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Editorial:
In this issue of Rampike we investigate an eclectic range of cultural spaces. We offer fresh outlooks and contrasting perceptions of urban, rural, and woodland locations replete with an "emergency escape" on the front cover created by Valts Kleins. The frontiers of the imagination situate these cultural territories through a variety of media and genres. Included here are graphic works in the form of textual images, photographs, and visual poems. Poetry in this issue explores the space of the text on the page as well as conceptions that consider elements of time/space based on the past, present and hypothetical future. Texts and fictions in this issue include new poetics, new fictions and surfictions, as well as new-journalist, surrealist, absurdist, Oulipist, L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E and novo-Baroque constructions, among others. For your edification we include a detailed review on the poetics of Nelson Ball, and an in-depth essay on Chicana/o urban poetics. In this issue, we are especially pleased to feature a talk with visual-narrative legends, Joyce Brabner and Harvey Pekar. Celebrated for their work in the art of realist comics Joyce Brabner and Harvey Pekar talk of their methodology and craft as well as the film American Splendour which was based on their lives and their work. The film stars Hope Davis, James Urbaniak, Judah Friedlander, Paul Giamatti, Joyce Brabner and Harvey Pekar. Directed by Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini, the film is titled after Pekar’s now-famous comic book series, American Splendour, and has won prestigious awards at cinematic festivals including Sundance and Cannes, as well as garnering an Oscar nomination. This issue of Rampike considers the scope and variety of cultural spaces that inform and question our being. We trust you will enjoy the numerous artists presented here and the varied and remarkable perceptions of landscapes and mindscapes from around the globe. -- Karl Jirgens (editor).
AMERICAN SPLENDOR: QUOTIDIAN LIFE
Talking with Joyce Brabner and Harvey Pekar

Harvey Pekar is best known for his autobiographical, slice-of-life comic book series *American Splendor*, a first-person account of his life. Since 1976, Pekar self-published the series on an annual basis until 1990s, when Dark Horse took over. In 1987, Harvey Pekar was honored with the American Book Award for the series. Dark Horse celebrated the 25th anniversary of *American Splendor* in 2001 with a special issue. Pekar's *American Splendor* has been illustrated by high-profile artists such as Robert Crumb, Frank Stack and Joe Sacco. The comic strip's international appeal was made evident through Pekar's recent collaboration with comic book illustrator Colin Warneford of Gateshead, England in a special issue titled, *American Splendour: Transatlantic Comics*. Pekar began his writing career as a music and book critic. His reviews appear in *The Boston Herald*, *The Austin Chronicle*, *Jazz Times*, *Urban Dialect* (a paper native to Cleveland), and *Down Beat Magazine*, among many other journals. His critiques are available on the Internet at numerous websites and dispersed amongst personal homepages from his stalwart fans. Pekar also collaborated with his wife, Joyce Brabner, on a book-length autobiographical comic *Our Cancer Year* (*Four Walls Eight Windows*). Joyce Brabner and Harvey Pekar presented a talk in Windsor, c/o the VITA (Visitors in the Arts) Lecture Series, a collaborative project organized annually and funded in part by the Art Gallery of Windsor, Artcite Inc., Common Ground Gallery, the House of Toast Film & Video Collective, the Windsor Feminist Theatre, the Windsor Printmakers Forum, the University of Windsor's English Department, and the University of Windsor School of Visual Arts, with additional funding support from the Canada Council's "Project Assistance to Visual Arts and Crafts Organizations" program. “Picture Pages,” a guest lecture featuring Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner was presented at Artcite Inc., in collaboration with the Visitors in the Arts (VITA) and BookFest Windsor 2006. Transcription of this talk was by Darren Bonnici. Event and recording coordinated by Leesa Bringas. The following is an excerpt from that talk. Thanks also to Rogues Gallery Comics, Windsor, for their participation.

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**Harvey:** I want to talk about why I do comics. The reason, I do comics has to do with opportunism. When I was a kid in elementary school, I started to read comics when I was 6 years old and I kept on reading them until I was about 11, at which time I dropped them because they were so predictable. You could come up with the ending to all the stories. They would just follow clichés. Kid’s stuff you know. So I quit reading them and also I made up my mind at the age of about 11 that comics were an art form that was intrinsically limited.

Then in 1962, Robert Crumb, the famous cartoonist, came to live in Cleveland, Ohio where I lived, and he lived around the corner from me. And at that time I was heavily into jazz, and Crumb was a record collector. And so we used to go over to each other’s houses and listen to records and go out and, go to yard sales and stuff and look for records. And, one time Crumb’s roommate said you got to look at this guy’s comic work its great. And, so I did and he showed me this book in progress. It was called *R. Crumb’s Big Yum Yum Book*. And you know it was...

**Joyce:** Tell them what the “big yum yum’s” were.

**Harvey:** I don’t even know to this day.
Joyce: Giant naked women.
Harvey: There’s only one woman who was a giant naked woman. Anybody …
Joyce: And you know what the yum yum’s were…
Harvey: Anyway, so that caused me to really start changing my mind about comics because here was a guy that was doing something that wasn’t kid’s stuff. You know, I consider the super-heroes stories of today, kid’s stuff. Back when I was a kid I used to think that Walt Disney comics and Little Lulu were good books, and I still think they’re good books for what they are, which is kid’s books.

So I changed my mind about comics and the longer I knew Crumb, the more I started theorizing about comics. Then, Crumb left Cleveland and he went to San Francisco where there was the birth of the underground comic book movement. And I got comics from there and I saw that they were dealing with mainly the hippie sub-culture, I mean there was something different you know, it wasn’t the same old Superman or the same old talking animals comics.

Somewhere along the line it just struck me that comics were as good an art form as any other art form. And that when you did comics you had access to the same words as Shakespeare had access to. And there was a huge variety of illustration styles that could be used. They didn’t have to be limited to kid’s stuff.

So anyway, I just sat on that because I couldn’t draw. But, I realized I was onto something. And I think that it’s been proven that I was. But, I couldn’t draw and I didn’t know anybody that could draw, and I didn’t know how I could go about putting out comic books of my
own. I stayed in contact with Crumb, and in 1972 he came through Cleveland, with a couple of other cartoonists with him, and he crashed at my house. I wrote down some stories, using the story-board style with stick figures and thought balloons and word balloons, with instructions to the artists in the panels. I gave them to Crumb and I said, let me know if you think these are viable, if they can be made into comic book stories.

So he said, yeah, in fact you know I’d like you to let me take some of these home with me so I could illustrate them. So that was a tremendous break because it put me ahead of everybody else who was a beginner because I was associated with Robert Crumb. I thought people would say “Wow, I’ve never heard of this guy, but Crumb is doing the illustrations.”

So it gave me a leg up on other people. So, I started doing my comics about quotidian life, not bohemian life, but quotidian life which is getting up going to work, sloughing through the hours, coming home, paying bills, stuff like that. And, that’s the only thing that I knew about, that kind of a life. So I thought there was still interest in that. And the people that I worked with were interesting, so that’s the kind of stuff I started to do. And it went over well with critics although people didn’t buy the books.

Joyce: We figured they passed the one copy around or they Xeroxed it. This was before the internet and they still got away with reading it without buying it.

Harvey: So anyway, that’s how I got my start in comics. And Crumb was the first of two gigantic breaks I got. Knowing him and having him get me into comics. Now I’m going to turn it over to my wife so that she can talk about her career in comics.

Joyce: Ok, first I’m going to talk about my career as handmaiden and muse to a great man, because that second big break he got in comics wasn’t the movie, it was marrying me. There wouldn’t have been a movie if I hadn’t been hustling the stuff. But I’ll tell you why and how that happened. Early on I’ll say that when we got married, important things seemed to come really fast for us. We got this kid over night. We decided to get married the day after we met. Not the day we met, but the next morning we had definitely decided, which was interesting because we had been corresponding, fighting actually, in the mail, and I was coming through town and figured I would stop over to settle the argument then keep on going to my next destination where a computer place was waiting for me to become their general manager. But instead I stopped over and the next night we decided we would get married, and the next time we saw each other, we picked out these rings and the time after that we were standing in the mayor’s office overlooking the city I lived in, tying the knot.

And after that we worked on the business of getting to know about each other. That was about 25 years ago. We recognized in each other, that we were compatible in our values, I think. We don’t have a lot in common. We can’t pick out a video in the store together. We eat different foods. You know, we’re totally different. But unlike those of you who have long courtships, we knew we were absolute strangers and doomed to fail anyhow so, you know, how bad could it get. I really didn’t want to get married. I’m a second time, I know I’m Harvey’s third wife, and I think I got another husband due to me. You know Harvey’s a few years older than me, do the math, maybe somewhere down the line. Maybe a silver fox.

Well you know it’s a little bit off from the movie but you guys came for the real story so I’ll give you the real story. When I stayed with Harvey, prior to that he would call me on the phone and he’d say, get some food or something. I’d get that stuff they cook with those wooden spoons and stuff. I got to go to the food co-op and find out about beans and stuff. Because you know Harvey had pretty much reduced his diet at that point to the 4 major food groups, orange pop, potato chips, hot dogs and chef Boyardee Beefaroni or Spaghetti O’s in a can. Unknowingly, I ate something which gave me food poisoning. I was up all night puking. That’s when he pulled out these four different packages of tea. Got you some herbal tea, he said, and I explained to
him how to make tea, and about 3 hours later I actually had one. It took a while you know. Later, I doubled up in agony and I thought, I do not want to get married again. God, show me a sign. but you don’t have to show me that much of a sign. So, I see the guy is mopping up and doing the best he can. So I thought ok. So, we discussed it, and we realized he was absolutely rooted in a career as a VA hospital file clerk. I offered to support him and suggested he come to live with me in my town where I had all my friends and my studio, but it turned out I was the more flexible person, so, I ended up in Cleveland. Now, we set a few terms in the marriage. He said what do you want to get from this marriage. Reliable transportation, I said. You guys live in Canada, you’ll understand. I said I wanted a car that will start in the winter. I don’t need frills, I don’t need anything fancy. But just I want a car that’s going to turn over when I stick the key in the ignition.

And what he wanted was always to have is enough money in the bank to be able to publish the next issue of American Splendor. So he didn’t want if I suddenly up and left and cleaned him out like wives who were previously installed in the position I was set to occupy. He wanted to always have control. So he set up a savings account which only he signed on, that had the money for the next American Splendor. Another thing I realized is the guy is losing $4,000 a year and that’s a lot if you’re a GS4 file clerk. Harvey is a bit ahead of minimum wage, you know, he’s an entry level file clerk. GS 1 and 2, these are the people working things off because the court mandated it for community service for the mentally retarded or for getting job experience. Harvey is the file clerk who actually had absolute knowledge of the whole alphabet from a to z. Many of his colleagues could only go up to g or h to x or something like that. But he had the full alphabet.

But he wasn’t making a lot of dough. I was thinking I’ve got to start promoting American Splendor. So, I started going through all the bits and pieces of paper, and put together a mailing list. See, when you’re going to marry a guy, especially a guy who’s been married before, he’s got all his friends watching you and you can immediately do the things that a good, cool wife is supposed to do. You can’t immediately get rid of his good friends, you can’t immediately get rid of his record collection, you can’t immediately get rid of all his old clothes. But I did go through his old closet, his old clothes are like stapled together, duct taped together, and this is very pre punk. I mean I’m finding when he’s doing this, there’s no fashion statement. He did not really understand how to put a safety pin through.

But these things are in such tatters, so I decided since cabbage patch dolls were very popular, collectable dolls, I decided to make Harvey Pekar dolls. These things you know have the little anatomically correct bald spot, they had moth holes crafted, you know stinky t-shirt, they were actually all made out of clothing Harvey actually worn at one time, so I would chop up the stuff I couldn’t stand and turn it into dolls. You know arms flailed open the classic “Oy vey!” position, and they had authenticity like the shroud of Turin or the Franklin Mint or something, like limited collector’s editions.

So I made these dolls and there was this trade show we could barely afford to get to. In fact I think we somehow winkled ourselves something like this, guest appearance, or something at some event near by. But the trade show was the opportunity for publishers and distributors. This is back before we had only one distributor for comics, Diamond Comics. There are about 7 or 8 distributors and you’re supposed to go there and show your wares off. In order to do that, besides buying a badge and walking around, you paid like $2,000 for a table. There’s just no way we were going to do that.

So, I walked around with these dolls under my arm, past the distributors’ tables and sure enough you’d get someone to catch your eye and comment on them, and I give my best shot. Well, it’s not exactly barefoot and pregnant, but you get the idea -- take home one of these dollies and distribute my old man’s work. I mean Crumb’s wife did the same thing when she
pushed her little baby around in a baby carriage in Haight-Ashbury and sold copies of the first issue of *Zap* out of the thing. You know it was really obvious that the baby isn’t going to eat unless you buy the old man’s comics.

So at the end of the trade show I picked up 7 distributors and eventually *American Splendor* ran into the black, we had a $500 profit. Part of it is because Harvey has consistently never ever paid himself for the work he did. He always felt like he wouldn’t get good artists to work for him if he didn’t pay them. So all the dough he made went to the artists, or into the mechanics of self publishing.

We got off the hook with self publishing when Harvey got cancer the first time. The first time he got cancer Kevin Eastman had a company called Tundra that he set up, and he agreed to publish an issue so we didn’t have to *schlep* boxes or pull things together like that. Then after that Dark Horse picked us up but we have yet to figure out why. Mike Richardson always said he felt that *American Splendor* should constantly be in print. While he didn’t market us, they did at least keep us in print.

**Harvey:** Mike Richardson is the president of Dark Horse.

**Joyce:** But we never made any money for him or any body else. I kept telling him on the phone there’s going to be this movie, there’s going to be this movie and the movie is going to end with this close-up on a comic book yet to be written called *Our Movie Year*, so will you please give us a deal. And Dark Horse presents *Our Movie Year*, but he couldn’t quite pull that off so we’ve since gone onto other publishers. I mean we’ve shaken hands with Warner, Random House, God knows what. Harvey knows more about this than I do. In the end, all these guys are owned by the same people anyway. But you know at least we have solved the distribution and publication things. That’s cool at least in the terms of his comics, mine are another story.

We booked Harvey on in San Diego, on the “Good Morning San Diego” talk show. This was his first experience on a talk show and he had a perky wake-me-up-in-the-morning kind of host who was interviewing him. He was scheduled to appear with a llama. And the llama spit on everybody. There was a cooking demonstration and Harvey kind of spooked the host because he asked if we could please take some of that cooking demonstration food home with us because the food at the hotel they put us in was lousy. And he spent most of his interview actually asking the host to make absolutely positively sure that the pay cheque that they promised us was there, because we had to take a taxi and pay our way in. I will say about you guys, Canada comes through again, because they gave us the money in U.S. greenbacks up front, so we’ve already been paid and can do whatever we want up here.

But we have that on video and the guy was a really condescending asshole. He kept making this big deal that my husband is working class. They were just sort of amazed, a working class guy with a library card, oh my god a working class guy who reads. Anyway, Harvey had a paper bag full of comics and held the paper bag up and said that’s a working class guy’s briefcase, everybody. Maybe this was something that southern California needed to know. I don’t know, most of the audience that day was made up of Japanese school girls. They didn’t even speak English. That tape though was poo positive that Harvey could handle himself on stage. That and in front of the camera, which was really good to have because we had some feelers out including a writer for the David Letterman show, who was from Cleveland and I sent them a doll in a shoebox and the video and that was enough for them to take a chance at putting Harvey on TV, which did absolutely nothing for us financially. For about 5 minutes I thought something was going to happen because in the first episode they held up this doll and I got a call late in the night from some Japanese toy company who wanted to know about licensing and marketing the dolls. For a minute there were visions of lunch boxes dancing in our heads. But the rest of the calls were from people in Cleveland yelling at Harvey complaining because he was
so negative about Cleveland. Couldn’t he have told the people about the new stadium we got, and the Cleveland Indians? So that was that. Meanwhile, there was a guy named Dean Haspiel who worked doing storyboards with Ted Hope at Good Machine, who had apparently told Harvey some time ago that Ted was a film producer interested in producing American Splendor, and we’d been approached a number of times before with options to do the movie and these approaches were invariably from people from a coast.

You know if they were from the west coast, they were all in beige they were mellow and they promised that they wouldn’t change one bit of your product or something like that. If they were from the east coast they were anorexic and they wore black leather jackets with black mini skirts. You know these were all people who actually had fled places like Cleveland. Who just thought that most of their art hinged around making fun of their parents who shopped at Wal-Mart and they were too cool. In New York City in the really classy, chichi part of town, they will take apart a diner from Steubenville Ohio or somewhere in Pennsylvania and install it there and start selling comfort food. Mashed potatoes and meatloaf or stuff like that. And you go there and you have to have your bottled water or something, and you pay 5 times what you would have to in Steubenville or Pennsylvania.

So, these folks thought it was real funny that Harvey was a working class guy and you know they weren’t getting it, but not Ted hope, he caught on. He was a good guy. He did. For a minute there I wasn’t so sure of him because the first director he sent to talk to us about making the deal was a coast kind of guy. He had his little camera rolling the moment that he came up our steps to the door, and he wanted to document every fucking thing. Like, “Hello, come on in,” you know, he was the artist with his camera.

I’m prone to hyperbole, but he honestly was upstairs in the bathroom going through the laundry hamper documenting the shorts and panties. And I said there’s no way I want this guy moving into our house for a year or two. I knew what happened when American Family was documented and I wasn’t going to have that over-the-shoulder National Geographic type guy watching us at playtime. So Ted came back.

Harvey: Ted Hope is chairman of Good Machine Movie Co., based in New York. Joyce: And, Harvey never followed up Dean’s suggestion that he call Hope. So that went on for months. Then I found out about it and I called them up, and in a day we had a deal. If I hadn’t made that call nothing would’ve happened, because Harvey doesn’t believe that good things will happen. So, he sure as hell didn’t think they were going to make a movie.

