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Heather Leigh Johnson is an M.F.A. graduate student at Georgia State University.

Seaborn Jones has poems in *Snake Nation Review*, *New York Quarterly*, and *Xanadu* and is anthologized in *80 on the 80's, A Decade's History in Verse* (Ashland U. Press) and the Chester H. Jones National Poetry Competition Winners 1993. He was the Alan Collins Scholar in Poetry at the 1991 Bread Loaf Writers Conference.

Philip Kobylarz has poems appearing in *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Epoch*, and *Santa Monica Review* among others.

Lisa Suhair Majaj lives in Somerville, Massachusetts.

Thomas Marron is currently living in a cabin outside Fairbanks, Alaska, and finishing the M.F.A. program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

Eric Nelson teaches English and Creative Writing at Georgia Southern University in Statesboro. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Shenandoah*, *The Southern Review* and many other journals. His most recent book, *The Interpretation of Waking Life*, was published in 1991 by the U. of Arkansas Press as winner of the Arkansas Poetry Award.

Robert Parham's collection *The Low Fires of Keen Memory* will appear this year from Colonial Press. Published or forthcoming in *Harvard Magazine*, *Georgia Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Lullwater Review*.

Sarah Patton has published in *The Wisconsin Review*, *The Little Magazine*, and *Poetpourri* and has two chapbooks, *The Earth Can't Forget* (Wilderness Press) and *The Roses* (Light Source Press). Mail: Rt. 1, Box 711, Center Point, Texas 78010.

Sherman Pearl lives in Santa Monica, California.

Robert Earl Price, playwright in Residence at Atlanta's 7 Stages Theater, has won an NEA Fellowship, Bronze Jubilee Award and the Georgia Poetry Circuit touring fellowship.

Geri Radacci, associate director of University Relations at Central Connecticut State University, has appeared in *Embers*, *Poetpourri*, and *Connecticut Review* and been anthologized in the *National Library of Poetry* and *Our Common Voice*.

Susan Rea teaches at Community College of Philadelphia, and has received several fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. Her poetry appears in *American Scholar*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *Passages North*. She lives in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, with her husband and son.

Michael D. Riley lives in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Margaret Robison has two books, *Red Creek* (Amherst Writers & Artists Press 1992), and *The Naked Bear* (Lynx House Press/Panache Books 1977). She has taught writing

in the schools, to women in prison, and currently to women with disabilities. Poems have appeared in *Ploughshares*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Yankee*, and *Disabili Rag*.

Larry Rubin teaches English at Georgia Tech and has published three volumes, with U. of Nebraska, Harcourt, Brace & World; and Godine. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harper's Magazine*, *Poetry*, *Sewanee Review*, *Yale Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and many anthologies, including *The Norton Introduction to Literature* (W.W. Norton 1991) and *A Geography of Poets* (Bantam Books 1979).

Dennis Sipe is "trying to live in S. Indiana." He has a chapbook, *My Days Are Str Dogs that Won't Come when I Call*, and has poems in *American Writing*, *Louisville Review*, *Wind*, and *Permafrost*. Mail: 4897 N. Water Tower Rd., Austin, IN 4710.

Daniel Sklar teaches writing at Endicott College. His plays, poems and stories have been published and performed.

Charlie Smith, a Georgia native, is author of four books of poetry, including *Before and After*, forthcoming from W.W. Norton in early 1995. He has also published four novels and a book of novellas. He lives in New York City.

R.T. Smith's new collection, *Trespasser*, will be published in Ireland, where he spent the summer of '94 on an Arts International grant from the U.N.

Jack Stewart was educated at the U. of California at Davis and the U. of Alabama. He is currently a Brittain Fellow at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Ted Taylor teaches at Mercy College and is working on a doctoral dissertation at Virginia Woolf at Rutgers. He is married to the artist, N.C. Gordon, and has three children. "If I have a poetic credo, it's clarity. (Poems should be read, not solved.)"

Rawdon Tomlinson's book, *Deep Red*, will appear in the U. of Central Florida Contemporary Poetry Series. He has poems forthcoming in *Kansas Quarterly* and *Birmingham Poetry Review*.

Diane Wald teaches at The Art Institute of Boston and Northeastern U. A chapbook of her prose poems, *My Hat That Was Dreaming*, was recently published by The Literature Renaissance. Mail: 52 Paine St. Boston, MA 02131.

Claude Wilkinson, a widely exhibited visual artist, won the 1993 Whittington Prize for painting from Cottonlandia Museum. Published in *Albatross*, *Poem*, and *Wind*, he lives in Nesbit, Mississippi.

Lisa Horton Zimmerman lives in Fort Collins, Colorado.

## Contributors' Notes

Enid Litwak Baron, former co-editor of *Rhino*, has poems in *The Literary Review*, *California Quarterly* and *Sing*. *Heavenly Muse!* Her book *Baking Days* will be published by HCE/riverrun arts in 1994. She recently completed her first novel, *Remembering the Alamo*.

John Peter Beck has published in *Louisville Review*, *Passages North*, *5 AM*, and *Woodrose*. He teaches at the School of Labor and Industrial Relations at Michigan State University.

Gay Brewer is an assistant professor at Middle Tennessee State University, where he edits the journal *Poems & Plays*.

Robert Brown teaches in the English Department at Kent State University.

E.G. Burrows' recent collections include *The House of August* (Ithaca House 1985) and *Handsigns for Rain* (Wayland Press 1989), plus poetry publications in *Ascent*, *Blue Mesa*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, and *Ohio Poetry Review*. He lives in Edmonds, Washington.

Gerald N. Callahan is Associate Professor of Immunology at Colorado State University. His poems have appeared in *Puerto del Sol*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Phase and Cycle*.

Dan Campion lives in Iowa City, Iowa.

Turner Cassity, recently retired from Emory University Library, divides his time between Georgia and California. He is the recipient of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ingram Merrill Foundation, and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His most recent volume is *Between the Chains* (1991) from the University of Chicago Press.

Michael Chitwood is published in *Poetry*, *The Southern Review*, *Threepenny Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and others. His book, *Salt Works*, was published by Ohio Review Books.

Rita Ciresi's collection of short stories, *Mother Rocket*, won the Flannery O'Connor Award for Short Fiction. She is an assistant professor at Hollins College.

Jerry Cullum is a free lance cultural critic, Atlanta correspondent for *Sculpture*, art reviewer for the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, and associate editor of *Art Papers*. (P.O. Box 77348, Atlanta GA 30357).

Tenaya Darlington is in the fiction program at Indiana University.

