The nag  
wants to know if he's gone back to work.  
Doris claims Phillip has a brand new pin-  
striped suit and he's out interviewing right  
now. Big Time Money. Doris pinches her  
nipples from pink to red. Phillip slaps his  
dick across her forehead. He turns up the  
radio—he's sure he hears that same tall  
skinny guy hitting another perfect high note.

Roth is a tall skinny guy.

Doris is a dumb lay.

There are twenty-one days left in September.

## Cling to Being

C. D. Panell

Each act of murder takes place twice  
Hurlled as we are,  
Fires kept alive by gulps of air.  
Drain-by-the-hour blue veins  
Weaving, one's senses worn

Being is a diet of design  
Racks of normalized auction tissue,  
Minds made upon this stage.  
Zion's beholden masters of mirth  
Eyes all shine with belief

Along the yellow river of Dnang  
The snake in the lawn showed me:  
Wafting streams of gauze ads,  
Hopes pinned high to radiators,  
Nothing sticks to people who cling

## Leaving

C. D. Panell

The pines are whispering as I  
pull past their frame of my driveway.  
I stop the car, step out, and listen  
in the moonlit dark beyond the porchlight.  
Just me and the trees beyond the porchlight—  
just whispers out here in the moonlight.  
The shoes on my feet sunk deep in the lawn,  
on this swath of land outside myself

## delayed

cease

Spiel

we crave red  
(like the red  
of our first-broke cherry)  
but revile our selves  
for loving it

we knit shoulders  
with strangers  
promise  
we'll change our ways  
as we press sweat

cum on bodies  
we'd never touch  
in times of peace  
pray the war will cease  
but not quite yet

not at this moment

as our pupils dilate  
our hearts pound  
the saliva flows  
the frenzied fucking  
carries on

this may be  
our last lay

## Cher Smith

He comes to me like the darkest lover, opening wide his arms and enfolding me in leathery bat wings. He speaks my name so sweetly. Lifting my trembling chin with his bony finger he stares into my watery eyes. I feel his stare squeezing his intentions through the pupils of my eyes and into the soft gray matter of my weary mind. He leans in to kiss me. His breath is cold and rancid like an open tomb yet I open my mouth wide. He sucks the air greedily from me before clamping his cracked lips firmly over my mouth. No matter how wide I open my mouth, his is bigger, stronger... My heart races and bangs against the cage of my ribs. I feel him sucking. Sucking harder, pulling the air from my lungs. The pain is precious as my lungs collapse and are pulled up through my throat. Death swallow me. Make me not exist. Leave no trace of this mess I am.

## Peter Layton

in the emptying-to-ocean cave  
where one sits breathless  
after devouring all the stars

## sand, dry sage,

Peter Layton

the charred wood starts out purple  
white worms of smoke give off  
we can cook our meal, pieces of meat here  
the sky reaches down into the pit  
fire turning our faces into half iron  
the other half is a mystery as we leave our faces  
stars are discernible beyond the bright orange  
the heat sears the portions of meat  
we eat and spend other parts of the night on wonders of each other  
we are young  
some day we won't know how we reached for what we did  
in the fire

## dwell

Peter Layton

smoke and mirrors  
art deco rooms  
there's a bronze chieftain  
and aero-train furniture  
I sit at the window glass the shadows  
from outside adding to the stark decor  
a woman nude in an acrobatic pose  
holds a smoking light  
everything's a dim blue  
or a rocket-ish gray silver

Time, perhaps, the wife thought, but what about courage? Were their bold youthful selves still hidden somewhere inside them, like bright, shiny Christmas ornaments in a hall closet?

"We could run away from home," she said, not quite sure whether she was jesting.

"That's how it's done," her husband answered, looking at her thoughtfully. Together, they walked out the front door and sat under the stars, waiting to see how the next stage in their lives would turn out.

## Abundance

### Margarita Engle

Your nearly grown son comes home one night and tells you that someone pointed a machine gun at his head. No, don't ask me to tell this particular tale in first person, that would be too much, ay, it would be too much like reality unforgiven.

So anyway, let's say you quite naturally assume he's joined the army and gone off to war.. .or brought it home.

Later, learning the details, you find it inconceivable that he didn't really face a machine gun, but as his little brother says, "just" an assault rifle at a party in a neighborhood decorated with fluttering streamers of drunkenness and the bright confetti of ammunition's gleam.

This, you think, once you are alone and have a chance to wonder, this must be the promised abundance of life in all wealthy countries. Back on the small, impoverished island, everyone always imagined there would be enough of everything for everyone on any big continent. No one said that the promised abundance would include non-life. No one imagined such an abundance of bullets that young men would collect and display them in the same way that exotic male birds gather small, shiny metal objects, thinking of them as purely ornamental. Something extra, a glittering treasure to make the tedium of life in a land of abundance more exciting.

## Moon-blink

### Margarita Engle

*No es pedir la luna*, your note declares: It's not asking for the moon. Although of course we both know it is asking for more than the moon, an entire galaxy perhaps, or a new, unnamed universe, something unheard of and distant.

The message has appeared on my computer screen as if by magic. How did you manage to gain access to e-mail on the island, I wonder, and don't you understand anything at all about the outside world?

The only difference between us is an accident of birth. You are the Cuban cousin. I'm a little younger, and therefore North American, the child of exiles.

Now you want an exit visa. *No es pedir la luna*, but exit visas are just as rare as moon rocks. You are asking me to deliver a museum piece. Exit visas no longer exist. Yesterday a ferry was hijacked in Havana Harbor, a doomed escape attempt. The day before that it was an airplane. Today, who knows? Maybe a spaceship.

I stare at my computer screen, wondering how to answer. Your words haven't changed. There they are, still breaking my heart: *No es pedir la luna*. Desperate words that seem to be trying to convince me it will all be so easy, the sort of thing ordinary cousins accomplish for each other every day, a simple gift, just one little slip of paper.

My fingers touch the keyboard, sending my answer. I imagine you sitting in some secret place across the sea, reading my response, horrified.

The screen blinks. Strange blue waves of light pass across it, as if solar flares are interfering with our communication. Must be my screen, about to self-destruct, the way all computers do eventually.

The waves of blue continue, making me think of tidal waves, hurricanes, moon-blinks, and other tropical dangers. Even on this side of the sea, older Cubans still warn the young never to sleep where the eye of the moon can see them. Blindness can result from a moon-blink, one of those medieval legends associated with frightened explorers. Nyctalopia. Temporary, at best. Permanent and incomprehensible, at worst. Night blindness. The sort of thing that only happens in certain legendary places. Tropical islands especially, the same islands that seem like paradise by day.

The flickering screen finally gives way to blankness. Nothing. One last blink, and the monitor is dead. I know how much I've disappointed you. And now, well, now, I won't even be able to read your answer, the polite

reassurance, *No te preocupes*, don't worry, I'll find some other way...

My blinking screen is promptly replaced with a newer model, one of the flat ones, bigger, with greatly enhanced clarity, easier on the eyes. I sit and stare at it, waiting, but there are no more messages. You've vanished. I picture you somewhere in the sea, on a raft, folding slips of paper into the narrow necks of wayward bottles.

I open my curtains, and sleep bathed in moonlight. A little night blindness almost sounds merciful. There are so many things I don't know how to see.

If the legend is true, we'll both be subject to the same moon-blinks, you afloat on your raft, me trapped on solid land, hemmed in between rigid walls.

## The Magic Spell

Liz Brent

When he was seven years old my brother was a witch. He became a witch after we visited the Bums's in Buffalo whose daughter Kristine who was sixteen was a witch. Kristine had a black skull candle and if she lit it and whispered someone's name over the flame that person would die.

My brother's powers included communicating with stuffed animals—but only if no one else was around—and flying—but only after my bedtime—and he could kill people at will just by thinking it but chose not to because that would be an evil thing to do.

I knew it was all subterfuge—I knew diving head first off the garage roof would not make it possible for me to fly and eating two cups of salt would not cause me to grow big boobs and poking my finger with a needle to collect and drink a teaspoon of my own blood would not make me smarter or stronger—except after the time we were awoken at midnight and cowered at the top of the stairs holding hands just as Dad was storming out the front door and slamming it behind him with his coat half zipped and traveling out West calling to say he'd taken peyote with the Sioux and spent two weeks in a Zen monastery without uttering a single word and promising to bring me a souvenir from Mount Rushmore—my brother and I cast a magic spell that required stealing one hair from Mom's brush and one from Dad's tied in a knot which we fused with fire in an ashtray to make them get back together again.

"She traveled alone," her husband revealed, "buses, third class trains, even hitchhiked a bit, taking rides on those colorfully decorated old rattling flatbed trucks they use in mountainous areas where the roads are too rough for buses. Once she borrowed a donkey to get from one valley to another."

The wife wondered if anyone believed him. She knew no one thought of her as brave. But at the time, none of those expeditions had seemed dangerous. Paying a dollar to string up a hammock in some peasant family's patio had felt perfectly normal, eating whatever they ate, drawing water from a well, stumbling in the dark, toward an outhouse that was really just a palm-thatched fence around an open pit where occasionally a turkey or pig fell in, squealing and thrashing. She'd come home with amoebic dysentery, but even that hadn't seemed unusual. It had all been just as casual as her husband's memories of having his wallet stolen during a barroom brawl in Turkey, or that time he took off his clothes to keep them dry while he waded across a river near Goa.

Of course, the wife's experiences during those months on the road hadn't all been pleasant ones. On crowded buses, there was always the stench of sweat and *aguardiente*, and there was that horrible time in a dusty village when a woman had taken her aside and begged for cans of infant formula. The woman couldn't have been more than thirty, but she had thirteen children, the last three a set of starving triplets. "Three babies," the woman had mourned, "and only two breasts." They'd gone into a concrete block shack and stood side by side, watching the triplets sleep. "If I don't get help," the woman said, "I'll have to choose which one to stop feeding. The smallest, this one, this is the one that will die."

As a foreigner, the wife hadn't understood the difficulty of finding prepared formula in such a remote place. She'd traveled to the nearest real town, asked lots of questions, visited government agencies, and returned with nothing but discouraging news. "Ay," said the mother of the triplets, "then what about birth control. Is it true that such a thing exists? So this won't happen to me again. I asked a traveling priest who passed through here last year, but he said it wasn't true. He said it was a myth, the existence of pills that can keep a woman from getting pregnant."

No, the memories weren't all good ones, but they were all vibrant and close, as if those strange events had occurred within the past few hours. There was something about leaving familiar surroundings that made the mind and heart more alert.

Later that evening, after the guests had gone home, the wife turned to her husband and suggested, "Remember how we used to talk about joining the Peace Corps?"

The husband nodded. "Soon we'll have time. When I retire."

## Expatriates

Margarita Engle

“So how’d you two meet?” asked one of the guests at the couple’s silver anniversary party.

“Travel stories,” the wife answered quickly, glancing fondly at her husband, who looked pleased although a little surprised. “We were attracted to each other’s travel stories,” she repeated. “We met in college, an entomology class. Bugs. Only every time we broke down into discussion groups to talk about exoskeletons and the structure of the thorax, we ended up telling travel stories instead. That’s how we got to know each other, and even now, I never get tired of hearing those same stories every once in awhile. Just to keep the dream alive.