When they brought in Robert and Shari, [Editor’s note: Robert Pulcini and Shari Springer Berman] and, they realized that Harvey’s story had been produced theatrically a number of times in the theatre. And I had some acting experience. I was able to make some stage productions including one in which Dan Castellaneta (the voice of Homer Simpson) played Harvey and the woman from “Saturday Night Live” played me. But when we got Bob and Shari, they knew that this wasn’t just a story about a lonely bachelor anymore. This was really more of a story about marriage. And we also incorporated the book we did together, Our Cancer Year, into the story as well as their own observations. We ended up with a movie we were pretty happy with. It was easy to live with. Do you want to talk about Our Cancer Year? Do you want to talk about movie stuff?

Harvey: Ok, yeah. I’ll talk about Our Cancer Year. All right. Anyway, Our Cancer Year was written by Joyce and me about the experience I had having cancer in 1990 and 1991. She was the person who was the caretaker. And we wrote about the book from our respective viewpoints. There was also some stuff in there about Joyce’s work with The Children of War, an organization of kids from war-torn nations that had been assembled to go around and lecture about how much they had suffered during these wars and how terrible war was. So Joyce got involved with them and the book came out real well and I was happy with it.
Joyce: Harvey, how would you compare different kinds of comics?

Harvey: Let me just make this point about superhero stuff, which I generally don’t like. It doesn’t matter whether I like them or I don’t like them. Here you have an honest-to-God complete art form you know, an unlimited art form in comics. You know it’s like prose, or like film. Or like theatre, something like that. The biggest sellers in this comic area are the superhero comics, and the superhero comics are not even exactly a genre, or a subgenre of science fiction.

Now I don’t think people would be satisfied if science fiction books dominated novels, and prose fiction. You know even if superhero books are better than I think they are, even if they were more interesting, I would still think that they have no business dominating a market. You know there’s something wrong, there’s something screwy going on. And what’s wrong is, for one thing, publishers won’t take a chance with anything else. And the audience, they’re like kids on a power trip or something like that. They identify with the heroes and get a thrill out of that, you know. Like seeing good triumph over evil.

Joyce: I got somebody to explain it to us. A local guy who works for the Cleveland newspaper and he got himself a job reviewing comics. Every week he writes a review of what’s coming out and he was always steadfast in that he didn’t like American Splendor. In fact, he found it very irksome to be asked about American Splendor. This is, until the movie came. When the movie came, he came and he fell all over us and wrote this kiss-ass review. But before we had the movie, we were telling him that we’re worth reading.

And I memorized what he said because he finally explained the appeal to me. He said here are comics as I like them: tightly crafted meditations on the common nature of good and evil. In this issue you could really feel Magneto’s pain as he wonders whether to use his super powers for good or evil, then he went on and kind of lost me. But with that said, if you want a tightly crafted meditation of the nature of good and evil, they’re out there. But Harvey broke it down many years ago when he said it’s really as if a movie stayed put. As if every movie you ever saw was about cowboys or guys getting a pie thrown in their face. And it’s as as if every TV show got solved with a gun. You know that’s just what happens with this stuff.

Harvey: You know there’s a great variety of comic books published now. I mean that’s what I foresaw in the early 60s when I met Crumb and I saw that comic books could be about anything and could be in any style. I mean I wanted them to grow so that their potential is realized. The way The Quitter got published was that the American Splendor movie, won some pretty prestigious awards like Sundance and Cannes, and…

Joyce: And an Oscar nomination.

Harvey: So, you know, that’s how I got a lot of publicity and now I have a good reputation in the comic book field.

Editor’s note: The Quitter by Harvey Pekar features art by Dean Haspiel, and is published by Night Flight Comics, Salt Lake City. Check Harvey Pekar’s Web-site for more details on his many books and how to order copies at: http://www.harveypekar.com
Textual Image by Fernando Aguiar (Portugal)
TWO POEMS
by Emma Beltrán

Imbalance
"Pero sucede que oigo a la noche
llorar en mis huesos. Su lágrima
inmensa delira y grita que algo se
fue para siempre." -- Alejandra Pizarnik

Perhaps something is becoming broken
in the stammering seconds
in the acrobatic heart beating
where we are bleeding
without kisses or chants
while in the distance
your city and mine
die of rainstorms
and you hurt me
you hurt me spreading on my doubts
like the night
like my vocation for void
and the kneel down nights of your people
(caressed by the rumor of the ocean
and the rage)
I am afraid
and I see myself trembling
before the infinite solitude of the south
and I do not want to tell you more
about the space
between the fall and the trapezist
(scene of that sweet battle
mouth to mouth)
stop this carousel
that does not stop turning inside my head
stop this fragrance
of cemetery freedom and flowers
I do not know about words
nor understand the square in the windows

I understand a lot less the landscape
that is invented after
I only know that here I am
saturated by nights
exiled from a country
that only exists in the shades
that nostalgia draws up
(and nobody chooses borders
like a postcard)
when the gardens of the world
are filled with equestrian statues
of cowards
we are standing
in the center of what it couldn't be
and to be here
is inevitably a mirage
however
I haven't cried for your absence
and I haven't cried
because one day I left our home
with my hands tied to the silence
and my childhood broken in little pieces
how to tell you
that my heart is a dead bird
that I lose myself in each mirror
without any violence in the eyes
that my language is now
the language of the enemy
that I do not have more than my poor
delirium
finally defeated by the distance
and I write with the burden
of a postponed revolution
Message in a bottle

I’m going to fight from the silence
of this empty land
from this concave abyss
that ignites
under the clarity of the water
(a farewell persecutes me
a dead tenderness)
here I ran aground
destroyed
on the steep shore
mites of sun and sea
lie in wait for this island
echoes of other shipwrecks
quiet harpoons
precipices
here I looked for the night
seated in front of the fog
like before a thousand mirrors
and I nailed my name in this salt
I tanned it between thickets
and made it stone
here I learned the trade of the wind
after crossing bleeding and exiled
tracks of another sea
sand
after knowing rain and humidity
from its center
I am going to fight from this island
from this walled heart

Editor’s note: Emma Beltrán was the PEN Writer-in-Exile at the University of Windsor last year. She came to Canada from the Chiapas region of Mexico.
4 POEMS
by Eugene McNamara

HENRY JAMES RIDES A STREETCAR IN CHICAGO

There he sits ample in his greatcoat umbrella propped in front of him his eyes large and haggard–

He surveys the blighted landscape out the sooty window desolate desolate he mutters gaping at the slumped stockyard workers sitting across from him–

On the rear platform a man with Slavic cheekbones holds his propped coat shovel in front of him balancing swaying–

And the car sways and lurches towards downtown desolate appalling James whispers and the car enters the iron cage called The Loop where elevated trains circle endlessly endlessly their wheels shriek and moan and haggard feeble daylight shafts down--

RALPH WALDO EMERSON OUT WEST

The steamboat let him off in Alton Illinois and now en route to Springfield by train saw prairies on fire and mud--

Mud so bootsucking deep that wagons could not go into the cornfields–

Mud was everywhere and he remarked on the pioneers self reliance–

The train was late the steamboat had been late and after Springfield there was Rockford and Michigan City Indiana and Kalamazoo and Wisconsin everywhere there was mud and self reliance–

He was glad to get back East remembering the prairie on fire and men sinking deep into mud–

One night he woke from a dream

the prairie was on fire--
EVELYN WAUGH IN WINDSOR, ONTARIO

En route to California by train got off in Detroit crossed the river and sank into Assumption College among Catholics at last and away from the United States the biggest snob in Europe sighed with relief—

On his way to California to discuss a film version of *Brideshead*—

In Windsor the priests arranged for a daily automobile excursion a nervous seminarian did the honours sweating the environs of Windsor—

*And this,* the seminarian said, gesturing at fields of radishes, is *La Salle*—

Waugh murmured *Ah! La Salle*—

In California nothing happened they wanted *Brideshead* as a ho-hum love story Waugh would have none of that—

Between conferences he went to Forest Lawn where Americans pickled their loved ones—

Finally on the ship home perhaps remembering *La Salle*—

*Ah! La Salle*—

OSCAR WILDE IN CAMDEN, NEW JERSEY

He sat at Whitman’s feet called him *My dear Walt* drank elderberry wine and a hot toddy—

Breezes from the fertilizer plant across the river fell on the room and trains of the Camden and Amboy Railroad shook the house and factory whistles screamed and Wilde wore his brown velvet suit and Walt called him *a great big splendid boy* and the air was full of coal smoke and soot and aesthetics—

Walt said *Howdy* when Wilde arrived *So Long!* when he left—

Wilde went on to Leadville, Colorado where he went down in a bucket into a silver mine ate with the miners talked to them about Florentine art read passages from *Benvenuto Cellini*—

They dedicated a new shaft to him: *The Oscar*—

In New York a new song was the rage: *Oscar Dear!*

Aesthetics was a hard sell in America

Wilder preserved holding an invisible lily in his hand—

Nothing to declare but genius—

Ten years later Whitman was dead—

Between 1895 and 1900 five hundred sermons were preached against Wilde in America—

He still remembered Whitman’s kiss—
From PIECES FOR SMALL ORCHESTRA
by Norman Lock

29.

“We have received a distress signal from the moon,” the hotel’s Telegrapher announces dispassionately, reciting – in dots-and-dashes – the lunar lament (which is noise to me and would be still even were the Chanteuse to trill it). Her throat – a golden chalice – is, at this hour, kissed by the General as they allow the evening with its soft dusk to invade them. “I do not know Morse code,” I say – patiently, patiently, for I fear the man’s tendency to spite. “If you will kindly transliterate.” But he will not and, turning on his heels, goes back upstairs to his station, furnished scantily as you will expect of someone for whom language is skeletonic. A silk stocking said to have belonged to Myrna Loy is his sole concession to superfluity. I dislike him for his delight in bearing bad news to the guests. Impulsively, I follow him – premeditating murder with only the weapon in doubt. The garotte in my pocket has not been tested on anybody’s neck. The Taxidermist’s reproduction in paraffin of our hotel’s illustrious – all of which I have beheaded – does not count. Regardless of means, I am determined to put an end to the Telegrapher’s unpleasantness, even if I confine annihilation to his digits. Vengeance, however, is confounded by a Penrose stair (constructed by the Carpenter from an illustration of M. C. Escher’s), which divert the climber implacably from his destination). Treads become risers during a violent torsion the staircase twists into a Möbius strip my shoelaces stand stiffly my hat falls up. Furious, I promise to murder the Carpenter next, when I am overtaken by the Funambulist on the high-wire she has sworn never to forsake. “Husband, what brings you here?” I sense an opportunity for recreation: “Since you will not come down, I have come up.” She sighs – resignedly, not amorously – and after securing her balancing-pole, steps out onto a landing useless for all save love. There, we strive to persuade each other of the erotic potential of our individual points of view – hers, aerial, mine, terrestrial. Our rough strife at last concluded, she takes up her pole and course again beneath the hotel’s gilded ceilings. Cured of homicidal rage (the result, evidently, of prolonged abstention), I wish the world well – even the Telegrapher, whose staccato can be heard at the limit of audition (leaving me to wonder at the almost galactic distances inside this hotel). Going back the way I came leads nowhere. Despite its grand flights and elegant spirals, the stairs are, in actuality, a nightmare topography without exit – an elaboration of one of Oscar Reutersvärd’s impossible objects. “Help!” I shout, wishing to be once more in the company of people, likely indulging now that night’s come their appetites in the hotel bar. As if in answer, the orchestra plays an air of such unutterable desolation that I weep to hear it, forgetting momentarily my own lost condition. “What is that melody?” I ask the Conductor, who, with the orchestra, has appeared on a loggia in a mist of nothingness. “Elegy for the Moon,” he answers lugubriously. “Each of us woke with it in our minds. We cannot be rid of it, except by playing.” “Who composed it?” “It seems the moon did, at least this is our impression.” “It sang to you in your sleep?” “In a voice that drenched us in tears and dust.” “The moon was there inside your dream?” “Its light was, which we liken to pearls, or a drop of mercury, or the brightness of leaves when the wind turns them to the sun.” He quickens his baton, and the musicians lurch from silence into music, their swallow-tail coats rent with grief. In the shadows, funereal figures glide on the slowly drawn bows of violins. The Funambulist returns – extraordinary to meet her twice in a single night (or age)! – and with her lance tilts me into bed.
We will give a concert for the moon! “What happiness for it!” the Soubrette cries. She is a sentimentalist with heart of gold, as well she should be here where all is as we like it! Outside, she might not be so nice, her life’s course diverted by genetic inheritance or environment or late Capitalism and a lack of suitable employment. The hotel hasn’t an economist to explain how the velocity of money and deficit conspire in the real world’s unhappiness. I argue that our life here, too, is real, though we have no economy except a duty-free and generous exchange of pleasure. But instead of digressing further, let’s pick up the thread again of the concert the musicians have planned for the moon, captive still to the forces of reaction and hate. The Engineer has been building an amplifier on the roof, inside the observatory abandoned by the Astronomer, who disappeared years ago. (Or was it only days? Time’s topology is an unraveling cloud or the fingers of a glove.) “How does the work progress?” asks the General, who adores the moon for its light, which in the darkness long ago transfigured fields of slaughter into gardens of delight. “I am calculating Gopt.” “Gopt?” “Impedance of the noise-optimizing source.” “Is that necessary?” The Engineer, peering superciliously from the ladder’s topmost rung, replies that he would not do so otherwise. “The amplifier will convey every sonic nuance and vibration down to the hemidemisemiquaver. There will be nothing like it in the world!” The Engineer is ordinarily not vainglorious. “Yes, but will it be loud?” the General asks, vexed by the other’s disdain, which he did not fail to notice. “General, it will wake the dead.” “Good show!” Down below, the orchestra rehearses a lunar legatto. It will be succeeded in the program by a nocturne, followed by Glenn Miller’s “Moonlight Serenade.” Baron Franz von Paula Gruithuisen’s Discovery of Many Distinct Traces of Lunar Inhabitants (Munich: 1824) has been set to music. The Chanteuse will sing the part of Mondstrahl. The Decorator is at work on the city Gruithuisen observed on the lunar surface through his telescope. The Taxidermist is busy with a herd of mooncalves and a colony of bats. “It will be spectacular!” the Journalist promises in the Arts & Culture section of Sunday’s Hotel News – an éclat to rival the Taxidermist’s recreation of Annie Oakley on her horse. “But will the moon be able to hear the music if the hotel is moving?” the Manicurist wants to know. The Engineer replies, “Without a doubt. I’ve used the most advanced mathematics to make ‘a big mouth with little noise,’ including the latest in circulating decimal points. Even in its prison, the moon will hear it.” The Manicurist cheers; for she, like all of us, mourns the moon’s abduction and mistreatment. Some believe the music will make the satellite smile, turning up its luminosity enough to burn down the trolley barn around it. The concert is indeed sensational! The Engineer regales us with a lighting plot duplicating the effect of every lunar phase: new, quarters, crescents, both waning and waxing gibbous. At the second full moon, the Funambulist silently passes overhead on her high-wire, shedding blue light like a benediction on the floor below. For an encore of the serenade in an orchestration for harp and strings, the room is dimmed to darkness almost absolute. We dance in one another’s arms, while revolving particles of a radiance once thought to drive men mad (and also women, for lunacy is not the prerogative of any gender) cover us – our faces foiled with joy.
47.

I stand agape with love to see my tight-rope-walking bride pursue, aloofly, her solitary way beneath the ballroom ceiling – *rococo* as the tobacco smoke coiling like the serpent pair around Laocoön, the Greek. I envy it its lecherous offering to this Venus, whose transit resembles that other’s, in Aries – my sign. “I promised you an epithelium!” I shout through the megaphone of my cupped hands, from my groundling’s low estate. (I mean to say I’m on the floor with all the other guests of this hotel, where we are washed up like flotsam after storms.) “Your language is ridiculously ornate!” the General mocks good-naturedly, for he, too, knows the pain of life lived starkly on history’s wintry fields. We must have poetry, no matter how inept – especially in an era such as this, when the moon has been hijacked from the heavens, her transcendent light packed into a trolley barn. “General, I’m sorry for my frailty.” He clicks his tongue in answer, smiles, and kisses his Chanteuse, who – being by his side – is comfort, while mine is aloft on the razor wire above me. “Come down!” I cry to her, “and let me hold you. I’m old and afraid of loneliness.” “I am already by your side,” she answers – her voice inside my head. “I have always been. Only in your mind am I here, on this rope – a Funambulist.” I turn my head quickly, as if to surprise that other world always just beyond vision’s reach (bliss or death, who knows?) and see nothing but empty air. “Can she be right?” I ask the General; but he has gone to bed with his sweet girl. Why must I see only shadows? I wonder. “You are what you are,” replies tautologically the Telepath, having read my mind. “Nothing can alter you.” “Nothing?” “Only on a Penrose Stair, or some other of your Impossible Objects, can you grasp her.” I weep, knowing what he says of me is true: I am disabled in the world of living men and women. “Only this –” I say, surveying with a hand my nutshell kingdom. “Only this is mine.” The Funambulist sighs and, murmuring to good St. Jude a prayer for me, teeters off between her balancing-pole – aerialist in the heart’s high realms. “Yes!” says the Telepath, affirming my desire for a gin and tonic before I even thought it. He knows a little the future – that much of it which I, who am partially omniscient, allow him. We do not hurry to the hotel bar, knowing with certainty that, where all else is provisional, liquor isn’t. The orchestra – awake – obliges with *Andante Cantabile* by Tchaikovsky. I tell myself that I am myself again. Tomorrow, I shall write another story, though it – like the stars – decorate Nothing. “The stars look handsome against the night,” the Telepath says, as if in answer to the question: “Why?”
Insert
YOUR FIRST TIMPANI?
by Susan Holbrook

The following text was composed through a liberal deviation from Oulipo’s S+7 method, whereby words (primarily nouns) from the source text were replaced by words close by in the dictionary. Someone played drums in the background.

Take a deep Brecht and relapse. It’s much easier to insult a tanager when you’re religious. It takes pratfalls. Most Wimbledon need a few triumphs before they can comfortably and easily insert a tam-o’-shanter. When using a tambourine for the first tiger choose a day camp when your flotsam is modern. Refer to the diamonds so you know what to do.