Phebe Davidson edits the Palanquin/TDM Poetry Series and teaches English at the University of South Carolina-Aiken. She has poems in *Nimrod*, *Poetry East*, and *Tri-*

*Literary Review*. She has two volumes, *Milk and Brittle Bone* (1991) and *Two Seasons* (1993) from Musc-Pic Press, and a third, *Dream eater*, forthcoming.

Derek Economy is a psychotherapist in Atlanta, Georgia. His writing has appeared in *Voices* and *Pilgrimage*, and will be forthcoming later this year in *Georgia Journal*.

Jack Evans' collection of poems, *The Catfood Factory*, was just published by Pygmy Forest Press. The owner of two used record stores in Boston and Cambridge, he has poems in *Chicago Review*, *Manhattan Poetry Review*, and *Boston Literary Review*.

Charles Fishman is Director of the Visiting Writers Program at SUNY Farmingdale.

Neva Vinetta Hacker is former director, now consultant, at a shelter for victims of domestic violence in Harrison, Arizona. Her poetry has appeared in *Contemporary Women Poets*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Webster Review*.

Gayle Elen Harvey is a "Lifer in the Kingdom of Uteca," artist's model and data entry clerk at a hospital. She won second prize in the '92 Chester H. Jones Foundation national poetry contest. She received a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship, and has poems in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Negative Capability*, *IQ-International Quarterly* and others.

Jack Hayes, winner of *Zone 3's* Rainmaker Prize, writes: "As Norman Cousins said, I am one of four billion cells in a body called mankind—this is all that matters at this moment. I've been married thirty years. I've outlived tribalisms and allegiances, but I will die a small man just like everyone. I thank my parents for the wounding, and the luck of love and healing."

David Hightower lives and teaches in Cassville, Georgia.

Daniel Hoffman is a former Consultant in Poetry of The Library of Congress. He presented the reading last December by the Nobel Laureates in poetry—Joseph Brodsky, Czeslaw Milosz, Octavio Paz, and Derek Walcott—and Rita Dove, Poet Laureate of the United States, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City.

Tiff Holland's poem "Ghost Month" is dedicated to her dad, Robert T. Holland. She did indeed get married in January 1994. She works as a claims adjuster for Nationwide Insurance and has poems in *Kalliope*, *The Coventry Review*, *Arctimex*, and the anthology *A Gathering of Poets* (Kent State). Mail: 1137 Waterloo Rd., Mogadore, OH 44260.

Peter Huggins' numerous publications include *Colorado Review*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. He was a Tennessee Williams Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference.

Bruce A. Jacobs is a free lance writer, poet and hired hand on a horse farm in Maryland. He was 1993 First Runner-Up in the National Poetry Competition.

## How night came in

Temperatures sliding off the nineties,  
the breeze steady and rising one summer  
when you were still a kid, hours from curfew  
and headed for the beach, the boardwalk, the lights  
of the rides and arcade that came on just for you,  
the sun going down and you  
not knowing  
    how night came in at Coney  
Island and Seaside Heights, the sweet, salt dark  
of sex and damp and silence rushing, the eely tidal  
marsh where all the rides and all the games were free,  
where no one knew till later how chilled they were,  
or bitten  
    the way time rode you all that night,  
the wild mouse screaming over the sea, how you drank  
the darkness and spit it out, how the ocean swelled and lifted  
you up, how it filled you full and emptied you,  
held you and let you go.

*Phebe Davidson*

## Gymnast

Sleek as otter or lynx  
She vaults near the lights  
That hang in cages from the ceiling,  
Arcs in perfect flight  
Her physical insights  
Or tumbles their echoes across the floor.  
Beneath her taut sheath,  
Barely containing  
The thin convention of skin,  
She ripples with life  
Like our original sea.  
Not erotic, only perfect,  
Her material soul can stretch  
My fabric of desire  
Until it threatens every seam  
Arcing through my echoing vaults  
Here among the gawking crowd,  
One of the attentive bears who hulk and yearn  
For flesh so fitted with its own idea  
That to move is but to think out loud.  
But I will settle for well-muscled words  
Poised for impossible springs  
Between immovable bars,  
Arms and legs drilled deep  
Into the heart,  
Angled knees and elbows swept in curves  
Above all beams wooden and inert,  
All bars too parallel  
And iron rings too cold,  
To find the flight above them all  
That unsentences the soul,  
When the word rises from the killing floor  
To dance through a woman's limbs  
In single celebration: the grace  
That settles over skin.

*Michael D. Riley*

## Butterfly Effect

Fooled by this mid-winter  
reprieve, an onyx-winged  
aristocrat has shed his  
pendant chrysalis to settle

on a patch of rye grass  
where the yard stirs  
toward the year's first  
green, and there he fans

his wings' white fringe  
and scalloped margins  
to warm up and seek  
sustenance from pollen,

carion or sap. God knows  
why he has gnawed through  
the cocoon to emerge  
ghostly and awkward as

a pharaoh from the tomb,  
but he is intricately  
splendid with his scarlet  
bars and black mantle.

Design science suggests  
the turbulence of his wings  
like a mighty king's single  
word can alter the wind

to trigger blizzards or stop  
a monsoon halfway across  
the world—the butterfly effect.  
And when the royal insect

has revved up and fled,  
the quartet of wings beating  
marvelously as any heart,  
the weather somewhere will

be altered and my garden  
will relapse to the spare  
harmony of mid-February,  
and perhaps by sunset this

specimen will already be dead  
again, the season's martyr  
rising stiff in the black  
beak of the jay currently

circling, his appetite drawn  
by an atmospheric change, my  
own attention or, in sun shafts  
of false spring, a symmetry  
of bright wings warming.

*R.T. Smith*

## Mt. St. Angelo, in the Artists' Barn for Robbie Tillotson

These are the mornings of yoga,  
herb tea and the prayer wheel.  
At the studio window he studies weather  
and watches the sourwoods  
and maples bleed and bullion  
as they prepare for the hour  
of rust and ice of the sterner season.

He has hardly the vigor  
to mix the cadmiums and alizarin,  
to lift the blur brushes and pinpoint  
Winsors with camel hair finer  
than needles. Something in the blood  
is hungry and thinner  
than water. At the easel  
he suffers the colors toward form,  
makes his painted ladies shine  
with Tribeca's neon, bangles  
and the desperate innocence of dawn.

The weathercock's swivel  
aches, metal on metal in the wind,  
and he remembers candlelight,  
the sweet touch of silk  
and wine. It was Piaf torching  
on the stereo nightly and elegant  
friction of two torsos  
finding a motion lovelier and more wild  
than Jacob holding the angel.