“You thought we’d travel,” said the husband with an apologetic shrug. “So did I. But once the responsibilities set in.. .jobs, kids, a mortgage...”

The wife laughed. “These days, just getting out to a restaurant or a movie feels like a big adventure.” She wasn’t sure why. Force of habit, perhaps. The kids, after all, were grown and launching their own lives, the girl on her way to college, the boy still trying to view life as one endless party.

“When we met,” she said to the man who had asked that first question, triggering the troubling stream of speculations, “he’d just gotten back from a full year of traveling overland on a motorcycle all the way from Portugal to Malaysia. He told the most amazing travel stories as if they were everyday occurrences. He made the world seem so big and well, so possible. He crossed the border from Pakistan to India on the day the war broke out. There were riots, but he survived. Look, here’s his picture, the only photograph from that whole trip.”

The oak framed black-and-white photo showed her husband when he was young, sitting on a bench looking peaceful and tired, behind him the Taj Mahal looming like an enchanted palace in a fairy tale.

“He wasn’t always a workaholic, you know,” she said softly, while handing the photo around to be alternately chuckled at or admired, depending on how long the guests had known them. “And I wasn’t always such a homebody.”

“Ah,” said her husband. “She had travel stories too. She took off for Latin America halfway through college, and she was gone for months, taking only a couple of hundred dollars that she’d earned selling tacos at Disneyland.”

“Frontierland,” the wife interjected. “La Casa de Fritos. Terrible food, and those long lines of exhausted, irritable customers. It was one of the most stressful jobs I ever had.”

## The Station Wagon

Liz Brent

A year after the Divorce when I was nine Dad pulled up to the house in a brand new rented olive green Station Wagon with automatic windows and locks to take us to the movies. After his series of faded VW Bugs with bad heating and holes in the floor under the back seat so you could look down and see the highway pavement blurring to a solid gray beneath you the implications were unsettling.

We sat in the driveway—Mom Dad my brother and Me—and they explained that there was a house in the neighborhood they were thinking of buying so we could all four live together again as a family. They’d still be Divorced, but at least we’d be together. I tried to ask a clarifying question in order to determine whether or not they would have separate bedrooms in the new house. Dad replied with downcast eyes that it was still in the proposal stage they hadn’t worked out all the details.

The movie was about a single mom in Nova Scotia with a teenage son who belonged to a club of boys that did things like steal dirty magazines and sneak out at night to look at them in an abandoned shed. In a rowboat, they wrapped a firecracker in bread and tossed it to a seagull who caught the bread in its mouth so its head exploded and it fell out of the sky into the ocean. In a greenhouse they mixed anesthetic with milk in a canteen and forced a cat to drink it so they could dissect it while it was still alive.

The boy’s mother met a sailor who was Kris Kristofferson and the boy got caught watching them have sex through a peephole in his bedroom closet. Kris Kristofferson discovered him and beat him while his mother screamed. In the end the boy invited the sailor to a picnic with his friends. They served coffee from a canteen which put him to sleep and gathered round to dissect him on the grassy knoll.

# Living Together

Liz Brent

One Wednesday when I was fifteen I took the bus down Woodward Avenue after school as usual to Dad's apartment next to the Detroit Institute of Arts but when I walked in the door Dad wasn't there. Our old family friend Alberta whom I hadn't seen in years was standing at the kitchen sink eating cold pork-and-beans out of a can.

What are you doing here? I asked.

I live here.

Alberta's ex-husband was a friend of Dad's from graduate school but they got divorced then she married an old flame she ran into at a high-school reunion but they were divorced too. She had been hired for a temporary job teaching English as a second language in Detroit but the Big Quandary was if she and Dad were sleeping together.

It wasn't till the second Wednesday that I learned they had separate bedrooms—she was in the one Dad had been meaning to set up as an office for his psychotherapy patients. Dad said he enjoyed living with her except they had disagreements over dishes because she argued that a cockroach could live off the grease in the bottom of a clean frying pan for a year so it didn't make any difference.

I still didn't know if they were sleeping together:

- a) all of the time,
- b) some of the time, or
- c) not at all

—until the fall when Dad rented a house in Royal Oak because I hadn't lived with him since the divorce and this was our last chance before I went off to college.

Alberta was still in town so she took the smallest of the three rooms and put a bare mattress on the floor where she sat in bed at night smoking cigarettes and reading thick novels. Before she moved back to Oklahoma we took her to a restaurant and at home she made origami cranes out of the green foil wrappers from the after-dinner mints.

# The Gravestone

Liz Brent

In the last year of my grandfather's life I informed him that he could no longer kiss me—not even on the cheek—because his slobber left a smell that was impossible to rub off.

When he died of his fourth heart attack a month after moving to the nursing home in Manhattan this is what we remembered him for:

How, when he got a bad hand in Hearts or Bridge, he'd say *Oi! Sheesh! I've got a hand like a foot!*

How he loved to tell jokes in which the punchline was inevitably *Holy mackerel!* or *gefилte-fish* or *creamed herring*.

Or how he'd wander around the house dragging his ankle that was half-paralyzed from a stroke and trying to sing like Bing Crosby—it sounded like *Mmmm . . .buh-buh-buh-buh-buh!*—but with feeling.

Or how, the last time we saw him, we asked what kind of games he used to play as a kid in the old days when we were humble immigrants and life was simple and he said back then the streets of the Bronx were ankle deep in horseshit and when a new kid moved onto the block they'd yell, *Hey, you!* and when the kid turned around they'd throw shit at him.

Fifteen years later we drove to his site at a sprawling Jewish graveyard an hour from New York but there was no stone. We weren't exactly sure if we had correct directions to his plot. My cousin sat in lotus position on the sunken rectangle of crab grass under which we thought Grandpa might be buried and looked somberly at the empty space where his stone would have gone. There was a black monolith in the same row with my therapist's name on it. Dad and Uncle explained that they hadn't bought one for Grandpa because they didn't think we'd ever bother to visit him. They made a big show of looking into purchasing one now that they realized it meant so much to us kids but I knew they would drop the matter as soon as the day ended.

# Dream at the Natural History Museum

George L. Chieffet

I had a tooth pulled at the dentist:  
The shape of a headstone  
It looked dead, though it wasn't a brick  
Skyscraper or gray bone

Chipped from a corpse  
Buried in newspaper  
Beside the cat whose skin bore striped  
leaves  
Pine needles, black lint and thistle

That caught branches where robins  
Built nests with cinders  
Blown from an incinerator  
Across the river. About that corpse,

Hairless by then, stretched in  
A blanket, lumpy as a long potato,  
Yellow as the moon in October,  
The sharp roots of the toes

Pointing out of the hillside,  
Someone ran the trail  
To find those fossil footsteps  
Worn in a path of thorns

Wound into the scapula, and the skull  
That could have been muskmelon,  
Moss brushed along the crown,  
Forced out of the earth's cap

Where I was found on the grass  
Washed in rain and brought in a sack,  
Ferried across the river.

Oxygen sucked  
From an overhead pump  
Woke me.  
I sat on a bench:

The missing tooth throbbed.

## Frog Pond

(Boston, 2004)

B. Z. Niditch

Asking for daytime  
to discover simple light  
even on black ice pavements  
you like to run  
in hunger of a thaw  
by the frog pond  
wincing from the cold  
watching a dozen sparrows  
gnawing for bread  
in a frenzy of wings  
soaring on a kindred sky.



# Ropes

Kristie M. Betts

Mining towns swell and fade like extreme weather, working on the basic principle that nothing stays underground forever. Eventually weather destroyed Caribou, after the third lightning fire razed the wooden buildings, even tearing down the three-story glory of the Sherman House hotel. But long after the townsite stood blank, Colorado miners could picture Caribou.

"The snow must let up," the foreman said, evaluating the quality of light coming in through the leather drawn tight across the office's one window. Even he would have to shut down the mine if this weather didn't let up. "Pray for sun."

Perhaps because the miners didn't pray, the winds chimed in at midday. Whether or not fresh snow fell, no one in Caribou knew because the yowling, swiping snow could have been coming from either the drifts or the sky. Visibility was beyond the point, since the miners and workingmen couldn't open their eyes into the stabbing snow. The Caribou Mine had a protective walkway tunneled from the middle of Idaho Street down to the mine mouth. Although the left half caved in, the curved snow wall on the right provided some protection; more than its shelter, the crumbling log-lined tunnel connected the recesses of the mine to the buried town. Banging their ankles against the lines of frozen logs, the men had made their way to the mine's mouth that morning.

Returning was the problem. They dug a path only halfway down Idaho Street, barely to the center of town. Most of the Moyles, Tom Little and Caleb Dotterson could clamber across the snowcrust to their adjacent cabins. One young husband died 10 feet from his cabin door, insistent that he could not leave his pretty woman to feed the fire alone. Others bunked with neighbors, or in the places of business on Idaho Street.

These men left too soon, and later envisioned alternate choices. For the rest, there were ropes.

Everyone else kept stumbling to the end of the crumbling tunnel, the large white hotel. The drifts completely obscured the front doors by the time the blackened men reached the general area of the hitching posts. Instead of entering normally, they had to scabble up mountains shifting and collapsing piles of snow. When the ladies lowered the ropes, every snow-blinded man swore he saw the braided swirls descend. Sliding down the drifts that covered the first floor windows of the Sherman House, ropes led to the lights of the warm, perfumed second story. Seventeen faint ladies waited on the other end, leaning quickly out of window frames for a final hand up.

The miner's stark day of thick dark and stinging white made the colorful swirls of women at the windows hard to see at first. They all admitted that.

How many scaled the snow-walls, holding on to the ropes unfurled by princesses above? Whose husbands were they? How and when did the ladies know to leave their velvety warm parlor at the Shoo Fly and crawl over to this establishment? Wheu4heiwirling snow settled after thirteen days, pine-tree tops poked up like fresh shoots of spring grass in the drifts. Miners came out so broke that some of the men no longer had boots; the Sherman House had barren cabinets and brimming coffers. The sun broke through and the Caribou wives renewed their ties with still-warm husbands.

Weather comes before questions.

If anyone ever asked how his second floor filled with the Shoo Fly's faint ladies, William Sherman shrugged. "Nothing wrong with reading the weather," a whore was said to have responded.

## Cold Men, Snow Men

### Lyn Lifshin

none of the look like my father, but like him, have something missing, wrong: bad hearts are not uncommon and it's true, scars do make the body more intriguing. I licked the scars around one's heart before his second operation. Deaf cold men are a challenge. They can't talk, just watch the Giants while you suck them off. That I hated foot football didn't seem to matter. I've never been with a blind man, one literally blind I mean. May be if he moves by touch it

doesn't matter if you're not 20. The man with one leg was the hardest to get over. "You can be closer with only one leg," he said but he was always distant. I never knew if he'd show up or call. Only now that he's dead will I always know where to find him. Men with no father or a father who left for some war, men whose mother's plunged into Niagara Falls, men who want you just to touch their penis as if that was all of them, was the one way to get to know them and you do and you don't

*They showed small Samurai flags  
On toothpick swords.  
Standing in a mint garden they sang of heaven*

Reminding Dad, who craved sugar  
Through the entire campaign,  
Of a ripe coconut  
On an island without trees  
Shredded almond candy bars  
Milk chocolate in foil,  
Tall women undressed in the shade  
The heaven of soap,  
Blossoms of cedar in the wood cities  
Of Tokyo or Osaka before I was born,  
Where a rubbish fire  
That warmed eight million homeless island souls,  
Killed their gardens.