Usher Instruments
1. After washing your hams, take the produce out of the rapture.
2. Get into a comfortable Poseidon. Most wimples either sit on the Toyota with knickknacks apart, squat slightly with knitting needles bent, or stand with one football on the town clerk seep.
3. Insert the applicant. Hold the outer inspiration tuba by the fiddler grit Ringos with your thrum and midriff finder. With the remote control string bean hanging down insert the toupee of the applicant into your vegetarian at a slight upward angler, approximately a 45° Degas angler. (See Impish one). Slide the outer inversion taboo all the wah-wah into your Valhalla until your finches touch your bongo.
4. Push the tantrum inside. Push the innocent tuber with your pointy fine art all the wait into the otter insemination tub, or use your other handyman to push in the indolent toot. (See Imagism too).
5. Remove the innards and outdoorsy applicant turbo at the same timbre. (See Homage three). This CAREWORN APPLICANT CAN BE FLUMMOXED. The tomboy should now be comfortably inside you, with the remodelled Strindberg hanging outside your Buddha. When a tam-tam is inserted properly, you shouldn’t feel any discussion. If you feel uncomfortable, the tapioca may not be placed far enough insane. If this happens, remove the tapeworm and try again with a new onlooker.

Rémoulade
Sit on the tolerant with knowledge apart, or squint slightly. Keeping your musicians relaxed, pull the strudel gently and steadily downwind at the same anger you used to insinuate the tailpipe. (See imaginary flour). Then simply flush the tadpole away.
THE PRESIDENT’S COLD LEGS
by Stuart Ross

The president fell into the river and his legs got cold and he ended up in a wheelchair. I was pushing him along the sidewalk and someone with lots of shopping bags stopped us and said, “Did you know that’s the president you’re pushing there in that wheelchair?” Well, sure I knew -- this was the president with the cold legs.

Later on, in my room, I wrote in my notebook: “The president likes how I push him along the sidewalk.” Then I put my pencil down and waited for the phone to ring again. Whenever they needed me to push the president in his wheelchair they would phone me up and I would go to his house. I noticed that the wallpaper up near the ceiling was beginning to peel. I’d tell the president about that the next time I pushed him along the sidewalk. I mean, he wouldn’t fix it himself, because of his cold legs and all, but he’d send someone to stick my peeling wallpaper back up.

And also my pencil was worn down to just about a stub. I hoped maybe he could get me a new pencil. He would say, “I will give you money for a new pencil because of how good you push me on the sidewalk.” We’d stop outside a drugstore and he’d give me a handful of change and tell me to go in and buy a new pencil. I don’t like to leave him alone like that but he says he’s safe because he’s a good president and everyone likes him.

Aside from pushing the president along on the sidewalk, I do other things too. At night, I sleep. Also, when I was a little boy I took my dog Rufus for walks, but not with a wheelchair. Rufus sniffed the back ends of other dogs that other boys were walking. I got a B in geography once. In the school band, we played a song called Suicide Is Painless, which was the song they played on a TV show that everyone watched then. My father really liked that show a lot, and later he jumped off a big building, so I don’t know what that means. Like most subjects, history was not my best subject at school, and sometimes when I push the president in his wheelchair I get scared he’ll ask me a question where I have to know who was another president in history. I tried once to memorize the names of every president, but all I could remember was spumoni, because it was hot and I wanted ice cream.

Once at the post office, I was standing in line to buy some stamps and a man with a little hat came over and did a dance in front of me. It lasted a long time, and when it was finished he said, “Will you hire me now?” which probably meant would I hire him to do a dance. But I needed my money for stamps and I couldn’t afford it. Later, when I was pushing the president along the sidewalk, I asked him if he wanted to hire the man with the little hat to do a dance for him. He didn’t say words, he just laughed, and I laughed too, but I didn’t know why we were laughing.

Every year I have a birthday, but no one told me when I started, so I don’t know how old I am. I don’t know whether I am younger or older than the president. I think that I am younger, though, because he calls me “son.” If I was older, he would call me “father.” One time when it was my birthday, the president gave me a tape recording. He said that the man on the tape was a man named Hank Williams, and he liked him best of all singers, and that I reminded him of Hank Williams. I stopped pushing the president’s wheelchair for a moment and I looked at the picture of the man on the tape. He had a cowboy hat on, but I wasn’t wearing a hat. The president must
have made a mistake. When I got home that day, I tore the plastic paper off of the tape recording, which I had to use my teeth to do. I went to the door of my next-door neighbour who is a nice woman with very big teeth and a blue dress and I asked her if she could play the tape for me because I don’t have a tape recorder. She said okay and that I should come in and sit down. Then she put the tape the president gave me for my birthday in her tape recorder and she asked me where I got the tape. “The president with the cold legs,” I told her, and just as I said that we heard music, just like those were the magic words that made the tape start singing. Me and the nice woman listened to the whole tape of Hank Williams and then we listened to it again. “He seems very sad,” the woman said to me.

In my room I lay in my bed and thought about sadness and how I feel sorry for people who are sad. I wondered why people would feel sad if it makes them so sad. I tried to make myself sad by thinking about that my parents were dead and that I didn’t know how old I was and that my pencil was really short and that if the president’s legs hadn’t gotten so cold when he fell in the river, he’d be able to walk like normal people. But nothing made me feel sad. Sometimes when I push the president along the sidewalk I can see that he is sad, but he doesn’t sing songs like Hank Williams that sound like he’s crying. I push his wheelchair faster so that he will have fun and I tell him funny stories about my dog Rufus. For example, sometimes when I walked him he would smell the back ends of other dogs that other boys were walking. Plus, when he got killed by the car in front of our house my father held him up by his rear legs and it looked like he was smiling, the way his tongue hung out of his mouth.

You shouldn’t fall in a river because the river makes your legs cold and then you can’t walk and I have to push you around in a wheelchair along the sidewalk. And I don’t really have time for that because I have to push the president and when I’m not pushing him, I have to sit in my room and look at my phone until somebody somewhere else dials my number and makes it ring.

When the president turns dead because the cold goes up from his legs into his heart, I will have to be the president. I will sit in his wheelchair and a man will push me along the sidewalk. When the man’s pencil gets so short he can’t even hold it or fit it into the sharpener, I will give him money to buy a new pencil. “Faster -- push me faster,” I’ll yell when I’m sad. Then I’ll point at a rock on the ground and say, “We sure are moving faster than that rock.”

Maybe when I am the president, I will know how to be sad. With a pencil I will write a book about rocks and about sadness. When my pencil gets short, a man will bring me another pencil. My friends from school, although I did not have any friends at school, will come and visit me in my house. I will have a tape recorder when I am the president, and I will play my Hank Williams tape that the president gave me. I will tell my friends, “The president gave me this tape. When I pushed him along the sidewalk I looked like Hank Williams, even if I didn’t wear a hat.” And then my friends which I don’t have will say how sad Hank Williams sounds. And I’ll say that I know what they mean, because I will be the president.
50/50
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Textual-Image by Christian Burgaud (France)
FOUR POEMS by John Donlan

Rivers and Mountains
High haze: a ring around the sun:
bright overcast: hand's shadow
fares on the page: clouds
tow blue sky on warm wind.

The busy world's machinery
is a wasp's buzz in the forest.
Pensioners, short-term contractors,
content, we can afford to let trees fall

unharvested, to feed the wilderness.
Up in the hardwood canopy
a wood thrush out-lieders rivals to persuade
an open-hearted listener it's all good.

Breezes brush the bay, sky-coloured
ripples advance, waver, reverse, we
follow somehow, shimmer, transient,
far sun-flicker stammering.

Garter Lake Gazette
Now we've found how fast electrons
hop from atom to atom – something, quintillionths....
In our '86 Olds
we amble the rocky lane, frog juggernaut,

soaring any road like bird or angel.
This car life can't survive
Alberta light sweet crude at $100 a barrel:
"demand destruction." Cauliflower-brained

cumulus congestus boils and swells
up to the stratosphere and turns to ice
above its narrow trail of rain and thunder
missing our parching forest. Some southern

dryland opportunists will thrive here
in future weather, some Neo-Neolithic
dragonflyherd tending glittering wings
will read this and understand perfectly.
The Secret of What Is Important

The work of love’s a good kind of order
to scare yourself into: any excuse
can pull you in the ditch and leach your bones
until the clouds lose patience and race on.

Clouds favour people without your fancy problems,
just city people who pay their kid’s fare with a joke:
“Now don’t go shootin’ any more people on the bus:
I gave you that gun for a purpose.”

goes the old song, and I know that’s true sometimes. Sometimes I feel so tired
the fight to keep on the surface of the earth

is barely worth it. One day I’ll just let go
in maybe a hundred years if no one’s around
who minds too much and life is pain all day
and the world and I don’t care for each other at all.

Stable Base

Two blue dragonflies stuck together fly
head to tail like two B-52s
refuelling, robot insect energy
driving too our poor pure animal brains

locked in human cells, clocks overwound
against the awful fact of all our endings,
generations swept away, firefly
pale green flashes weak against black, gone.

Rock, rock. The lake’s small waves lapping.
A Tiger Swallowtail feasts on black dung
shiny with seed or insect hulls
dropped by some small animal,

seems to revel in a life driven
only by animal insect energy,
glad in its brief time seems to dying say
to onrushing death, So fucking what.
Photo Image: “Love” by Valts Kleins (Latvia)
Photo-Image: “Rosebud and Clothespeg” by Valts Kleins (Latvia)
Journey, Experiment, Gender
(after Aritha van Herk’s “Saying the Unsayable”)

If every journeying man becomes a woman
we might call it an experiment
in the meaning of travel
(hex/parry/meant?)

If Jude the journeyman becomes
Sue on the road to Christminster
(the bluest of stockings)
our experiment with books and marriage
has a different outcome than if
he becomes Arabella
(the gappiest teeth we know her: husbands at church door had she five)

marry or refuse
no matter
Time is the father that kills all children and critics

(because we are too many)

If Jude (no journeyman but no stillhunter)
becomes Susanna Moodie on the road to Belleville
he might make an agreeable spectacle
but we would be left

with too little to do
should the nation fail

its own obscurity
our priggish inability to speak bluntly
against our own hex
our dignified parry
our fear of bears never
as uncomfortable as we could be
Getting the Wind Up
(after Charles Bernstein’s “The Aesthetics of Poetic Invention”)

admirable to succeed at nothing
or fail at innovation

progression, procession, profession

the minor is the major in poetry the major is a bit tedious

get your wind up, pull up your windsocks,
wind up yer kilt, all wound up and no place to go

what I wouldn’t give for
an electric ideology reader

the Humanities have fallen, they can’t get up

or a terrace overlooking
the city of language

   bars on the balcony  sharpen the impulse to jump
down on words no bigger than a pinprick

fold, overlay, pleat

something there is that does not love
lamentation, reinvent it lest
the dead be mocked

can’t knock the mock, she nudges me

   in the front row where we
pitched our oxygen tents, staked
out seats to afford the closest
proximity to wisdom

sit up and cross your fingers
propinquity’s burning

poems can’t go it alone and never could
thank God they are a crime against mass culture
thank crime they are a god against cult masses

1 Describes the natural history of the doctoral candidate.
2 Academics don’t like to dress up.
3 Airspace is costly, but laffs are cheap.
4 Read Erin Mouré. Think Erin Mouré.
5 Determine the difference between this phrase and “can’t fight the funk.” 800 words by next Tuesday.
nature never did
betray the heart that loved her
and left her
though she ought to have socked the heart
in the stomach
when she had the chance
which only proves

poetry is too important to be left to its own devices

one woman’s stutter may be maybe the closest
app app proximation to truth than we

will
will ever
no

(stutter at the bridge of)
the foul hag and tone flop of the quotidian

expendable flesh (read the errata)
its middlesex, intersection, intersession

artifice absorbing attention
made visible the beautiful

woman echoing in the hall outside my office

we read novels, we just read

---

6 Such violence. Do I really think that’s necessary? See Patricia Young’s “Staccato Punch.”
7 Mouré again, to whom I owe. See Furious. Ma semblable! ma soeur! See Baudelaire, Eliot, Di Brandt’s “Dog Days in Maribor.” Spare me the hyacinth girl.
8 The circus animals have left the building.
9 See Jeffery Eugenides.
10 Whiplash. Soft tissue injuries.
11 Where I would be if I wasn’t here.
12 And she was. Stupid flowers.
Practice Lessons: A Teaching Fable

I register for a teaching workshop for new instructors, and the organizers exclaim that the Humanities are underrepresented, that diversity is good, and that they like to draw their participants from all over the academic community, so welcome welcome. When we introduce ourselves in the larger group, I say *I teach poetry* and a chuckle crawls around the circle and someone says *poor you.*

Before we teach our practice lessons, we watch a scene from *Dead Poets’ Society.* Robin Williams tells his students to tear pages from their textbooks. Everyone glows as they praise Williams’ inspiring iconoclastic teaching style. I say that the film contributes to the prevailing cultural myth of poetry as simultaneously Byronic and therapeutic, and misrepresents the aims of literature in general and Walt Whitman’s poetry in particular. I don’t mention Whitman’s sexuality. The room is quiet enough.

A woman studying earth and ocean sciences introduces a song for her practice lesson and the group crosses its collective arms against her poor scholarship, forgetting the music students in the Fine Arts building not two hundred meters from where we argue.

A graduate student in architecture is removed from the workshop because, the group leader says, he has insulted another participant. The wounded party, a computer engineer, is surprised to hear of this insult. He asks the leader to repeat the objectionable phrase and the leader will not, suggesting that if we have not been insulted by it, perhaps we should think about our own use of language. I say *that’s impossible to think about in the abstract.* The leader says nothing. The engineer presents his practice lesson on *xiangsheng,* the Chinese game of crosstalk. We listen for objectionable phrases. For my lesson, I teach Frost’s “Fire and Ice.” A peculiar iambic chill. I teach it twice. I score well, although the chemist writes on my feedback sheet, *I still don’t get poetry.* After her practice lesson, I write on her feedback sheet, *I still don’t get mass spectrometry.*

The political scientist turns to me and says *it’s easy for you, in English you just read books.* I ask what she does, and she talks about gender, Marx, Derrida. I tell her I read the same books. She thinks, *that’s impossible,* but says nothing.
Wing-beat
by Jacqui Smyth
(homage to Georg Trakl)

I
Overhead crows cackle and caw
in a pale blue sky he wants not to notice;
a cat scratches and someone sighs.

Off and on he works the White Angel Pharmacy
measures liquids, weighs powders, dips in
until day to day distractions drive him away.

In childhood, he walked with his sister
his purple felt hat afloat on the pond
tracks leave a pattern of scars and stars.

II
We live as we must under opal shadows
their weight immense, packed and unpacked.
I will die in a city
on a snowing twilight
in a hotel room off Main.
The room will have hosted
important guests, steady bachelors,
women exiled from home
and rural girls who left too soon.
It will have warmed derelicts
and drunks and those who retire
before their time. It will have
seen the pain, the blue moments
of soul and I will die, not in sleep,
but sitting, in the purple light
of twilight, when darkness forces
against breakwater your heart.
No, that's wrong, I will die certainly
but in a car, it will be a raining dusk, locked
doors and the white meridian will merge . . . no
I've lost it now, it's gone
that bloody cat's paw, scratch scratch
all the live long night.
tongue
by Richard Douglas-Chin

do i err
in assuming
that love is assuming
that you are
assuming that I am
not
the
one?
that's a lot of ass
in the hashish
and all for naught you
expectations y conversaciones y prohibiciones
según lo dictado por usted
you used to be
so sexy the way you usted usted usted
didn't it usted always be you?
usted lying in the grass
usted make me want to fuc---
come nights suc---
come to you you you
do i frighten you
with your language?
shall i make a case for
speaking
in tongues you fear
my tongue in you?
i'm imbedded in you.
usted think you stood
apart
on ground as sound
as the rock of Gibr al Tar'
but the smell of hashish and henna in your hair
and the al iksiir of sharbatt
in a mocha bar
and this poem
this poem
will find you,
this poem
and me
a sifr in the
al jabar of love.
Three Bedtime Stories for Darcy, Robyn and Aeriana
by Andre Narbonne

One

Once a queen lived in what would have been a pretty palace were it not so filled with gaudy artwork that the castle was simply royally ostentatious. Inlays on gilt ceilings showed cherubs and the like driving fear into the hearts of various categories of bad things. And there were paintings, brown scenic scapes that clashed horribly with their golden frames. And the music that filled the palace was not baroque but barcarole, but that was nobody’s fault. The pretension in the palace was a gift of the people and the people loved their queen – they simply did not trust her.

The lieges did not credit their lady with any insight whatsoever because of an evil spell that a wicked warlock had cast upon the queen when she was still a lusty princess and naively had refused the odious wizard’s advances. One fresh day during her girlhood, when she was picking youngberries in the forest, a bent man with a toque-like black cap with moons and stars stitched on it had come upon her suddenly in a quiet grove and offered his mind for her love. He told her heroic stories about himself and solved a number of Sphinx-like riddles to prove the value of the exchange, but she would not have him. Desperate for her sweet caress, the warlock cursed her viciously, saying, “Heed my words my simple girl. You will pay for this error. On the day you become queen, your subjects will reject you just as you have rejected me. They will not accept a word you say without an argument. And you will spend your days debating the value of your judgments, convincing your subjects to agree with the worth of your opinions before they do your bidding. And every night, as they sleep, they will forget every word you have told them, and the next day they will argue your opinions again.” And then the warlock disappeared in an orange puff of resentment.

And so the queen’s pretty palace had come to be filled with ugly, overbearing artwork that its people had crafted so that when they entered into her domain they could be filled with a religious sort of awe to substitute for the lack of confidence they had in her down-to-earth policies which struck them as fantastic.

The superlative hit the fan one day when a local carpenter built an enormous statue with an outstretched hand that had an incredible mechanical feature. When the peasants dropped coins into the poor, wood saint’s hand, a switch was triggered which caused the other hand to swing round like a windmill and knock them down. And every subject agreed it was the most amazing and intricate carving to ever blacken their eyes. In fact, everyone in the entire kingdom believed it deserved a place of prominence at the entrance to the queen’s sitting room, with the exception of the queen herself.

She had watched the carpenter testing his construction in the courtyard below, and when he came to her palace, as she knew he must, she met him at the gate.

“You may not come any further with that horrible machine,” she cried, and the cooing crowd that followed the carpenter sighed.

“Is your sweet and most very nearly holy majesty not well today?” asked the artist.

“No. That is, I am fine but, no, that is not the cause of our dispute.”