These are the afternoons of surrender,  
the weariness that gnaws  
from within, where time is the assailant  
and memory hope's only friend.  
Halloween coming on, he can  
smile at the gaunt face thrown back  
by a shadowed window,  
while outside the Chinese elm  
dances its own slow death,  
the sap too afflicted to mend.

In the slender moon's first gold,  
he cleans the brushes with turpentine  
and contemplates the portrait's  
lively eyes. He is free from the fear  
of stray vapors or angina,  
but the Red Death is waiting in maples.  
Pine needles drift and the wind  
sighs like a lover in the thicket.

These are the evenings of healing tea,  
meager dinner and a short stroll,  
vines thick as i.v. tubes  
twisting, labored breath in the arbor,  
the colors subtle or lost  
in the dusk. He feels the empty space,  
fatigue. A crow shrills caution  
from the elm. An artist  
is looking for comfort, a skeleton

is looking for flesh. The flavor  
of late fog rising is acrid,  
harsh and marrowless. In the last  
gallery where no critics smirk  
nor patrons coo and grin, under the moon's  
cold eye and the test of time,  
it is the taste of inspired regret  
that marries the fire within.

## Spirit Catcher I

Sit me down  
in a blue mauve place  
stretch me across  
yr ivory canvas lap  
stroke my cheek  
with a sable brush  
smear oil and water  
on my chest  
hum prismic paens  
blow melody over my damp skin  
cast a shadow spell  
splash my soul  
on the wall  
and leave it there to dry

*Robert Earl Price*

## Fayette

The waves speak,  
one hand clapping  
on the ringing stones.  
  
Stubborn against gravity,  
cliff pines gnarl out  
from the limestone  
and offer no shade.  
  
Our feet are unsure  
on the fallen stones  
smoothed round by  
these rhythms, slippery  
with life simpler than ours.

I pick my way,  
the others behind,  
to pass the bend.

There are only  
so many days  
in this life.

*John Peter Beck*

## We Are Looking for a Sign

*Ye who do not seek  
shall not find*

We are looking for a sign—  
a burning bush, a limp phoenix  
rising from the ash would be fine.  
Particular, we're not, we don't require  
firecrackers or the miraculous, no need  
for flash, impertinent acts, comets  
and tidal waves need not apply.

We are looking for a sign—  
we'd settle for something subtle,  
a small oversight  
at the bank, a call  
from a friend, the right glass of wine,  
a stray cat, one night, perhaps  
one night of uninterrupted sleep.

We are looking for a sign—  
and weeks pass. Our dog dies, days  
and nights end in rain (no thunder):  
a sewer of damp heat, books shrivel  
in our hands, conversations,  
even with neighbors, decline,  
evenings end wriggling  
on separate sides of our bed.

We are looking for a sign:  
Ye who seek shall certainly find.

*Robert Brown*

## Point and Shoot

Another tourist clutches the railing;  
The scene inflicts that touch of vertigo  
That makes a thousand-mile drive worthwhile.  
Looked down on, time's prolific as the sea.  
Across this summer's gorge, the layers fan out  
From Ordovician to van der Rohe,  
Establishing the backdrop and the floor  
For snapshots of ourselves on top of things.

*Dan Campion*



## For Sale

"Just Divorced," reads the window sign,  
"The judge says everything must be sold."  
And there they are, lined up like  
custody's children: Tables, chairs,  
pots and pans, plates, margarita glasses,  
strings of pearls, a belly dancer's  
shimmy chain, Bill Cosby records  
all at one-time-only prices and I wish  
that my parents had known to do this,  
cash in early, hand-paint a sign and  
summon the neighborhood to settle this thing:  
the bed that absorbed my father's lies  
stripped to the mattress and price-tagged on the porch,  
stacked photo frames sponged clean of memory,  
innocent as cafeteria trays,  
our car priced to move, sold and gone  
before it could carry perplexed children  
on outings with his mistresses,  
the house stripped board by board  
its hauntings swept to wind,  
my parents warmly shaking hands, dividing the proceeds  
of our family's better years  
and handing each child a large check  
with which we could run and shop  
for anything,  
anything we wanted.

*Bruce A. Jacobs*

## Sustenance

The house sags with the weight of food.  
He brings tomatoes large as cantaloupe,  
cherries plump and round as apricots,  
bread crumbling in thick brown disks.  
Already, canned goods tower shakily,  
spaghetti stacks the shelves,  
olives and pickles march the counter,  
an army in brine.  
Sometimes he brings whole lambs—  
carcasses bloody from the butcher's hook  
trundled quickly past the bleating  
at the door. Whacking strokes  
of his cleaver fill the air,  
meat severed from bone by hands  
blunt and strong as clubs.  
Bone chips fly. At his feet  
the cats prowl, bright predators.  
Chunking meat for the broiler,  
he fingers tendons and ligaments,  
searches out bone's buried message,  
skewers the raw flesh, draws it  
sizzling and redolent from the flame.  
Sopping bread in the fragrant juices,  
square hands heft food to mouth  
with enormous satisfaction.  
While he eats, she works wearily,  
wrapping meat in thick white paper,  
stacking labelled packages for the freezer's  
frigid plentitude; chops, ribs, stew meat,  
heart a quiet stone.  
Her hands are soft and vulnerable.  
Where the knife slices her thumb,  
she puts her tongue to the cut,  
tastes acrid blood,  
chokes it down.

A

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## Irides

*for Caitlin at four years*

With starlings chattering in thin green elms  
And the sky open and wind cool as mint,  
We stop before a bed of irises  
To look and touch, then holding, breathe their scent  
Of Nu-Grape soda pop, their yellow stripes  
Of caterpillar hair like boas on petals  
Fluttering, frilly, delicate old floozies—  
Common as sparrow and worm, their fierce mettle  
Is barely concealed under last year's bed  
Of leaves and parchment husks, from which they thrust  
The spearhead leaves and the bloom-weighted stalks,  
Offering sun their freight of golden dust.  
You ask me why some of the blooms have dried,  
Collapsed like face erased to skull, their stems  
And petals shriveled tight as umbilical cord  
Around a finger stalk, transfixing them:  
In bones I feel the answer's earth and air,  
"Because death feeds life," and point to  
A bud's corolla unfurling purple-sheened  
As congealed blood: see how it's driven through  
Air from below by rootstock ravenous  
For more color, more black-fire debris.  
You praise the balance of this formula,  
Accepting joy and the factory.  
I concur, knowing nothing else to do,  
Surrounded by the blackness of deep space,  
Presented with these gifts of bright flower  
And brilliant daughter at this time, in this place.