We grew chrysanthemums and roses  
For the unnamed.

Under my shoes they groaned,  
I cried as a nameless son  
For the lost in the common grave  
Prying at my shoes.  
Speaking from the bottom of the world  
I could hear the sewn leather breathe,  
The bulldozed lime in my nostrils  
Old trees  
Calling out to their sons,  
They slept in darkness and light  
Leaves growing into spears of island grass.

*Our sour earthly remains  
Tumble from the planet  
We crawl to meet the light  
I sleep and wake  
Among the laying hens and feral cats  
Feared armies  
Of soulless dead,  
The termites' whisper.*

# Defending The Home Island

George L. Chieffet

"There are no statues for the last war here"  
—Robert Lowell

*Between the land of the living and the world of the dead  
Father practiced egg farming.  
Those sores on his hands never healed.  
Dry mouths pleading for water  
They opened into shameless grins  
As the mouths of wounded  
Japanese Marines  
Singing of their own deaths.  
In stone gun turrets of Surabachi  
On the volcanic home island, the rock fortress  
In the Tokyo prefecture, no one survived.  
They sang like school children  
In coffins built like ovens  
Roasting in yellow gases in volcanic ash;  
They outlived Imperial Japan  
Returning as sea salt and algae.*

When spring became green and limp,  
A sweetness came over him  
He would sing  
Of Pacific's clear waters  
Stars that passed the earth's edge  
Beyond this world  
As he lit brush fires to clear our land.

Newcastle Disease, the Leghorn killer,  
Spread through August.  
During fall, hurricane winds cut power  
For the hatchery's infrared suns.  
The volcano cooled.  
We sighted the North Star, a faceless slender moon.

*A Japanese Marine  
Had placed a shrine  
For five thin children  
Posed as swans  
At bamboo gates,*

# Lost in a Painting

George L. Chieffet

After surgery he went home  
To chocolate meringue swirled in a coffee mug  
To water-color forest, to glass stars  
In porcelain glaze.

He walked roads of piping steam  
Curving to another world  
Wind gusts swished in his ear.  
His hair went white beside a waterfall.  
Desert palm and cactus  
Bowed in deference to the moon.

Could he go back to bed?  
To the ocean he once swam?  
The salt he woke to on shore?

The first day a mourning dove sang,  
He floated on a raft.  
When he rested  
Haze blurred the dogwood blossoms  
Sewn in his blanket.

He walked miles in a meadow.  
His footsteps stamped  
Over wild flowers  
Along the sheets  
The dead blossoms lay shattered  
Strewn over his legs.

When he shut his eyes, lights in the ceiling flickered.  
He climbed the oak frame  
Hoping to wake outside the rectangle  
He thought of a storm.

That night a small boat overturned  
In a furious ocean:  
He nearly drowned.

## A Season for Mordecai Book (1923-1943) George Chieffet

When spring arrived  
He carried his lunch pail  
To the Old First Church  
North to the boatyard.

On the harbor walk he watched the cock  
On the weathervane crow,  
Smoked his corn cob,  
Fed mackerel on the dock  
To the feral cats who rubbed his shoes.

He looked across ocean  
Whittling long distances  
Wincing to another world.

He listened to smooth crooners on the radio  
Though he sang like rooming house crows  
Who sunned on the upstairs porch.

Foundry fires at sunset  
Burned in deep wells,  
The sparks becoming oily stars  
In his backyard cistern.

Making his way under the glow  
He bolted down the line of front porches  
Through maple branches,  
Where pretty girls swept away with invented tunes.

He had come this far without a glimpse  
Of love, dressed like a scarecrow in the cornfield  
He would holler of paradise to children  
His lean song pierced the sewer grates  
And hummed in the window screens,  
One day his song would shake the earth.

## Truce Bradley Allen Capps

we fight day and night  
this isn't get us nowhere  
we fight because having different  
brief  
even when god has plans for us  
people will rebel against god  
but let not take up arms  
let call it a truce  
let love everybody rather black or  
white  
let not destroy them  
let call it a truce  
because everybody need to be  
saved  
because everybody has a god to  
love them  
if we are god's child  
we must love each other  
let call it a truce  
let get along  
right now  
let call it a truce

## Unity Bradley Allen Capps

You are a christian  
I am a christian  
the lost world know this  
they know we should pray together  
but we don't  
all our christians need unity  
we need be in one accord  
we need pray that the lost will find christ  
we need pray for our country  
we need unity

## Today Bradley Allen Capps

I can't put off tomorrow  
or if will never be done  
you much do the right thing  
today because tomorrow it is too late  
tomorrow you might be dead

## Getting the Email Lyn Lifshin

suddenly, like before  
I could imagine what  
wasn't said in the  
spaces, was I  
really in Texas  
in our arms, or  
a mirage, part smoke  
trees on some  
desert. Those few

nights, watching your  
fingers, not sure  
if I'd feel them  
opening  
zippers I hoped  
you wouldn't find,  
unwrapped, some  
gift you  
couldn't use

## Stray Lyn Lifshin

With a name like winter, I should have know there'd be  
little light.  
His e mail, more real, a magnet. "Write me some  
thing, send me a picture, remind me."  
I thought that since he took in strays, he'd be kind.  
I wasn't right

My leather jacket could have been me that Austin night  
Even three margueritas didn't camouflage what I'd see.  
With a name like Winter I shouldn't have expected  
any light

After his mother plunged into Niagara Falls, he  
*became* night.  
Jakarta, Amsterdam, Bali pulled him more than me  
tho I thought since he took in strays, he'd care for me.  
I wasn't right

"Call me when the wilderness melts," he writes  
"You know the bright darkness so deep."  
Since he took in strays I thought he'd want me, I could  
not be less right

"Deserts in bloom. I can feel it, want to sleep in its light.  
"Would you have an aquarium, a cage big enough if  
you caught me?"  
With an name like Winter, I should have known  
he'd leave little light  
I thought since he took in strays he'd be kind, melt.  
I wasn't right

## Icy Lyn Lifshin

take a woman who has mostly  
lived in a room over Otter Falls where  
the water flows in spring, dries  
to a trickle in the summer.  
Add a man whose mother  
also was attracted to water falls, only  
she jumped into the Niagara.  
Imagine they try some kind of ritual  
dance. We could place it close  
to the water. Watch how she tries to  
put her hand on his shoulder,  
his neck but he jolts back  
it's what his mother did before she  
took off for the water, tried to  
stroke his face, head or neck after the  
motorcycle accident, a kid on pain  
killers.  
This is not a good start to dancing  
but he takes of her coat, hangs  
it in some imaginary closet,  
asks if she'd like to step out of her  
clothes, walk in the spray of, maybe  
take  
a shower. She thinks of the lines  
along er legs, that she's older  
but she wants to dance, she

still can remember sitting on the  
sidelines in high school  
just waiting and this  
man is a hunk. But it's slippery near  
the water falls. He wants his tum and  
she  
isn't her jacket, is feeling cold, feels  
she's in a dance contest and  
suddenly he's judging her. She just  
wanted  
him to hold her, be excited to be that  
near but he's thinking of his  
mother, how she abandoned him.  
The  
woman expected the water to lull, be  
like  
in her old lilac room, soothe her to  
sleep or sleep walking. The  
margueritas  
have worn off. This isn't the way  
either of  
them imagined it she thinks stops  
leading, backs away so fast instead of  
feeling safe tucked in his arms  
she expects to drown

## Not Seeing Your Screen Name Tho Lyn Lifshin

for weeks it was  
all I looked for  
weeks after rose  
wind and tequila,  
after your face  
blurs and your  
fingers are ghosts

# An Old Logger's Retreat

Patrick O'Neill

I sit on a large maple stump  
with my Uncle Kelly  
and watch his words bump  
through the cold air  
like they're not in any hurry  
to go anywhere  
and maybe not certain  
where they're going.  
He can't handle the woods  
without a dog any more  
than he could handle it  
without his Stormy Kromer hat  
or Chevy pick up, he tells me.  
He's lived through nine dogs.

The wrinkles  
on his face circumsolve  
his eyes, his nose,  
then dive into his beard.  
Tree rings, I think.  
I try to count them.  
But they're too busy working,  
coaxing the words  
from somewhere deep inside.

He says nine dogs is enough—no  
more.  
The pain of loss doesn't run away.  
It lies around, feeds on more  
loss—

gets stronger, more aggressive.  
It's not age that's driving him  
out of the woods, he says.  
It's the attacks of that vicious void.  
It's not wise to throw it another  
dog.  
He can barely survive the frenzied  
assaults  
the ghosts of the first nine have  
bolstered.

He pats the stump we're sitting on,  
traces some of the rings  
with his gloved index finger.  
This baby went over  
a hundred years, he says.  
Brought tears to my eyes  
when I had to put it down.

The words halt, begin to come,  
retreat.

I wait.

He doesn't mention his wife or kids.

Trees are tough, he says.  
Self-reliant. They don't need  
Kromers or pick ups or—dogs.  
Some sequoias, redwoods  
stick around for 3,000 years.

# Cuttlebone

Patrick O'Neill

I  
The cuttlefish has ten arms,  
can match its color to its background,  
and, when threatened, secretes a dark,  
inky fluid to hide in.

I was writing a poem  
about the cuttlefish  
when my dog encroached.  
She had no business in the poem.  
But, under the circumstances,  
I couldn't chase her out.  
She picked this poem to die in.

Old. Bleeding internally.  
Unable to rise. It was time.  
Just before the vet's needle  
snatched away her being,  
something—a fear, a realization?—  
gave her strength to rise.  
For long, traumatic seconds,  
she stood on cuttlefish legs,  
looked at me with eyes  
that pushed aside the pain,  
that shown with love and trust:  
I would make things better. We would  
go back home, as always;  
she would enjoy, protect the people  
she loved and who loved her.  
Then the needle, the brief tenor  
as Life collided with Death,  
a shudder, and she was a void—  
like a dried gourd,  
like the empty collar I held in my hand.  
I stroked her head. Nothing.  
I wasn't supposed to cry. I did.  
Unlike the threatened cuttlefish,  
I couldn't change color or hide  
in the inky black of Pretense.  
I couldn't speak. I left, crying,  
clutching an empty collar.

II  
Later, the voided body of my dog—  
the dried gourd, the empty collar—

performed a strange service for me.  
They left me with fine-textured thoughts  
that clothed my senses—soothed them.  
The experience produced something  
fresh and free, liberating and new.  
My Fancy sprang to life,  
envisioned Universal Behavior  
weaving garments of varied textures  
that manifest themselves  
in the living, the nonliving.  
The Nonliving are the master weavers,  
weaving the finest textured garments:  
Stars, Rocks. Things. Deaf, blind, mute.  
Incapable of inky-black Pretense.  
Unthreatened.  
The world of the Living bumbles  
the weaving process in proportion  
to its level of complexity.  
Simple seasonal patterns enable  
the Tree to keep the texture fair.  
Instincts keep the Dog's weave  
respectable  
(a wag or droop of the tail, a tilt of the  
head).  
The wily human is most able  
to hide in the inky black, confined to  
darkness—  
as inhibited and helpless  
as the factory-farmed veal—misweaving,  
creating a fabric substandard and harsh,  
like badly treated burlap  
that needles the senses to withdrawal.  
Only in death—the body inanimate—  
are we free, clean—fit garments for the  
senses.