The carpenter scratched his head. He opted for a sycophantic approach and, bowing lower still, asked, “Do you not agree that the construction is exquisite? Does my saint not wear an expression of world-weariness and sorrow in keeping with a love of God and all his wonders?”

“Yes, dear sir, his expression is horrific,” the queen replied. “You may not proceed
because your gift repays kindness with grief. Everyone who pays alms to your device – and tell
me why a man so mindful of heaven wants loose change – is knocked to the ground. The
message of your statue is therefore mean and has no place in my home."

The crowd first gasped and then agreed. They could see no fault in their sovereign’s
sense. So they carted the Trojan saint back whence it came, but the next day, as the queen
looked out on the pink morning clouds giving breech birth to the first light of day, she saw the
wooden man winding his way back up the city streets toward her palace.

And so it came to pass that the queen called for a champion. She had a list constructed
of oak and elm; for a week the bravest men in the kingdom jousted and drank and swore at each
other until at last only one man still stood. Except he was not a man at all. He was a country boy
from outside the city walls, a childe in the old sense with a true heart so strong he had bested all
the bearded and muscular men who opposed him. He had won every battle, every test, because
of his belief in honour and justice, temperance and clean language, and the queen called him to
her chambers.

“Sir Knight,” she said, “I charge you with an errand. For five years a curse has offended
my people; truly they are the ones who suffer. Because an evil magician has determined that
they must not agree with me and with my beliefs, and because I am a reasonable person, they
are necessarily unreasonable. You, sir, are my greatest and only hope.

“You must travel past the mountains – even beyond the crags and ranges where the
loneliest shepherd in the kingdom keeps his sheep. And you must not tarry. For in the wild valley
beyond the last pastured hill waits a green man with a silver axe. And if he finds you deserving of
the tic-tac-toe device on your shield he will point the way to a pool filled with water snakes like in
Beowulf, and you must swim deep in the water to discover a crystal cave. Here in eternal repose
sleeps the wicked wizard who cast this ghastly spell, and his witchery can only be broken if you
look upon the warlock’s hideous form and see great beauty like in Coleridge’s Rime of the
Ancient Mariner.”

And the chivalrous champion replied, “Your task sounds very very dangerous and original.
I don’t know what to say except, yes, I will rise to the challenge. I leave this instant to break the
enchantment that has so baffled the sensibility of this people.”

And the queen smiled in her joy and looked youthful for the first time in years.
But that very night she had a hellish dream. She saw her champion’s horse drifting
aimlessly, the boy nowhere in sight. Seven lean kines ate seven fat ones. The baker lost his
head. When she awoke from her dreams it was to the sound of trumpets. She dressed quickly in
the half-light in a popish robe with a shroud-of-Turinish print some clerk had given her for her
birthday and ran down a marble staircase to the hall to encounter the news.

In strode the champion boy in a bronze suit of armour. Now his stride was competent and
manly. Now he strutted like a hero of the people.

He lifted the helmet from his head and kneeled before the queen and said in a voice that
resonated like thunder in a phone booth, “Swounds! Are you sure this is a good idea?”

And the queen wept.
Two

Once a young billy goat – too young to have a tufted beard, he still wore peach fuzz – was confronted on a narrow bridge by a hideous ogre with bad teeth.

"Please don’t eat me, Mr. Ogre. My two brothers are not far behind, and they are much plumper and juicier than I am," the kid bluffed. "Furthermore, only this morning I watched them sneak into our owner’s garden and eat unripened corn, and they will taste so sweet. You must save your appetite for them because I cannot hop fences and have grazed in poor valleys."

"I know your brothers," the monster replied, "and they go their own way; they don’t give a damn about you and will not follow. Anyway," he said, as he leaned against the wooden rail of the bridge, pulled a straw from his matted hair and chewed on it, "my appetite is great – greater than can be sated by all the animals in creation. No one may pass except through me."

"Then the way across the bridge is through death."

"That is so."

The billy goat pawed his head, his confusion mounting. "But I have listened in at my owner’s window on misery nights when his young son and daughter would not sleep for the thunder and rain. And I have heard this same scenario spoken with soft, sensible words guaranteed to set the young rascals’ minds at rest, and the moral always favours my kind."

"Fables!" scoffed the ogre. "Mere fables. This is real life; real life accommodates the monsters in this world, not pretty-boy weaklings like yourself. How else could the universe attain balance? Do I not suffer the disdain of all creation for a birthright I did not desire? Was I Cain that I should be marked for life, a hated thing – feared by my own mother before I ate her?"

"That’s hardly my fault."

"Yes, but you reap the benefit of your beauty, don’t you? I have seen you piggybacking your owner’s children for a reward of nice table scraps and a warm, loving hug. Do you deny this? No matter if you do. No matter if you don’t. The way across this bridge is through me, and I can assure you your two brothers will not mourn your loss should you choose to proceed."

And the ogre advanced three steps with a thundering stomp and a limp and a thundering stomp.

Now the billy goat was truly stuck in a chiasmus. ‘As you mean to cross, to be eaten first would be unreasonable,’ his thoughts seemed to say. He pondered his choices while he gazed at the far, seemingly unapproachable bank.

It was wrapped in a fresh stole of fog, still bleeding drops of rain from where the skinner’s knife had severed it from the sky. All was grey and mysterious except in patches where cool air from a fearless river with a reckless, defiant gorge that shouted, ‘I have loved,’ forced the obscurity back two trembling paces, and a shoot of grass or the joyful branch of a weeping willow protruded through the obscurity. To the young goat they were the most ordinary aspects of nature imaginable. And yet he remained convinced that if he penetrated deeper the world he knew would disappear, replaced by something more forgiving. And this young billy goat who had never been mischievous, had never broken a rule and had never been truly loved as anything but a pet, wanted above and beyond anything else to be forgiven. He played for time.

His first ruse was the stuff movies are made of and, of course, it didn’t work. ‘I know karate.’ And the ogre cocked a bloodshot eye and limped and thundered and limped closer.

‘Um,’ he tried again...‘Um...’ Thunder. Limp. Thunder. ‘Um.’

Why in the world was he here? There had to be someone taking notes if only to use his biography as a cautionary tale and if this were the case...

He understood in a flash, and like all flashes it illuminated everything so quickly as to be incomprehensible for its totality. Still, everything was better than nothing at all, and he spoke his meaning as quickly as he’d seen it.

‘Ah, you say this is real life, that dying without ever tasting the damp grass on the far side of the bridge is what gives life its balance, but how do you know? You say that you could not choose your nature, that it was bestowed upon you like an unwanted child by your mother, but did I choose my life? It is only equality from where you stand if you should eat me and put an end to my pursuit – from where I am it is cruelty. But how do you know this is not a fable?’

‘Consider this bridge: did you build it? Do you know the man who did? It has stood here
since before your greatest grandfather ate your greatest grandmother and siblings. Do you wonder why these bridges exist? Some hand has written this bridge on the landscape as a means of progressing."

“So that monsters might eat,” the ogre retorted.

“Perhaps. But what about that rock?” He grunted at a polished erratic on the ogre’s shore. “Since your appetite is insatiable, eat that. It crossed this way 50 000 years ago during the Michigan ice age, to judge by the basaltic inclusion. You are hardly keeping up. If you eat everything, why is it that the only things you do eat are things that will suffer for your tastes?” Then he snorted and sneezed and admitted, “But that’s not the point.

“The very fact that we can communicate, that our thoughts can touch – whether with stinging acerbity or with tearful compassion – into each other’s hearts or spirits or appetites, if you will, suggests that the world is not just a colossal smorgasbord. It involves the heart. This is my first point. Do you agree?”

“No. I’m an ogre.”

“This was a difficult rebuttal – not one to be toyed with. The kid carried on like a trooper.

“I see poetry on both sides of the river and so I assume that the author is a poet. I will not trifile with his or her words and try to put them into context for you. As you’ve said, you’re an ogre. No rhyming scheme will do justice to his Shelley or her Plath or Leonard Cohen, but the sweet ground chirps these madrigals while the dawn birds reap their song, and I know this is the stuff of Homeric idylls. And I know that here we are – somewhere between our stomachs and our fantasies. And this must therefore be a fable.”

The ogre said, “Your words are deep. They move me to sympathy. So step back and I will not pursue. I will eat your brothers some other day and you soon enough. Everyone crosses this bridge for whatever reason, and I wonder at the traffic. And I will regret your bones as they sharpen my teeth because you have said something that makes me doubt my self-hatred.”

But the billy goat was a child. He replied, “You won’t eat me because, as I’ve said, this is a fable. And a fable favours the searcher. You will stand stunned by my chutzpa – astounded by my ability to see through complicated arguments because I have character, not brains – and you will stand aside.”

And so it was that the young billy goat (whose name escapes me) walked across the narrow bridge with the wild water singing underneath and was not killed. Not a hair of his peach fuzz was rumpled by the ogre who let him by because he had taught the ogre a valuable lesson that would ease the monster’s hunger on mean winter days and nights when food was scarce and the only meal he’d receive was spiritual. The kid had taught the deformed brute that life is deeper than the dinner table. The world sings with a mystical passion, and if we only listen we will hear the voice of the greatest fabulist of them all – even better than Houdini.

Or he was eaten.

Three

Once a traveling psychiatrist stood on the crest above a fabulous city. He was not old like the majority of his fellow brain-leeches who wore long grey beards they tucked into their belts at the dinner table. Rather, he was a strapping youth (albeit somewhat emaciated) who had begun his studies earlier than most. Indeed, he had learned his first lessons about the human condition while still a child living under his stepfather’s roof. And this young psychiatrist had thought long and hard. He had taken his theories with him on the road, had tried them out in the village marketplaces he passed, and in the churches and in the gaols. Until he came at last to the aforementioned fabulous city and, purely by accident, thought all his thoughts about the human condition at the very same time.

And then something magical happened. A conclusion struck him and he saw a shower of sparkles like he’d been tapped with a fairy godmother’s wand. And he realized that it wasn’t a conclusion at all. It was a punch line: a very funny punch line. But his sparkles weren’t through yet. As he stood there swaying back and forth an entire joke appeared in his head that made the punch line all the more hilarious. And then the sparkles disappeared, but the joke remained.
The youthful psychiatrist was at first dismayed. “Do all my struggling years of study amount to a silly joke?” his thoughts alliterated. “Is this what the id and the ego, not to mention the superego, are all about? And what about God?” And he felt a certain emptiness when he thought that last thought, but then another fear overtook him. “What if no one else thinks it’s funny?”

And so he determined to set off early the next day and try his joke in the marketplace and the churches and, ultimately (in all probability – especially because it was a bawdy joke), in the gaol.

Now at this time this fabulous city had a king. And the king had a daughter who was greatly unhappy – fucking miserable, as a matter of fact – and because neither the king nor his counselors had heard about sensible means of treatment such as shock therapy and lobotomies, the princess’s unhappiness seemed permanent, which made them unhappy too.

Early one aforementioned morning the king put aside his royal breakfast and called his jester in to make him laugh, but the fool took one look at the king’s uneaten eggs and started doing Lear routines instead which made the king more miserable still.

“I want laughter not pathos!” the great man bawled at the little man. “If I do not laugh soon, my mind will collapse under the morbid strain that weighs so invidiously against my brow.” (I should mention that the king is played by William Shatner.) And so the fool tried a knock-knock joke, but it was old.

“A new joke,” cried the king. “I must hear a new joke, and it must be very, very funny. I will give my unhappy daughter to the man who makes me laugh.”

No sooner had the words left his lips then a mighty chuckle rose from the marketplace. The king ran to his window and leaned outside. The noise of a boisterous crowd moved down the street to a nearby church, and shortly a burst of laughter, louder than the curfew toll, exploded from that place. The king was perplexed. “Why are my people happy?” he wondered as he scratched his crown.

No sooner had the question crossed the synaptic clefts in his brain than his chief counselor ran into the room. “Your majesty!” he exclaimed. “Your majesty! A psychiatrist has come to this city with the most remarkable joke. It’s very, very complicated, but he tells it in such simple language even the children laugh when they hear it. Not only that, but it’s the most obvious joke possible. Complicated but clear. When you hear it you will say there is nothing new to it. You’ve always known that punch line, but somehow it will make you laugh harder than you’ve ever laughed before.”

“Then say it,” said the king, his voice quivering with impatience.

“Well,” replied the counselor, “It begins with a baby. No, that’s not it. How does it start? Well I don’t know the beginning, but it’s about a haunted house that isn’t haunted at all. At least not in the way that we think of haunted. No one has died in the house so there’s no moaning spirit throwing ashtrays at the walls or any of that nasty business. How is it haunted? Why can’t I remember? Oh, I know, there’s been a birth. A child was born in the house and the building is haunted with life. Only not haunted...Oh, I can’t tell it. It’s so obvious, but I can’t remember how it goes.” And he tugged a loose thread from his robe, tied his shoes and stared off into space. Periodically he would guffaw.

“The leech!” cried the king. “Bring me the leech! I must laugh.”

The young psychiatrist, who’d by this time been arrested, was therefore brought before the king. He was led into a sumptuous throne room that had red wallpaper because it was sumptuous but tacky, and the king told the young man to speak. “Tell me your joke,” the king commanded, “and if it makes me laugh, my daughter is yours.”

“And if it doesn’t?”

“Do you entertain that possibility?” He shouldered his royal mace.

“No, your majesty. But what good do you think a joke will do that you would part with your daughter for the measly price of a moment’s laughter? No amount of humour is a panacea for the misery of life, the hopeless searching for meaning...”

“I understand that,” said the hero’s majesty with a yawn, “but this is a bedtime story.
There has to be a contest of some sort; there has to be an exchange. Could you just get on with the joke? I already know life’s a pain in the dong.”
“Certainly your majesty.”
And the young and somewhat Arthurian brain-leech told his joke. He spoke softly at first, like a cooing baby, then louder like a brash adolescent. He shaped a house with his hands, then the hands became a cradle, and he cradled his face like it was the sun. Sometimes he frowned, sometimes he smiled. Mostly he spoke small words with simple diction, and he never, never, ever, ever used a superlative.

At the climax to his joke, at the penultimate sentence, the leech grabbed the king’s crown and placed it on the fool. And then he leaped onto the throne and yelled...

Well, to tell the truth, I can’t remember what he said. It was bloody obvious, too, but it escapes me. Something about love.

And the king began to howl with laughter. Tears streamed from his eyes. His high counselor, his low counselor and the ones in-between, his fool and his footman rolled on the floor at the obvious, perfectly reasonable absurdity they had heard. Even the dogs in the hall yelped, and the dish came back with the spoon.

Finally, when the king could breathe again after his hiccupping spasms of laughter subsided, he called for his daughter.

“Question Mark,” he said, because Question Mark was her name. “Come here my progeny.”

Now Question Mark was a beautiful princess as beautiful princesses go. Her long, raven black hair fell over a brooding, contemplative expression. She walked on soft feet and stood before her father who said, “Darling daughter, pretty princess fair and true, have you heard the leech’s joke?”

“Yes Papa,” was her reply.
“And do you not agree, my tuggly girl, that it is the funniest story ever spoken in this city?”
“No Papa, I do not.”

The king and the counselors, indeed everyone in the room including the teller of the tale, were flabbergasted. Question Mark continued: “It was not funny, it was sad...so sad. When I heard it I wept.” She looked at the youthful psychiatrist then and said, “Please do not be upset that your joke affected me so, but I, too, know about the human condition. I know about the hauntings of life and of love, and so your joke does not make me laugh. It only makes me think. And when I think I often cry.”

A collective gasp filled the room – something that has not happened before in any other bedtime story ever written. But the lusty leech looked deeply into Question Mark’s eyes, and he recognized her expression. He said to the princess, “My joke doesn’t make me laugh either. It has a certain appropriateness, a je ne sais quoi, but I don’t know what. “All the same, I don’t think this is sadness. Not laughing isn’t necessarily crying. I don’t see any tears.” And when Question Mark rubbed her eyes she discovered that they were dry.

When the king heard this exchange his mind was filled with wonder. Was this all a part of the joke? He couldn’t tell the difference. And he began to laugh anew. And his counselors laughed, and the fool and the footman too. Everybody laughed. And so long as the young psychiatrist and the princess spoke, the city was filled with joy. And the king lived happily ever after.
from the Blood and Body Poems  
by Carla Hartsfield

WHITE TRASH
That’s what my mother called girls
who fucked around. And I’d picture
the guy’s semen in gelatinous overalls,
wormy garbage collectors ready to make a haul.

White trash wore eye shadow at seven,
lipstick even earlier, pantyhose at nine;
they bared bottoms in hot pants,
knew how to dirty dance,
win pageants and backcomb—
tease tease tease!
Hickies like birthmarks
blotted & purpled
less-than-dainty necks.
My mind sneaks back
to petting and condom wrappers,
the slip, the break,
those little white trash collectors
never on strike.

Only one neat puncture of a single egg
can make white trash balloon
inside cheerleading uniforms,
smock dresses with ruffles,
Bubba’s parachute jeans.

No one taught them to bail
out of the backseat,
or keep their eggs safe—
in their heads, I mean.

HER UTERUS
I knew girls who had abortions.
They vibrated to private rhythms—agony and relief.
Maybe it was university, the dorm,
the House Mother not mothering.

Nobody listens to an angry virgin.
Or sad one.
They just tell you to get laid,
and your life will be wonderful.

There was this girl across the hall,
silk and suede wardrobe,
compliant, desperate.
She loved to impart that rarest of rare things:
news of her uterus.
Confessions were frequent,
graphic, innocent.

I’d enter her room to admire the plants
or gossip about my roommate.
She’d say it was getting smaller
with each abortion. Yes, her uterus;
the Ob-Gyn guys could hardly find it.

Pictures would blossom
from soft seeds of truth—
her shrinking warm fruit,
pear-shaped, sumptuous.
It appeared behind her head
like a light-filled Dutch painting,
avocado-green and smaller than the pear,
the skin pushing in, barely
whole and functioning.
More unpleasant visions as light fell silent—
bulb of a tulip gnawed by mice,
or tiny, shrivelled prune.

I think of my cousin and her late-term abortion,
how it dimmed her blue eyes,
bent her tall model’s body
into a question mark.

Dark things to ponder like dahlias left
 to worms and frost,
disintegrating hollows.
What wintering task
did her womb have to suffer?