Rawdon Tomlinson

## Splitting Pine

I heft the sledge above my head  
and swing it down squarely against  
the wedge ringing, log bucking apart  
clean and white as a sliced apple,  
sun-flesh no man has seen.  
  
No analysis today: I toss  
the knotted ones into a pile  
where they can lie until I'm cold;  
I know the way of will,  
how wedges bury and axe binds  
  
in twisted grain, against whorled spikes  
of branches hard as hate,  
the pain stored in that dumb matter  
a lifetime's secret bludgeoning guilt,  
daggers of *if*. Today I'm after  
  
the tone of honest work, heart song,  
the sapling core from which all rings  
ripple to light full-flamed  
as the aspen leaves' yellow desire,  
a drowsy rasping in smoky weeds.  
  
Sun and work burn into shoulders,  
sweating armpits and crotch  
(the slabs will stack snug as quatrains):  
each unflinching stroke flows  
from eye to hand fusing muscles  
  
and bones to a wave outrunning thought,  
seams riven from inside  
exploding a bouquet of resin,  
momentum's edge holding the beat  
like a wheel spinning standing still.

Rawdon Tomlinson

## The Perfection Clerk

for David

My student said she knows a man  
who works as a perfection clerk.  
*Where does he keep his files?*  
I wanted to ask her, having a few  
items to add: the northern wind  
shivering the needles of this pine  
now, at eight o'clock this morning;  
the sprinkle of chickadee sounds  
outdoors; the beagle's lop-sided  
tapdance across the kitchen floor  
to retrieve a sock; morning light  
blue on the snow; and, of course,  
how you smile when I tell you this.

Susan Rea

## Ether

"Blow up the balloon," the nurse said,  
but it wasn't a balloon;  
it was dark and still  
like a stopped heart,  
and I was blowing myself into it.  
I was eight years old,  
and I was sick.  
Somebody wanted me dead.  
Not the nurse, that gamp,  
but someone close, someone bad.  
There wasn't any pill  
to cure what I had.  
No nurse could vamp  
me with her fake toys.  
I took oblivion straight. Yes,  
now it can be told.  
That was a treat,  
that little cup of death,  
heavy but so sweet.

Susan Rea

## Uncle George

Uncle George was crushed by a truck.  
It was ironic  
considering he had just married  
at fifty-six  
years old because he was  
finally in love  
with someone.  
(A blonde forty-eight year old  
cashier at Snow White Coffee Shop  
on Kings Highway.)  
She wept and none of his relatives  
believed her.  
They could not see how  
anyone could love George.  
After all, he was a bachelor  
and possibly probably  
tough to live with, with  
the painting of his mother  
straight over the couch,  
and the neat ways he tucked  
things in places and how  
he cooked his little dinners  
of beans and breads  
and listened to Count Basie  
too loud every night.  
He mowed the small yard with  
a manual lawn mower and wore  
a brown fedora and gray trousers.  
But she made him happy  
for fourteen months.  
They were happy and made  
each other happy, although  
she chewed gum and laughed too loud.  
George's brothers and their wives  
did not like her.  
She never went to college.  
The fact that George never went  
did not matter. He was self-made

with a Brooklyn trucking business.  
He had to pay off union officials.  
He hollered at his men.  
His face was like a concrete block.  
He was happy with Shirley for fourteen months,  
and no one knew it but Shirley  
who was heartbroken, heartbroken for good.

*Daniel Sklar*

## My Boy

I want to date Elroy Jetson  
now that he's old enough to drive that space car.  
I want to go with him in that bubble-topped craft  
to a bar tucked in his corner of the galaxy.  
Our first date we'd go to the oblong building  
circled by supports that don't touch ground,  
with lights flashing *Neptune's*.  
I'd wear one of sister Judy's outfits,  
she'd do my hair in a curly ponytail.  
Judy'd teach me how to dance in the air  
to Eep Op Orp, her prize winning song.  
I'd make sure I got invited over for one of Jane's  
famous wall-ready meals,  
I'd dine next to Mr. Spacely and his sprockets.

Back on my front porch  
I'd let Elroy kiss me goodnight.  
He'd marvel at the height of the pecan,  
the lipstick pink of the azalea.  
I'd show him the age of my house,  
the uneven boards, the way the windows stick  
or fall, the heat grate in the floor.  
He'd be charmed to finger  
my antique teacups, the sugar bowl, the creamer.  
He'd come toward me quickly in front of my new microwave  
and I'd allow him to know the age of my other wares,  
whispering in his well-drawn ear, words like "Elroy,  
my adolescent time traveler,  
speed me a love that is ageless."

Elroy would return to his galaxy  
and I'd surprise him with handwritten letters  
and other archaic forms of communication,  
like souvenir postcards.  
He'd land on my roof every weekend. We'd hold hands.  
We'd spoon. He'd bring me genetically  
engineered flowers, music by bands  
yet unborn, an electric cat named Pollux,  
and I'd let him climb the thick magnolia  
right in front of my door.

Heather Leigh  
Johnson 66

## Catechism

1  
It was my last year for dreaming  
of Priesthood. Cathy Morin moved in front  
of me that year, and her strawberry hair ruined every hope  
my eyes had for the altar. Hair  
the color of the Hail Mary beads on my rosary.  
Breasts that'd just begun their miracle.

2  
So I'd kneel, glaring at the blue  
and innocent angels in stone.  
*What is this*, I thought, knowing  
no answer was coming from those  
or even the distant pitiful thing  
hanging with arms flung and the nails in.

3  
Saturdays I'd waken early, and by then  
I'd been working three years for Greenwell.  
Long enough to take the White  
Oliver tractor alone to the May fields.  
With the sea-gulls wheeling and calling back of me,  
I'd sit there and try to keep the lines straight, and try  
not to think of them grabbing at the seeds  
or about the dust kicking me in the face.  
The old engine shook each joint and every bone  
and I learned how our Father of Dust loves  
each tooth in the empty mouth that longs  
for bread or breast, salvation  
traded for longing and unendurable desire.

Thomas Marron

## Barcelona

The huge granite statues  
are sleeping in the square  
deep in the white powder  
that falls from the stars.  
On the baker's long mahogany table  
a warm blue glow surrounds  
the bread and the oranges.  
The woman at the table  
is reaching deep into a white sack  
as if looking for a secret hidden there.

And there they are!  
The stars themselves,  
specks of light glittering  
in the handful of flour.  
Crush them, a voice whispers,  
you must crush them!

