

THE SAME

\$9

Double Issue

Volume 5, Number 1

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Like a caged animal, I saved the best for last. Nobody knows how supportive our troops are. Not until they're gone and brown children miss the guns and gum in front of the candy store. Like a caged animal, I'm too lazy to walk through an open door, too fat to fit. Listen, I saved the best for last. I love you. Who are you? That's a lie, I never loved anyone, least of all myself. If I did, I wouldn't butter my toast. Certainly not with a palette knife. Nevertheless, I love you.



I've forgotten what I smell like. Diesel, wet sidewalk, roasting coffee, these scents tell me I'm home. Don't ask me, don't tell me, I already think I know, even though I don't. I have a bed. I sleep in it, even though I didn't make it. I dream in black and white but also in stereo. I'm losing my hearing. I did not invest it wisely. I forget things if I write them down, so I write a lot. I am Isaiah with the Lost Books. Can you read them to me? My parents picked cotton, had dirt floors and no shoes, ate squirrel and opossum. Now they have oxygen and new corneas and cable TV. Like caged animals, not happy, not sad, they just go on. How do you feel about that? You're wrong. But here's the best, which I've saved, as day follows day. When I was a child, I had a rabbit who died trying to squeeze through a tiny hole in his crate. He knew it was too small, but the world on the other side was so wide. And Bill, dead in his birdcage. Swordtails jumping to the deadly carpet. I let my cats go outside, and they don't always come back.

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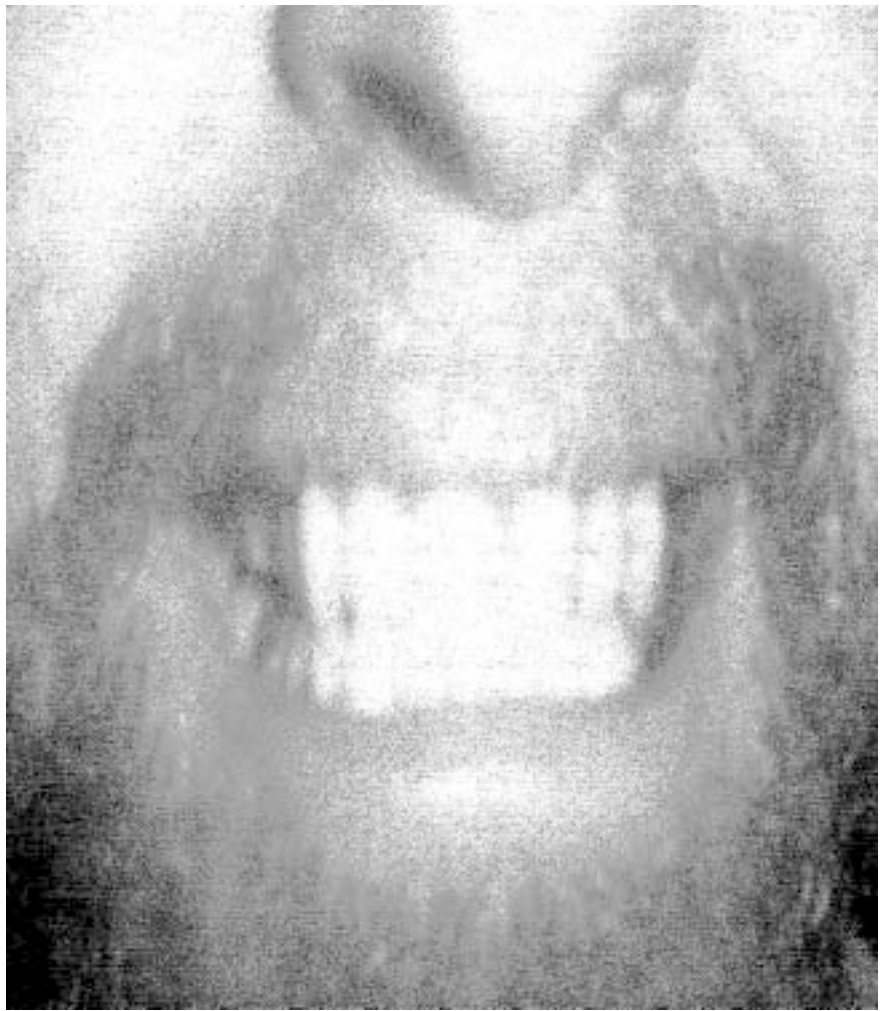
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Front Cover: Photo by Eric Thomson
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—AC

Antescript

by Carl Bettis

You might notice a slightly new look to *The Same*, besides the extra thickness that goes with a double issue. Anne laid this issue out on a different computer and we had to make some font substitutions.

The next issue will bring larger changes. Philip Miller has seized control of *The Same* in a bloodless coup. I will stay on as associate editor and webmaster, but my participation will be limited. There will be no more “Neo-modernist” column. (By the way, the Blake anecdote in this issue’s column is fictional.) I will continue to do the “Formal Considerations” and “Web Notes” columns.

It’s been a pleasure and a privilege to edit this magazine, but personal matters require more of my attention now.

Phil gives me to understand that future issues will be digest-sized, and the magazine will come out twice a year. Look for the new editorial contact information elsewhere in this issue.

The Same

“Read my eyes,” we say,
“No read mine,”
a kind of parlor game.
You’re thinking:
“Things will never be the same.”
I’m thinking,
“Things will always be the same.”
You’re thinking, “Reconciliation.”
“Let’s be friends again,” you say.
I’m thinking, “When was that?”
I’m thinking, “Reconciliation
to what—to this, to that?”

It’s a kind of parlor game.
Things are still the same.
It’s double solitaire.
You stare;
I stare,
hold out a card or two.
We can’t win or lose,
You, on your side,
I, on mine,
up in the air,
up in dead air.

“Read my eyes.”
“No mine,
Read mine.”
You’re thinking,
“Resignation”;
I’m thinking, “Quits.”
But I can’t go
And time sits and sits.

It’s a kind of parlor game,
and things are still the same.
Still the same.
The same.

—Philip Miller

After the Wake

His dad had
died. People flowed in and out all day.
His daughter showed them all
the new dance
she learned, and that night she asked him what
is death, and why flowers?

He turned it
back to her and asked her what she thought.
She pursed her lips as if

she was grown,
tilted her head purely for effect.
Then, in forced falsetto,

“grief,” she said,
and laid down her head on the counter.
Frowned. Furrowed her brow. But

this was no
scared groping in the dark. Her little
legs still kicked back and forth.

Fluorescent
kitchen lights hummed. Just then his daughter
seemed to him a stranger.

—Kelly Kealy

all night embrace...
fingers
still linger
—ayaz daryl nielsen

Contingency

Something owes us
an apology,
but don't hold your breath.
If it comes
it will sound
mealymouthed
or hollow
and need footnotes
or a tome
of explanation.

That's if all this
is on purpose.
If it's all
an accident,
let's rejoice—
at least when
the collisions
let up for a bit.

—Graham Duncan

Seizure

Drawn back to attention
by the unannounced change,
like a tidal wave.
My mind returns

from the routines of life.
In the moments after,
there's a naive innocence
that floats in your eyes

when moments before
you seemed lost.
We sit, talk quiet
you emerge, again.

When I'm not there—
and the lion hampers
your journey up the mountain—
what Beatrice guides you back?

—Joseph R. Cecil

Born Again

You better watch out!
The rapture's coming,
Your best friend, yes,
Even your spouse
May disappear in a blink,
We who are born
Again will head heavenward,
And leave you high and dry:
And by and by, anyone,
Not saved
By the book,
Goes straight to hell:
Jesus bled
On the cross
Because of us,
And we need to let him
Know how much
We appreciate
The—you know—
Death benefits,
Mostly the kingdom of heaven
And eternal life,
Rewards we receive
If we only believe.
Listen, don't take it from me,
Read it in the Bible,
Or see the movie:
Mel Gibson's *Passion*.
I've seen it seven times.
While they were shooting,
Mel hid under Jesus,
Squirted fake blood
To make it look
Historically accurate,
Adding lots of action
Blood and guts,
Blood and guts.
It moved me, I'll tell you,
Made the wife bawl.
After the show,
As usual we didn't talk,
But I knew what she was
thinking

Just what I was:
That they thought they really
gave it to Jesus,
Those Jews
And those Romans
The ones who nailed Jesus
They got theirs in the end,
Hell's fire,
Just like the unbelievers
Slinking around these days
Lost in sin,
Wait until they see what they get.
—Philip Miller

Dixie Melody

It's my fault that you don't
love me.
I got old.
Judy Garland ever here?
She made me love you.
You made me feel guilty.
I didn't want to do it.
I didn't do it.
What is guilt?
It's something you borrow
from someone else.
Then you direct her finger
at your mirror
and crack your eyes
for thirty years of bad luck.
I loved you like a plum.
I ripened.
I lost my juices.
I am following your red slippers
to lie down and get a view
of the bush
at the end of your yellow brick
arch.

—David Lawrence

working title

how important
is the title?

does it matter
if you call me *ms* or *ma'am*
or *sir* even
if you
can't see me?

what if
you can't decide
what to put on
the birth certificate?
name the kid *kid*
& wait to see
how he develops

or let him
choose a name
or pick
a temporary one
until something better
comes along

a working title—
send the kid
to school
with a note:
this is not
my permanent name
someday he might
shave his head
then he'll need
something balder

how many names
does your dog have?
there's a given name
a nickname
a happy name
a naughty name
a bad dog name
a silly name
& the name
nobody knows

what's great
is she'll answer
to all of them

like her you have
a proper name
a found name
an earned name
a holy name
a changed name
a silent name
a dream name
& the real name
everyone calls you
behind your back

—Karen R. Porter

My Mug

Let it flow like wine
Until there's nothing left
And see what it's like
To be empty
Like my mug
Sitting on our table

—Ryan Miller

Cambridge

My inky boots
have hushed the shadows
of deep water darkness
near the riverbank
a stranger good wishes me
on Valentine's Day.