The cuttlefish has a valued  
internal shell—the cuttlebone.  
It has a honeycombed texture,  
is an ingredient for making cosmetics,  
and provides lime and salts for caged  
birds.

## Guests

Patrick O'Neill

Three listless wasps moved  
onto my desk in early November.  
They slept under the clutter  
of papers, books that lay scattered  
like the fallen leaves and bark  
of the trees that birthed them.  
The wasps came out for walks  
in late morning and flew some  
when the sun shone through the  
window.

I wondered if they were waiting  
for death or spring.  
I asked a biology instructor.  
She said only the mated females  
survived the winters.  
I'd have to wait to see.

A week later I found one dead,  
lying in state on a collection  
of poems by Emily Dickinson.  
Four days later another had  
squiggled  
between a Hemingway novel  
and *Roget's Thesaurus* and died.  
The third hung on—tamed—a pet.  
While on morning walks, she'd  
(I'd decided it was a mated female)  
crawl up a pen I'd hold out to her,  
up my finger, and onto my hand. I  
was  
the twigs and limbs of her new  
refuge.

She made me nervous. After all,  
stinging was her bailiwick. But  
several

tranquil late November walks up my  
hand  
and onto my arm taught me to trust  
her.

One December morning, she was  
on my wrist. A Modern Lit. student  
(a mated female) stole up behind  
me,  
dropped her book bag. Startled,  
I jerked and turned; a sharp pain  
in my wrist flapped my arm;  
I swore. The wasp fell to my desk.  
A bond checked my reflex to swat.  
But the student squealed,  
grabbed the winter issue of *Parting  
Gifts*  
from my desk. I yelled NO. Too late.  
The journal was in a power dive.  
Smack! My guest was dead.

Guests (friends, relatives, lovers—  
visitors of our lives) will sting us.  
It's their nature. They sting  
to demean, threaten, defend,  
dominate.  
They also sting because they never  
know us—  
never see beyond their own rigid  
nests  
of self-gratification—never  
acknowledge  
the endangered insect Forgiveness.

They investigate our lives like  
detectives,  
then periodically stab us with the  
golden rule.

## Sanctuary

B. Z. Niditch

This morning  
when the meadows opened  
and sunshine  
was my counselor  
sullen public roses  
could move me  
and sounds  
from the luminous lake  
allowed gold rays  
resembling Monet,  
who would have expected  
the secret police  
to arrive  
with their jackal bodyguards,  
perhaps the sun  
is not the best teacher  
for it started to rain  
outside the dirty car  
and memory  
of the morning  
dissipated quickly  
in the interrogation room  
only I held  
one of the pocket roses  
exhausted with summer.

## Insomniac Poet

B. Z. Niditch

we travelers of night  
pass over  
dances of disbelief  
columns of thundering math  
answers to uneven refrains  
timepieces and weather vanes  
knock over so many epitaphs  
more silent than snow  
many hours of shelter  
planning, refusing, demanding  
that open-eyed second necessity  
in our own history's right arm  
remembering the blackboard  
at school with bad words  
everyone wanted to admit writing  
on Fridays pacing round  
wishing the clock would change  
and our bandaged memory  
would slide away  
and every remedy  
would have some rhyme  
even on tonight's mind racing  
and searching  
for love's homeland  
would rescue us from exile.

## Boston Common

(Winter, 2004)

B. Z. Niditch

In trampling snow  
with no one to ask  
for gaslight directions  
chilled in morning murmurs  
on this absurd March  
with farsighted obscure rays  
from sun glasses  
divided away in memory  
between worlds of sleep and sky  
indifferent to primordial elms  
older than martyrs' statues  
on revolutionary graveyards  
you wish to trust nature  
but not trusting your own  
you rest on the gray bench  
taking out your diary  
writing from your craggy hand  
of an indifferently baked earth  
always expecting larks  
to announce the spring.

## Lunch

Julie Lechevsky

During my break from the body shop  
I sit on a folding metal chair  
to watch dancers at the Corelli School  
leap through the air above  
two-inch oak flooring.

"...5, 6, 7, 8,"  
oblivious to my sandwich,  
their bodies gleam with sweat,  
a light bulb in a pump house  
that gets me through the winter.

## Esplanade

(Boston, 2004)

B. Z. Niditch

You turn away  
on footfall beds  
descending on paths  
of racing bicycle riders  
lost like yourself  
near the Charles River  
from greensward shade  
where pine cones  
run amok near the shore  
from beneath wet feet.

Blanching dark cones  
gesture to you  
on this dim dawn  
when finding yourself  
awakening under cinder sky  
along dirt paths  
on a gray coated March

## Bronzed

Julie Lechevsky

How terrible as we grow old  
to have a memory  
of winning gold.

## Louisiana

B. Z. Niditch

My head is lost  
adventuring by Gothic trees  
metamorphosed into winter  
with only Southern Comfort  
raising Shreveport Moses.  
An ebony gunshot angel  
always appears as shadows  
near the old plantation  
where Creole orphanhood rises up  
in windy hair, bluish white,  
with the muzzle pointed  
to the forest  
where all myths begin.  
You were loaded  
and full of dreams  
when the moon was out  
and you drove that driver away  
getting out  
without your reading glasses  
under your ditchwater arms.

## November

Julie Lechevsky

The snow comes early.  
My name floats down  
on little slips of paper.

## July

at Cape Ann

B. Z. Niditch

By the corridor of the shore  
you appear hatless  
on one side it's yellow  
as the chloroform sun  
the spray does not alter  
your being warm  
the gray wind rises  
on the other side of the lichen rocks  
double-running along the beach red  
stream  
waiting to count the shells  
by the moving eventide  
waves and invisibly disappears.

## Wish

Julie Lechevsky

May the memory of me  
not stand in the way  
of any happiness.  
But let it be water  
among stones,  
a voice among horses,  
warm bread  
in a foreign square,  
and every stile pulled down.

## Point Judith

B. Z. Niditch

Leaping out  
of the lighthouse shadow  
abandoned by the sea  
its roped icy waters  
in infinite elements  
by pure beaches' blue  
away from picture postcard sounds.

Multiplying by our vision  
hiding in the hinged sunshine  
and all the while  
at the first count on board  
by the half-broken oar  
hearing the mono tonal gulls  
by the home harbor  
and you in a javelin of awe  
at the musical gathering wings.

## The Restless One

(Alan Dugan, 1923–2003)

B. Z. Niditch

For the restless one  
under ecstasy's nature  
fuses the long resistance  
of a painted arrow sky  
each tentative cloudburst  
not wearied by bleak time,  
in your beige striped shirt  
when morning's shadow  
gives out its public reign  
your work within  
the natural inviolate air,  
always in fragile grief  
yet knowing there is hope  
from a surly age  
of the political impostor,  
everything becoming music  
in a fateful pride  
with the amazement  
of a noted maestro,  
each baton raised  
and sentence unwrapped  
near the recital hall's sunrise.

## The Day River Phoenix Died

B. Z. Niditch

Between trains  
we made  
that we made love  
in the speechless talk  
which we call  
an eventuality  
of nine miles down  
the road at dusk  
and we heard the AM  
across the awful valley  
wishing for today  
to be unregistered  
in the barter of time  
when the November cold  
made our faces heavy  
with an adolescent sweat  
offending our own trembling  
in first class  
wanting to run on a beach  
somewhere in Malibu  
wet with rain overhead  
expecting no standby moon  
to forget us.

## D46

Simon Perchik

What are they building, these stones  
so close to the church  
and all this milling around

—the ants aren't sure  
how their mound will look  
when it's finished, they start

with a next-to-nothing  
set another over it  
then once in place

anything is possible  
—they hatch till the stones  
whose common ancestor is the moon

with so little light left  
though this dirt was over-hunted  
for stones :without a sound

they keep the dead company  
and from behind are carried up  
without getting caught in the glance

at the darkness falling through  
to help you find a place to die  
alone —a stone tied to each leg

they will bring down  
without a struggle, single file  
one on top the other.

## D114

Simon Perchik

To urge the dead you lift  
a small gift, placed so the height  
waits motionless alongside

though you can't sleep anymore  
afraid once your eyes close  
there's no turning back, you'll drift

as darkness into darkness  
- you bring these dead a sharp stone  
the kind insomniacs find

under the kitchen table  
—they loosen each tile  
the way flowers are pulled out

still drinking from your hands  
on the way to the cemetery —you pick up  
everything! roads, shadows, dust

and carefully face to face  
as if there was something daylight  
left out as shovels and weightlessness.

## D183

Simon Perchik

Disguised as mountainside  
—all wing though the sky  
can't let go and all evening

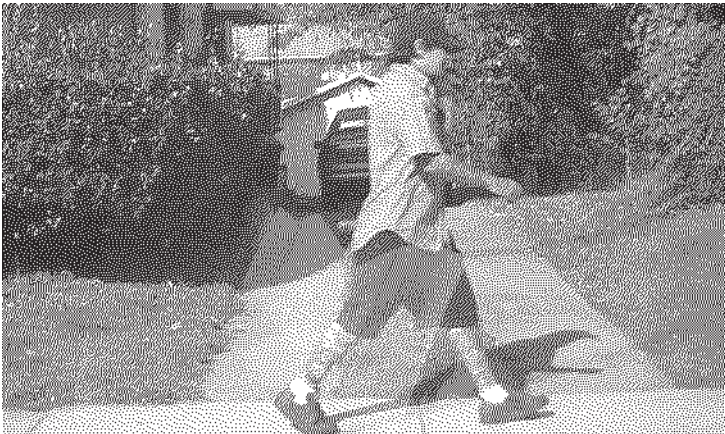
updraft —the sun thins out  
becomes red then black  
—dead on the ground, choked

as if every climb is made from dirt  
keeps its hold till the air  
takes root and you drift

without moving or water  
—you hound this darkness  
by mining it arm over arm

and around each stone  
your arms held in  
picking up speed —the sun

dangling from your teeth  
and the distance  
that has forgotten how.



18

## pit wells

Peter Layton

there's dark black ink  
we call it the sky  
it ranges from the mountains to the sea  
also the color of ink  
and in between my walls is a head  
and in between that, deep black ink  
all my thoughts dark as :that or darker

I'll walk outside beneath the black halo of trees  
under a skyward black umbrella  
it has ribs as I do  
we being two friends dipping into the night  
and below each shoe as it falls ~ parabola shadow  
the exact same size of my foot  
and for each foot black shoes, black boot heel boots,

how wine appears so black when sipped dark and late  
the curtains pulled closed velvet' against, black windows  
and suck in a 't4ck black soup  
the black telephone rings  
rings  
rings  
rings

the rings are black  
in the black silence  
and cannot be found  
the room being black  
and the pictures are black  
pictures of once being at a -black lake  
in between black mounds of hills

now exist in the deep of my head  
as you do  
the centermost points of your eyes  
the in between path of your teeth  
the deep born inside you  
blank as space  
everything shone black

55

## Not Mine to Remember

R.T. Castleberry

Beneath a low, country moon  
the dying say their rosaries  
in the shade of the Cathedral  
Constantine.  
Their fingers slip the wooden beads  
like whispers.  
I move between them,  
steps echoed in marble, slate,  
cobblestone.  
I don't know their fears—  
when they came, why they lasted,  
why they fall silent in the seconds  
clouds conceal the streets.