And you hear them now, can't you?  
Snapping like weevils between her fingernails?  
But listen.

How quiet it is in the doorway.  
The sound of rain  
drifting up from the city.  
And the smell of men—  
the smell of rain on stone.

*Anthony Sobin*

## After a Tracheotomy

*for Anna—*

Who took away her voice, hiding it  
in an ostrich egg, keeping it waiting in a small,  
blue truck, planting it among rhododendrons  
on the slopes of the Himalayas.

Orange leaves are missing.  
Perhaps the earth gave her voice  
to the stones  
because they are orphaned.

Perhaps her voice lives in kitchens where teakettles  
whistle and the sounds are immense and white  
as Jostedalstreen.

Perhaps, when the last bus leaves,  
her voice will ride North past farm houses, villages  
haunted by good deeds, the wind of her passing  
riffing the hair of a lost Cree.

Breathe—Anna. Breathe. Lungs open  
like almonds. Norwegian's whittled  
tuneless. English is skinned eels. The sky chokes back  
winter. Winter adopted her voice.  
Loud as smoke, fringed with  
consonants.

Vowelless, her life in exchange  
for the trachea's  
spliced rope.

*Gayle Elen Harvey*

GA

65

## Totems

Purloined, preserved,  
the doorposts of the Haida soar  
toward the louvered glass skylight  
of the anthropology museum.

Fangs red in the cedarwood,  
the brown bear on his elbows  
crouches like a sphinx on the tile.  
He's clan and family, avuncular,  
his sagging jaw familiar.

When Raven pried open the shell  
found on the beach at sunrise,  
the first people emerged  
blinking, rubbing their eyes.  
Over them, the huge  
feathered shadow hovered,  
unable to decide  
whether to leave them or eat them.

In time no more than a crow,  
he dabbles among gulls  
who was once Creator and speech-  
maker, who warbled  
like orioles in the branches  
until his throat closed.  
He taught us cawing and silence,  
woes, and the world in a shell.

Pass through this doorway  
with its frogs and beavers climbing  
sill to lintel  
and there's nowhere else  
except vision, a forest  
of Sitka spruce and dark hemlock  
looming from the origins  
and a bear you know by his grin.

*E. G. Burrows*

62

## Maybe

Maybe a great soft warm hand  
will catch you.

Maybe broken shadows will swarm you  
and suck your fear like leeches.

Maybe there is light and a choir.

Maybe there is a hammer  
and a pile of rocks.

Maybe you stand on gravel under stars.

Crickets rasp  
and a corkscrew pod of clicking bats  
hunts the reef of light beneath  
a pole in the barnyard down the road.  
A dog barks.

Now you are awake, in this moment.

There is nowhere you need to go  
but this is good going.

Maybe this will last.

Maybe not.

*Dennis Sipe*

63

swath down her belly. The more complacent she was, the more I wanted to please her. She felt alternately smooth and rough, and tasted salty, fishy, bitter. I went down on her, and her legs and trunk stiffened, as if she had been shot through with ice, when she came.

It was a memory I played over and over again in my head, like a slow, sad favorite song—probably because it was the last time I remember being with her without anger, without fear that she would leave me. After that evening it all became a game—turning the other cheek during the day, turning our backs at night in bed. It was all silence, abruptly punctured by wild volleys of nasty comments. *You look miserable. Well, you look happy. You might at least keep up appearances. Why bother? Working tonight? Going somewhere?*

Because it had to be someone's fault, I blamed it all, ultimately, on Lorenz. Oh why had he ever invited Sandy to the house that night? Why hadn't he left Sandy back at the hospital, where he would have remained a two-dimensional figure we heard about from time to time, another character in one of Lorenz's tales from the surgery, another horny doctor who had goosed a more-than-willing nurse? I could hardly abide being put to such shame by a colleague of my brother's, a man he came face-to-face with every day, albeit behind the shifty cover of a surgical mask. "I'm sorry," Lorenz finally said to me, when it somehow became apparent I resented his role in it all. "How could I have known? But if it hadn't been him—"

"There wouldn't have been anyone else," I said.

Lorenz shrugged, as if to let me know it wasn't for him to say. I would have to find out on my own that Rosalie and I had been ill-suited for one another. In the meantime, I could think of nothing but that pull between Sandy and Rosalie, as strong and as plain as the pull between two magnets I once had purchased for the girls in the very same five-and-dime I had bought the walrus. The magnets were glued onto the feet of two plastic dogs—one white and one black Scottish terrier. Dina and Donna had spent hours goading the dogs to join forces, testing over and over again how close the two could come before they hesitated, quivered, and then snapped together, locked in a determined embrace. Some higher force was behind it—physics, nature—and to fight against it was useless. Who had the strength to wrestle with fate?

I bit my lip, then let out a deep breath, as if I could release with it what little urge I had left to fight. It was done, everyone told me. Over. Out of my control. But I felt as if I would never be able to put it behind me. My heart still thumped when I grew close to Herald Square. I still saw her face appear in the crowds on Fifth Avenue, and at night, I had odd, truncated conversations with her, followed her down some street, reached out to touch her dress, and pressed my body against hers in my dreams.

I nursed Lorenz's gin like lemonade. *Dreams aren't real life, kiddo*, I heard Lorenz tell me in my head. *Real life is the present, the good old here and now*. But what did the here and now consist of?

This: one morose, soon-to-be divorced man draining his brother's gin and tonic to the ice cubes, passively observing two uncherubic little girls in a fight

pool, the walrus between them. Dina had the tusks in her hands and Donna, bless her heart, was hanging onto the tail for dear life. "It's mine!" Dina screamed, while Donna made odd grunting noises. She completely lacked a coherent vocabulary, but determination was evident in her clenched teeth and red, breathless face.

I knew I should break it up. But the fight, raw as a bloody steak, fascinated me. It was the same sort of fascination that glued me to the TV at 7:00 each night so I could travel to the wilds of the Kalahari Desert and the canopy of the tropical forests, the same need to participate, vicariously, in the chicker-chat of monkeys mating and the hiss of cobras honing in on their prey. All those months I had lusted after the primitive—and to think that I could have found it right there in Ho-Ho-Kus, sitting in my brother's backyard! I watched that walrus being pulled from left and right, silently cheering on the underdog. "Go, Donna," I said beneath my breath. "Go, go, get it!"

Then Lorenz came dashing across the lawn, sloshing beer on the grass. "You were supposed to be watching them!" he called out.

"I am watching them."