But under the sulfur sky
Cambridge has not recognized
me
this transparent late afternoon.

A future lover
lies even to himself
even Mr. Harvard's face
pale, red-eyed and cold
frowns snow-sick with secrets,
my new watch strap falls
near the parking garage
a Spanish band plays
at first glance
I see my double.

—B.Z. Niditch



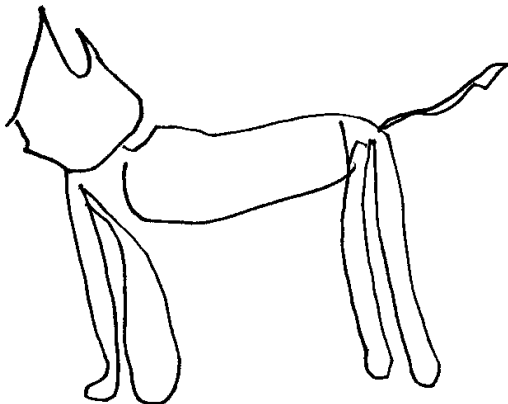
—PM

Letter to Marshall About Fire and Time

Dear Martha Jane: Before we harnessed fire, we went to bed when everything else did. We slept in trees or caves where we could sleep safely through the night. Time for us was the same as it was for trees, hummingbirds and snakes. I have no idea what went through the mind of the first person to pick up a burning stick and understand that with fire the night lost some of its darkness. Cooking wasn't the big discovery. I'm sure they had found beasts baked in the forest after a fire and long since knew a lot about a well-done leg of lamb. But understanding what the flames did to time was the great discovery. It made men brave late into the night; it scared off their enemies and it gave them time to tell tales of the day. Language must have bloomed by that light and where children first learned to whine, hoping to stay up late and listen to tales of the hunters and the hunted. We had to become creatures who could learn to sleep for fewer hours and still keep our bellies full and our offspring safe from harm. To do that we had to find ways to spend less time creating our own light and more time just enjoying it.

Think of what the first oil lamps must have meant to our ancestors. Think of how that helped invent the written word, paper, ink, books, universities and the Sunday Edition of the *New York Times*.

—Fredrick Zydek



—MB

Letter to Quate About Alzheimer's

Dear Stevi: This morning I took my coffee out near out tiger lily beds. I do not know how they remember to open when the sun calls them. Something in them is thirsty for the light. I conducted an experiment once. I planted a few iris in pots. When they first bloomed, I took them indoors to a closet. I wanted to know if they opened because

of the time of day, or because the sun reminded them that closed they could no longer welcome the insects and humming birds that nourished themselves in the pits of their petals and in return helped the iris in the mystery of their journey. They opened but not all the way. It taught me something I've never forgotten. Things

of beauty almost always require reminders and a place in the sun. It won't change the fact that someday my iris will all wilt into nonexistence. That is the way of all things. But between then and now, there is so much I can do to enjoy them. One year I even gathered up their dried lifeless bodies into a small sack of cheesecloth

and put them in the bureau to sweeten the linens. An old Chinese woman once told me that the secret to the lush bounty of her iris beds was the she talked to them every day. I do the same thing with mine. It works. Even when age causes them to forget to unfold—they know that sound of my voice, and it makes their passing easier.

—Fredrick Zydek

Driving Home And You, Could Be Lover,
Worm In

For T. T.

tracking your name on my brain
past the flesh that folds around
the brumal past I told you about—
slipping into the cracks of ice-hard light

I try to close by reading the dull road signs
“no trespassing,” “two for one,” “grave blankets”—
imagine widows warming their deceased,
already slinking on some party line listening

through a dead dial tone as you tap
the T’s and O’s of your name on my mind
till I wince—and hear
you say again how cold,
being the son of a famous-name artist,
the poets you read, why you never married.
Listen. I have my own name, names
at home to care for. And you’re almost gone

when a hearse pulls out,
white, comedic, fringed on top,
the sheep faced mourners following,
their headlights, eyes,
looking through me, you.

It’s not our time,
and I block the labyrinth of traffic
the way I block you, quiet now,
but moving beneath a grave
blanket of the past
or the future

where we need a name,
a stone—and worms.

We always think of worms,
as if they’re the worst thing
that could happen.

—*Donna Biffar*

Three from The Viagra Falls Diaries

1

The farm smell of your platinum
cornsilk hair
wakes up my rooster.

The swan curve of your neck
begs me to slobber.

Why do you fear me as if
I were a poisonous watersnake
slithering on the Suwannee River?

Let’s get naked and wet the bed.

2

All winter night, cold and starlit,
I’ve longed to romp like a Saint
Bernard up and down the long
snowy slope of your back.

All summer night, hot, honey-
suckled, I’ve longed to flop and
splash like a fat black porpoise in the
swimming pool blue of your eyes.

O my Hollywood starlet, let’s
get naked and slop the blanket.

3

May I circle your twin tits, sipping
like two swarms of thirsty Japanese
beetles around a double dip of ice
cream spilled on a Tokyo sidewalk?

The cherry trees! The cherry trees!

O my Zen, my vanilla, can you
hear the sound of one hand
slapping your ass?

Let’s get naked, juice the futon.

—*Harvey Goldner*

Pilot

Considering the frightful
amount of work my brain
has been doing for half
a century—remembering
where the keys are,
details of proposals
at long board meetings,
shapes of rooms and smells
of sheets going back
to childhood in Detroit,
Los Angeles, San Francisco,
and important faces in my
life—I am satisfied with its
countless performances
and understand its
wisdom in not making
me love life more fiercely.

—*Anselm Brocki*

Van Gogh

The hand of my rage
has torn away
the last painted layer
of sanity,
and sent my portrait,
with its colorless eyes,
into a chaos
of scrawled lines.

—*Raymond Cavanaugh*

uncle's last moments
between a sip of beer
and a piece of pie

—*ayaz daryl nielsen*

Flush or Bust

She smokes
as you roll
up. It's late
and you figure
it won't hurt.
The grasshoppers
are something
else, she says,
crushing her
Winston how
she does when
there are no
customers.
You say
you'll have two
Nathan's Famous.
Hand her
three bucks. She
won't take
your money.
She's right.
And you know
she has a say.
But you don't
talk. Only
look out and
wonder how
you could not
have noticed.
There must
be hundreds. A
plague, you think.
Unless, of course,
you were
a toad, then
you'd be flush.
But you're not.
You roll
down the window,
chewing and
backing up
and listening
to tiny bones

gone bust.
You don't
wave.
You wish
you'd said
something, but
you go on
chewing and
driving slow
on gravel,
watching your
low beams
thinking
that her
shift is over,
sure
she'll beat you
home.

—*Jason Wesco*



Breaking Free

Coming out of the womb
straining stretching
breaking free
Everyone speaking with sounds you can't under-
stand
walking straight lines excreting in porcelain bowls
struggling over mysteries of numbers and figures
moving heaven and earth to get into other wombs
smiling at bosses who don't smile back
working with people you distrust
praising people you despise
socializing with people who give you a pain
lifting bundles spinning knobs punching keys
wearing out arms and joints and lungs
worrying about defiant kids taking perilous risks
who move heaven and earth to penetrate the wrong
wombs
stuffing acorns in nooks
storing for cold days
disbelieving doctors who pontificate over your
suffering
who slice probe stitch your impaired flesh
disbelieving doctors when they hand you your final
notice
never achieving the triumph of breaking free
and reaching that wiser happier better place.

—Gerald Zipper

"What Is Your Earliest Memory?"

A secret throng of flies
in the vacant lot the other side
of the alley. Behind the weeds,
the grainy ones with sharp
blades, the purple maces,
I heard a hiss and pushed through
expecting snakes. A stray dog
lay collapsing into the ground.
His dark soul took to the air
and flurried around my head.
I remember remembering snow.

—Carl Bettis

Early to Bed

The steady hum of the furnace
clicks off abruptly,
and in this newfound quiet
I hear everything:
Canada geese bickering over beds
on the weed-choked banks of the lake;
Maggie's breath whisp-
ering absently through her nose;
a faint, dreamy tinkling of wind chimes
above the front porch;
Snowball's sandpaper tongue smoothing fur
somewhere close in the darkness...
then a single, dried-up leaf
scraping across our lawn.

—Jason M. Vaughn

My friends down at the corner

They know I'm back in town
but they won't call around.
They wait for me at the corner
of 46th and Union
where they feel like they're *cool*,
smoking their heads off,
whistling at fancy girls
who only want guys with big cars.
Boogie Joe slaps my hands
the way we do it, yells,
*Tony, my man, what brings you back
to Shit Town? Thought you was
gettin' educated, man*
They don't believe me when I tell them,
Man, I need some fun,
but they make out like they do
and take me back to Lucky's place
with six-packs and the whole fucking evening
ahead of us
to tell each other lies.

—Brian Daldorph

Geography of Survival

Is it safe to walk in the galactic
plane without your heavy duty galoshes.
There are times when I feel like the
Flying Dutchman.

Especially when they invite me for a
visit and I pack underwear but forget
the toothbrush.

I find that loading up on garlic helps
to shorten boring conversations.

I did enroll in Geography 101 but
still get lost when there are so
many corners in this world.

I admire your explication that it's
vitally important to avoid going
in circles.

Because don't we need to believe
there's something more than.

I have often thought managing this
particular cosmos would be much
easier if it came equipped with
a paratext.

I want to believe we've made
progress despite the fact that the
scenery hasn't budged.

Perhaps we would do better to try
taking a different route at the
next crossroads.

But in any case I refuse to become
a modernist and announce a major
case of angst.

You tell me geography is relatively
free of the always already but
what if I deconstruct your pet
dogma.

Would some friendly pilgrim tell
us how important it is to
peregrinate in survival gear.