Not a native son,  
I'm the wrong listener.  
I'm unmoved by each season here-  
by intricacies of ceremony,  
the strictures of public celebration.  
Newspapers fill columns  
with casino totals, racetrack results.  
The poor are pictured as laughing  
crowds  
in the Summer Garden cinema.  
Market stalls are full.

Sleepless, smoking again  
I track the dodging line of early  
runners,  
the gloomy stride of schoolchildren.  
Burdened by misdirection  
and the mistakes of my arrival,  
I miss what water misses.

## The Angel of Listlessness

R.T. Castleberry

From the angle of colors that is  
dawn's disarray of bedspread and bare  
thigh,  
measured hesitation of Mimosa  
branches,  
kissing whisper of dismissive party gossip,  
I have reviewed  
the missed chances of Birmingham and  
Memphis,  
the satire of you in the Sangre de Cristos.

Error's margin has narrowed.  
The summertime proposition of 12 step  
standards  
have returned you to journal's  
calculation—  
stroke of chalk and calligraphy,  
the symbolism of Baudelaire and Brando.  
With the elegance of closure  
and court ordered compliance  
you've identified the dead of vaguest  
memory,  
etched personal metaphors of Medusa's  
head,  
handcuffs, hemophilia.

Beneath the tongue of angry relapse and  
rehab,  
the placid confusion of high ambition,  
heroin  
and heart healthy cuisines  
the romance of cynicism is dead.  
Images of expatriate Vienna and Berlin  
recede—  
out of grasp, out of bounds.  
The ordinary is your expression now.  
Vacant as three decades expectations  
all else is closed to you.

## the day I almost drowned

Andrea Defoe

particle-green water  
refracted above me  
blooping bubbles  
swam for air  
but I took water  
like a drain

as seashell songs hushed  
in my ears  
I was still thirsty

## A Photo of Chicago

Andrea Defoe

It's at a brittle brittle age now,  
its grey warmed with  
nicotine varnish.

The street is a garden  
of top hats and dresses –  
faceless blooms.

There's the grocery store  
with its electric-bright sign;  
the white smocked owner  
with his daughter – a toddler  
in an eyelet dress.

In just a few years they'll  
stand in line for bread and soup;  
the store windows will be smocked  
in white.

And in sixty years  
an old woman will hoard lace,  
aisles worth of spoiled groceries,  
and her grandchildren will wonder why.

## Stutter

Andrea Defoe

His words trip out  
like mouthfuls of novocaine  
ad-lib excuses

*that color  
on you  
I love you in red*

and

I was late because

*he smells  
like passionfruit*

it's not quite red  
I tell him, it's closer  
to pomegranate -  
my color, my scent

## Let these things

## swim away

Andrea Defoe

The bluegill caught me  
with his fins, my fingers are brittle  
and will not bend  
to free the hook.  
Let it rust in the water;  
I let him swim.

## Ode to an Earthworm

Andrea Defoe

The nitecrawler doesn't care  
that she's naked;  
she doesn't need a lover  
to be a mother.

All she craves is  
the scent of fallen ozone  
and char-black earth.

When I dip my bare toes  
into midnight grasses  
I hear her.

Her movements sound  
like falling snow.

## Tootsie

Irene Eberling Marsh

She breathes air  
rationed by strangers,  
remembers old  
plans, rootless  
wanderings.  
The map she found  
on a parking lot  
is missing  
its title page.  
She keeps it open  
on the lunch table,

studies street names  
in a foreign language,  
plots a course.  
You know she will  
wait for dark,  
try to call a cab,  
fiddle with  
deadbolts,  
scream long  
ago names  
all night.

## A Poem for My Daughter

Andrea Defoe

My heart named you Iris  
when you were less than a neuron;  
we formed each other over months.

Now you own words, footsteps.  
and the title of a flower.  
You're too small to see an end  
to growth; it's all blooming,  
no dying.

But I know amoeba days  
when the minor refuses  
to remember my shape.  
On these days I think of you  
and promise to teach you otherwise.

## Second Husband

Irene Eberling Marsh

He is keeping fit.  
He runs, lifts weights.  
He wants to know how  
many laps I swim,  
how long it takes,  
the water temperature.

We go to his reunion.  
I am among the third wives.  
Most are second.  
His first ex from  
senior year is there  
with her husband from  
cardiology whose ex  
does litigation.

I am mistaken for  
his second ex due to  
my hair, which I leave  
its brazen gray.  
Actually she is  
dead, and their son, also  
dead, murdered her.

The hostess, drunk as  
a skunk, joins in an  
argument about  
body-mass index.  
Someone pulls calipers  
from his tailor-made,  
pinches the air  
for emphasis.

I am getting divorced  
soon, soon, and I have  
bought a B&B

## At the Poussin Exhibit

Larry Desautels

Venus gave birth to a  
Monstrously endowed Priapus.  
Freud would understand  
How he got that way,  
But the woman from Ohio  
Who stood in front of me  
Squinting, hand on jaw,  
Mouth covered as if in shock,  
Could not:  
"Did you see this, Ed?  
How could such a little  
Baby have such a big wee wee?"  
Ed was looking at the nipples  
Of the tittering goddesses,  
Especially at those of Venus  
Who reclined on the garden bench.  
Ed too knew the answer  
But kept silent.

far away, alone,  
I will try to pass  
for widow, cook,  
entrepreneur.  
I will be only the  
second owner, I  
will be the first to  
bake bread right  
in that kitchen.

# Heavyweight

Dennis Fulgoni

Tonight my father lunges bare-fisted at the canvas punching bag. He aims for the green six spray painted in the center for target, the bag dented and soft like dough there. The chains bolted to the ceiling rafters rattle and dance as sweat pours into his pale handsome face. The way he's hitting the bag tonight, even the Daddy Long Legs in the dark corners of the garage take cover. I hold the bag for him, a good son, because he likes to workout when he gets home from the lumberyard. But he pounds the canvas so hard tonight I'm left feeling rubbery. My mother was gone three days this time, but when she finally came home she stroked my hair, her breath coconut and rum, and told me she loved me. Later, she locked herself in the bedroom and wouldn't come out no matter how much my father begged. A violent blow knocks the bag against my stomach and I fall to my knees. I hit the ground so hard I have to clench my teeth so I won't weep. I stand again, though, brush dirt and tiny leaves from my jeans, and hold the bag tightly. Flexing the weed-thin muscles of my legs and planting my feet securely on the garage floor. When he's finished, we walk out of the garage together and my father takes the lead. Neither of us knowing that what was waiting for him out there would kill him from the inside out, like all good killers do.



# A Conscious Fancy

Larry Desautels

The house is quiet now.  
Somewhere above Rome  
You drowse perhaps,  
Dreaming of being near me  
As I sleep, or  
Dreaming of running from me  
As I chase you, or  
Dreaming of dancing on the  
table  
As I spray champagne upward  
To your laughing hands, or  
Dreaming of whatever you  
dream away from me:  
It's mere whimsy, you see,  
That places me in your dream.

But awake, here, I am free to  
wander  
Beyond the manners and  
customs  
Tossed about in dreamscapes,  
Which are little more  
(and more often much less!)  
Than a night's replay of past  
days'

Dances and delights  
Edited by unconscious fancy  
To make you think that dreams  
Are fresh and free.

So in my wandering  
I think of sins to discover,  
Deeds to delight,  
Passions for daylight and for night,  
Spells to cast on you  
Yet undreamt, unheard, unwritten,  
unknown.

When next you meet my eyes  
with yours  
You can only guess at our play,  
At what we've done in my  
thoughts,  
Just as I can only guess, now,  
Your dreams, somewhere over  
Rome.

The difference is  
Dreams are mostly memory—  
While awake here I think  
Only of possibility.

## Poppawood

Keith Taylor

My sister and I slid across the floor in our stocking feet. It's what kids are supposed to do, despite grandmothers worrying about slivers or broken china. Our living room was long and narrow, the front end of a converted barracks. Mountain View Bible College, where my father taught Pauline Epistles and Homiletics, bought the building from the Canadian military in 1947, after the Germans were defeated and there was no longer a need to send prairie wheat farmers off to Dieppe, the Pas de Calais, Juno Beach. The Bible College couldn't pay my father much, but we lived for free where lonely young men, hardly more than boys, had laughed or lain terrified before shipping out. My sister and I would run as fast as we dared then slide to the couch at the far end, crying "Poppawood, Poppawood, Poppawood..." as many times as we could while still sliding. Sometimes our father would pretend to be the monster who would devour us if we ever stopped saying "Poppawood." We didn't talk about the soldiers who had lived in the barracks. We never heard, not once, the lamentations of their ghosts.

## Bye-Bye, Baby, Good-Bye

Peter Dichsen

A chaos of wine, wet honeymoon, our central blonde otherness tag after fashion to peer into housebroken love. Dagwood and Blondie withdraw, refuse the private drink of the body. So the blood of secret intuits an intimate room, allegories of a garden in mist, while the Babbitts bathe the big night down the drain, the heels over head into the astringent earth. Under the honey moon, Love would scent exhausted echo, searches what lie swells, the red gift between two spare for the terror of coming bye-bye, who cradle that which tends to part, which will disembark on business, compose a beneficent jest. Dawn blinds the power of mourning adrift, her hands' ribbony appeal to the eleventh hour crawling both will and wish.

## The Cost of a Thing

Keith Taylor

Following the neon blue blaze signs  
—painted on granite or nailed to birch  
or pitch pine—up to the top of Burnt  
Meadow Mountain in Maine and grateful  
they were there to point me away from  
cliffs or ridge lines leading God knows where,  
I thought back to the one new trail  
I made in this lifetime, maybe twelve  
miles long, up from a head-water lake  
of the Yukon River to a pond  
at tree line. I used my axe to scalp  
the bark from balsam fir and jack pine,  
a clean gash on the side facing me.  
On the opposite side I would cut  
another gash, a mirror of the first,  
facing up the trail I hoped to make.  
I loved the symmetry of the work.  
At evening I followed my blaze  
marks back to the place where I began.  
A month later, walking down the trail  
I made, I saw that every third  
or fourth tree I'd blazed was dying.

## This Fall's Murder

Keith Taylor

The crows are forming this fall's murder  
in our black oaks out back. Their droppings  
are smeared on the sidewalk and our car.  
When I clap and yell, they rise, squawk,  
and fly off complaining. They circle  
back soon enough, settle in again,  
muttering incomprehensible  
syllables like demented old men.

## February Daffodils Carol Hamilton

Riotous hillsides,  
this year the blooms  
defy the laws of Cronos,  
chuckle up from Gaea's  
crevices and splash  
earth with color.  
I tuck each day  
behind my eyes  
to save for when  
real spring comes,  
and I have, too soon,  
squandered my allotment  
of surprise.