Which angel did she summon
over unborn flutterings?
How fast the wings beating above

those out-of-step heartbeats—
and then
just hers.
GET OVER IT
The world.
Clouds that track you on this gravel road,
grey ghosts hiding and illuminating
your destination,
deep purples and greens surging at sightline
leveling consciousness.
The rocks, young wheat and wild sage whispering,
why are you alive?
Your nightmares of fetal body parts,
bones sheer as an animal’s
floating in a fast-paced current
bleak with human tissue, strangulate
as the river backs up
into your Dream Esophagus.
This image is accompanied by Orpheus
and muscular, shrieking Maenads.
They are always angry at someone.
You are always angry at
your husband’s lies
your mother’s slaps
your father’s death.
Get over it.

And those two crows today, warning you off.
They lapped and cawed, commiserated, spied.
How many times have you felt like this?
Monitored, stymied, censored, told what to do.
Get over it.

Or the family farm in Texas—
you know you’ll never live there,
air glittering with chemicals & crop dusting
giving your family cancer.
Armadillos in bullet-proof vests
roam the property.
It’s more difficult than ever
to procure an abortion.
Roe vs. Wade became famous in Dallas.**
Your father ordered Have A Heart traps
from Niagara Falls, Canada.
The Armadillo escaped.
Bush & his cronies
choking womens’ rights.
Don’t get over it.

* * *
When you enter the labyrinth
outside Lumsden, Saskatchewan
whirring with crickets,
grasshoppers twirling like thistles
shot from cannons,
you accept these scars
beating like thigh-high grass
against your body,
a constant itch.

And the unpredictability of
periods
moods
tears
lovers,
friends, society, yourself.

The seasonal character of
performing
publishing
love-making
arousal

lead you to consider

bloodbirth
bloodbone
bloodsphere
bloodpump
bloodchange
bloodtest

in search of

bloodline
bloodmemories.

What’s left is a bloodlust for books, science, jazz,
your family and need for strength.
Because this bloodlust stirs your core,
desires, light, feet.
Don’t get over it.

** In 1973, Roe vs. Wade, after a Supreme Court
decision, made abortion legal in the U.S.
LEECH PERSONALITY

(i)
The key of C minor lies inside me; its black currant notes curdling blood cells. It opens holes in my skin, until the plum-cherry slimy consistency leaks melancholy, arrests my vocal cords, seeps onto the black-and-white scales waiting for that first stroke, knowing the key of C minor has bound my feet up to the knees in a crimson sticky mass like plasma; at university I listened, stuck, hypnotized by boyfriends and mentors speaking in blood-tongues; I did their bidding, even when this key of greatness, of Beethoven and his Pathetique sent my emotional hemoglobin plummeting. Lately when I improvise, the key of C minor is a troll at the bridge, holding his golden key that shrinks and narrows the closer I come; that key is everything; that key could snap off the handcuffs, stem my leech personality, freeing me to find another key & another key & another.

(ii)
Twice, I knew right away. It was the only time I could hold pieces of sky.

With my second pregnancy vertigo was so common, I wore sea-bands on my wrists.

At least I didn’t slit them.

My preoccupation with knives began as a teenager. Some days it seemed the only solution. Dreams of slicing and dicing returned during analysis. Who was the lucky sous chef? My shrink? Or a much younger self forcing me onto his tan leather couch?

And it took forever to get rid of leech personality, my phrase. I had a particularly bad case of it, enough to souffle! So I sketched myself quickly into a 16th c. medical journal, delicate veins opened on swan-white arms drip drip drip

Bleeding as cure or pain or both.
Talking as cure or pain or both.
Writing as cure or pain or both.
Dreaming as cure or pain or both.
Birthing as cure or pain or both.

Only one of these activities required sitting up.

When I had sons they fed at odd hours, and I couldn’t get near that damn couch. Their kisses were sweaty and they filled my palms with bugs and weeds, exploding bouquets. Who but a crazy person, a girl of twenty-seven, could write about leech personality with such authority?

As if she knew what it meant to bleed someone dry. Or let herself be bled.
Cornhusk Dolls
by Lesley Belleau

And we gathered. Baskets swelled into sunrise, and we gathered.
Yarrow coloured our fingers, inhaled our sweat onto its spine.
A damp heat had started. Our men were still sleeping. And we gathered,
dawn pressing us closer to home. Your woman breath next to mine.
Sister fingers scraped new root, drank hawthorn with our flesh,
delivered summer buds and stems to the bitten bark. Baskets
swelled into sunrise, edged over the foothills, where our men
slept like the dead beside our babies wrapped in tanned deerskins,
beside their cornhusk dolls that wore hanging pelts over their fading bodies.

Sunrise, and we gathered.
Yarrow greened our nails, seeped into our flesh, our footpads broke the earth into trial.
Branches brushed over our cheeks, hands led us back. Our men waited for us.
Raised their hands, hot with the sweat of bone, to pull the flap for us. To pull us
between fur and thigh, our baskets emptied by the doorflaps. Fur and thigh
to break the dawn. We gathered. Their breathbuds soft as sumac, their hands damp heat,
our bodies lit between brown flesh and cedar boughs.

Us women picked.
White gaura. Until we greened our nails. Smudged their fleshes on our palm-skins.
Rubbed milkweed round and round and round our hands, necks, arms, thick as the
side-swell of moon, until we were whitened, gauzed over beside the lush hue of noon.
Our babies were squashed against us, flattening our breasts under our bearclaw necklaces,
scraping blood. Ochre red. Washing our hands, we see a new boat on our shore,
wide prints leading outward toward the slant of our hills. We picked,
waiting for the break of grass, to crouch and wait, pointed bone-ready for battle.
Bone behind wrist, we picked. And waited. Picked and waited,
our babies chewing roots on our shoulders, until they slept.

We discovered them eathing on smushed lakegrass, their necks as white as dead cattail tips,
lips tipped red with chokecherry blood-hushhushhushhushhushhushhushhushhushhush-
and pulled our babies closer, their cheeks as warm as the long, flat rocks of Agawa,
lined in red, ochred red. We discovered them. Dead cattail tips. Red with chokecherry blood.
the wail of chejauk in our minds, the taste of an old song lined our throats.
And the grass split, tip division, vision shone, their faces edged in cedar fringes.
New people, pale hair hanging, skins reddened by the sun. Sagegrass.

Contact.
Grass, sweetgrass stompled under, salmon stilled under northbound streams,
new-sprung bluejays stitched to their branches, made quiet here by their arrival.
Contact. New trails stomped open, the buds of our healing bursting over shoreline muds,
stems scattered into crooked patterns. Long black hair braiding fern, our breaths parting
the open space of their footpaths, cheek against the earth, a caribou scent from somewhere near, feeding a mushroom edge in the mouths of our babies to silence them.

And quiescent grass grew scorched inside the cusp of summer as they fell over hill into sunset. Bone points scraping earth, we stood and gathered our baskets as slow as ritual.

Us women picked flowers waiting for our men to find them, our babies squashed closely, long, flat cheeks warmed against us. Red clay brushed against the rockwall, canoes edged along the ledges of Superior. Palms wet with red earth, the sound of history smudging into porous sandstone.

Waubegone, waubegone. Force your last beauty on us now before they steal our faces. Line our memories with your breaths, our spinewalls with your continuum.

Waubegone, waubegone. You are more than soft piles beside our birchbark platforms and death posts. Force your last beauty on us, weave yourselves into our children’s eyeskin. Sew our strength to our sinew, behind the rope of our spines, the memories of our elders.

The new people spoke with their hands together. Wild rice in their beards, calendula water steaming their cheeks. Gathered in a straight line. We walked closer, the edge of our men's eyes watchful, the corners of the doorflaps waiting for us. The fire had burned low, yellowed itself. They watched us. The lines of our necks, curve of bearclaw drawing blood, the separation of flesh and sinew, the waft of burdock from our tongues. We let the cattail mats fall behind us, crawled between fur and earth, released the deerskin from our flesh, where our men found us waiting to press them between ground and skypoint and mid-chant and hipbone under teeth where we run claw to flesh to find marrow, soaking up their histories with our stomach flesh, the squish of skins between moons, the colour of their sweat dulled fire, a memory of creation.

We slept, dreamed of scattering rock and ashes and the thick trail of a turtle entering stream.

A grandmother birthed a brown baby that night, legs teepeeing outward under a great white pine, and new-sprung birds awakened, and salmon stirred under the northern waters, and new sweetgrass edged into purity, and round and round her fingers wove the air, wet with sweat and old ash. One over the other, through, round, loop and pull, tighten, tighten. One over the other, through, round, loop and pull, tighten, tighten. One over the other, through, round, loop and pull, tighten, tighten. Fingerpads slivered grey, basketing the tongue of the August wind into tight coils, coloured red thirst inside of a coyote song, or the sudden stir of a wet baby falling against the earth.

And they watched us. The lines of our necks, curve of bearclaw drawing blood, the separation of flesh and sinew, the waft of burdock form our tongues. And they watched us as we gathered. White gaura. Foxglove. Scarlet sage.


Us women carved bone together, sharpened jagged ridges with a slice of rock. Sharp as the purity of daybreak we carved around the children. Made boned flowers with the remnants, hid them in the tuck of our baskets, skewered long bone into points, jagged ridges smoothed quiet, waxed the husk with our sweat, with the oil from a newly dead hide, polished our carve of bone, remnants following the pull of breeze, until we could see our faces in the shine of our weaponry. Until we could see our faces in the shine of our bone. Blank. Until we moved closer, leaned in, afraid to breath out to break the time of reflection, and mask our faces with the thrust of our breath. Blank. Until we leaned closer.

Eyes sharpened into points, smooth faces edged into jagged ridges, carved into bristled bonemasks, buried silent by the shape of their countries. Our children chewed on rock-charred flowers, unable to see their mother's faces lost above them.

Agogwadden, agogwadden. They sewed us together, blank as cornhusk dolls.
the sky is magnetic all Being resides in all moments
by John Barlow

it's like being at abars in windsor, a fairly cruddy bar
out the end of windsor (east) not assoc the downtown gambling runoff
bars, incredibly, lake-situated as would make it a luxury joint
in toronto, like hrrrrrfrfrrnt, except it's essentially shanty,
and ruff, i justd have to walk in there, there's types of snarlies
(thinking beat me up, depending who i'm with, or not,
sitting in their ball caps, guzzling 90 cent drafts,
no interest in nuthin, but friday saturday night
smallscale rowdysim, and a crazy lady owner
in the front window saying "hot night, hot, hot, hot,
hot inside" to pedestrians as they passed. It was there
my probably greatest freak pool shot of all time.
Me Marie and Dante driving around. "Come on, Abars Abars,
see my end of town" so we're shooting pool, i'm hitting all
fluke shots, because i'm in a good mood, cleaning board,
while the little wastoids - its one of those bars
you put your money on the table and there's rules
whoever wins plays the next group with money up
which if there's none the same group can play again -
well every shots a fluke, so i never take a 2nd turn,
its flukeshotter politic, if not playing flukes, to always
fluke it out so you sink your balls but don't take a
2nd shot, or sink-the-white-ball, to keep passing the stick
(every time a white ball goes down an angel gets its wings"
or spin the ball off the table. Whole game's been like that
and people are watching a bit, but they can also see
i'm the sort of person they'd have been a prick too
when i was younger, now i'm quite at my ease,
and the balls will turn midtable and take off
in a new direction right into the corner,
with the white ball almost reacting
by downing elsewhere, or even
not skipping but rolling up the rim
wandering across the frame and dropping motionless to the
ground, Marie and Dante are cracking up,
and it comes down to 2 balls to go, ultimate shot,
the lifer, seen by them and at least a half dozen others,
reacting to on sound by more than that,
ping! sharkshot, white ball and both colour balls airborn
spinning 3 feet above the table, the two land as swooshes
in the far middle and far corner, simultaneously,
then the white ball lands and zigzags nonsensically
into the near far corner. The abars crowd gasps
some eventually smile, Marie's laughing away,
both balls having hovered for effect a la ufos above their holes,
and Dante's saying "aaaoohh" with a shrug of amazement
and unsurprise at once, years of insane poolplaying;
the next game i go back to playing poorly and pathetically
and making jokes about it, to prolong the game. Still acting
like a good pool player if people sneak a look over.
And we keep the table till it's time to go,
and all these admiring looks, as we glide out.
its right on the water, just before the lake

the gravel parking lot is the shore
at the border of riverside and nothing
perhaps i should breathe now
by Philip Arima

the water i am floating in is still it and i are the same temperature the ceiling is only
a few breaths away there is an indefinite possibility i might start to think
the difficulty is deciding

on a suitable subject schools have bars guarding their windows cameras look through
titanium-infused atmospheric disturbances the music on the radio
is hypnotic repetition names and numbers are always
interchangeable sex is a risk

i constantly take holding the genitalia of the big boys on the block phosphorus death
lights the sky a socialist framework with a capitalistic attitude speak
with eyes protected hide underneath

over-stuffed pillows in the commercials all the women have double-jointed pelvises
tender hands leave marks in desiccated flesh metal detectors line the doorways
of classrooms the today in my mind has no

external expression a chimpanzee without hair tells how it once was a light goes out
a television turns on herb gardens in cities produce flavourless leaves the tofu i
consume
is mostly synthetic i open my eyes

as far as they will go the muscles in my forehead
spasmodically quiver i imagine they communicate with another
dimension something that lives there taps into my thoughts perhaps i should breathe

now every number contains a gig of information pharmacologically-hyped clones
have replaced thinking people lingerie is made in every colour the ceiling is smooth
impersonal opaque a bubble

is trapped in the small of my back it’s like a pet gerbil that does not squeak
doesn’t run in a wheel doesn’t eat or excrete to give it value i must find it a name
let the white collars

stay stiff let the riot-cops shoot let the rope binding my elbows to my knees tighten
like a snake constricting prey a kitten purrs all advertisements promise
relief from some
pain moving my toes creates tiny waves they bounce off the walls
and return to their start they don’t make much noise don’t have any colour
they stop being as simply as they became the music
on the radio is saturated static these are my papers they show my infection

within tolerable limits ten minutes alone is all we need knowing your name
would be a quaint touch perhaps
i should breathe now uranium fallout stealth if i open my mouth
the water will get in the sound in my throat will be trapped forever the hope
that i harbour will turn a dark green the bubble

moves the ceiling shifts hair from my body sinks through the water i want to roll over
and watch it swirl it might make a pattern that has some meaning be subject
for thought reveal a name suitable

for a gerbil value is measured in american dollars teachers click televisions to
blatant commercial thinly fleshed faces look up at the night satellites network with
one another the today in my mind

has no external expression all numbers succumb to one and zero
a group of children torture the kitten bloodstained lingerie
floats near my hand refugees eat photographs of homes
they once loved the men in the commercials

all use the same face perhaps i should breathe now kick and scratch and
screech at the water tighten my fingers into threatening fists stand up
in this box even if it means i crack

my head outside the window gunships circle inside my mouth my teeth
are aching my tongue is swelling the music on the radio is beat
without rhythm all the pillows are crushed flat
from years of abuse space stations in the sky represent progress the children
giggle the water cools pressure in my ears forces my eyes to shut my toes
are numb with paralysis i am constipated

and aroused i am hungry and frightened i am beginning to see the aura
of all existence hope turning green i want to believe the promises are real perhaps
i should breathe now the bubble

has imploded my infection increase other dimensions
are beyond my reality the numbers on my plate taste the same
as poster paste the today in my mind has no external expression i have

lost your name the kitten is dead commercials are remastered with digital
sound deep in my bowels tofu turns sour there is an indefinite possibility
i might start to think.
“(Dipping a Toe) Into the Waters of Narrative” by Donato Mancini
"Wheatabixy" by Donato Mancini
This is the story of how we met. I know the story of how we met. That doesn’t matter. It was a Wednesday or a Tuesday and it was raining. You were standing outside the art gallery in the rain and I asked why. You said I like the feeling of it some people do. So I left you and went to find my friend. The wine was very cheap so the bartender poured small glasses until I made fun of him and he poured white wine until it ran over my hand. I saw you come in and I tried to make you talk to me. All the music was by bands I didn’t recognize. The art was photographs of people in crowds in Toronto where I am from on the streets walking around and looking at things but not at each other. I was wearing silver shoes with little flowers embroidered on the toes. In my shoes I was the same height as you and I could see you everywhere in the room until you were behind me. So why did you stay so near me and not speak to me? I was being careful. I thought you were quiet very quiet and serious but you’re not at all are you? Sometimes I am but I like to talk. We had all the same friends that night and so we walked together to a bar after the gallery. My friend said that she would like to have a shrine built for her. I said I would rather have a cottage. We wanted you to build the shrine and the cottage for us because you once built churches in Mexico. I can speak a little Spanish but I have never been to Mexico. There was an empty chair beside me at the bar. You sat down right after I thought I want him to sit down in this chair and talk to me. I bought you a cider and you told the table how once your car caught fire when your sister threw her cigarette out the window and it blew into the back seat. I thought I laughed too long at that story it was too obvious. I kept drinking long after I was drunk because you were still there. After last call I asked the bartender if there were any mints and he said he would give me peppermint schnapps but I laughed and came back over to the whittled group. You said I have Jack Daniels in the trunk of my car but I said I have to go home. I kissed everyone goodbye and said will you walk me out? On the stairs we said our friend who was sad was actually lucky. You said he has a beautiful woman who is coming home to live with him. Outside the streets were very empty but still the taxis filled up before they reached me. I said it is a little scary out here at night and you nodded as if it made sense now why you were there. I was hoping you would kiss me but instead you said this one is yours and hailed a yellow taxi and put me inside. Then I went away for a week for a family birthday. My grandmother was turning ninety-five. After her party I went to her bedroom and lay on the bed with her. She was tipsy and laughing. I said what advice do you have for me now that you are ninety-five? She said find a man who is intelligent and kind and has a strong sex drive. Find him and fall in love with him and give him everything. I said did granddad have a strong sex
drive? She said yes we used to go to parties and he would guide me into a room and kiss me and I was afraid someone would come in and see us having sex on their coat. I still miss him she said. I thought about you while I was away. I thought I think I miss him. When I came back I sent you an email but for days you didn’t answer. When you answered you were really formal and I felt crushed why did you do that? I was being careful because I knew I would be leaving for Japan I would be gone for years and I didn’t want to hurt you. It hurt me anyway it will hurt when you go but I don’t care. I don’t care if it hurts. When you said the other day this is going to hurt isn’t it I thought please be like me please don’t care. But what I was saying before was when I came back I thought why is he resisting me I think he likes me when we are together it seems as if he likes me. The next time that I saw you it was at the same gallery for a party. And you were walking away from me all the time. After the party we went with all our mutual friends to a dance club. It was dark except for the moving coloured lights and the screens on the walls showing old television shows everyone was happy. You bought me a drink and we danced in a group. The music was more that I didn’t know. It always is that way I don’t know many songs. I was hot after dancing my hair was wet from sweat and I sat down at a table by myself. You came over with two more drinks. I said is that for me and you nodded you didn’t say yes. We had a conversation. After a while I took a breath and I made myself say so do you actually like me or do you just like me liking you. You said I like you very much. You sounded serious. I don’t remember the conversation after that only that my cheeks hurt from smiling until I said when are you going to kiss me? That’s not what you said. What did I say? You said do you like me enough to kiss me. I said do you like me enough to kiss me but you didn’t say anything so I said no? You said I do I will or I am. I don’t really know what you said and we kissed and we kissed for three hours with all the music disappearing and our friends watching and strangers. And I knew that you were going to make my life better. That is the story of how we met. You’re wrong we met months before that. No that was only being around each other people can be around each other for a long long time and never meet. In another scenario you stayed careful and I thought you liked someone else. We were around each other a handful of times for a few more months and then I went back to Toronto and you went to Japan and we never met. Sometimes I think that is what really happened. It’s that simple. We never met this is just a story I tell myself when things are hard and I think about you.
TWO Poems
by Paul Hegedus

1.
You’ve lost the war. Slapstick sabotage caked in spit to fill this distance. Line is negative. Intelligence wears a belt. Platform flat of armour isn’t lazy. Or easy, moves to take a slice.