There seem to be voices off to
the right even though there are
no clouds gathering
Perhaps we should try asking for

directions unless you say this
is a chicken's way out.

Actually, I don't believe a
map came with it.

I don't intend to be too
personal but my peristalsis
may never be the same after this.
Probably the periwinkles I sipped
on at the Undertow Cafe.

If we really do survive I invite
you to co-compose a text of
it all.

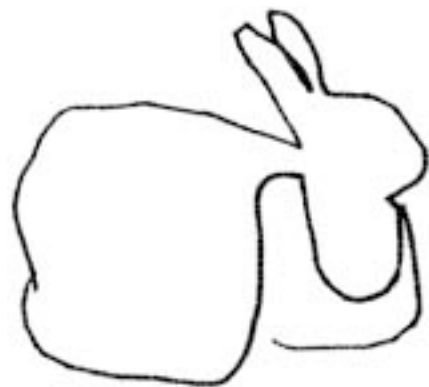
Cousin Clarice Jo has a great
place in Ship Bottom, New Jersey
where we could hang out and do it.
You should know she formerly taught
geography to the cultural elite.
And she never gets lost.

There's so much ocean to take in
when you become bored with the
evening news.

Meanwhile I wish you would decide
once and for all to tell me more
of your life history.

Because somewhere out there
may reside mountains with
nothing to say.

—*D.T. Bolling*



—*MB*

message in egg

at the counter
hunched and writing
he sits with the smell of
bacon and coffee and toast
eggs sunny side up
a pot of coffee almost empty

torn sugar packets
evidence how long he's been there
he fills his cup drains the pot and writes
when I told you I loved you I didn't expect
you to run away I wanted to spend my life with you

no that's not the way to say it
he tears the page from the pad
rips it into squares and
drops them into
congealing yolk
the waitress puts the plate into

the bus tub
the dishwasher carries it
into the back and unloads the dishes
pieces the squares together
white and yellow
reads the message

looks out and
sees him still sitting
still writing and
wonders if anyone
will ever write
a message in egg to her

—P. F. Allen

Maiden Voyage

our captain kept
circling the seven seas
searching for a first mate,
his bridge burning like desire
in every fiery sunset.

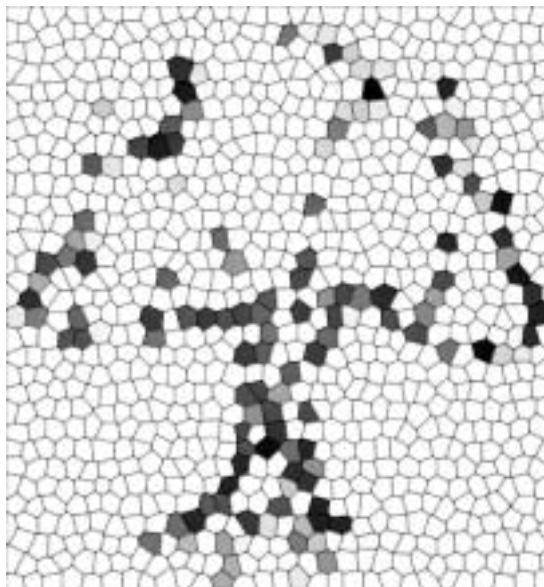
screened by a fine salt mist
our crew hatched mutiny
in the swaying crow's nest.

sails sewed into great
white wings flew us
to South Sea islands.

Thinking they'd sink
in a week, we set our
captured captain
and his loyal officers
adrift in a long boat
and scuttled our whaler's
timbers in a tropical harbor.

Years passed lolling
with native women in grass huts.
We forgot the obligations
of civilization. Many babies
were born before the gunboat
showed to take us home in chains.

—Arthur Gottlieb



—NB, AC

Stings

The men have come today
with their white suits & nets,
skinny torches on silver wands
to burn down our hive. The bees attach
to the eaves, the grooved wood siding,
hook into each other, as if their lives
work up to this moment of fury & loss.
I think of you, the day before you left,
nervous body, awkward buzz in your voice.
I am familiar with this retreat—
where I close my curved, spoon-shaped jaw,
wait for the eventual tap & smash
to break me out into daylight.
And you're there, face turned away,
fingers like fuses ready
to light me up.

The men knock the hive from its root,
burn the tunneled city of wax.

A trapped drone stumbles
into a jar of light, finds a patch
of skin & stings,
murmurs his dull humility of love.
The queen & I know this valiance,
know the loss is habitual,
a blind protection against defeat.

The burns continue—
I cover my mouth and nose, wonder
when you sunk into me,
who you were protecting

—Amanda Auchter



—AC

Revelation

If I understood the signs then I could tell
if they came from God or the pharmacist
who commissioned the ad. We are all one
on the high street, the color of our cards.
Mine's purple with a hologram of Jesus
and a magnetic strip with a record
of my favorite sex toy (sleep). See here,
the terrorists of the last century back
have given their names to ball clubs and drinks
made with loud combinations of fruit juice.
Make mine a Proudhon to go with a taste
of the Martyrs Brigade on rye. Stop there—
now I can hear you breathing in the smoke
of liberty's censers, or a trash fire
that began with a cigarette and cans
of obsolescent hairspray. Tomorrow
I have another appointment with the Shaman
to take out this tooth, which wants so much to bite.

—M.A. Schaffner

A New Year When Pink is the New Black

Clawless, she threatens the day,
startled into a new year
of Friskies and gravy, not caring
for the calendar,
each day black-boxed and hanging
on the wall we watch, tap, to make a point: Here,
here is what must be done
today. Today,
there are dustballs and toy mice,
a piss-stained bathroom carpet
and a toothpaste cap
behind the magazine rack
there, in that dark corner
between the poetry books and the fake marble tub
my ex swiped from Contemporary Marble
in Millstadt, Illinois in the middle of a hot August
night
after too much toot-sweet, there,
is May the cat—named for May Sarton, but
in this poem a green sprig of life,
those Dylan apple-bough days
when pink was the new black
and no one thought of December
or cold things falling, or January
with pink-cheeked calendar babies
lounging in silver buckets and cute bows
saying this year is clean, tied up tight—May bites
at anything that moves,
swinging doors, spiders, time,
a new years gift
its numbered legs thrashing,
covered with spit and blood and fur,
caught
in those smiling pink jaws.

—Donna Biffar

Kemp

With his fine blond hair streaming in the wind
from a noisy electric fan,
Kemp reads in his metaphysical text
that the seat of the human soul
is probably the pineal gland, tucked under the
brain, and not, as Kemp is convinced,
a golden throne on the dark side of
the silvery moon.

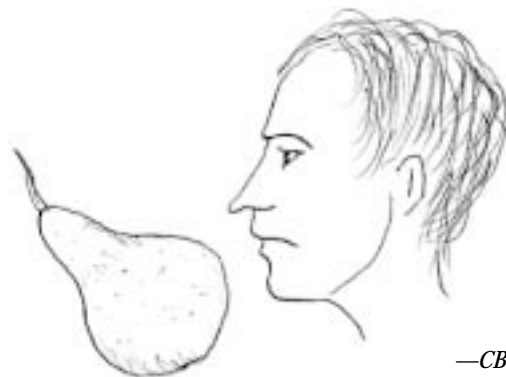
This bit of misinformation from the
smug and ignorant book
so pisses off Kemp
that he flings it through the open door of his
gloomy Memphis apartment,
and it lands open
on the burnt grass.

Then Kemp gets up from his
sleazy chair
and goes outside into the heat, the harsh
light of the August afternoon.

When Kemp bends over to pick it up,
the book speaks
in a small, sweet voice: “Kemp,
I baked you a little cake.”

Kemp stands amid sunshine, holding the book
to his breast,
as if it were a nursing baby, and then
Kemp starts to weep.

—Harvey Goldner



—CB

More of The Same: The
Anxiety of Competition or
"All Those Other Poets"

by Philip Miller

If you have you recently browsed, semi-masochistically, through the awards section of *Poets and Writers* magazine or the photos in the *American Poetry Review* of famous (if usually not rich or actually very well-known) poets; if you've even begun to wander the www for multitudinous spectacular press and writer websites with their lists of publications, awards, blurbs, and photos; or if you've just heard that a prize-winning, MFA holding, NEA Grant Winning, new poet/author has just moved into your—let's call it region—you may exclaim (as an acquaintance of mine once said), "We don't need any more damned poets around here!"

This is the anxiety of competition (or of "all those other poets!"), the last one in this series of short essays. This anxiety masks a more genuine one: the anxiety of "too many poems, great ones from all times!" It seems to me when we write a poem we are writing in a tradition (as Eliot put it) that places us in competition with all poems, especially those written by the dead poets—you know, the ones whose work still lives. Forget the well-credentialed new, prize-winner poet who's just moved into your apartment building; worry about Dante, Shakespeare, Swift, Dickinson, Yeats, Eliot, Stevens, Moore, Brooks; worry about *The Canterbury Tales*, "They Flee from Me," "Valediction Forbidding Mourning," *The Dunciad*, *Leaves of Grass*, "Design," "The Lost Father," "The Fish," "Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane," *The Changing Light at Sandover*; worry about all the ones we still read. The anxiety "of all those other poets" made me decide to write this essay and assume that the reader would be a poet, as poets seem to be everywhere (giving poets the feeling of being surrounded). I also assumed that non-poets never read literary magazines anyway, espe-

cially columns in literary magazines. The anxiety of "too damned many poets," like the others this column has discussed (accessibility, popularity, marketability) are all the same anxiety, the famous one we all know T. S. Eliot once defined exactly:

As things are, and as fundamentally they must always be, poetry is not a career, but a mug's game. No honest poet can ever feel quite sure of the permanent value of what he has written: He may have wasted his time and messed up his life for nothing.