"You're crazy!" he said, putting down the glass and the beer on the table. He strode over to the girls. "Dina," he said loudly. "Donna. Whoa. Yo. What do you say, kiddos? Time out. Cool it. Just cut it out, will you? Girls, there are other toys. Girls, are you listening? There are other fish in the sea!"

Lorenz, at his wits' end, sank his nails into the back of the walrus and grabbed it away from the girls. For the second time that day, the poor walrus had the plug pulled on him. With a whoosh, he zoomed out of Lorenz's hands and flew in a crazy, cockeyed arch before he fell, deflated, into the wading pool, soggy and pathetic as a man drowned at sea.

I closed my eyes and felt myself going down with him, falling far below the surface of the ocean. I descended through coral reefs, schools of fish, forests of seaweed. The water was murky. But finally, paddling among the rocks that looked as fragile as sandcastles, I thought I glimpsed my love glistening on the ocean floor, halfway submerged in sand, a heavy, sunken treasure never to be recovered. I had two choices: to embrace it and drown, or to swim away. I struggled. I floundered. My lungs felt as if they would burst before the instinct for survival finally won out and I shot back up to the surface, leaving it behind for only the lowest forms of life to see.

Triumph! I sat there, ready to take on the next fish in the sea. But my victory lasted only a moment. All my hopes were deflated as Lorenz—who truly, at heart, was as soft a touch as I was—gave in to the screams and cries of the girls for their beloved object, held the walrus to his mouth, and began to pump it full of air again. Drunk on love, I watched the walrus grow larger and larger, until it seemed as if it were floating above me, threatening to fall and smother me, like some crazy cartoon character—the mighty Popeye, the lovesick Olive Oyl—who floated above Broadway that fatal day Rosalie and I acknowledged it was all over, after marching what seemed like forever in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade.



I thought of all the pleasant little phrases etiquette books recommended for unwanted invitations: *other plans*, *previous commitments*, *pressing engagements*. I couldn't count the number of times over the past few months that I had ducked the issue with such silly excuses. It was time to 'fess up. "Dina," I said firmly, "Aunt Rosalie will never come back here again."

I hoped I hadn't shocked her. But she nodded, a little sadly, taking it so well I wondered why I hadn't been straightforward before.

"Daddy said so," she said.

That irked me. Although it was completely true, it was my shot to call, not Lorenz's. I took another, bigger sip of Lorenz's drink. The screen door opened and Lorenz stepped out onto the porch. Then, from inside the house, I heard the phone ring. He waved at me—little knowing how much I resented him at that moment—and went back in to answer it.

I turned back to Dina. "What else did your daddy have to say?"

"He said you were getting a horse."

"What?"

"So you wouldn't be married anymore."

"A *di-vorce*. Yes, that's right. We'll go to court and—and get unmarried." Put in a child's terms, it seemed simple and free of malice. "Then maybe someday we'll both marry someone else again."

Dina swung her legs. "I know who Aunt Rosalie is going to marry."

I felt as if someone had socked me in the gut. Was it possible? That even a four-year-old, on the few occasions she had seen them together, had noticed the sparks flying between Sandro and Rosalie? Or had she just overheard Bets and Lorenz discussing it, one evening while they thought the girls were engrossed in TV or fast asleep?

"Don't be silly," I said sharply. "Rosalie isn't going to marry anyone for a long time. And neither am I." That much at least, was certain. I bent down and grabbed hold of the walrus. My hand scraping against the plastic produced a flatulent noise that made Dina giggle. "Here," I said. "Go play with this. In the pool. And don't hog it, you little piglet."

Dina grabbed the walrus and ran back to the pool. Donna held out her hands to get the toy, but Dina plopped it in the water and mounted it like a horse, heigh-ho Silver, away.

"Share," I called out. But the command was half-hearted, and absolutely absurd coming from me, whose insides were twisted with possessiveness. So what, I thought. So what if I couldn't be blasé, couldn't be adult, couldn't be *European* about it. Rosalie had accused me of being *bourgeois* about her affair with Sandy, but wasn't I merely being human, wanting everything she had to give me? What was love, then, if you were willing to share your partner with someone—anyone—right off the street, giving her out as freely as you gave the time, handing her to whoever asked, the bum who begged others for a dime, the man in the phone booth who needed to borrow a pencil? I took the old-fashioned view of marriage. I believed that we should cleave together—fasten our grips and hang on for dear life, as protection from the outside

11 ————— protect from such charming good-looking men as Sandy.

Sandy seemed to have it all—a hint of the Old World, the gracefulness of the New. Even when I cursed Rosalie for being seduced—or seducing—him, I couldn't forget how taken I was with him myself, that cold winter evening we arrived at Lorenz and Bets' house and he rose from the sofa, all five and a half feet of him, his hand outstretched, a warm smile crinkling up on his face. We were all intrigued by the details: the crisp white shirt beneath his rich maroon sweater, the tasselled loafers, the slight gap between his upper front teeth. And his accent—in such good taste, you hardly even remembered it was there, except when he fished for a word, couldn't find it, and turned to us for help, only to discover a more gracious synonym after we had offered up something feeble from our lame vocabularies.

At first he was Lorenz's catch—proof that not all doctors were brusque, crass characters interested only in blood, guts, and bones. *Wait 'til you meet this guy*, he said. *A general surgeon. He comes from Venice. He speaks a million languages. He reads. He's interested in music.* "You should hear him in the shower after surgery," Lorenz said, while Sandy shook his head, laughing. "Belting it out like Caruso!"

At Lorenz's insistence, Sandy sang for us that night—hokey songs like "Adeste Fideles" and "Ave Maria." I accompanied him on the piano. He did have a gorgeous, full-throated voice and a natural sense of when to swell up and die down in each song. Accompanying him was easy. Lorenz, Bets, and I all clapped wildly when he was done, as if we had never heard anyone sing so well before. But Sandro's slight, mocking bow seemed directed at Rosalie, whose applause for anything never went beyond polite.

He was the first to leave that night, and we did nothing but talk of him after he left. Lorenz, boisterous from the wine, loudly sang Sandy's praises, and Bets said that whoever married him would be lucky. She would have to be nothing less than perfect, I said. The more compliments we heaped on Sandy, the more Rosalie's lower lip curled back.

"Well, Madame?" Lorenz finally burst out. "*Que pensez-vous?*"

Rosalie smiled. "Too short," she said. "Too Italian."

Lorenz hooted. "He doesn't even have dark hair!"

"*Ca n'importe pas*. He has the beak."

"It's very aristocratic," I said. "He looks like nobility."