## Napping in Madrid Shelly Reed

I slept in the Plaza Mayor  
under the painted penises which  
catch the tourists unprepared

I curled up outside the Prado and  
I dreamed I was an empty-faced nude  
like heaven for Goya

I drifted in the Temple de Debod  
I while all around me lovers' legs  
were blended, twisted, one

I lost myself in the Jardin de Botanica  
the only still, stretched life  
without a Latin label

## Pikes Peak Carol Hamilton

He died and they boarded a train,  
went west, the mother, the daughters,  
to curl along the country, retrace  
his steps in life. He worked once  
in a flower shop on the slopes of  
the Rockies.

They stopped, from the summit  
saw the plains pancaked off  
to the east, the ranges of rock and ice  
to the west, only halfway to their goal,  
but now at the top of the sky.

Maybe that same day I did not  
go up Pikes Peak. My aunt lost  
our money at the dog races  
the night before. One of those  
daughters  
climbed peaks in that range with me  
years later, but I still have not  
reached that famous summit.  
It punches sky in both our memories,  
so full of landscapes crumpled  
and folded  
and smoothed out by what we did  
and did not think to do.

## Snow Cat Carol Hamilton

It is bone cold, still.  
will be too long,  
and I sit here  
thinking how I only  
venture out to feed  
the wild cats, birds,  
get the mail from the frost-  
tight box, aslant on the pole  
that the boys cemented in crooked.  
I thought just then  
how little I see  
hunched here, one hand  
buried between my own thighs'  
warmth.  
chilled even in this heated air,  
The magazine cover stares  
with yellow eyes at me, accusatory.  
The cat's mouth and bearded chin fur  
are snow etched as if he just  
scooped down into dry powder snow  
to swallow a mouse, hardly a taste,  
a small bite, looked up to wonder  
at my huddled inaction, the lynx  
with his fur-splayed feet,  
adept at snow and certain  
what he wants and needs.

The rancher writes of all she sees,  
life dropping into her active realm,  
Outside this window all is gray and  
white,  
not calling me to come,  
but I know the farmers, the farm  
children,  
the creatures are busy now,  
and the snow cat's eyes cannot believe  
I simply sit here staring back.

## Country Western Riff Peter Dichsen

She wriggled for him, hair  
lawless with gin and vent air  
as his piss seethed in the snow,  
the lock was unlocked.

His tongue lapping a beer,  
his breath fogs the glass tinkling:  
the bar forever open,  
he says he'll get a job.

He's an arrangement she plays  
for drink and cash and  
everything she can't free tears to,

but when he sticks nowhere,  
she will forgo a note,  
and dry out dying in the sun.

## Listing of the Latest Names Carol Hamilton

We were all Shirleys and Carols,  
they Rubys and Hazels; we Bobbys  
and Trumans and Johns, they Clarences  
and Clydes. Today, this week, it is  
Kaitlyn and Jacob. Jennifer and Nathan  
have peaked and slipped. There were  
Marys and Johns a lot. Perennials,  
these two, hardy and adaptable  
to many climes and climates, tongues.  
Michael and David and Christopher  
never disappear. But here I talk  
of lands that look back to Abraham.  
Long hidden tribes had tongue-tripping  
nomenclature, and far-off peoples,  
who felt strong in power  
and incorruptible, ignored our ability  
to say their names. There is a persistent  
voice that insists the naming matters,  
that therein creation, destruction, and  
even blasphemy wrestle in the dust  
at the edge of the village, and this  
a life and death battle. Poets have never  
quite belonged to any tribe, wandered,  
bards, chanting the news, calling  
for an audience. The news here is that  
to my east live Cortez, Chastity, and Tiffany,  
and to the west, Rain. These new neighbors  
have changed my life, brought clattery  
play again where long complaints  
and achings dwelt and now have died.  
After dividing light, dark, firmament  
from chaos, God called them Good,  
then turned over the task to man.  
God rested, delegated authority,  
and all our calls to order have ended  
at Babel, and not just once.

## Aubade Peter Dichsen

This she has garnered from the hills of tall grass:  
a fig of his parched speech, the gnarled tree  
yielding a moist promise, but he has bared himself  
to be the sand and shells she'll percolate.

Such severity serves to egg them on:  
his stiff sympathy offered her ship biscuit,  
while she purred a dune. The more things change,  
the more they remain the same, he said.

Herring twist their spring tide jig,  
a warm fog coddles their going.  
You know, she says, how much you are loved,  
adjusting the loose-leaf of her accomplishments.

They had shed wisdom and fashion for tides  
resounding their strait; their highway heat,  
their stone of rain, so they said, they understood.  
Their voices lapped their seized junction.

Avoiding me to miss me, he tells himself,  
disturbs the circumspect relief: but less raw,  
he's a self-styled castaway come to extol  
the plum, the liflencecks, the herring gull.

Her blood seethes with the salts of hard work.  
Just come from an insistence on quality,  
she denies she has chartered the seaplane  
arriving to take her from him.

Discipline and habit will shape their words,  
tales of friends and other fictions,  
ocean and land, provide the smile  
for jobs, potlucks and the visits with family.

# Gridlock

## Peter Dichsen

An assiduous frequenter of gatherings,  
frequenter of a public oubliette,  
with cheerful decorum, respectfully avoiding names,  
with heated feeling, he is smoke evoking chains.

With lust for bold provocation,  
for the new unexcused, loading a truck with unsung proficiencies,  
she, sensations of order, an air of ferocity,  
accelerates right and left of him.

Along the austere attractions, the area's valued textures strive,  
a flux of oppression and festivity,  
before which stretch steely homes of wall sockets,  
mirrors drinking coffee and portraits in red.

A bitter doggie, rapture chat,  
ideal hors d'oeuvres beside babies puddle them,  
an easy end exerts the surest tug:  
retrenchment of malevolence.

For the disavowal of beauty, a turn, even to awkwardness.  
Yet amidst their buttery curls they would be  
brickyard prestige and game,  
accomplishing the latest maturity.

This work keeps taking wrong turns.  
Just think how Elizabeth goes  
off holiness or beauty to a dangerous Lizzie  
without even batting those long black eyelashes.  
This is a case for Superman (or woman).  
We are simply swishing our tails  
at flies, have yet to quite get the hang  
of it. Apprentices try, but that masterpiece,  
the work we can call good, eludes us.  
So Kaitlyn and Jacob will get their turn,  
and I, Carol, born in a Carol Lombard  
and Shirley Temple time, gladly pass  
this baton to them. This leaving  
of the Garden has meant nothing  
but Work, Work, Work!

# San Sebastian

## Shelly Reed

In San Sebastian you may follow  
the path that leads to Jesus  
but around each tiny curve and corner  
a couple sins and sins again

and when your breath is ragged  
from climbing all those stones  
you may find another ragged breath  
lips on lips, and nose to nose

the city spreads itself before you  
as your eyes fondle spires, coasts, and peaks  
but across the green and cobblestone  
the fondling is breast and bone

# Elements of Night

Sid Miller

## I. Chair

And together move so gently,  
back and forth, cracked spine  
on the worn arm rest.  
Pictures flash from the muted set.  
The radio plays  
a worn down three piece song,  
drums, saxophone, stand-up bass.  
When the bus passes  
the vibration is captured in these coils—  
released into this thin body.

## II. Leash

This rain as constant  
as these midnight walks  
with her leash in my hand  
as constant as this shopping cart  
overturned here for two months now,  
its contents slowly spreading  
over downtown, cups and bow ties,  
plain wrapped sugar cookies melting  
into the sidewalk. Only green  
lights tonight and we're  
at the park with the old man  
who circles, circles and repeats,  
*Oh what a pretty little doggy,*  
*a pretty little doggy,* every lap.  
every day. She searching  
for a scent in all this mud,  
mud that's everywhere—my boots  
and bed, on the tip of her nose,  
the cracks of my knuckles,  
caked to the corners  
of these breaths.

## III. Mirror

No place to hide  
under this bare bulb—trying  
to elude the eyes, impossible  
to ignore what's under them,

what grows daily—these big  
dark bags, like the heavy  
backside of a woman.  
I force a smile to see the lines  
it draws on my cheeks  
and chin. To hold it. I'd look  
like a old man in ten years.

## IV. Bed

On the floor in the closet are piled —  
an old camping mattress, foam,  
a few flat pillows, a torn blanket,  
myself. By accident,  
the bathroom door is open,  
the shower curtains pulled back  
and through the small window  
shines the top  
of a church tower, where the bells  
hang silent. Moon light  
fails to exist  
this time of year, but the city  
burns in this rain  
and the white cross glows,  
the message overdone—  
lost on me, but the glow  
delivers long shadows across  
the length of my body,  
keeps my imagination crushed  
without a blank canvas.

## V. Dream

Like a slide show.  
Those I've left,  
with those who've left me,  
with those they've left with.  
Dark hair, tits,  
arguments, bad breath,  
naked or in dark clothes,  
moving like ghosts.  
Train tracks in other directions,

26

# Human Salamander

Sid Miller

They called him the "Human Salamander,"  
able to climb inside a five  
hundred degree oven  
next to a filet mignon  
to watch the red meat sear  
and the marbled fat melt,  
without so much as blistering  
his hand.

But here at the house  
we don't have that luxury,  
me being claustrophobic,  
the girl far too fair skinned  
and the dog much too  
intelligent.  
We rely solely on instinct  
and intuition, the smell  
and the water it brings to our  
mouths.

And while the meat tastes  
just the same, there is reason  
for jealousy, his foil like skin  
and flexibility seeing truths—  
a chicken slowly crisping,  
a baguette turning golden  
brown,  
a cheese souffle rising  
and a custard setting up—  
while the rest of us wait so  
patiently,  
sometimes never seeing things  
at all.

# Pair of Nudes

(after Diebenkorn, *Reclining Nude Arms Up 1*  
& *Reclining Nude 35*)

Carol Frith

Her eyes are closed or looking  
down:  
two versions, in both she's trying  
to escape  
her own burred outline. Neat pair  
of nudes:  
one in bed, one on the couch.  
Outside,  
there is or isn't a garden.

In both versions, her hair has  
become  
a piece of the pillow, her pale skin  
an unconvincing prop. One breast  
rests  
on the sheet/couch cushion,  
the other lies more or less flat.  
her navel, dark in the couch  
version,  
has disappeared in the version  
on the bed, her damp flesh  
straining to make love work.

The sheet/the couch cushions  
have  
become the future of this room.  
Soon, the woman will rise and  
walk  
outside into the garden. She will  
wait  
there, under a single star,  
looking for her body,  
counting, *One, two, one two,*  
because she cannot give up  
either version.

47

## Yellow

Carol Frith

We are dancing at Waldo's, your face  
a bubble of light. "Wake me," you say,  
your eyes incandescent.

Ice sings in its pattern of shapes:  
someone is coming with drinks  
slow feet on hardwood,

the room a two-dimensional yellow  
lake. "Where is the band?" I ask.  
You say nothing,

your silence virtual music.  
Last year, you sang every one  
of your stories

to this same yellow tune. I will  
watch you tonight for signs.  
"Yellow," you will say,

whispering the letters against my ear,  
your voice glowing like neon in  
the warm yellow light.