Now, poets, there's a gloomy notion, something that stirs up its own anxiety. And now I realize that everyone of us already knows everything I've just written, that we all have the same anxiety as we face our mugs in the mirror and ask how we have the nerve to dream that we love and know enough to write poems at all! "Ah," one of us sighs, "I'll bet there's a poem in that."

Note: although this may be the last in the "anxiety" series, "More of the Same" will continue.



—CB



—AC

Trout by Trout

I decimate the tiny
pool, then break

for a few while
it replenishes

itself as if with
arcade ducks

springing back up
into place. Happy

to be here alone,
stringer half-full,

rush of water,
wind in the trees,

the bears still
sleeping.. Still,

I remain alert:
Bears like this spot

just as much as
I and the trout

do, just forty
yards down-

stream from the
little stone bridge

where the fish
truck stops

once a week. If
there's a Heaven,

I'll settle for being
the one that got away.

—Pete Lee

The Vigorous Grass Is Quiet Below.

Having the right mind
to reduce the nature of good manners;
but not smart enough to be married without attempting service,
there being advantages to being loved.
One should never remember the inner voice
that is close to the nature of a mountain stream.
It thereby invites injury.
The world is easier when the earth is quiet below.
The mutual restraint will be exhilarating.
Great things should not be exhilarating.
The sage should never interrupt the proper course;
the two possible ways to utter failure
are like the mud of my opinions.
We have heard it said that flesh is blamed on fire.
What can I do to your sons?
What does the future hold in bottom position?
They will lay upon straw,
but one invites injury
as fast as fast as danger can be.
The superior man gets stuck.
Patiently, the old man should await the proper course
through the danger ahead and mobilise the little thicket;
the time removed from the rest with mounting screws.
Though they pulled and broke his mate, they shall be exhilarated.
The sage should go the way
of every successful person of my lady's chamber.
Without a banana it will be quick
and will bring forth approval.
The state produces no error but the darkness at hand.
See what a wife could eat?
When the thunder awakens
they which have fallen asleep
find the most powerful force
to be their misfortune.

—Gerald England

Dessert

After all-you-can-eat
mom and I stop
by the statue of Burger
Chief in the parking lot—
his headdress sanded down
to the brown
of his never-painted skin.
In the shadow at his feet
we face the after-
glow across the street:
the evanescence
of a rusty strip mall,
the amber shade
of a green elm.
We stand together
still.
Street lights flicker on.

—Michael Morical



The Saddest River

All the rivers I remember
carry the gut and eyeballs
of dismal fish, baptisms
of the faithful, billfolds lost
in dark water, trepidation
of harmless snakes.

I recall the naked water-sprites
breeding on gravel beds,
stirring the pearlescent ambiance
of shell clutter abandoned
by raccoons in the shallows.

The rivers I loved the most
are those in which I nearly drowned.
The Verdigris: green and snaky.
The Arkansas, wide, deep and
slow, metropolis of carp.

And the rivers who loved me
were happy to give up their ghosts
and ask for nothing in return
but nights swallowed by moon,
sex and fire on the cutbanks.

But the saddest river, forsaken
with driftwood, floats past the
mudflats through mass graves
of cholera victims: the children
I've seen, diaphanous, hollow-
faced, restless in their bones.

—Gary Lechliter



—MB

A Mountaineer on the Job

The foreman cannot know
where I am.
He can only shout
at my absence.
He can only cuss me out
because what I'm not
is not performing functions
I have no intention of doing.
While he's belly-aching,
I am on the arete,
clouds soaking my shirt,
dallying with a rock-face,
amazed how a million years
can fit the palm of my hand.

The foreman can knock me down
but he can't knock me
off these heights.

He can stand over me
with his eyes bulging
and his mouth foaming
but the climber takes orders
only from his footholds,
his hard grip.

He can scream,
"You're fired"
like there's anyone
in this time and work addled world
who can let go
a man from his mountain.

When I fall,
it won't be on his say-so.
When I fall,
it will be with
the grace of a bird,
the ease of a heart,
and the feel of myself
climbing higher.

—John Grey

Being, Nothingness, and Housework

by *Patricia Lawson*

Every day there is housework to be done. And from doing housework questions arise about methods, providing illustrations of existence preceding essence. What product to use in the solving of problems—e.g. dust, lint, mineral deposits. Whether to approach it from a green perspective with non-toxic cleaning agents such as vinegar and salt or to become, at least momentarily, happy and oblivious like women in commercials and get out the Lime Away. How to diagnose. How to proceed. Whether to begin upstairs or down. Whether to pick up dirty clothes or kick them under the bed. Whether to remove the cat that died under the bed—and when and how—or allow it to become totally desiccated. (Homer Barron in “A Rose for Emily” comes to mind, though one wonders about his degree of desiccation since mention is made of the mattress he had become “inextricable from” and after whose decease the townspeople cleaned up with lime rather than Lime Away). Or should one refuse to take even small steps so as not to force something into bloom prematurely, but to wait instead until the room seems ready for a complete overhaul?

And then, should one go for a minimal, decluttered look—no more perfume bottles on the window sill, no forced forsythia, no beaded necklaces, amber bracelets, or rhinestone chokers hanging about the room on hooks, no portraits of loved ones (baby, dog, cat as kitten), no more stuff of life at all in fact, dead or alive, but in the bedroom only the basic bed, dresser without mirror, and perhaps a single green plant to suggest possibility. Perhaps a snake plant, for its allusive richness. Or perhaps a formless, allusion-free plant like a philodendron.

Should one clean to music? Should one be in the moment or transcendent of it? Should one pause to reflect on the importance of material things? Suppose Desdemona had not dropped her handkerchief nor Iago felt compelled to pick up after her. Macbeth sees a dagger before him, but suppose he had seen a harpsichord. On the other hand, one might pause to reflect on the spiritual poverty stuff contributes to (see any number of religious treatises from *The Book of Job* to the Buddha’s “Four Noble Truths” to the writings of C. S. Lewis).

And how thorough a cleaning should one give? Is cleanliness really next to godliness or is it closer to sterility, or does it all depend on the amount of bleach? And should one let oneself become distracted? Should one pause to stare out the window? Answer the phone? Attend a funeral? Ah, a funeral! Should one keep to a schedule or be spontaneous, e.g., it’s spring, so let us coax the plants back to life with

water, and let us put away gray and bring forth green and bring forth the bubbling fountain, toss out the cat carcass, and let the canary out of the basement? So many questions. So many roads diverging into yellow (or other) woods. And does one dare to eat a peach, knowing that one must decide whether to discard or plant the pit? There are no rules here. As Sartre said, probably thinking of cleaning up the house after another bout of *nausée*, “My acts cause values to spring up like partridges.”

Breakfast on the Patio

We were still slurping the morning breeze
when a sun-shaped blimp passing over us
started to rain down eggs
on the field beyond the patio.
Some fell on the table and broke
open to release full-fledged songbirds
with night-colored wings.

As soon as they started to sing,
a forest of strong, silent trees
rose out of the ground to listen.
Without clearing up the mess on the table
we betook ourselves into the woods,
calling to one another. We’re still lost, though
we come back to roost on the patio every night.

—*Paul Sohar*



—AC

Light in Mid-May

The white spirea, white daffodils
and white phlox have now grown dim.
But the peonies along the road
and beside the cabin give out
a white light, both day and night.

Such mammoth blossoms!
So heavy, so full—I have to prop them
with wire supports and twine.
They thrive and reach for the mild
white sun and the crescent moon,
but still they lean, maybe drunk
with their own white wine perfume.

In the mid-May morning
I stand back and look. I bend close
to smell and study the soft feathery faces.
For a long moment, I am like a woman
in a dark world who will not go
into the amazing light, into which we all
one day must fall.

—Pat Durmon

A Long Drive

A father behind the steering wheel
with styrofoam cup steaming, his black coffeed eyes
focused on the broken lines of yellow,
lost within a pallid arch of headlights.

The son buckled in to the passenger seat,
pressed against the glass, squinting himself
into the night and passing stand of longleaf pine,
desperately trying to follow the moon.

While windshield wipers
dance the distance in between.

—Steven Brown

Someone Goes Over Old Love Letters

Someone forgets for a
moment, thinks of
going next door to
borrow—then falls
apart. Someone
still expects a
woman with
strong arms
coming back
with groceries
and a joke. Some
one waits for a
black Honda, thinks
of the smell of coffee.
In another house,
someone starts to
make lunch but
there's no one to
make lunch for.
She can't stop
seeing the
shapes tumbling
from the sky.
Someone sets up
an altar with
incense and a drawing.
Her child stops
before it, says "*come
eat dinner Daddy*"

—Lyn Lifshin



—MB, AC

A Soldier Writes

I am that army of one, America
I am one arm, America
I took the word of those with a need
A child of trust, I have protected you
Poor boy of St. Clairsville, Ohio
School grades nothing to brag about
My choices only a few, America
And the recruiter nice enough, America
My Uncle Ed wondered why no protest
Told of the sixties and street marches
Pardon me, but those days had a draft
And both rich and poor looked death in the eye
Today I watch your SUVs fly by, America
Your games played as before, America
While here every so often a limb disappears
And we get to go home where
For awhile we are heroes
But I understand you have lives to live
Things to buy and all that
Listen, I can take your glance
And the whispers behind my back
The wonder how it happened?
No need for pity, I'm proud
But in a dream
I walk down my block
And sweet Susanne smiles
Until she sees my arm
Black as a chimney sweep's face
Her scream is mine as I sit up in bed
Know I am done when I reach for the light chain
With a shoulder that has no fingers

—Greg Moglia

the days, remembered
airplane against a sky-blue sky
and the sun where it
touches the wires
the bones of indians hidden
beneath the river
reaching up through
parking lots
each moment bigger than christ
and more beautiful
and i am through standing at the foot
of the hill of fifteen crosses
i am through living in the
shadows of
the killers and their victims
at some point
you find yourself staring at a clock
in a stranger's room
wondering how you've wasted
so much of your life
at some point you dream
not of escape
but of coming home
of the bodies you'll find there
and the names that go with them
the reasons you had for
loving who you did
how they seemed
to matter at the time

—john sweet

Her White Wedding Dress

The black rain didn't freeze.
There was too much oil in it.
He faced a grimy day
With a tool kit
For a mouth.
He was a mechanic.
He liked taking things apart.