"Not when you make him stand up like a gondolier and sing for his supper," Rosalie said.

Lorenz continued to tease Rosalie about how demanding she was, how fussy. Rosalie refused to give in, finally tossing a cocktail napkin at Lor and calling an end to the soirée. Back at the apartment, she was surprisingly docile and dreamy, and uncharacteristically sweet to me. At that point, if I had been going to accuse Rosalie of being unfaithful, I would have charged her with having an affair with her hairbrush, which she lovingly cradled in her hands each night, pulling one hundred long, provocative strokes down her black hair. Usually she wouldn't let me touch her until she had gotten that ritual out of the way. But that night she let me undress her, smiling absent-mindedly as I nibbled her shoulders and breasts and dragged my tongue in a long, slow

"I just wasn't thinking." I sipped my beer, watching Dina order her younger sister in and out of the pool to fetch her a ball, then a pail. "It would be all right if Dina didn't push Donna around."

"That's perfectly normal," Lorenz said. "I mean, look at us when we were kids."

"You were a rotten older brother," I said.

He toasted me with his gin. "You were the perfect younger one."

It was true. I was gullible, malleable, eager to please. I once overheard my mother describe me as *Born with his heart on his sleeve*. She said it in a sorrowful tone, as if she had brought forth into the world a child with a serious defect.

Lorenz had long been on a campaign to rid me of this handicap. He stretched out his legs, spread his flat toes wide apart, and cleared his throat. "So," he said casually, "how're things?"

This was just the kind of question I hated. "Fine," I said. "I have three new students. One of them plays very well."

"No, I mean, how are things?" He gave me a significant look. "You know, things. Are you seeing anybody?"

"You know I'm not."

"Why not?"

"It's too soon," I said.

"Six months is too soon?"

"Seven."

"Whatever. Most relationships don't even last that long."

"So why bother?" I asked.

"Have some fun ones at first."

"I don't want fun ones."

"You need fun ones," he said. "You don't need serious, believe me. What about that student you just mentioned?"

"He's eleven years old."

Lorenz coughed. "Forget him."

"He wasn't up for consideration," I said.

"So what about the girls?" Lorenz dogged on. "Got any girls? Who are we looking at? What are our choices?"

There were times when Lorenz reminded me of a bookie waving a racing form in front of my face, begging me to put a buck on one of the top fillies. I could have told him he was crass, and left it at that. But I had to admit that this was nothing I hadn't done before on my own—running down the list of possibilities and weighing them each in my head.

"There's—there's a girl called Catherine O'Donnell," I said.

"Aye, Cathy—that wild Irish rose, just waiting to be plucked!" he said. "Her round, innocent, lovely face—her long, graceful hands!"

"Her joints look arthritic."

"But she plays the scale like a dream."

"She's religious."

I shook my head. "I can't."

"Why not?"

Once, when I was standing at the bottom of the elevator at Macy's, waiting for Rosalie to end her shift, I noticed Catherine at the cosmetics counter. "Rosalie sold her a tube of lipstick," I said.

"Lorenz threw up his hands. "Rosalie has sold lipstick to practically every woman in New York!"

"I know."

"At this rate, you'll have to go to the moon to get laid."

"I will not. I could go to Connecticut or New Jersey."

"So why don't you?"

"Because," I said. "Because I still—feel things for Rosalie. And because love isn't like a faucet."

"Who said it was?"

"You did. Acting like people can turn feelings on and off with a twist of a spigot. That's not the way it goes."

Lorenz looked surprised. He even looked a little contrite. I should have stopped there, but I didn't. "I mean, put yourself in my place," I said. "What if it were you and Bets?"

He didn't even think about it for a minute. "Bets would never," he flatly said.

It was an honest assessment. I couldn't be angry with him—only regretful that Rosalie had been my own bad choice and that I first had to live with her, and then live without her, for all the rest of my years. I drank down the last of my beer and stared at the suds that clung to the side of the glass. I must have had a morose look on my face, because Lorenz immediately offered me a refill.

"Just keep an eye on the heirs to my throne," he said, as he got up and took my glass. "Make sure they don't kill each other."

He padded across the lawn to the house. I looked over at the girls. Donna was squatting in the pool, methodically scooping up water in an orange pail and dumping it out again. Dina crouched on the ground. As Lorenz walked off, she sensed an opportunity and wandered over. She sat on the end of the chaise longue, primly pressing her knees together and making a conscious effort not to look at the coveted walrus.

"Guess what?" she said.

"What," I answered.

"I'm going to be five next month."

"Yes," I said. "I remember."

"I'm having a birthday party."

"I hope I'm invited."

"Yup. You're invited with Aunt Rosalie."

The way she stared at me disconcerted me. I leaned over to the table and took a sip of Lorenz's gin.

"I'm afraid Aunt Rosalie won't be coming," I said.

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Earlier that week I had returned home to the empty apartment, made my usual dinner—a hasty tuna fish sandwich and a bowl of noodles—and plopped down on the couch to watch a nature program that ran at 7:00. That night the program focused on the Northern Seas—frigid cliffs, gusty winds, and slippery marine mammals dog-paddling in choppy waters. The announcer had a calm, soothing voice. *Eskimo knives, darts, and harpoons sometimes are to avail when it comes to the walrus. His tough, heavy hide can bear repeated attacks! Like other cheerful members of the pinniped family, the sea lion likes to indulge in high-spirited fun. But beware the wrath of the aroused male!*

I set my bowl of noodles on the couch (Rosalie had taken the coffee table). Two male sea lions were shown rearing up, bopping their bald heads upon one another, in a bitter fight to the death for a prized female in heat. It made my heart ache. I pitied the loser. But at least he was put out of his misery. I was sure mine would never end. If only I could go back in time, I too would confront Sandro. I would challenge him to a duel. Ah! I would run a sword straight through his naked back at the precise moment he mounted Rosalie, pinning them both to the bed!

I must have looked like a madman, sitting there on the train, trying to shake out all the evil thoughts pent up inside me by shaking my head. I felt crazy, chock full of wild urges that never could be expressed. But in the presence of others, I had to keep up appearances, reply *fine, and you?* to whoever inquired after my health. I had to take the subway without confiding my sorrows to the fellow holding the next strap, shop for groceries without bursting into invective at the stock boy over the lack of fresh hamburger buns, or weeping, incomprehensibly, over a bruised can of Jolly Green Giant peas. Tears, tantrums, and tussles? They were reserved for lower forms of life: animals, cavemen, children. Lucky three.