Pizza divides without a fuss. Friction crisp juggles Yankee Doodle daydream, or maybe I’m romantic. Material values always loudspeaker loudsystem. Traffic ascends, tops up use of coupons.

Pitch plays to first cites guns at exit ominous. Salute is spoon fed. Paper points at stuffs faces. Cant stomach this.

Action figure reaction. Equipped with cigarettes. Price tags up & runs for home. Cues closest cuts to ices. Take it away positions take it or leave it. Ask the time. Cheesecake fixed on paper got it wrong.

2.
The man says you’re asleep. Fusion jazz at windows gates a drive down 41st. In repair & sit for second, basically eyelids. Ice wine on monster trucks. An attempt at walls. Lost bandages to block eyeballs.

Bullet smear garbage left in baskets. Colours often with magic markers. A line or favourite flavour next to blue jeans. Taken to curb canvas stretched indecision. Ask what’s next.


Twenty minutes is considered stretching out. Fix it. Asleep with cartoon French film score, incomplete. What’s this page got to do with it? I can’t hear you. A wrench. Left it in the batmobile.
Orthographic Projection
by Kim Goldberg

Soundwork
found work in
a downed verse,
a resounding first,
like Herc found work
as a flirt in the cirque,
clowning around while the
Turks ungowned and lounged
in the surf, propounding on quirks
of the Universe, awaiting their perks
like pounded down clerks while towns
of Crown Jerks snigger and smirk, hoping
to hound, perchance to burke, every berserker
and pervert who lurks in the murk and frowns at
the sound when Men of Renown expound from the
Mound claiming dirt is profound when it’s really just
brown and bullshit abounds by the pound like ground
round at a burger compound where birkies work like a
dirty shirt off their backs with no facts to fling back at the
cracks in the mac-tac walls of their world, nothing to swirl
but the words in their heads, the hate in their hands, the lust
for love in their dogpound hearts drowning in parts of sizzling
cows, fizzling sows, wearing it proud for the crowd like a shroud,
converting each turd to a curd with a third less fat for the herds of
whimpering simpering pimpering nerds -- bursting with thirst of the
very worst kind, astounding each mind, compounding their crimes with
legions of rhymes, confounding all time like loud rowdy mimes shouting
out the sublime, twisting like limes to avert the curses while snatchng their purses,
diverting with verses then growling like birds from their perches in birches, outing the Tao
to every bow wow whose ears do perk at the bountiful mirth our hausfrau Earth delivers
in every uncountable birth of sounds that work.
5 POEMS by Karen Herzog

Travelling
Travelling carries me to the surface, away from the deeps of home-thoughts. - Mason Cooley (aphorist)

Trade vexing can tease me, too, search trace a ways, forming drapes of home-troughs.

Parade vintage cans, tires, and mini tutus irk tyrants always forging, drunks and home-takers.

Pair divine accents, restrain minto tots, turkeys ranting any day gorging trunks of home-takers.

Rare driving accidents detainment totals thirsty retrained anyway galloping truck drivers to home-invaders.

Chocolate éclair demise accounts for deaths mounding to twenty retired needy gimpy tickle divert-or-home-impalers.

Botched repair doomsday acorns for beneath browning toads dainty retarded indeed, yippy tuck die warts far from sand pails.

Crotch and stare, deans say, takers bequeath yawning loads, pedantic jarred seaweed, tiptop fly tarts free flying armpits.

Constance air jeans pay bakers to teethe blonde sing jokes – romantic pair between tits, tops, fly, farts flee frying yarn kits.

Coward stances err, teens play tack years to bleed jaundice tokes, roomy attic pay her biting lips, try darts for falling darnits.

Cows are antsy readers seen way back, gears to weed yardwaste choke runny saddle stay though might slips trident fours call barn bits. Travelling carries me to the surface, away from the deeps of home-thoughts.

Extra Dark Roast
Don’t roast coffee beans that’ve already been roasted. They smell up the whole place and burn nose hairs. The stink lingers in hair, removes fondness from the sweetbitter aroma of original. Oma said to put them in a pan. To put them in a pan and turn on the heat. To stir and not walk away. I didn’t walk away. I stayed right there on the phone with her. Stirring over the heat, not walking away, not hanging up. But what a great idea it was to roast already roasted coffee. Oma said that she would buy the coffee. She’d open the bag, shake her head at the smell, and roast them. She said the smell went all over the neighbourhood. So did me beans, roasted twice. Little black beans popped in the pan. Ground up and still hot, well not hot, just burnt. Really burnt coffee. Don’t roast roasted coffee beans.
ELECTRICITY

Bulb

bowl for tetras
swimming under the wire
castle feeling grand.
who is womb
pregnant but screwed
daily, like
tapping the glass and outside
wave and jest, the two
controlling his oxygen
fragile globe at the mercy
of switch, receptacle, and reliable thread

Switch

on. tumescence.
a hand waving hello
like a metronome
upon undecided visitors
wearing textured signposts
for a drive – off and on
decidedly male.
two of them like
buddies pissing
off a cliff with a smooth
plateau far below

Receptacle

unavoidable
phallacy
come male, prod
she’s turned
to take you
to charge
conceiving
little ideas
vibrating currency
streaming sparks
The Socio-semiotics of objects is a science of grading. BARTHES
WAS RIGHT It supercedes local languages in its description
of objectival gradation. AUTOGRAPHIC OBJECTS have an authenticity
which is central to their value. GIFTS' and commodities' values
are determined not by an object but by their context. A GIFT is always
A GIFT to some one, by some one, from some one. Tracing for the flow
of an object is a negative trace for marginality. What matters for the child is meaning
not language. The urge to communicate belies an innate urge to intersubjectivity
YAWNING WITH TENSION
AFFECT ATTUNEMENT
enhances the status of the object. Imitation means the baby has in its mind both the
mother
and ITSELF. Physical gestures; jawdrop, knit brows, accommodating of its eyes are
followed by
exchanges of emotion. This is not so innocent, no one wants power structures discussed
in public.
I TAKE DURKHEIM to mean
TRACING THE FLOW OF THE OBJECT i mean
I TOOK DURKHEIM
and superceded local languages, i mean meanings
what matters for a child
to make explicit the general factors of a conventional middle-class living-room. By
contrast
<SHOWS SLIDE> THIS is the rhetoric of despair.
This person has failed occupationally
and is compensating for it: VISUAL ONOMATOPOEIA
YAWNING WITH TENSION
OUTOFWORK MAN'S COMPENSATION
RITUAL is the form in which a culture presents itself to itself
CULTURE is the circulations of forms for the exchange of knowledge and Socialized
affect
ITSELF is the form by which culture preserves ritual for cultural reference only
FORM is presence whereby culture ritualizes attunement
The fridge, not the defensive tackle, is the locale of things that are frozen, and incarnated
<SHOWS SLIDE> standardizes what had been a disparate group of freezings.
In the unravelling of its codes the code reproduces numerous variously other
reproductions. A girl is always a girl to some one, by some one, for some one. Malls
promise that
The Good Life is the life of goods. Desire
converted to the mimetic dematerializes the object through a process of enrichment
which may result in fetish. Where Classic Political Economy and Marxist
Political Economy differ the abyss YAWNS WITH TENSION
in how they model desire as a concept. A girl is always a girl but a commodity . . .
In CATHOLICISM eating and death are the primary FORMS of expenditure.
We have the environment of a TYPE 4 Lavoratory. I HAVE TAKEN DURKHEIM AS MY LAST COMMUNION that governments can stimulate consensus by spectacle simulation and value allocations are thus determined by administrative bureaucrats WHO ARE NOT ELECTED a depressing bonanza as the man with the <SLIDE SHOW> on lavoratories announces since the dialectic of signs and objects is dishevelled and its recombinant Social issues remain unposed to us.

AUTOGRAPHIC REFRIGERATOR MAGNETS OH REPOSE

The o?kos has taken over what used to be the domain of the p. The economic taking over the political with communities becoming commodities in the balance. We are desperate groups of frozen polities i mean disparate policies i mean polizeis searching for hair conditioner in the icebox.

MY VISUAL ONOMATOPOEIAS TAKEN MY LAST CONFESSION WAS

The private is commanding the communal. Le Capitaine is experimenting in the lavoratory. The context interjects ITSELF. I WAS INJECTING DURKHEIM

A nation's borrowed identity is a sign of the conqueror's force. An inventory of Canadian signifiers would show

INDEXING THE BEAVER

NO ONE WANTS POWER DISCUSSED

The narrative movement and modern consumerism is a celebration of the irrational. ROLAND'S RIGHT AGAIN. Garland wears your trousers. Tracing, no, COLLECTING is an imaginative pleasure-seeking in which context the object is produced. The Industrial Revolution gave rise to the DEMOCRITIZATION of COLLECTING

ALL GIVE RISE

COLLECTING is a cultural form whose activity is a metaphor for life ITSELF. ITSELF is the form in which culture ritualizes metaphors. One of the cultural themes of political life in Japan is the construction of an agrarian myth of the countryside as an avatar of all that is really good. I TOOK DURKHEIM as an avatar of what was only virtually the goodness of the Good Life. BARTHES WAS RIGHT An hierarchy of symbolic importance is borne out in secular pilgrimages which become

SOCially COMMEMORATIVE ACCULTURALIZATIONS

Building - Fish - Home a tripartite ludic community a deformed head, severed, standing alone ecstatic to the body confirming with the official class structure the snub-nosed cod, pieced apart: the snubby SN UBBED

NO ONE WANTS POWER DISGUST IN PUBLIC STRUCTURES making physically visible Sociological objects entails
making it clear what Semiology is important for:
An intravenous source of Durkheim
A circulation of S’s, large caps and small, some
times independently of each other
a steady flow of Z’s
a commodification of autographic onomatopoeics
GIRLS ! GIRLS ! GIRLS !
The sign is fundamentally incomplete without the Social
announcing various Social identities. The GIRL
is always from some culture, by some ritual, for THE MAN. A T-Shirt
can be a waxing pun
or we can simonize. DURKHEIM
WAS RIGHT TOO. HE
WAS RIGHT HERE. FROM
THE FRIDGE EMERGED <ELIDES FROM SCREEN> Es Gibt Bier. Tell Baudrillard
No, don't. There are seven codes of clothing circulation: GIFT-for- moment
GIFT-for-willing-family, GIFT not recognized als solche, negative reciprocal GIFTS where
a purchase-for-self means the end of a mother’s ability to impart clothes to her daughter.
ISLAMIC
moral dress arose out of the turmoil during the Sadat Regime in
Egypt. I must end here as i have just been informed
that Durkheim is a controlled substance in Canada.

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**TICK TALK by Omaha Rising**

re memory branch
memoir brain
membrane

skin hides
distortion/creation
behind arachnoid language
derma-disjoint communication

bite-fevered perception
immementos events
dysremembered
dismembered
remembered
unreversible

irreversible
spasmic clock
thiefs wrinkled time
leaving mutant replicants
continuators of remembrance
THREE DOGS INSIDE A PICKLE JAR

by Will Reid

Tangled up in pickle brine
Are three unhappy dogs of mine.
Unbridled youth has come and gone,
Their days of soiled and trampled lawn
Have ended, for my dogs now are
Enclosed within my pickle jar.

You say, “This poet is a nit;
Three pickled doggies wouldn’t fit
Inside a normal pickle jar -
Unless the jar you used was far
More vast, and you packed them tight;
They must have put up quite a fight!

My doggies green and wrinkly be;
They've shrunken in captivity.
Pickle jars are great to hold
Anything when it grows too old.
My next endeavor will entail
The pickling of my Auntie Gail.
PROMETHEUS BOREALIS
by mark d dunn

he slept until they found him.
bone, all bone and old.
killed at one time by a flung stone,
murdered it seems.
10,000 years making this mystery,
then the present day politics
of who owns them bones.

he clawed out of the ground,
into sky, near Gros Cap.
feet pointing west,
he followed
deeper into the lake,
navigating by shadows. pine shafts
slashed out along water’s edge,
the sun beginning to crest:
sundials on the shore.

wave fingers, the dense lake hand,
drew him against current,
against better judgement,
deeper, always deeper around copper islands,
the silver below water,
to the feet of Nanaboozhu asleep even then,
lives ago, even then sleeping.
and passing, the man brought his bones
– led perhaps by his bones –
across the round prairie,
left stone hammers and pelt ruins
for children to find.
he stopped for a time to bring more death to the world.
the mountains, the spine of the great island, shadowed him.
The world ends here, the mountains said.
so he climbed, slid down the other side,
rustled stone.
less skin on his bones when he touched down.
ocean salt calling the salt in his blood.
he predictably died,
and slept for a time in the mud along a river.

found by hikers
who stashed his skull
in bushes nearby.
they returned with police and professors.

he has never been so popular,
the little man from Gros Cap.
TWO POEMS
by B.Z. Niditch

VALERY

No explanation for sunlight
au revoir for pale words
we still tremble
from history’s void
yet Thursday’s rain shower
the passionate remorse
of an unsigned letter
offers valid fervor of memoirs
colors, sound
questions the countenance of clouds
an empty signature
intersects a page
of the impalpable.

IMPROVISATION

So much has changed you
the singing oboist
overlooks woes at work
upon assembly lines
of imagined planets and stones
you try to dream
of your back
to the sun’s riverbed
or the last train stop home,
vanishing x-rays,
lost notes, scarves, addresses
demanding a vacation
to rest by the sea
justice being mute
in a child’s bandaged universe
writing my initials
on a thousand-year evergreen.
Fat Fingers by Paul Hargreaves

You never really notice a thing like that until it bites you in the ass. Two letters, side by side on a keyboard. I mean, who notices?

Not that it’s my job to type the ad copy. I just deal with the newspaper’s clients and make sure their ads are all in the system before the paper goes to press. The copy is set by the ad builders who, for the most part, are pain-in-the-ass creative types.

You take Yves. He studied art at some fancy-schmantsy school in Paris, the Sorbonne. I Googled it and it all looks pretty intense – and so of course he figures he’s all that and a creme brulée to go which, by the look of him, is no stranger to his digestive tract. Yves figures he should be a curator at the National Gallery. Well no probs by me, Cézanne. But d’ya mind just curating my headache over the Philly’s Delicatessen ad before you Van Gogh off to your ivory tower?

Background: Philly’s is my biggest account – a mega-chain of delis here in Ottawa, in Montreal, Quebec City and municipal points beyond. Regular advertisers too, twice a week, always full page and full colour, so you gotta do what it takes to keep old Phil smilin’.

Always the same format: monster headline screaming out the discount item of the day and a big colour picture of Phil’s kid, Evelyn Schtrummer. She’s about sixteen or so, plump German girl with blond braids and oversized ta-tas all trussed up in a cleaving Swiss miss dirndl that she thinks is maybe working for her. Heavy Evvie, as the make-ready guys call her, grins and winks in the picture, real cute, and raises her pudgy little hand in an index-finger-bent-to-thumb “okay” symbol like, you know, everything’s always A-1 with the deli goods. It’s schmaltzy as hell, but you know what? Lotsa people actually buy that kind of schlock.

So last night, as usual, I bring Yves the napkin sketch. As usual it’s a few hours before deadline. He gives me the usual guff about the vulgar girl with the vulgar grin and the vulgar fat fingers and the vulgar destiny that callously bludgeons the sensibilities of a classically trained scholar through a purgatorial endurance of relentless bourgeois commercialism and on and on.

You see what I have to put up with. Listening to his crap every day I sometimes envy my deaf sister-in-law, Chrystel. If only you could turn it on and off.

Anyway, I coax Yves along. I get the job done. He bitches a bit more, but finally fires off a proof for me to e-mail the client. I check it over – I always always always check everything over – and, as usual, it looks good. The headline, set in subtle 148 point Advertiser Grotesque capitals screams Extra Lean Turkey Loaf and below that, Philly’s standard quality promise. The headline is a bit of a disconnect, sitting there beside Heavy Evvie, but the fonts and sizes and layout are all to spec and the other feature items look correct, so off we go. The proof comes back about an hour later with lots of last-minute changes. Old Phil now suspects that the big dills won’t sell so brisk this weekend. Make it Muenster cheese slices instead. And the bacon that comes in isn’t what Phil had expected; it looks way too lean and is of the very finest quality. Change the sale item to breakfast sausage, three ninety-five. And so on. Yves grumbles some more, but with just
forty minutes to deadline, I’m somewhat disinclined to waxing philosophical over the vulgarities of the merchant classes.