She was a snowflake, dancing
In her parlor, waiting
For him to come home
To abuse her.
She wore her white wedding dress
Because it showed the blood up best
And gave her something
To talk about

When she got together with
The girls for cards
And compared domestic stains
And bruises.

—David Lawrence

Drive, Drive

I want weekends for myself when I can drive,
drive up to the mountains on a wide empty road,
the road half up a cliff defying gravity,
the gravity of a train across the valley,
A valley of quilted fields echoing whistles,
the whistle of air streaming through my window,
the window on the world unfolding beneath me,
beneath me the weekdays dark as storm-heavy
clouds.

Clouds break on the sun, and I swear it smiles,
Smiles like the cartoon suns we saw as kids,
while kids play in the yards of far small towns,
small towns with houses shuttered on Main Streets,
their main streets staggered under the ranging
highway,
the highway ranging farther than the eye.

—M.A. Schaffner

Prairie Life

She lifts the blue glass
bowl from the cupboard
sets it too hard
on the counter. Thin
fracture from base to rim,
lightning strike.
Flour, sugar,
cinnamon, nutmeg, pinch of salt.
Apple slices, buttery crescents
small boats without sails.
Crust on the cutting board,
an open mouth,
fluted edges of flesh.
Apple mixture poured and patted,
latticed in.
Already light
leaves the bowl.
In the oven, a darkening,
heat wings flutter
at the ceiling,
her skin sticky, warm
blue veins distending
backs of hands, breasts.
She opens the door.
Grasses rustle,
aspens titter. Secret on the wind.
Smell of smoke.

—Jackie Bartley



—NB, AC

Happy

1

What gods of happiness have showered their
blessings on me?
Good food, money in my pocket, regular sex.
I have what I want, I have lost my edge,
my bony hips are now curves,
my once scathing tongue spews honey & homilies,
my wrinkles disappear in my smiles
and I am in the moment.

2

But, how can I win without my edge;
my sharp and devastating blade?
The taste of drawn blood when I know I'm right.
But there is no resolution in a 5 to 4 world,
barely half and half, sides polarized and
sometimes, how wrong right can be.

3

Yet, now my cup runneth over,
the water is clean, art fills my walls
and my lover loves me, and though this war goes
on,
we speak out of both sides of our mouths,
and the TV constantly flickers, there is no solution.
We break bread, toast the day, lay down swords.
I still lay down my sword.

4

I love, therefore, I am.
I love you despite yourself,
in spite of my self. I can help myself.
We all have the same book of pain,
Eden is the illusion,
let the damn snake be.

—Phyllis Becker

The Slug

It is not a homeless snail.
Childlore says it sucks blood,
perhaps confusing slug with leech
or building a case for pouring
salt on this crawling wound.
I couldn't do that now.
I have my own sores, I would writhe
and fear with my victim,
as I struggle and shrink with long dead
ants, spiders, grasshoppers, pill bugs,
all the little creatures that fell prey
to my childhood's pitiless boredom.
I've outgrown my callousness, and today
torment only fellow humans, and only
out of rage, and only those I love.

—Carl Bettis

Getting Through a Montana Winter

On the way to the Belton Bridge I watch
happy school children hop into parents'
warm cars, a man on a tractor plough out
someone's drive at the house
where Christmas ornaments still hang
Would you believe it—the river completely
frozen—a keen blue sparkles and burns
like an electric arc churning ice.
Yesterday, 25 below, my house still warm.
Today I drink hot chocolate to celebrate
the angel plumber who climbed under the house
into the cave of stiff pipes with his gas-fired heater
to make water flow.
Now I watch a large deer cross the back yard
on its way to the honey and oats spread out
for them as all here crawl through winter;
plod in the rhythm of getting by, bear the boring:
only so many books you can read,
TV you can watch, and hours at night
you can slumber.

—Thomas S. Rich

The Altered Boys

We watch for walleye looks,
Sores like rotted tree trunks,
Hookworms crawling on their scalps,
Hognose snake skins in their yards.

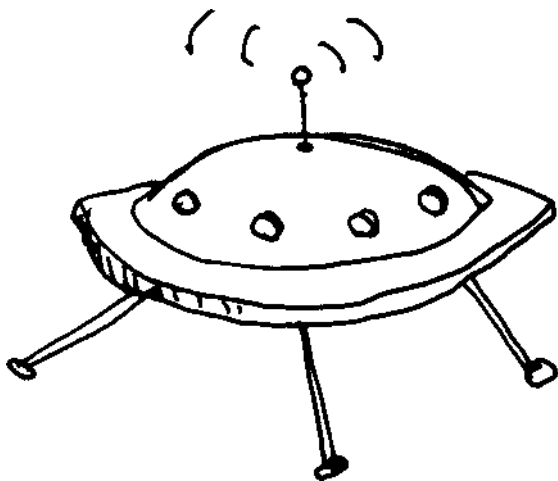
We listen, at school, for wheezing spirits
When they breathe, for earwigs and weevils
Burrowing at their hearts, for hollowness each time
A rock lands hard against their backs.

We've heard, at night, they swallow
Their tongues while they're asleep,
And twitch like walleyes on a dock,
Like the dead when they go dancing.

They live, we know, far outside of town,
Where hoot owls cry out around their houses,
And they sleep at midnight in the loam,
Where maggots feast.

And if they brush against us during recess,
We watch ourselves for walleye looks,
For hookworms digging at our scalps,
And smells like fetid swamps.

—Doug Ramspeck



—NB

Flywheel

An old despondency of the moon returns
and I sink down to greet it, turn with
it a few diminishing returns until it
almost stops
along with
breathing.

Then a flywheel
effect kicks in, an old
resilience of the sun lifts me up
and I am looking past blue window sills and
open kitchen doors into sunlight on green things.

—Robert Weaver
(From *Disquietude*)



—CB

Chicken(s)

They're born to fear
the possum, the hawk,
the raccoon, the fox,
the dog and the rat,
the man and his axe.

But they're too dim-witted to fear
the bleakness of their own short lives.
And my mother (if you can believe this) fears
their snapping wings and staring eyes!

So when she gathers up their eggs,
she looks about warily for the worst,
as if it's part of a game they all play:
to see who'll run away first.

—Jason Vaughn

Cry Wolf

*Inspired by sculpture "Howl"
by Luis Jiménez 1986 (Spencer)*

Lavender and slate
plastic fiber
re-enforced
shimmering wolf
bares his teeth
arches his neck
as if howling to a moonworld—

his undulating tail
rippling waves
naked scream
spouting from
his protruding ribs—
hungry
like the "Howl"
of a poet
starving hysterical naked
looking for impossible
fiber in a plastic moonworld
screaming
about
minds
exposed
lost
in the wail
of
the sirens
of Los Alamos
gobbled up
by Madison avenue
the wolf
crying in the
zoo of reality.

—*Silvia Kofler*

Ghost Story

She never leaves, the ghost of my heart.
I hear her beating, a faint echo (echo)
of my real heartbeat, not quite a sound
but a sensation, recognizable.
I acknowledge her presence.
This seems to please her
and she settles down, floats back
into the recess of my sternum.
She doesn't like it when I ignore her,
skip merrily into the next thing and the next.
She flares her diaphanous nostrils then,
and I hear those extra beats
as she stomps her pretty ghost feet
in petulant dismay. "Shh," I hiss,
annoyed that she has once again stopped
my daily pace, refused to let me play my life
as I want. At other times she tiptoes to me softly,
her extra beats a bell ringing in the distance,
a chime of charm. "Come dance with me,"
she whispers, "come cling to my beat, let us be
one."

"You're not my lover," I remind her,
but neither is she my enemy.
We are sisters, she of the ghost realm,
I of the physical, living together
in uneasy harmony, neither of us ready
to cleave co-existence,
both still insisting on chanting our own rhythms.
Perhaps when one of us yields, surrenders,
accedes to something—
whatever it is that hides inside the mystery—
the other will give a last sigh and disappear.

—*Maril Crabtree*



—*CB*

The Neo-Modernist:
Thoughts on Form

by Carl Bettis

**spices plucked
from the daisy wheel
she loves me not**

In my previous column, I announced the topic for this installment as pattern, or form, in art. (I didn't know then that I was going to read Meredith's *The Egoist*, with its scheming Sir Willoughby Patterne and the puns on his family name. This is the sort of coincidence life accepts much more readily than fiction.)

Since this is my final Neo-Modernist column, I'm bringing you a bundle of thoughts—or more accurately, sketches for thoughts I'm thinking about thinking. Brave sharing or laziness? Maybe both. Some influence of Wm Carlos Wms, the south to Wallace Stevens's north. I like to flip polarity now and now. From pruned melons to wild grapes, from wheat to cockleburrs. My own compass points east, but sometimes I consult it to go contrary. It might be pretentious nonsense, but that's a risk I don't take often enough.

Have a handful of lemon grass and wild violets in a cracked clay pot.

**he gives her roses
she sniffs his hair**

Man is a pattern-seeking animal. The dadaists with their anti-art experiments proved there is no escaping art, form or meaning. Da Vinci demonstrated how we will find form in smudges, spatters and smears, and the success of *The Da Vinci Code* corroborates our delight in discovering patterns.