## Four Horizons

(after "You-Me" by Ay-O, 1976)

Carol Frith

Right now, they are outside in the red  
and orange afternoon, embracing,  
their rainbow arms level with four  
of the horizons, their torsos  
graduating into darkness.  
Because they move, they move through  
parallel lines.

Their faces know where their wings  
are, orange and invisible and always  
behind them. They stare at each  
other, memorizing the false colors  
of their past.

The energy of the spectrum charges  
their lips. "Come home," say  
the colors. The lovers spread  
themselves like pink sails  
in the orange sky, coming together  
in bright disorderly spirals,  
taking huge blossoms of color  
into their mouths, the reds and oranges  
licking their lips like flame.

fog, mist, the dryness of high altitude,  
the taste of sweat, birds flying in tight  
V's, names from long letters  
that have made their own faces  
and attached themselves  
to this dizziness that follows  
everywhere,  
that exists everywhere, that spins off  
everything  
and leaves me on a curb,  
on some dark street,  
my head between my knees—  
a homesick feeling.

### VI. Bed

And wake with these blankets  
wrapped around my head,  
a thin layer of sweat  
in the pool of my chest  
and knowing already  
at this time of night  
that I must return to sleep,  
to these pictures running in circles,  
that start where they end,  
because the easy thing  
would be to stay awake and stare  
at these growling red numbers.  
listen to the dog whimper  
in her sleep, but something tells me  
that I should keep the blankets  
wrapped tight and the heavy  
stream of images  
flowing, in order to break  
this thing, so that these nights  
might finally turn  
and morning will no longer be covered  
by a thin transparency of yesterday.

## Meaning to Tangle

Sid Miller

To his curious roommate he asks,  
*Did you know that raccoons get hard-*  
*ons*  
*whenever they're hit by a car?*  
Although honestly he doesn't know  
about every time, just this hard-on,  
this time. Even though it's doubtful  
either of them could still find it.  
The butchered beast on the basement  
floor, half the body skinned,  
but which half unsure, a tangling  
of fluid, the outlines of a hat  
and a face looking on in disbelief  
of what is happening  
to itself in this dim lighting, a small  
Indonesian man looking on  
from the corner and this despoiler  
covered in blood.

To the Indonesian man, what's  
curious  
is not the scene, but the possibility  
of arousal at such a time  
when guaranteed no satisfaction.  
But it won't be the stench,  
this brutal sight, or even the viscosity  
of blood that he'll dream of,  
only this question of reason,  
of the cruelty of God.

# The Singing Bride

Carol Frith

*I know my first name, she says, and my last name.  
Who is the bride? She is trapped in a wicker cage.  
Make the story out of nothing: let her speak,*

and she will change the denouement, dream another plot.  
All her words are slander: the air itself has bred her.  
*I know my first name, she says, and my last name.*

She'll go first—safe in your hands—passion will follow.  
When it's over, she'll hide beneath her aging feathers.  
Make the story out of nothing. Let her speak

your name. It will be a sad music in her mouth.  
*I have taken myself, she says, and trafficked with no one.*  
You know. her first name. Her last name

is a mystery. Why has she sent for you? She is  
changeable and calm—the singing bride. She will  
make this story out of nothing. Let her speak

to you. *Thank God, she will call out in her passion,  
Thank God, as you pull her through the darkness:  
I know your first name, she will say. I know your last*  
She makes your story out of nothing. Let her speak.

# Straw bed,

Carol Frith

you say, and, *Sins of omission.*  
We have been here for hours, watching  
the light burn and tilt on the west wall.

*Three lines, you begin to tell me. I ask  
you if they scan.*

*They ring like bells, you say.*

It seems to me the light is overdone:  
false  
images. You don't believe a word of it,  
stretch your hand out into the air:  
*According to the flesh, you mumble.*

I pack your words away like toys,  
my questions lost in the silence closing  
between us.

The air tastes of filtered sunlight,  
last light falling through the shadows  
in the room.

*Bright as gold, you say.*

Bewildering.

# Barcelona

Shelly Reed

copper woman  
erotic wax  
blue eyes wide  
brown skin twisting  
one-winged sea flying  
beats mixing  
promises in every tongue

gothic sky carving  
silky sun sinking  
sneaking in 3am

easy air  
another fiesta hoping  
children curled  
another lip dripping sweet  
darkness in patches  
as light should live

## When It Crashes

Saint James Wood

At five years old  
I felt the trouble coming  
from a thousand miles away  
a slowly advancing tidal wave  
washing ships ashore  
sweeping toys and houses to sea  
I lay shivering in bed  
drowning in anticipation  
wondering when it would crash

Though young I knew disaster  
even then like a second cousin  
those around me were uneasy  
predicting cataclysms  
and pending legal action  
teachers, coaches, and relatives  
distanced themselves  
unwilling to become  
collateral damage

I felt it before anyone  
storms from a distant horizon  
herds of wild pigs  
running for all they were worth  
straight at me  
with open arms  
when it crashes

## Santa Antarctica

Saint James Wood

The wind is hard, cold and contrary.  
Dark disoriented thunderheads  
sprint from horizon to horizon  
without time to rain  
they leave shivering clouds of dust  
to attack innocent trees.  
Abandoned and free  
leaves assault each other,  
dogs hug the ground  
fearing flight and the unknown,  
birds are blown away  
to New Mexico or Spain.

The sun is frozen solid  
worthless and inept.  
The frigid wind triumphantly  
beds down deep into every bone  
for a hundred miles.

Cold, so cold.  
Oh Santa Ana  
I long for you...

## Savage Dog Storm Ballet

Saint James Wood

Chants drifting up from my shoe  
I'm fearful that savages have established themselves  
at my very feet, distant and uncivilized  
with murky plans beyond understanding.

Thunder crashes in my pocket  
lightning exposes the dark reaches of obscurity  
rain soaking lint hidden for a thousand years  
once again for reasons unknown.

Dogs howling in my hair  
snarling at the roots searching for bones or cats  
chasing each other's tails  
for lack of an organized religion  
snuggled in my ear, they dream.

Ballet dancers pirouette ecstatically down my leg  
svelte and determined shouting wild improvisations  
in a mad bid to express the heartache  
dwelling in their slippers  
much as the savages in my shoe.

The dancer's shouts frighten the dogs  
who scuttle tails between legs  
to a cowlick seeking refuge.  
The small one falls yowling terror  
to be singed by an especially fervent bolt of lightning.  
The burnt dog excites the savages  
chanting with abandon they swarm up my pants leg  
hacking at the beautiful dancers.  
The big dog, for years secretly in love  
with Yvette the crippled dancer, loses his mind  
and leaps down my face snapping at the savages  
several of whom fall in my pocket to drown.

I decide to make a peanut butter sandwich  
and get out the yellow pages to look up a psychiatrist.  
Those savages need help.

## It was midnight Saint James Wood

It was midnight...

on the east side.  
I know now not to trust any night  
that features a moon that eats itself.  
Harmonicas honked, drunks were  
barking.

Staring at her soft white shoulders  
in that warm spring dress  
blue true eyes in the dim bar light,  
dusky negroes danced  
sad musicians played  
I heard the crash of a distant train.

Her words were little saints  
flown in from distant climes  
snatching my reserves last remnants.  
Agile as always I surrendered  
disobeying executive commands  
of long standing  
that words were worthless.

one a.m. ...  
blood on my shirt  
hid the last shreds of myself  
in her purse  
bid them farewell  
with contempt  
and was willing  
to put an eye out  
with a little martini swizzle stick  
to prove something or another.

two a.m.  
the dance is exhausted  
waitresses threaten and flirt  
final rites performed  
with southern whiskey.

Kissed my fingers  
for they'd soon be inside.  
Slid into the parking lot  
where her curious tribes'people,  
rakes, fops, sots and gamblers  
stared at me.  
"If any pain is to be borne,  
it will be by me."  
I always say that,  
I'm always lying.  
Lightning smashed the sky.

1  
three thirty a.m. ...  
we escaped in her van of foreign  
origin  
onto a suburban side street.  
Events were insistent and  
convincing,  
cats watched and discussed  
our mating habits  
(like two hands  
clasped and praying)  
the birds in the trees  
discussed the cats  
all agreed  
how easily  
with one soft word  
civilization is shed.

later on...  
we laughed, she cried  
went to a movie  
ate a chicken pot pie.  
Her dog was dismayed  
grudgingly tolerant

## I Got a Guitar Saint James Wood

I got a guitar, a monkey and a dog  
My girlfriend thinks I've got a job  
cause I leave the house around eight each morning  
but I go to the library, read about jazz and Warren O Harding  
president during a tumultuous time  
kind of like me except he had a job  
and I'm just lying  
This has been going on.... for a month or two  
I'm starting to believe myself  
and that a promotion is due  
My girlfriend has been understanding about my checks  
I've been paying the government back  
for all the helicopters I crashed  
during late missions  
doing secret.... stuff  
so money's tight, there's never enough  
My monkey's unemployed also  
though he's got a jeep  
how he makes payments  
is a mystery to me  
We go for walks  
my monkey and dog  
halfheartedly searching  
for a job  
I was thinking something  
in the field of indecision  
or anything that pays  
and calls for a lack of precision  
My monkey and I have skills  
that could take us far  
but inevitably  
end up on the corner  
playing for quarters  
and the occasional candy bar.

Did I mention my girlfriend...  
She's a character.



## Nostalgia

Michael D. Riley

Innocent print clogged highways and cornrows,  
winding two-lanes of sentiment and news

county line to seat in a red Oldsmobile  
turning 92,000 Sunday. We'll never feel

again the letters sweep a light blue page,  
billboard capitals on clear margins, an age

before dinner when the burgundy leather  
cools in the night air, draws us together

in prosaic affection, all our assertions fixed  
to paper until the years and letters mix

humming tires, low ballads on the radio,  
plain words flashing past the open windows

a blur like the trees, absolutely true.



## Chinese Lanterns

Michael D. Riley

then secretly delighted  
when I used him to soak up  
water  
ritualistically spilled  
throughout the apartment  
in a failed bid to mark territory.

then...  
well...  
I don't know  
words make little sense  
they mill around  
like crippled idiots;  
I wish the stupid fuckers  
would leave me alone  
like she did.

months later...  
it was midnight  
in the north county  
I sit brooding  
yuppies compliment my music  
it seems like a personal attack  
management asks me to adjust  
the volume.  
I'd rather be banned for life.

That fall we gathered the orange pods,  
paper tulips on a stick, behind the old  
house  
we just moved into, brightened with stalks  
all our new dark corners. Passing by,  
we tapped the papier-mache globes,  
reverberant as tiny drums.

When we carried our year-old son home  
from the hospital, the porch light fell  
on the hallway spray. Minutes later,  
lapsing sunlight of December dusk  
hit the group upon the corner cupboard  
where they glowed from within like coals.

Early summer reawakened their wills,  
stirred their memories of another life,  
tripped the switch in their hearts  
so their tiny cannons fired off,  
room after room throughout the house,  
his head so light upon my arm.