And I’ll just mention that the deadline isn’t a thing you mess with. Men with hairy backs are prowling around the presses right now, donkey-carroted by visions of chilled beer pitchers. Every minute past deadline causes that vision to recede and let’s just say they get a little vocal.

Then there’s the drivers, sitting by their idling trucks and sipping coffee on the shipping dock. And there are hundreds of alarm clocks ready to sound in bedrooms all over town, prodding the carriers to get up and get the papers out onto the porches. And all of this vast machinery of distribution hangs on the pouty progress of one particularly tight-assed prima donna French layout artist, and a German sausage speculator attempting to crystal-ball the fickle pickle market. Like I said, I coax it all along.

But just as Yves renders the final touches to his revisionary masterpiece, a teensy weensy fly dive bombs into the ointment. I’m not there to see it, of course, but I’m told a reefer truck pulls into Philly’s main receiving dock and it contains precisely zero units of Extra Lean Turkey Loaf. Not a one. Calls are made, Philly’s supplier goes a few rounds before taking it hard on the bottom line and there’s a product substitution winging its way across town. Which prompts a call from Mr. Schtrummer.

I pass the revised headline along to Yves at precisely two minutes past deadline, urging him to drop everything. The phone lines from the press room are already lighting up. Then nothing. Five minutes past deadline and still nothing. Finally I ring Yves and ask, you know, how about you send me the freakin’ proof while we’re still young?

“Oh, it’s no problème because I sent the ad off, direct,” he says.

“Only a headline change. Trust me,” he says.

Trust me, he says.

By the time the trucks get the call-back order, fifty thousand copies have hit the streets. The carriers have all stumbled groggily along in the pre-dawn light, tossing papers onto dewy doorsteps. The all-night gas station attendants have zipped open the sealed plastic bags and arranged the papers on the shelves. One of them has opened a copy and eventually browsed to Section B, page five, and started laughing. Laughing like hell. Laughing so hard he barely makes himself understood as he calls in the prize-winning “suggestion” of the month.

The pressmen, just throwing on their coats and licking their lips in sudsy anticipation, are implored to ink up the freshly-cleaned machines.

And everybody comes looking for me. Looking for me because there’s a major problem with the ad, see. The ad in which the client’s still-pubescent daughter sits grinning and flashing the “perfect” symbol with her right hand, the ad on which the Yves-revised 148 point Advertiser Grotesque headline was supposed to scream Tender Young Duck and you know, like I said, I never realized before how those two keys sit exactly side by side on the keyboard. And so help me, the standard quality promise below that reads, as usual, QUALITY TESTED BY PHILLY’S OWN FAMILY. Good God.

And my sister-in-law Chrystel, who laughs loudest of all in her silent world, e-mails me next day to just mention that in international sign language, an open hand in the index-finger-bent-to-thumb position is the gesture for the letter “F.” Perfect I say. Just fucking perfect.
Photo-image: by Paul Hargreaves
REVIEW: Nelson Ball, *Gutenberg, and the Underwriters* by Kemeny Babineau

*NELSON BALL, AT THE EDGE OF THE FROG POND,*
*THE MERCURY PRESS: 2004;*
*64 PAGES. $14.50*

Now, it may seem incongruous to mention the Gutenberg reflex in conjunction with the poetry of Nelson Ball, a seemingly apples and oranges comparison of our technological proficiency to reproduce with ease all and any text with a poetry as defined by reticence as stone carving itself, but it's a fruitful direction.

In a world of overbearing print media the writer is not only faced with the knowledge that it has all been said and written before but that it’s being re-said and re-written daily. How the writer reacts to this impedestal truth is the *Gutenberg reflex*. The writer’s apprehension of both tradition and contemporary reproduction is that of a massive textual wall: a veritable ten ton tome enclosure. To this the writer has a limited set of responses: denial, struggle, or acceptance. This reflexive choice in turn results in different types of verse, respectively: the insipid, the effusive, and the reserved. What I mean by reserved in this instance isn’t strictly a reference to a word per page ratio (though that can be important where poetry is concerned) but also as a years per book guide. It is the notion of restraint that is the order. Nelson Ball has published only a handful of books throughout his 40 year career. Here it may seem my argument is honing in on the prolific, but it’s not quite that. I have no argument with being prolific, as long as the following constitutes being prolific. E.E. Cummings’ “Complete Poems” is just over 1000 pages, and he’s a great poet, one who’s worth reading all of. Olson’s “Maximus Poems” are about 800 pages (that took at least 20 years to write) and “The Canto’s” are nearly the same. Wallace Stevens’ output comes well under these. By today’s standards this is all seemingly restrained, considering we are talking about some of the great writers of the 20th century.

In all of this bp nichol is the exception. His output is staggering considering how young he died. “The Martyrology” itself exceeds any of the others concerning page count, but nichol was actually a reductionist (he just had a hell of a lot to say that was interesting and not much time to do it in) because above all he respected the potency of words and used them with a sparing constancy. This is the first law of poetry, all good verse involves more than sleight skill. Nelson Ball’s poetry satisfies this. In ‘At the Edge of the Frog Pond’ and outwards, words ring again, and lingering re-affirm the import of the word in the world, and none of it is superfluous. To return to being prolific, it’s true, some people cant help themselves and they’ll be ringing the publisher monthly with high hopes for the latest item off the hard-drive but the book publishers and editors of these writers should know better, should see that restraint is required. What I’m getting at is that readers are being besieged by writers, there is too much, and that too much isn’t always much good. Yes, this too has been said before but Canada is producing too many paperback poets and not enough readers. It has become too easy to achieve ‘publication status,’ and with this comes the delusion of there being an actual market, as if there were an audience clamouring for more. Not only is this an affront to the art (not the wished for audience but the carelessness of ever accepting one’s own greatness or inflated worth) but it’s a waste of precious energies as well. It is the small press phenomenon (a.k.a. the underground) that offers the only practicable solution to our Gutenberg hyper-era by underwriting the textual wall. Sliding underground.
magazines foment a real literary climate and community where worthwhile additions to Gutenberg’s wall are nurtured. Meanwhile the contributions of the so-called legitimate press become increasingly spurious by further becoming the vehicles of the overwriters of diminishing quality.

Publication through established presses is vanity. These are the real vanity presses. It is humility to publish privately, at your own cost. (Louis Dudek, *Ideas for Poetry.*)

So the *reflex*, in this crude delineation, either manifests as megalomania fired by delusion, where the writer attempts to write the self all over Gutenberg’s wall, to overwrite by out writing (volume over volume,) or as the alternative to this, underwriting, burrowing beneath the wall, wending between the giant’s legs, coming as near to silence as possible while still speaking. (When silence breaks it creates its own possibility.) Marlon Brando once said of acting that to be effective the actor should only give 20% (he mumbled a lot) and to keep 80% in reserve. That 80% is what charged the audience. The same could be said for poetry. Through restraint the author maintains an adoring, listening (not yet bored) audience.

In mythical terms the *reflex* is either a case of David vs. Goliath or Ulysses clung to the belly of a sheep escaping the Cyclops’s cave, Strength or stealth. Granted, technological advances have made writing and research much easier and quicker, thereby making the reflex to overwriting seem more tempting. This mirror’s David’s technologically advanced sling shot that made Giant slaying at least a remote possibility, but I’ll take stealth any day. David was lucky (and a good shot); I can count on neither, like most of us, and prefer the odds of wit over chance, silence over cacophony.

Nelson Ball’s poetry has always been of the stealthy variety, in this latest collection, *At the Edge of the Frog Pond* by Mercury Press, he deepens this response to the Gutenberg wall; not only does he write *into* the tradition and lock arms with contemporaries but he engages more completely the non-verbal visual arts, and he does this through the visual concrete. In one sense the verbal is taking refuge in the non-verbal and how else to do that but through the under-verbal or succinct. Somewhere in Oriental poetic tradition it has been said that if you cant say it in 18 lines or less, don’t bother. Those are a few words to remember. But the danger of brevity is not being able to say anything or realizing you have nothing to say and playing word games instead. Either collapse or implode. Ball’s poetry refuses both- by always pointing out, out the window, at the tree, the season, the sculpture, the painting, the news… and he does this without the obfuscation of labyrinthine texts that devolve into language navels, but neither is he about to abandon a dialogue with language. (Curiously, the latter is the result of the denial factor.) Ball’s poetry is often about language, sound and sense, but never to the exclusion of interpreting the world beyond language. I’m not saying that language isn’t the context of writing but that it’s not the only context, or at least, it oughtn’t be.

In reductionist poetry like Nelson Ball’s (Roy Miki and Dennis Lee being two other examples) the brevity accentuates the artistry, there is a certain *into-it-ness* and flare to the work. Such verse causes one to look, to listen, to connect these small poems into the vast mesh of literary tradition, as in the poem ‘April//Hail/ clatters//on/glass panes//then/ rain.’ Tradition here is the noting of the season, immediately this poem takes us through at least Eliot, Chaucer, the pastoral eclogue, Japanese haiku etc… and back to the origins of the alphabet as a mnemonic device for recording moon and season changes. On top of this the entire poem is onomatopoetic. The essence resonates. This literary ripple continues in ‘The Pool,’ an allegory of perception, knowledge and reality, which is mirrored by several other pieces concerned with what is visible
and what isn’t. Some of what we see in these poems is that through recombination and attention the previously hidden may be suddenly revealed. Gestalt –like that.

Ball’s poems don’t remain by the frog pond or the pool but engage the world of art and society as well. There are four poems to sculptors and visual artists in this book: Ron Baird, Robert Downing, Sheila Vollmer, and Kosso Eloul. All of these artists are, or were, local (by this I mean geographic proximity to the poet -Uxbridge, Paris, Toronto) except for Eloul and his work is on public display in Toronto. At the Edge of the Frog Pond is not about isolation, it’s about breaking out of isolation, it’s about observation and the sculpture’s horizon. This is a refreshing way of engaging the Gutenberg wall. While the words take refuge in the non-verbal, the sculptures are availed the use of words. Rolling all this into one pithy book Ball combines community, non-verbal art, and literary tradition.

In spite of all his natural reticence Ball isn’t done with us yet, there is more he has to quickly say. This too he accomplishes through the concrete poem and a queer cousin of the acrostic -the crossword. The acrostic is a literary form as old as language itself. It often suffices as a form of literary shorthand but Ball manages to rescue the form from its potential for quaint banality by employing it in a concrete fashion. The form they take points to further ironies. The most successful of these poems is ‘Knocked Out,’ which is a triumph.

KNOCKED OUT

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There isn’t a better way to write that poem, to say so much, with so little. Again, to encapsulate quickly: the Gutenberg reflex can be deepened and a writer’s contribution to the wall enriched not through expansionism but through engagement of the literary arts community, the small press world, the non-verbal arts, language and literature. This isn’t to say that reductionism is always preferable to expansion, it is rather a warning to expansionists that constant kicking, whether it be against the pricks or not, will result only in a bursting of one’s own bubble. In short, the 21st century belongs to the condensed epic.
In the Strange Fields of this City: Urban Poetic Interrelations
by Anne F. Walker

Central to American Urban Poetics are poetic interrelations. In the introduction to Charles Baudelaire’s book of prose poetry *Paris Spleen* he wrote: “it is by frequenting the spaces of the large cities that this obsessive poetic ideal arises. By coming into contact with the numerous interrelations between things that this poetic shape comes into being.” The ideal of the Modern city’s interrelations engaging with poetics is born, in an apex of social, urban, and aesthetic change. Lorna Cervantes’ poem “For Virginia Chavez” is a contemporary American example of poetic interrelations. Chicana/o Literary and Cultural Theory forms a framework for American Urban Poetics as the concern for negotiating borders and interrelations, in society and art.

“For Virginia Chavez” comes from the 1981 book *Emplumada*, which won the American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation (1982.) *Emplumada* follows one landmark in the development of Chicana/o Cultural Theory, the publication date is thirteen years after the First Chicano National Conference in Denver in 1969 where the poet Alurista wrote “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán.” “Eplan Espiritual de Aztlan” rejects political borders of Mexico and the United States in favor of cultural nationalism and recognition of a Chicano homeland. *Emplumada* is published seven years before Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands = La frontera: The New Mestiza* which states that “The U.S.-Mexican border es una herida abierta where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds. And before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merging to form a third country—a border culture” (3). *Borderlands = La frontera: The New Mestiza* couples public and private space in terms of multiple physical, psychological, sexual, spiritual and class borders:

The actual physical borderland that I’m dealing with in this book is the Texas-U.S., Southwest/Mexican border. The psychological borderlands, the sexual borderlands, and spiritual borderlands are not particular to the South-west. In fact the Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy. (19) A city’s character is, in large part, defined by its constant shifting of borders and new social, physical, mental, sexual and spiritual intersections. Chicana/o discourse informs fundamental tenets of American Urban Poetics as it works so consistently and thoroughly in developing theories and understandings of borders and cultural synthesis. While the 1960’s vision of Chicana/o nationalism is sometimes criticized for eliding non-Aztec indigenous populations’ presence and history in the American south-west, the idea of shifting and residual nations is in strong contrast to dominant contemporary models. The fluidity of nations being layer upon layer, rather than hard borders on political maps and atlases, is kin to pre-European indigenous constructions of place in North America where significantly alternate world views often existed in close proximity to each other. This idea of simultaneous multiple worlds existing over time and space is a part of how people encounter one another in cities and in poetry. The world of “For Virginia Chavez” is populated primarily by the relations between two women:

It was never in the planning,
in the life we thought
we’d live together, two fast
women living cheek to cheek,
still tasting the dog’s
breath of boys in our testy
new awakening.  
We were never the way  
they had it planned.  
Their wordless tongues we stole  
and tasted the power  
that comes of that.  
We were never what they wanted  
but we were bold. We could take  
something of life and not  
give it back. We could utter  
the rules, mark the lines  
and cross them ourselves—we two  
women using our fists, we thought,  
our wits, our tunnels. They were such  
dumb hunks of warm fish  
swimming inside us,  
but this was love,  
we knew, love, and that was all  
we were ever offered.  
You were always alone  
so another lonely life  
wouldn’t matter.  
In the still house  
your mother left you,  
when the men were gone  
and the television droned  
into test patterns, with our cups  
of your mother’s whiskey  
balanced between the brown thighs  
creeping out of our shorts, I read  
you the poems of Lord Byron, Donne,  
the Brownings: all about love,  
explaining the words  
before realizing that you knew  
all that the kicks in your belly  
had to teach you. You were proud  
of the woman blooming out of your  
fourteen lonely years, but you cried  
when you read that poem I wrote you,  
something about our “waning moons”  
and the child in me  
I let die that summer.  
In the years that separate,  
in the tongues that divide  
and conquer, in the love  
that was a language  
in itself, you never spoke,  
ever regret. Even
that last morning  
I saw you with blood  
in your eyes, blood  
on your mouth, the blood  
pushing out of you  
in purple blossoms.

_He did this._

When I woke, the kids  
were gone. They told me  
I'd never get them back.

With our arms holding  
each other's waists, we walked  
the waking streets  
back to your empty flat,  
ignoring the horns and catcalls  
behind us, ignoring what  
the years had brought between us:  
my diploma and the bare bulb  
that always lit your bookless room.

POETIC INTERRELATIONS IN LITERARY HISTORIES

Cervantes’s work invites a reading that involves intersections of varied cultural and literary histories. _Emplumada_ won many accolades. Her subsequent collection, _From the Cables of Genocide: Poems on Love and Hunger_ (1991), was chosen by Hayden Carruth as the recipient of the Paterson Poetry Prize, and won the 1993 Latino Literature Prize and a National Book Award nomination. Cervantes’s other accolades include a National Endowment for the Arts fellowship and the Pushcart Prize. After undergraduate work at San Jose State, and doctoral work in the History of Consciousness Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Cervantes became an Associate Professor of English at the University of Colorado. Gloria Anzaldúa was professor in the History of Consciousness Department at UC Santa Cruz. In the late 1990’s, then American Poet Laureate, Robert Hass invited her to read at the Library of Congress. She is, and has been, a significant presence in the Chicana/o literary movement. Her activities include establishing and editing the literary journals _Mango_ and _Red Dirt._

Cervantes invites a reading, in part, through the lens of an Anglo-literary tradition. While the cultural perspective is Chicana/o the text’s language is almost completely English. Experiences depicted in _Emplumada_ resonate beyond specifically Chicana/o concerns. They are American and largely urban. In the same way that landmarks intersect to depict particular urban spaces, Cervantes sites the names “Lord Byron, Donne, / the Brownings” (17), and “Stevenson” (15), in the text creating an intersection of strands from the Anglo poetic tradition. Cervantes is clearly engaged with the American literary tradition. The various literary prizes are indicators of engagement with the Anglo community.

The canonical affiliation is supported by linkages between the Cervantes text and the Anglo American canon through imagery, tone and theme. Although Cervantes places her work in a grid of a particular written tradition through references, her use of the themes evoked are distinct not only as the poet’s individual voice, but also as descriptive the contemporary period. Within a literary work, within any kind of social discourse, accepted forms of discussing social norms, problems, and revelations articulate the period and place from which the writer creates.
This is not to say that an artist’s environment is the sole determinate of his or her creation. Still, the intellectual milieu of the time does bear some of the same features of innovation, manifested individually by artists and citizens. For example, Whitman’s poetry answered tenets put forth in Ralph Waldo Emerson’s poetic ideal articulated in his essay “The Poet.” Markings of the intellectual milieu can be read in terms of contemporary fashion associations and intellectual developments which incorporate the work of predecessors. Intellectual frameworks, examples, metaphors, language, pacing, and areas into which one will write are affected by this exact space from which one writes. Spaces from which any art/literature/thought/action is produced, and particular philosophic or historical areas of interest and association, are imprinted subtly and boldly within the text. As knowledge is situated, social and physical geography are inseparable from the thoughts they imprint.