A hidden mockingbird in the wildgrowth lot was not singing for my delight, but then neither do lesbians kiss to titillate me and yet I surge. Hearing the fowl's revue of standards I looked for a daytime moon, but there was

none. I remembered the night I strolled a mile to my high school's Halloween carnival. The walk wafted and scuttered and crackled, and I took as much pleasure in it as my unsleeping anxiety would allow. I can slack my nerves a touch when no one's around, and it was a quiet street. But as soon as I arrived I was surrounded by eyes, I shrank and hunched and gazed sideways at girls I wisely didn't dare talk to. And I was sad and wondered why I had come. But I knew. I had hoped to be a different person when I got there, a fellow who could enjoy games and noise and people and who could talk to cheerleaders without provoking laughter. But the same self surrounded me. God, how I hated me then! I sided with the bullies and the mocking beauties.

But to understand this story you have to know that the shuffle home was just as pleasant as the jaunt out.

What does this anecdote have to do with the topic at hand? Nothing, as far as I know. But what did you think the connection was, how did you place it into the pattern?

**the old dog,
bald, blind and brittle,
still runs in dreams**

Pattern, or form, has a reputation among some (e.g., "naked" poets) for being deadening, soporific, dishonest. But art awakens, it breaks habits of seeing and being. Art is not an escape from life, art intensifies life. Flight from the world is the creed of the privileged, and escape is a luxury only the pampered can afford. But as Jerome Rothenberg somewhere points out, where human life is harshest and survival least certain, people still make time for art.

Of course forms can lie—the forced rhyme, the pat symmetry in plot, the studiously disarranged composition—but form isn't of itself inauthentic. Are your articulated limbs less real or honest than oozing protoplasm?

**the squirrel's mouth is crammed:
brown leaves, one blue petal**

The form of a work is a set of eyes we're invited to look through, a pair of hands with which to tumble the world, a personality we're urged to inhabit.

T.S. Eliot rightly said art is an escape from personality. Form helps the artist free himself from his own habits of looking and showing. Form absorbs accident. It turns disruption into inspiration, phenomenon into essence, chance into destiny, the murmur of the wind into the one true name.

A work of art is a person without a self, an objectively existing individual.

The maxim, "form follows function," sacrifices the vital tension every versifier knows, between what the artist wants and the medium demands or allows. Swinburne and Poe, at their worst, show what happens when the medium wins. Pound and Sandburg show what disasters are possible when the artist wins.

It's the old struggle between flesh and spirit. When either is vanquished, death results.

**a little girl
squats by snail tracks,
dried snot on her cheek**

Can form by itself be art? Ask the musician. Music, at least, is saved from the periphrastic heresy. No one assumes the form of a sonata is incidental to its content, or that they can tell you what Mozart's Hafner symphony "means."

Art doesn't give us a message, but an experience. Every form is a possible design for living, and as in science, every system is pro-visional.

What is art but an interruption of life, as if the artist couldn't wait for a natural lull in the cocktail chatter before braying out his silly scrap of song?

Sometimes the click, click, click of fingernail clippers and the barely audible

pat of parings as they land on the tabletop is music enough.

***no bird slams into glass
except on his own wing***

Creating an unfinished surface is laborious. The truly unfinished always has too many accidental symmetries.

The country where I want to live allows no natives. Children born within its borders are shipped off as soon as they can totter and lisp. All adults are newly arrived, and no one speaks the language with an indolent fluency.

Only nature can make a truly random selection, and only careful design can give the appearance of chance. But authentic or simulated chaos, patterns can always be found, a design uncovered.

William Blake was once asked whether he truly saw angels and heard them singing. He replied, "Moo."



—CB

Returning to Missouri from Pennsylvania in February

I can read just one of them
from the list of the Ten Commandments
on the side of a tractor trailer
hauling god knows what from god knows where:
"Thou Shalt Not Covet,"
that quaint word
reminding me of "coven" or "cloven" or "covert."
But I ask myself why I saw that one
on his truck and not the more romantic
"Thou Shalt Not Steal," "Kill," "Commit
Adultery," and then I wonder what happened
To "Thy Neighbor's Ass"—maybe not so good
for the back of a truck barreling
through a red state close to Kingdom City, MO
in the bleak and blurry weather, cold rain
pouring down like The Great Flood.
The truck driver—who I don't
covet one whit—may be wondering
if these are the End Days,
or about what happens to the truck in case
the Rapture hits, or what happens to him,
realizing as one might, hurtling
down a slick, gray highway at over ninety
in a truck that could hold a herd of cattle,
that his days are numbered,
that even the bravest born-again might have cause
to worry a little, and I hope he's not praying—
with his eyes shut anyway—
and then I think of praying, myself,
as he passes me, making a great wall of water,
and I wonder if he thinks carrying the commandments
along with him
will earn a little extra credit,
just the luck he thinks he needs to make it
where he hopes he's going—in any weather—
and without slowing down.

—Philip Miller

Unfamiliar Ceilings

Whitewashed tiles in a curious geometry—
then a close look: time-refined mold and stains,
unnoticed dents, small enough to escape the cur-
sory
eye of a janitor's attention to the floor. Pain
subsides with forgetful signs
before I realize this is another
unfamiliar ceiling. Blocking the view to heaven,
it leads my eyes astray, to the rain outside and
thereafter—
nurse station calling, to a patient in room 304,
EKG-sensors stuck, their hardened threads making
a sort of porcupine fur—
a half-way body, a temporary lodging
in a borrowed room. A loss wouldn't hurt.
I wasn't there. "You can relax, it won't hurt."

—*T.K. Komura*

At Jane's Dojo

She doesn't need
the black belt
to set her off. The whites,
yellows,
browns and
reds
show themselves
in their clumsy
movements, cubes all
elbow and knee
rolling hard-angled
over the mats. When she throws me
she is a ripple
in still water and I
am flying.

—*Sari Krosinsky*

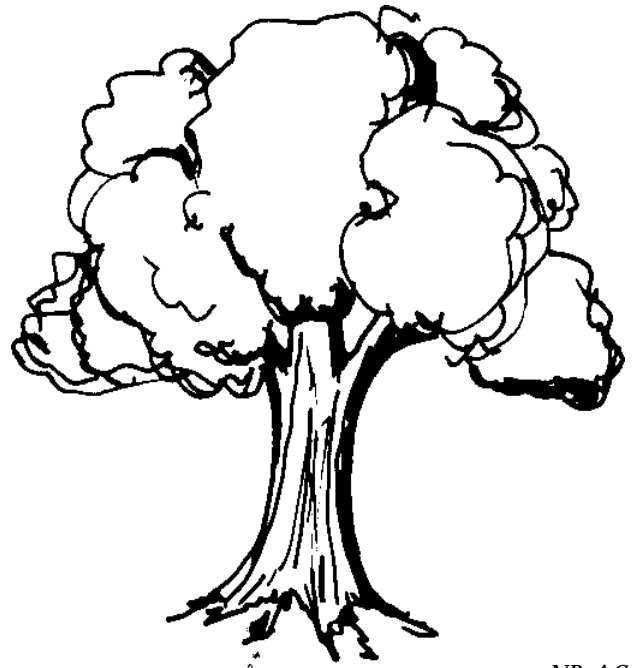
Spiritualism

Ask the right question and a bell will ring,
the face of the dear departed appear unflawed
on the pleated drape, the table quake
with greed for the deceased.

If you know magic you know the truth:
the medium has no message.
Harry Houdini said it was done with mirrors,
a collapsible wand, photography, a fake shoe,
screens and screams from the cellar.
What else is there to say that the dead
must say it? What last word do we want
from a wailing wobbly sheet?

Let us watch another show,
dawn's curtain dissolving in light.
Though time may seem to pass
we know we remember this same summer day,
these identical eastern veils shrouding our earth,
the farm across the road all bright acreage
and a row of trees as blissful as ghosts.
Who do you need to tell you to live
without answers? The trees step forward
to dry their leaves, speak your name.
The crystal ball says you are alone in the future.

—*Joanne Lowrey*



—*NB, AC*

The Prize

for Jane

Assigning points and adding them up
provide the proof required to award
the pumpkin of the year, in costume.
If we win, if we are blessed in this way,

and if you insist we should escort it
to the ball, we'd better stand in line
at dawn, camping out in our pajamas,
an adventure. That's very important,

but only if the pumpkin cooperates.
As expected, the prize evaporated,
like the flight I dream I can never
board because I cannot find the gate.

I hope you're able to sleep in peace
without aching or a neighbor scaling
the bushy side of our house, an attack
on our unprotected flank, which is what

flanks are for, aren't they? Be careful.
Last night they egged your old car again,
the shame of our street, your legacy, my
luck, our past with plush blue upholstery.

—Ronald Moran



—MB

Four Generations

The table is being set.

The turkey is almost done.

The baby's arms beat the air,
mouth open; she rocks and sings
as if saying, "Let's get things moving."

Great Grandmother holds the baby
in her lap, tells the baby stories,
even though the baby doesn't
know words, yet, and Great
Grandmother is losing hers.

Great Grandmother tells her stories
of another busy baby, her baby,
her daughter, this baby's Grandma
who kisses her Granddaughter,
reaches to pick the baby up,
listens to her own mother caught
in a loop of memory as she tells her story
to the baby again and again.

Grandma raises the baby high,
the baby smiles, drools, kicks the air
Grandma sits between her mother
she now cares for and her daughter
she raised alone, raised well enough.
She hands the baby to her daughter,
mother of the baby, who smiles,
rolls her eyes at the stories she's
heard since she was a baby.

The table is set. Her baby plops
to the floor, raises her arms, pumps
the air, like a conductor, opens her
mouth and all the generations
join in a chorus of "a-a-ahs."

—Phyllis Becker

Web Notes

by Carl Bettis

Aha! Poetry

<<http://www.ahapoetry.com/>>

Aha! Poetry is practically a daily stop for me on the web, and I'd recommend it to anyone interested in Japanese verse forms like haiku, tanka and renga. Check out the related site for *LYNX* magazine, "A Journal for Linking Poets."