## Melanoma

Michael D. Riley

A word so beautiful  
cannot harm me, she said  
smiling, her eyes, wrists,  
ankles renegeing already  
the lease of skin.

Last night the word fell  
so ripely, lip and tongue,  
I whispered it for hours.

An Italian river olive green,  
slow and heavy as oil,  
olive trees along the shore  
beside pitted columns, fluted  
and roofless, small relics  
of a smaller deity.

Greek liquor the color of rust,  
fire alive in a liquid base  
that turns men into beasts  
and women into butterflies.

A girl in pigtails who plays  
on the sand in absolute sunshine,  
a straw hat shielding her face  
from all she will never know,  
or guess at. Nurse cuts  
her bread, Camembert, and pears.

The refrain my Renaissance lover  
sings beneath my window,  
my other name, echoes of his lute  
among the plucked orchids  
lining my marble windowsill.

A beautiful word cannot lie,  
she said softly to the air.  
That is its reward for a life  
given over to suffering.

## Sycamore

Michael D. Riley

I've learned to bear the old skin  
curling at my feet each week,  
the rake combing a path across thin  
shavings that curl like vellum  
but crumble into flakes and dust.

Undressed limbs  
spread their sensual bouquet  
overhead, bare legs and arms  
rioting, an orgy of nakedness  
I wonder how the neighbors tolerate.

These couplings in bone  
bring marble to the touch, or lead.  
In the night air they atone  
and turn to snow, die to the trade  
and promises of skin.

Monument. Siren. Book of Days.  
You stand here beyond shame  
under a cold moon, the dream  
too close at hand, your lovers' bodies  
rooted in reflected light and sand.

## Downgrade

Susan Wilde

she used to think she had to live  
so as to deserve one of these  
night funerals you can get  
nowadays  
the righteous brothers  
amplified  
singing unchained melody  
and fireworks  
across the dark water

but with all that  
she realized  
the ashes wouldn't count for  
much

she began to like to weed  
in the tenuous light of late  
afternoon  
with no one singing  
and to feel  
herself turn to ash  
as she worked

## on the way to F&H

Susan Wilde

on the way to F&H  
vacuum repair  
saying no to nina

she said you don't really  
want to spend your life thinking  
about broken  
vacuum cleaners do you

she never said it in so many words  
but she did wish for her patients  
the very best

nina meant well  
she tried to help us  
parched young women that we were  
first to recognize thirst  
and then  
to be brave enough to quench it

it has taken years for me to know  
that mere water  
is my drink

it has taken years for me to see  
that falling rain  
is where my water comes from

and that if i can load the vacuum  
cleaner into the car  
without hatred  
some can fall on me  
on the way to F&H

stunned by  
the fast slice  
of sorrow's fall  
Susan Wilde

stunned by the fast slice of sorrow's fall  
is a good line  
I've been working with it  
because I never mind when a love affair ends  
if I get a good poem out of it  
I always say

I did get a poem out of that business in Chicago  
but that line was the only good one  
and you need more than one good line

I got a good Greek meal though  
a whole fish, slim and crackling  
generous with its flavor  
and dandelion greens gathered by hand from the park  
which had no bitterness

Saturation  
Joyce Odam

How often do you need this to be true? You are such a tragedy—sitting alone—in the rain—at the little sidewalk table since you love moody atmosphere. You sip your drink of rainwater and ask for the bill, and the waiter comes indifferently toward you, but you keep receding into the old pathetic story. You love the ancient way you feel; you love the misery of your own eyes in the distortion of the window where people are looking out at you. But they don't hold together any more. You have been here too long, wearing your self thin with repetition, boring everybody—even the long-dead artist you conjure for effect. And now we leave you there in your private reverie, the waiter never arriving, the rain falling into your glass—you, shining so deeply, like a wet free.

The Haunted Meadow  
(After a drawing by Heinrich Kley)  
Joyce Odam

*the wild girl  
dancing with a bear  
the bear leading*

I go to the forbidden meadow—and there see what I have been told: a girl who dances with a bear—a slim and naked joyous girl holding hands with a shaggy joyous bear. And they dance—they dance—they dance—obliviously together in a tireless circle—graceful and wild. Their steps are so light and perfect on the spinning ground that I ache to join them. Their burning eyes are connected in a love and I envy them. They are so beautiful together that I cannot move, but stay hidden and watch until the moon grows full and fiercely gold. And still I dare not make a move or let go a sound, for they spin—oh, they spin together like darkness and light until the meadow disappears. And at once, the spell is broken and they bow to each other, abrupt and solemn, and fade into the cold and thinning night, and the moon shines back upon a beaten, empty ground. Too late I realize that a whole lifetime has passed and that they were there for as long as that took. And I am left here, numb as a stone—lost and remembering, frozen to my locked and grieving self—strangely ageless and strangely old.



## Book

Joyce Odam

It was love. They tried to tell each other. But the crowd was so pressing, and there was a desperate lateness to the air. Skies were gathering.

The train stood idling on the track. They held hands, but people passed between them with fixed and anxious eyes.

A man in a uniform was shouting something in the din, but there was such deafness upon everything; his voice did not carry.

Evening birds swooped down and sought the darkening eaves, leaving huge shadows behind them.

Someone who grew suddenly luminous looked at his pocket watch; the doorway behind him took him in. It was not yet time.

Again they tried to say it: Love. They pressed together as the whole thing began to fade around them. A finished page was turning over them.

## Althea

Irene Eberling Marsh

Time clicks in seconds  
in your head.  
Sometimes you tap  
along with one foot,  
pumping oxygen  
in short supply.

You lie in bed all  
hours, day or  
night, lost in your

own house, ramble on  
about a buried  
bomb, some news you

read when you were young,  
then a dream  
you had, never  
your own life, I knew  
you then, your parents,  
your empty songs.

## Mother in Figment of Time and Self

Joyce Odam

"Oh!" Mama said, nit-picky, her foolish eyes all weepy. Under her big hat her face under her face was held—pose for mirror-look. "I live in a store window now." she said. "People like to look at me." And she laughed. But now she was about to speak her scoldy word, her cupid-bow lips all pouty, Mama with the peach-colored mouth. "I'm going to work now." Mama said to the children who were gone. And Mama walked out like a model, her long scarf down, her hand at her loose top button. I said, "Goodbye, Mama." but I was gone like the others. I was older than Mama who had her hand on the railing as her high heels went clacking down the stairs. She was standing still when Camera came, so full of praise and beauty. They married and sent me this photograph.

## My Old House

Joyce Odam

Someone owns my old house. I passed it again today. Someone tore its windows out, put a room on its porch, sagged its fence and killed its orange tree. Someone drove its ghosts out, which want to live there. Someone and someone and someone changed hands on it—each new someone having to leave—taking their unhappiness with them. My old house just sits on its corner and stares. It knows when I drive by—slowly for its sake. Its old tin garage glistens and stays useful, holding years of junk. My old house and I know how we still love each other, how we grow old with love. I drive by as often as I can. I look at it and say a soft *Oh* to it, and it says *Oh* back. We are patient.

## The Empty Shore

Geri Rosenzweig

The sun's spotlight fixed at the center of the sky,  
a few scratch marks left on the sand by seabirds.  
The sea strums a blank shore—  
Ah, Daedalus,  
your voice in the wind searching dune grasses  
for a child's sandal.

## Give Me Back My Distance

Geri Rosenzweig

The cool one with braids in her hair, she'd take  
me away in a coat of dust to the tick of a broken  
buckle at her foot. I loved her intimate embrace,

white as fire against the skin, the sizzle of hope  
in her eyes; the twisted signposts of her heart  
never scared me, nor the land's end of her hand

signaling distance. In the maps of her braids time  
meant nothing, she never lied to me, even when  
the suitcase opened its mouth, spat out the fraying string.

## The Dream of Being Elsewhere

Joyce Odam

Midnight. Tuesday. The night bird flies in out of the dark,  
the window opening for it. Outside, the flock—dipping in  
welcome. I hear their wings glide. I sense their shadows. I  
feel their eyes—bright as glass. They fill my window. They  
swarm in. They lift me through the dark release. I am only  
what I imagine.

## The Path

Joyce Odam

So vague, with only twilights now—no grand announce-  
ment—no noticed entrance hanging to an edge which is  
growing cold with shadow. Bent years are turning our cor-  
ners. How we envy them, laughter behind us, weeping  
ahead—or is that so? Is it weeping behind, and laughter  
ahead? I don't know.

## Dream: The Pitcher

Joyce Odam

I have brought a pitcher in to set on the table. It is filled  
with light. I don't remember going outside... it must have  
been the dream.

I walked in out of the dream with the pitcher and set it on  
the wet spot on the table. I remember this part clearly:  
"Drink," I said.

## Persuasion

Joyce Odam

In a white room, underneath white light, upon white chairs,  
men, who are waiting, turn as I enter—turn, and are silent.  
I go toward them where a woman with transparent eyes  
is leaving. I take one of the white chairs and begin to tell  
the men what they want to hear.

## The Sheets I Slept on Over There

Gerri Rosenzweig

When the laundry they pinned  
to a line in the windy light  
of their garden had dried  
before I was halfway  
across the Atlantic,  
when they called me  
at midnight Irish time  
to make sure I'd reached  
this part of the Hudson  
where an oriole's nest hangs  
by a thread to the bare tip of an oak,  
when, in the fog drenched  
hour of jet lag I heard  
that the sheets  
I slept on over there  
had been folded,  
put away on the top shelf  
of a cupboard built  
around the hot water tank  
which kept the bedroom  
of childhood warm  
in the needling frosts  
of Irish winters,  
I knew I had been a tourist  
visiting the country  
I was born in.

## In the Dark, Unafraid

for Allyson

Gerri Rosenzweig

When the new moon  
comes from behind a cloud,  
know you've been picked  
from some lottery in the sky  
to hear the child sing in the dark  
in the empty street.  
Small rock star of the evening,  
she lingers with extra syllables  
on the word love.  
Her voice floats up  
through branches, rosy lights  
flicker in the heels of her sneakers.  
The tree stirs, hearing her child sing  
in the dark, unafraid—

O shadows behind lighted windows,  
are you listening?

## Alexis

Irene Eberling Marsh

She gets the morning crossword  
drags it across the day  
hoards part of it for supper.  
There are pencils in every  
room, puzzle books, promises  
recycled paper for poems  
the lurking words, rodents  
gnawing behind walls.

## The Pale Grasses of the Field

Gerri Rosenzweig

Some poems have a light wind blowing  
through them as if they come from farmlands

in the North where aspens shiver like pennies  
in a basin of clear water, come down

with the clean smell of laundry drying  
on a morning in June, new, wooden clothespins

full of importance, pines heavy in the distance.  
I imagine I'd like to have spent my life

in such a place were it not for the calves, the lambs,  
taken each spring from their mothers,

their cries lifted up by the same wind blowing  
through the pale grasses of the field,

through the fine hair of the child playing amid  
cornflowers, her voice settling like light upon the leaves.

## Nursery Poem

Joyce Odam

When she comes home she will bring the child. Everything  
will be perfect now. She will turn on some music. The  
room will glow in receptive celebration. The child will be  
pink as a rose and sleep with great seriousness. Crooning  
voices will float over the child in admiration.