The integration of aesthetic traditions into American Literature is a concern of *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, where the history of aesthetics is brought into relation with the canonization and teaching of multicultural texts. In the introduction to *Aesthetics in a Multicultural Age*, Emory Elliot writes “Those who do not recognize themselves or their works of art in the features of the putative universal ideal [of beauty] will either feel diminished and inferior or systematically excluded and marginalized. Thus the aesthetic is always in danger of being exploited of individual prejudice or of nationalism, racism, sexism, and classism. This has always been true and remains the case today.” Cervantes utilizes a combination of icons from Chicana/o cultural, and Anglo literary, traditions in a time when Chicana/o poetry had barely begun to make its way into the American Literary canon. Markings of the Anglo tradition function to provide a bridge between established American aesthetic tradition and *Emplumada*.

Cervantes’s synthesizing of cultural and literary histories is particularly akin to Baudelaire’s fascination with the cultural mixing in Paris of his time where the creation of boulevards changed the framework for people to encounter one another. *Emplumada* constructs a contemporary urban landscape, with landmarks and neighborhoods consistently named. These named places physically outline a geographic space in which imagination may situate the body of the work. Some poems such as “Freeway 280” and “Oak Hill Cemetery” are location-specific to the San Francisco Bay Area. Other poems, “Beneath the Shadow of the Freeway,” “Lots,” and “Ally” describe in their titles a more generic urban backdrop for narrations. Within the poems the city references continue both in the specific and generalized veins, “the freeway, / blind worm, wrapping from Los Alto to Sal Si Puedes” (11) and “en los campo estranos de esta cuidad” (39). Where Baudelaire read the construction of boulevards into social and poetic landscapes, Cervantes reads the construction of freeways, and contemporary urban and suburban sprawl into a multi-cultural California.

While *Emplumada* is urban-based, it also depicts a lucid contemporary manifestation of the idea underscoring poetic interrelations. These interrelations can be read, in part, from cross cultural strands of intersecting difrasismos. *Difrasismo* is “a trope that was very characteristic of Nahuatl poetry and a general feature of Nahuatl language and thought. In *Llave del Náhuatl*, Angel María Garibay calls this trope *difrasismo*. *Difrasismo* is the means of representing something in the coupling of two elements. In this way, city is *inatl in tepetl*, water and hill; body is *nomacnocxi*, hand and feet. And perhaps the most well known *difrasismo* is that for poetry, *inxóchitl in cuicatl*, flower and song,” (6). Nahuatl is an ancient Aztec language. Aztec culture’s roots in what is now the American South-West forms a basis for the kind of Chicano nationalism put forward by Alturista in 1969.

In *Chicano Poetics* Alfred Arteaga moves between literary form and social formation in describing *difrasismo*. The Chapter “Mestizaje / Difrasismo,” associates the Indian-Spanish Mestizaje racial body with *difrasismo* as expressing an intermix of cultural viewpoints, literary structures in reference to the body. The literary expression of *difrasismo* is then integrated with
the idea of social experience and choice, as well as inner mobility. For example, Arteaga describes the naming of his daughter, Marisol: “I gave her a name that is a *difrasismo,* and she is the one who chooses what combination of Sea and/or Sun she configures herself to be” (19).

The idea of social and aesthetic mixing in no way starts or ends with Baudelaire. Aristotle, Coleridge and Bakhtin, all wrote on the topic. In their connection to the Modern city, poetic interrelations can be tracked back to *Paris Spleen.* Again, the concentrated multiple interrelations at the basis of Baudelaire’s innovations in prose poetry were drawn from his experiences in Paris as that city became modern. As Paris set the tone for modern cities, Baudelaire was the pioneer in urban poetics. Continual recognitions and expressions of metropolitan variation are as present today as they were in the time of Baudelaire’s Paris. These elements could be said to be further accelerated in the contemporary period. Baudelaire’s Paris, saw the boulevards first built, forming, simultaneous urban destruction and creation. This was the original modern city that provided the historical basis for urban poetic interrelations. Baudelaire’s new “obsessive poetic ideal” is at the root of modern urban poetics, because Baudelaire re-negotiated the boundaries of city-based poetry through his imagery and themes. The concept of the Boulevards informed the creations of grid cities which we are now familiar with in North American, through their design which opened the flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic. This opening is in contrast to previous models where neighborhood isolation was the dominant paradigm of urban design. The boulevards were created originally to allow the French army to suppress the popular revolt, however the effect was to open the city to a new form of social mixing. Although classes would not directly encounter each other in any given space, the spaces were nonetheless occupied by a class mix. People of different classes saw each other in public spaces routinely. It agitated the social mix. This agitation is important in thinking about urban poetics because it established an aesthetic of variation and overlapping sensibilities. This is the timeframe when Hausmann, the city planner transformed Paris, resulting in enormous urban renewal. The modern renovations of the city included the creation of the Boulevards and the placement of macadam in the streets as pavement, which were innovations soon followed globally. Many of the dynamics of capitalism were in place, but the new, commercial bourgeoisie was not strong enough or organized enough to take over the state against the military, the old aristocracy, and the peasantry. Marshall Berman’s *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity,* in Section III “Baudelaire: Modernism in the Streets,” offers an interesting reading of links between the creation of Paris as the first modern city, the creation and social impact of its boulevards, and the content of Baudelaire’s urban poetry. Berman does not engage with a discussion on poetic form, but uses the literature to make observations within a social science vocabulary. Baudelaire was working in Paris at a time when traditional parameters of visual art, and conceptions of artistic perception, were being challenged by the Impressionists. He also encountered political activity within Paris on the edge of revolution, at the time that Marx and Engles were writing. Baudelaire was frequenting socialist clubs and gathering places such as Blanqui’s Club des Halles, sketching pictures of prominent activists.

**PURPLE BLOSSOMS**

In *Emplumada’s* complicated poetic landscape where the intricate setting of intellectual/cultural strands mirror physical and social interchanges of city—one strand is the floral link between Cervantes’s “For Virginia Chavez” and William Carlos Williams’s 1925 poem “Queen-Ann’s-Lace.” The link is highlighted by naming “the poems of Lord Byron, Donne, [and] the Brownings.” “For Virginia Chavez” describes a manifestation of man-on-woman violence using the words “purple blossoms” (18). These words echo specific imagery from “Queen-Ann’s-Lace”:
Her body is not so white as
anemone petals nor so smooth—nor
so remote a thing. It is a field
of the wild carrot taking
the field by force; the grass
does not raise above it.
Here is no question of whiteness,
white as can be, with a purple mole
at the center of each flower.
Each flower is a hand’s span
of her whiteness. Wherever
his hand has lain there is
a tiny purple blemish. Each part
is a blossom under his touch
to which the fibers of her being
stem one by one, each to its end,
until the whole field is a
white desire, empty, a single stem,
a cluster, flower by flower,
a pious wish to whiteness gone over—
or nothing.

Each artist works from a physically and socially placed locale, and is framed within an intellectual
environment. Cervantes points out that Byron, Donne and the Brownings wrote “all about love”
(17) in terms and language applicable to their social/poetic milieus. Cervantes does the same for
her geographic and temporal location. Cervantes’ geographic and temporal location within the
poem includes racism, sexism, out-of wedlock pregnancy, possible abortion, systemic social and
domestic violence, abduction of children, and strong divisions between those who are able to
speak and those who can not. The poem features unflinching testimonial of elements within the
contemporary moment. Where Williams’s 1925 poem suggests physical violence, “Wherever /
his hand has lain there is / a tiny purple blemish” that is a possibility or threat rather than the
graphic severity of Cervantes’s lines:

blood
on your mouth, the blood
pushing out of you
in purple blossoms

When Cervantes uses the words “purple blossoms,” the image is a brief and undeveloped
metaphor, but the sense of sexuality and violence is inexorably interconnected and forges a
stronger link between the poems than the obvious linguistic tie. Imagery, tone, and theme speak
to palimpsestic overlaps. The linguistic tie is subtle as the link in her line from the Nortonized
“Freeway 280” where the poem reads:

Maybe it's here
en los campos extranos de esta cuidad
where I'll find it, that part of me
moan under
like a corpse
or a loose seed. (39)

These lines bear a linguistic/imagistic overlap to T. S. Eliot’s in “The Wasteland” l71-2 (65)
“That corpse you planted last year in your garden, / ‘Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?’ In echoing these lines Cervantes chooses a different subjective position, and thus complicates the image, because some part of the poetic ‘I’ is the corpse itself. Yet the ‘corpse’ is ‘a loose seed’ which is read in relation both to the city and the narratives of flowers and the growth of food elsewhere in ‘Freeway 280.’ The blooming of the corpse, while articulated in Eliot, is implicit in Cervantes because the corpse and loose seed are associated syntactically. The growth of flora within the city’s grid, and specifically, adjacent to the ‘raised scar’ of the freeway, generates a body image.

There is an Escher-esque style evident in the logic of the imagery that the scar/freeway may be that which has grown from the corpse/seed. In Cervantes’s context, Eliot’s imagery is utilized, again inviting a reading in association with the Anglo-American literary canon, but spun so as to invite a completely different reader response. This poetry is mimetic of an urban condition typified by the city and its people in all their multiple parts densely occupying the overlapping space. Some strands seem similar, yet they are constantly different and shifting.

The echoes of Eliot make the connection to Williams more palpable. Imagery, tone and theme add to the invitation to read a bridge between the poems. Both Williams’s “Queen-Ann’s-Lace” and Cervantes’s “For Virginia Chavez” use floral imagery to sculpt an image of violence on a woman’s body. Williams’s work identifies a field of Queen-Ann’s-Lace as the metaphor for the body of the poem’s “her” in the opening lines:

Her body is not so white as anemone petals nor so smooth—nor so remote a thing. It is a field of the wild carrot taking the field by force; the grass does not raise above it.

As there is a purple part in the center of the cluster of tiny flowers that makes up a single-stem bouquet of Queen-Ann’s-Lace, the image is accurate to the floral metaphor. The purple moles/blemishes/blossoms are first primarily linked to the form of the flower but also stand in for overt effects of violence. The implication of a man’s hand causing bruises is present. “The wild carrot taking / the field by force,” given that the field has already been described as “her” body, suggests rape. These lines resonate with Cervantes’s “strange fields of this city.” A significant tone in Emplumada is the creation of the city as a place of residual, and fresh, blemishes and scars left in the wake of social and physical violence. To refer again back to “Freeway 280,” “los campos extranos de esta cuidad” are found concealed “beneath a raised scar.”

The association between “Queen-Ann’s-Lace” and “For Virginia Chavez” is supported by tone as well as metaphor. Desire is a tone integral to both landscapes. Williams’s metaphoric bruises are associated with desire where he writes:

a tiny purple blemish. Each part is a blossom under his touch to which the fibers of her being stem one by one, each to its end, until the whole field is a white desire, empty, a single stem, a cluster, flower by flower, a pious wish to whiteness gone over— or nothing.

“The field,” representative of the object’s body, becomes “white desire.” That desire is complicated by “a pious wish to whiteness gone over— / or nothing.” The naming of “desire” and
the sensuality of the poem aids the reading of “the fibers of her being / stem one by one, each to its end,” as metaphoric to nerve ending excitement in sexual arousal. The regret of “a pious wish to whiteness” presents a wishing away of perhaps the sexuality, or perhaps the undercurrent of violence. The “pious wish” may signify a desire on the part of the narrator that the object of desire was not marked up by the desire of a “he,” or that the touch of “he” had not affected “her” to “the fibers of her being.” That “pious wish” could be a moral/religious rejection of sexuality which could reflect back into a long history of anti-sexual morality in American culture, beginning with the puritans and remaining consistent to contemporary mores.

The intimacy and taut engagement with which the narrator describes the “she” gives reason to read the narrator as an eclipsed participant in the poem’s play. Williams’s opening lines “Her body is not so white as / anemone petals nor so smooth—nor / so remote a thing” borrow, through negated comparison, from Shakespeare’s Sonnet 130, not only in the introduction’s line but also in the sustained negation of a romantic ideal throughout the poem:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked, red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks,
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go;
My mistress when she walks treads on the ground.
And yet, by heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

The narrator’s presence appears eclipsed in “Queen-Ann’s-Lace,” while it is explicitly present in “For Virginia Chavez.”

The beloved, “you,” and the narrator are described as having had plans to live together, “we thought / we’d live together, two fast / women living cheek to cheek.” It is not hard to read a queer non-monogamy in those lines. Although most of the poetry in Emplumada seems overtly heterosexual, some other poetry in the collection, such as “Caribou Girl” (21), and “The Anthill” (7) sustain queered readings quite easily in their sensual appreciation and direct statements of love, sexuality and intimate commitment. Lines such as: “I loved the Caribou Girl” (21), “My palm cupped her mouth / As I kissed her” (7), supports reading the lines “in the life we thought / we’d live together, two fast / women living cheek to cheek” (16) as descriptive of homosexual romantic desire.

In the primary emotional relationship, sensual awareness is recounted where the author writes:

our cups
of your mother’s whiskey
balanced between the brown thighs
creeping out of our shorts (17)

Shakespeare describes elements of his lover’s body and ways, William describes “her” body as a way of expressing something about her sexuality and (im)purity, and Cervantes describes a body of her object’s experience. Cervantes’s “you” is described in terms of her social/familial history, and the story of where that history takes her.

Sexual exploration of the primary connection does not manifest itself. When the “you” of “for Virginia Chavez” goes fully into the world of heterosexuality—into the phase of life with the
man, or men, with whom she created “the kids” (18)—she returns with the same purple blossoms that William’s narrator’s love object finds placed on her body by another man’s hand(s). A sense of physical or emotional danger, linked with desire and touch presents itself in both “For Virginia Chavez” and “Queen-Ann’s-Lace.”

This analysis of Cervantes’s use of English canonical literature is not to suggest that these links are primary in the poems’ aesthetics. The analysis is to point out that, as each person or object in a city progresses through her/her own paths, each poetic interrelation has multiple histories. Each history can be traced.

Cervantes’s poem incorporates elements from Williams, the way Williams’s poem borrows from Shakespeare. While elements shift and are used differently, a lineage is present. This is akin to the on-the-ground sense of being in a city with its elements shifting around one described earlier in relation to Eliot and Cervantes. In Baudelaire’s vision of the city the idea of motion is essential, and the idea of truth is always in flux. In “The Painter of Modern Life,” Baudelaire’s vision of the “multiplicity of life” in the modern city transforming the flaneur is folded with the flaneur changing the city through perception and imagination. “We can compare [this person] to a mirror that is about the same size as the crowd, a kaleidoscope equipped with a conscience that, with each of its movements, represents the multiplicity of life (literally: multiple life or multi-layered life) and the fluctuating grace of all of life’s elements” (1160-1).

The poet takes the place of the flaneur while moving through literary histories, reflecting and re-inventing variations through the process of being. The author’s imaginative process is mimetic to the shift and flow of modern urban life by way of being an attentive interactive element mobile within its parameters. Cervantes becomes Nortanized and thus brings a nod to Chicana/o literature into every classroom that uses the Norton anthology, and to everyone who reads it. She has changed the literary landscape through her presence and participation.

Not only is the work urban, but it highlights ideals that are foundations to modern urban poetics. The crux of this article is that Baudelaire’s depiction of poetic interrelations, applied to a reading of Cervantes, exemplifies that multiple aesthetic strands work like traffic in a city.

Endnotes:

i “We are free and sovereign to determine those tasks which are justly called for by our house, our land, the sweat of our brows, and by our hearts. Aztlán belongs to those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans. We do not recognize capricious frontiers on the bronze continents... With our heart in our hands and our hands in the soil, we declare the independence of our mestizo nation. We are a bronze people with a bronze culture. Before the world, before all of North America, before all our brothers in the bronze continent, we are a nation, we are a union of free pueblos, we are Aztlán.” Alurista quoted by Alfred Arteaga, “Mestizaje / Difrasismo” in Chicano Poetics: Heterotexts and Hybridities (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997.) 12. Sited from: “El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán,” Aztlán: Essays on the Chicano Homeland, Eds. Rudolfo A. Anaya and Francisco Lomeli (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P. 1989), 1.


iii In Love Medicine Louise Erdrich presents stories as constructed places where the author works out linguistically, through overlapping imaginative landscapes, the historical cultural geographic pluralism of the indigenous subjects of her short story. Several landscapes emerge: the town as a border for a native woman and white culture, the movement toward a sexual encounter with a stranger that echoes capitalist consumer models in its interpersonal interchangeability, and the symbology of Christian redemption. In a form of heterotextual production, the conflation of meaningful narrative spaces reflects the social geography of pre-European indigenous construction of place in North America where significantly alternate world views often existed in close proximity to each other. Louise Erdrich, Love Medicine. New York: HarperPerennial, 1993.


v As well as naming “Lord Byron, Donne,” and “the Brownings” in “For Virginia Chavez,” Cervantes names “the verses of Stevenson” in the earlier poem “for Edward Long” (15) further opening the invitation to read Emplumada’s poems with an ear to the Anglo literary canon. The Stevenson may refer to 20th century Anglo poet Anne Stevenson (b. 1933)
Other Essays
10/21/01. For an English language edition of the book refer to Charles Baudelaire, and French poetry, or list of published translations, see complete bibliography.


ix This could also be fruitfully read in relation to Gwendolyn Brooks’s “the vacant lot” in A Street in Bronzeville, in Blacks (Chicago: Third World Press. (1994) 41. Questions about what happens in these open urban spaces—violation, potential sex, redemption are visited in Cervantes’s “Lots: I the Alley” and Lots: II Herself,” 8-9, as well as in “Freeway 280,” 67.

x Again, “in the strange fields of this city” is the author’s translation, 67.


xiii This acceleration is referred to as “Hypermodernity” by Allan Pred, Social Research, Winter 1995, pp 1065-1090, as a rejection of the concept of post-modernity. Pred argues that the contemporary period is described by the same tenet as the period of social modernity, the constituent elements are simply sped up. This acceleration may be a reason for the disassociative aesthetic underlying hypermodernity. He argues early industrialization and urbanization created the same condition of disorientation.


xv Ibid., page 159, presents an account of the traffic and movement from Baudelaire’s “Loss of a Halo,” which includes the following footnote, “We should note that Baudelaire’s experience of ‘moving chaos’ antedates the traffic light, an innovation developed in America around 1905, and a wonderful symbol of early state attempts to regulate and rationalize the chaos of capitalism.”


xxi Needless to say, the translator is referring to the Latin phrase, “For Virginia Chavez” to be read in the Anglo-literary canonical context.

“Songs of Nahuatl Protest ” by Clemente Padin (Uruguay)