Electronic Frontier Foundation

<<http://www.eff.org>>

EFF is a non-profit group devoted to "Defending Freedom in the Digital World." They provide news coverage, advice and opinions on issues relevant to online freedoms. This is a meaty site. They cover blogging, privacy, censorship, intellectual property issues, spam, the US PATRIOT Act, and many other topics. EFF also gets actively involved, as with their recent lawsuit against Sony BMG for stealthily installing software on their music customers' computers. The EFF site offers a free e-mail newsletter.

haikuworld

<<http://www.haikuworld.org/>>

The front page says "haikuworld exists to help [haiku] publishers, poets, and readers discover one another." If you're interested in this genre and its related literary forms, haikuworld is a good starting point for your exploration, with information on relevant magazines, books and contests. Other items of interest here include the monthly "kukai" (a haiku contest on announced topics), notes on renga (the collaborative verse form from which haiku sprang), and articles on the reading and writing of haiku.

New Hope International Review

<<http://www.geraldengland.co.uk/revs/>>

This site reviews "poetry-related publications"—and by *publications*, they mean things actually printed on paper. They sometimes include other media such as audio recordings and poetry-

related art objects. The site is well-organized and easy to navigate. There are a number of different reviewers, and it's impossible to ascribe a single editorial stance to the site. However, the reviews I've read have always been articulate, opinionated and thorough—not a few lines pounded out after skimming the publication. (Disclaimer: *NHIR* has reviewed previous issues of *The Same*, overall favorably.)

Poetry Daily

<<http://www.poems.com/>>

Poetry Daily provides a different poem every day, and generally a quite good one. There's also an archive of poems going back a year, a free e-mail newsletter, and attempts to sell you stuff.

Poetry Net

<<http://poetrynet.org/>>

Poetry Net describes itself as "a loose association of poets willing to cast into uncharted waters," which sounds to me like the artist-as-hero braggadocio you typically hear at open mikes, and if by "cast" they mean cast a net then I don't see what "uncharted" has to do with it, and if they mean "cast off" they should say so, but don't judge by me because my feet hurt and I didn't sleep well last night and this issue is running unbelievably late, so I'm a little fussy. Poetry Net features a poet of the month (profile and poems), experiments in "negative image" writing, an introduction to the ghazal verse form, and poetry links. The site could stand to grow, but it has a solid core. On the technical side (web technique, not verse technique), it uses frames, which I dislike.



—MB

The Other Fathers

would be coming back from some war, sending back stuffed birds or handkerchiefs in navy blue with *Love* painted on it. Some sent telegrams for birthdays, the pastel letters like jewels. The magazines for children were full of fathers who were doing what had to be done, were serving, were brave. Someone yelped there'd be confetti in the streets, maybe no school. That soon we'd have bananas. My father sat in the gray chair, war after war, hardly said a word. I wished he had gone away with the others so maybe he would be coming back to us

—Lyn Lifshin



—CB

*

Night after night a paper cup
filled with hillside
and the makeshift thirst
that won't move an inch
keeps damp in an invisible mouth
where oceans are buried
—there's no place to want
—there's only take-out and the lid
is already closed
though it leaves some room
to lift the shoreline to your lips
—this coffee is flowing
from a darkness suddenly homesick
though you don't hear the mourners
or the grass splash over one hand
and with the other you open the cup
just to see what's inside
as if black still counts for something.
—*Simon Perchik*

Grave Going Sonnet

Now comes nickels for milk, stone soup.
I have tightened threads,
cracked the dry nut of hunger long before
our full fruit basket years.
Once was joy in the giving in, our love,
the peeling back to poetry's flesh.
Now comes the cadence of wind
where Catullus wrote.
Outside the dog cries for water, frets
through the sharp straws of sleep.
The turnips lie in straight rows,
knowing only of earth, snow
and your sure going,
footsteps across their graves.
—*Donna Biffar*

Because I took loans to study poems

The image of Homer, who wanders blind,
returns to me often through the workday,
every time I miss the nail & smash
my hand with a hammer, when I puncture
my flesh with a drywall screw.

Collection notices arrive by mail,
and phone calls into the night. I remove
the jack from the wall & plug it back in
when I need to dial out. I rarely
check the box, only to look for good things,
letters from silent friends, or magazines,
subscriptions unpaid, ones I still wait for.
I remember the thoughts I signed my name
to: this document sends me to work
everyday; this is how they get you.

—*Chris Siteman*



—*CB*

Nutrition facts

In my diet-cola dream life
tanned, fast-carred, DVD'd, G-strung,
siliconed and lipo'd, all low-sodium,
without calories, no carbs or protein
my percent daily values
based on a 2,000 calorie diet
(with phenylalanine and potassium benzoate
to protect flavor)
the mirror has me slim, trim,
and feeling fresh, energetic, vigorous.

But when I look for taut skin and ribs,
bulging biceps, pecs like butterfly wings,
I understand total fat.

—*Patrick Dobson*

Near

You can never stare too long at the sea horizon,
it's not the sun with its glare
nor the wind with the spray
blowing straight on your face,
it's not even that well-known unease
at being face to face with just the waves
and the line down there with nothing in between,
it's your chin that simply drops after some time
and your gaze that rests on the water's edge,

on the quiet foamy shallows, it's more natural
to meet what's near, as when you swim
and see only a blur of foam and your skin,
and from time to time flashes of the beach,
when you are stung by seaweeds
and fear the small electric shock of a jellyfish,
you just dread this instantaneous contact
with bright needles.

It's this your unknown,
you think you'll be always too busy with it
and at the end it will perhaps all be like now,
you getting out of the water watching your feet
taking care not to slip on the stones
and feeling a shell floating
and touching the palm of your hand
asking to be grabbed.

— *Davide Trame*

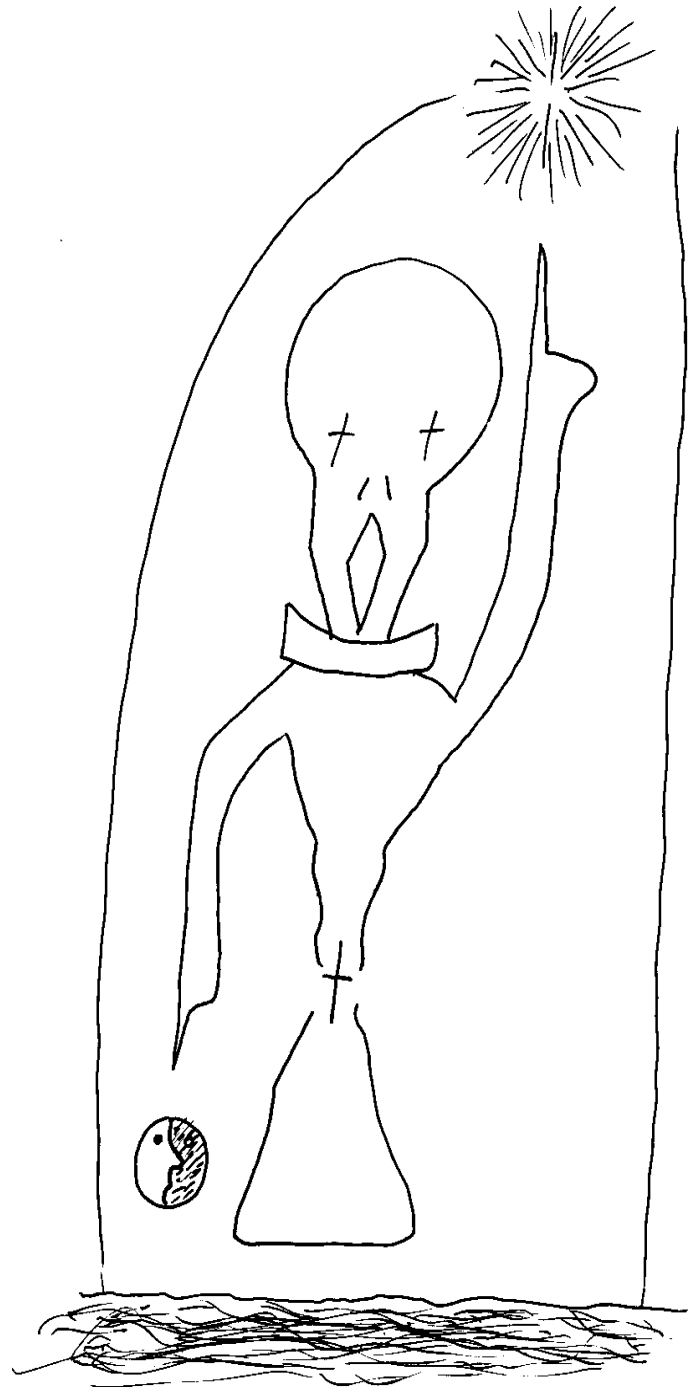
El Jefe

We grieved as our cigars grew short.

Tree frogs screamed in the silver maple;
the dog next door awoke in a frenzy of growl;
a congress of cats behind the fence wailed.

The whole neighborhood wanted
just ten more minutes with Castro.

—*Patrick Dobson*



—*CB*

warm heaven waits

the snow pinks the sun in the west
birds settle in bellies full of seed and suet
find nests not warm but out of the wind
winter only two days old

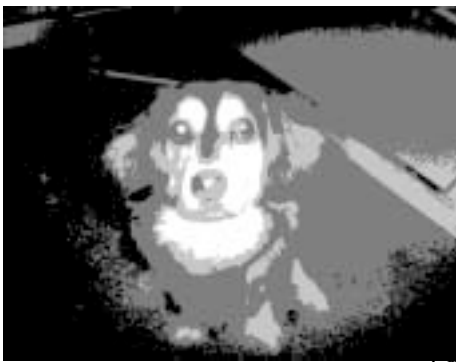
yet fierce this year already
weary birds bundled up and fluffed
not wasting calories on song
a brown mouse finds a home

in the mud room lives on millet and
sunflower seeds the birds never see
he scurries and hides thinks you can't see him
pads claws out through the thirty pound

bag of sunflower seed as if he has died and
Hades is a place warm and paved with
black seeds no dogs three headed or
other to guard the gates but

he smells cats he knows just inside
the door it's perhaps paved
with tasty nuts and light
warm heaven waits with sharp cat claws

—P.F. Allen



—AC

Monochromatism

What we missed most those forty days and forty
nights
and the hundred and fifty nautical days thereafter
was not terra firma or the unfortunates left behind
as much as Eden's favorite color
washed gray by heaven's deluge
and grayer in the Lord's vast new lake,

the color of verdancy lost in the bowl of sky
and blank reflection sloshing all around us

until we reveled in the shell of turtle
and the toe of lizard, diamond of snake
and feather of a favored parrot,
even Ham's wife's emerald eye

all of which gave our own eyes practice
in what we did not dare forget—

what we lived for all those months on Ararat:
a piece of green appearing at our feet.
Neither goat nor sheep nor camel lunged
for that first holy mouthful until it was blessed.

The wet desert that had paired God's silver light
with Satan's slate sheen was shattered

by a single blade melding blue with yellow
to sustain us and all further generations,
little bits barnacling the sides of the Ark
that had brought us back to forgiveness
and second-growth greenery.

—Joanne Lowery

Thankful

In spite of its demanding, time-consuming, finicky nature, need for theatrical productions, and sometimes embarrassing or comical outcomes, a cosmopolitan part of me most sincerely appreciates my sexuality—which gives me a broader, more creative reason for living than other basics such as hunger, thirst, fear, or need for air—however, at the same time it is most grateful for not being born with some other periodic, more bothersome sexuality like that of a bull elephant, who comes into musth only two or three months a year, at which time he oozes thick smelly fluid from glands between his eyes and ears, green, more smelly foam from his four-foot sheath, dribbles urine off and on throughout the period, and has to wait patiently for nine or ten months for another sloppy display.

—Anselm Brocki



—CB

Heading to my Email Box

September 24, 2004

Decades beyond the pony express,
I head down a dry gulch toward my email box.
The quagmire of headline news sucks me in
where I meet the Hurricanes: Charley, Frances,
Ivan, and now Jeanne. Some force beyond
the Democrats stays mad about Florida's dimpled ballots.
And here's John Kerry understating again,
"President Bush masquerades as a mainstream conservative."
Mainstream? Bush and I aren't in the same river.
Though, we all seem caught in this slough some
Faulknerian character plows and waters; except
for those billionaires Forbes magazine claims form
the longest list ever. I don't even go there. Instead,
I ride my limping horse toward the "Honeymooners,
Lost Episode Found." Good news. The blustery Ralph
returned with his sharp-witted wife, and goofy neighbors,
Ed and Trixie. God, how I long for those days
when America had friends. But wait,
aren't we back in the 50's? McCarthy reincarnated,
mutated, and multiplying. The war against a noun,
back on, Terrorism replacing Communism, but an enemy
enough to take us off half-cocked blasting at Saddam Osama.
"Whatever his name? Those people all look the same."

If I have to get off and walk, I'm moving on
to email. I'm tired of the mortgaged future, and watching
heads roll. Happiness is an oasis where friends like Ed,
the sewer worker, and bus-driver Ralph share jokes
I've heard before. I laugh again, hit "Forward" so everyone
in my address book, all those cyber-friends who sent me
chain letters about Jesus, angels, and Bill Gates can read
this joke which left St. Joe, Missouri, April 3, 1860,
in a leather, rainproof pouch and only got lost once
in the 650,000 miles traveled by the pony express.

—Victoria Garton

The 1st Day of a Long Winter

Impossible to forget!
It's all over, no point talking about it.
Don't try to confuse me.

Would you believe it?
Sure, the story has two legs,
it can go either way.

Happy holidays!
And sad holy years, covered
with prickly holy seconds.

What's your name?
I'm not from around here.
They call me the same.

I'm not from around here.
What's the problem?
The white wind of waiting.

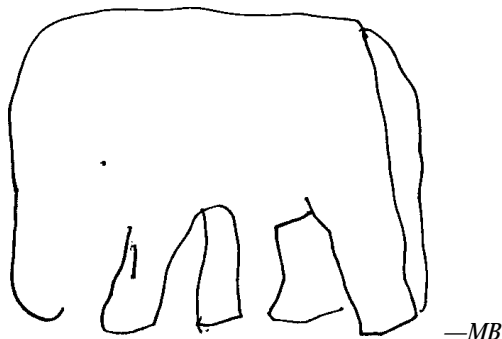
Tallest building, tallest lie,
Only time can tell.
And the speed of the building.

The tallest must lie down.
In the sea, to make way for
the gray wind of fear.

I'm trying to forget.
It's a great vacation spot.
Out of sight, out of mind.

What are you talking about?
Yes, I can feel it, too.
It's on the tip of my tongue.

—Paul Sohar



Again Alone

I met my grandma for lunch to discuss
Wedding plans when she got off on a
Tangent about baked fish, from here
The conversation spiraled into the complicated
Topic of her first husband, my grandfather,
Who was a controlling abuser—she also felt
It necessary to add small tidbits of my
Parents' immaturity at the time of their
Marriage, connecting this somehow to her
Own second marriage that was
Everything she wanted until cancer left her
Again, alone. During the buttering of her rolls,
She explained the disaster divorce between
My uncle and his first wife, Danielle, and then
The complications between him and his second
wife,
Due to extreme psychological issues, this brought
Up her third son and his reluctance to ever
Marry which then led us to her own, current third
marriage
And my third grandfather who is an evangelist.
As she stirred her tea my grandma casually
Mentioned her sister who was abandoned by
Her husband with three children then described
Her other sister, a happy mother of ten. It was
When my grandma and I both reached for our
Identical pieces of double chocolate cake
That she said she'd be happy to sew
My wedding gown. I took a moment to breathe,
Then explained how the baked fish had
Terribly irritated my stomach.

—Johnna Crawford

Definition by Absence

The night sky bombards us with
Light-years of emptiness
And here I lie between two
Million blades of grass
In a clean-cut open field
With half the constellations
Of a universe as witness
Though none of them will see me
While I am still here breathing
And none of them could hear me
Even if this voice weren't failing
To touch the nearby skyline
Where all the trees are hollow
And every leaf has fallen and
Each of them is rotting in
The interim of seasons.
But I remember, now
In these spaces between living
That even the moon is leaving
And so I lie alone.

—Ryan Hartel



—PM

Meet the Press

It's half flattering, half
aggravating
to have the press at my door *again*,
TV cameras set up
all along my picket fence,
CNN, CBS, the God Channel,
who'd miss this?
I launch myself outside
into the small explosion
of camera flashes and TV lights.
Black preacher either side.
The first question's about yard work.
How did it feel to cut down
that prickly bush outside my window?
Hundreds of expectant faces.
"Felt good," I say.
Reporters scribble notes.
Lights burst, TV anchors
turn to cameras:
"Asked about yardwork,
he made this statement..."
The next question's about supper,
what I'd eaten, how I feel.
"Full," I quip
and feel the storm of laughter.
"And what sort of tea will you be drinking
tonight?" asks a bright young man
from *Time* "English Breakfast,"
I say, then, "No more questions, please."
I smile, wave
and turn away with my men of God.
There'll be more questions in the morning.
How to satisfy such hunger
for the details of my life?

—Brian Daldorph

Battle of Wounded Knee

There, near a grove, a papoose cries
in tones hollow as coyote howls
echoing across plains
once free for buffalo.
His wails would wake us,
if we were able to sleep,
stuck here in a cabin
not far from a battlefield.
We see him lying in a cradleboard
on his mother's back.
She doesn't answer,
her spirit flown far
from this reddened earth.

War time, they say, is no time to write.
So I become an Indian girl waiting
for a man on a black stallion
to make the first move.
He canters along some trail
overgrown with weeds,
back there, where ghosts
of Indian mothers
hush their babies.
And I smell gunpowder
wafting across the prairie.

—*Lindsey Martin-Bowen*

The Driver

A daughter's grief and a wife's cannot compare,
but how many miles between?
I remember watching the back of your head
driving forever
from winter to paradise, so

can you tell me the distance between
a wife who drove us to piano lessons
in your tired Ford
and another
who tossed us, useless plastic things,
from the window of her laughing Mercedes, you
in the passenger's seat, laughing right along.

Sometimes we glimpsed your trip from gray to
youth
and hoped for a short ride,
or at least some directions;
you were always so good with directions.
But you sped on and on, grinning at our upturned
thumbs
until you had to stop.

We picked out your last vehicle,
neither Ford nor Mercedes
then watched you
lowered slowly.
We threw dirt and flowers
and hoped we could find our way home.

—*Kathryn Atwood*



—AC

Eternity

Now I lay me down to

She sleeps a lot during war, but she does not rest.
She dreams of robots commandeered to annihilate robots
or better to re-educate the powers who snare the naive to believe
that it is acceptable to drop bombs and to kill other people.
Instead of counting sheep, she counts corpses lined up daily,
scenes not broadcast on television news programs.

In the creator's name, we pray

She imagines the faces of those entered into eternal slumber.

For freedom, for liberty and justice for all

She pictures their twisted torn apart bodies—
And their eyes, like those of a deer she saw in shock,
legs sheared off by an eighteen-wheeler, upright on the asphalt.

I pledge allegiance

Its eyes looked calmly into her eyes as she passed by,
life blood flowed outwards and then went limp.

Deliver us from evil, for yours is the kingdom, the glory, the power

She tosses; she turns, falls, forever waking, uneasy.
She sleeps, but there is no rest.

—Kathy Allen

The Same exists to publish good poetry, fiction, non-fiction, criticism and artwork. While we see ourselves as slightly old-fashioned (i.e., modernist rather than post-modernist), we are eclectic in our tastes and do not limit the material we publish to any ideology, aesthetic or otherwise.

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