\* \* \*

At the end of the line, Lorenz was waiting for me in his emerald green Lincoln, which obviously had just been washed and polished. Some of the yellow wax still clouded the silver door handle. I got in.

Lor looked at the sagging piece of plastic in my hand. "It's a walrus," I explained. "For the girls." I found the plug, put it in my mouth, puffed up my cheeks, and blew. More spit than air came out. I blew again.

"You smoke too much," Lorenz warned me.

I thought about that run down 42nd, how I had huffed and puffed even after I finally sat down, my heart thumping a deep, dark drumroll for my mortality.

"Nonsense," I said.

Lor took the walrus from me, leaned away from the steering wheel, and blew into the plug. In between short, powerful breaths, he kept on talking—idle, staccato statements about the new partner in his urology practice, the stuffed pork chops Bets had promised to make for dinner, and other tidbits calculated less to convey information than to demonstrate the superiority of his lungs. Lorenz liked to play colossus. No matter what the task, he performed it like a boy at summer camp, hoping to outstrip all the competition.

I reached in the plug and examined it.

SA

"Ugly sucker," he said, tossing it into the back seat. "The girls will love it." And—surprisingly—they did. They scrambled up from the floor when we came in. Both of them looked beyond me, and for a moment I imagined they were craning their necks, just as they used to do, to see if Rosalie might be coming behind me. But then I realized they were looking for their gift.

"Is that dog for me?" Dina asked.

I held the toy out. "It's a walrus. See, look at his tusks."

Dina's sole interest in the tusks lay in grabbing them like two handles to pull the walrus away.

"Share it," Lorenz said, as Donna toddled up to see.

Dina clung to the walrus with one hand and held her nose with the other. "Donna smells bad."

Lorenz gave me a feeble smile. "Oh Bets," he called out. "Front and center on the old poopdeck!"

Bets emerged from the kitchen, wiping her hands on a dishtowel. Flour clung to her chintz apron, and her light brown hair, frazzled at the ends, hung limp. *Quelle coiffe*, Rosalie used to remark. *It looks like she's been standing over the stove all day*. Even on the most special occasions, Bets could never match Rosalie's immaculate toilette. But what she lacked in glamour she more than made up for in kindness. She kissed and hugged me. She had a strong, solid back that Rosalie also had scorned. *Built like a mule*, she said.

Bets swooped Donna up and sniffed at her bottom. "I don't smell anything," she said. As Bets carried her off to check, Donna began to howl, holding out her hands towards the walrus. Dina smiled. She sat on the floor, clutching her prize. She was triumphant.

At four years old, Dina already was the sort of kid people described—with a mixture of admiration and disapproval—as *smart as a whip*. Rosalie and I were her godparents, and I was convinced that at her baptism a grievous error was made. Rosalie had worn a sleeveless dress to the church, taboo in those days. As Dina lay all dressed in white in Rosalie's luscious bare arms, I swear that Father Kopansky, aroused by the spectacle, accidentally anointed Dina with the spirit of her godmother rather than the spirit of the Almighty. She was a vixen.

\* \* \*

It started off as a typical Saturday afternoon. Lorenz gave me a beer and fixed himself a drink. Bets got the girls into their bathing suits and sent us all outside, then went to the store to pick up some things for supper. I sat down on the new lawn furniture—two chaise longues padded with splashy orange and yellow cushions—while Lorenz filled up the wading pool with water. The girls jumped in. Within two minutes, they were fighting over the walrus. It wasn't much of a contest. Dina was bigger, smarter, and could yell the loudest. Lorenz finally strode over, grabbed the walrus by the scruff of the neck, and carried it back to where we were sitting. He dropped it down by the side of my chair, where it fell off its front flippers onto its face.

"Let me teach you a lesson about life, Karl," he said. "Never buy one toy for two kids."

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d who, if I cried out in the Arts Center station. . . .  
beauty's (yes, I'm late) the beginning. . . .  
nkly, my dear, I don't give. . . . *Hi, Ned. Hi, Max.*  
*'lo, Marianne.* Hello, Mary Lu,  
dbye heart. . . Who, if I  
d out now, would hear. . . *O, Hell.*

28-29 december 1993, being the western church feasts of the  
slaughter of the holy innocents & martyrdom of thomas à becket

*Jerry Cullum*

## Blubber Love

*Rita Ciresi*

Lorenz told me to quit moping around. "You're like an old dog, drooling and farting over a lost bone," he said. "Forget her. One good grind is all it'll take."

My brother has never taken much stock in romance. He told me to get out of my dark apartment and rejoin the world. Take the next train down. He would set my head straight.

So I went down to Ho-Ho-Kus—to have Lorenz pester me, Bets feed me, and the girls ignore me, as if I were some boring object that kept tripping them up, like a footstool or doorstop. I had lost my charm for them when I had lost Rosalie. Gone was the glamour of our visits—the red lipstick kisses that clung to their cheeks, the sophisticated whiff of Rosalie's perfume, the prissy little gifts that made them so happy. "Uncle Karl, you bring us *boy toys*," Dina told me last time I visited. For that reason, I spent an inordinate amount of time in the five-and-dime outside Grand Central, examining each cheap plastic doll and brightly colored jump rope, trying to pick out the perfect thing.

It was a hot July day. Huge fans roared in the corner of the store. The heat made me indecisive, and I wandered up and down the aisles. Dina and Donna were too young for yo-yos and too old for rubber ducks. Some inflatable animals sat on the top shelf—a fire-breathing dragon, a shark baring his fangs, and a walrus with ivory-colored tusks. I took down the walrus, tucked it under my arm, and hustled it up to the counter, glancing at my watch. As usual, I was running late.

The woman behind the cash register had a blond beehive and turquoise catglasses that sparkled under the fluorescent lights. She pointed to the walrus with one of her long orange fingernails. "Ya gotta getta flat one," she said. "Undaneath the shelf in plastic bags. The ones fulla air are for display."

I looked over my shoulder. Behind me in line was a teenager holding a bag of pink curlers and a jar of goopy green hairstyling gel. Behind her was an old man with a yellow complexion clutching a bottle of Maalox. I set the walrus down on the counter and got out my wallet. "I'll pay you a quarter more for this one."

"Ya gotta getta flat one."

"You want a flat one?" I asked her. I turned the walrus over, found its plug, and pulled it. "Here's a flat one for you." I plunked two dollars on the counter and ran down 42nd toward the station, dodging people to get to the ticket counter, the walrus hissing all the way. By the time I had dashed for the train and flopped down in one of the aisle seats, the walrus was completely deflated and I was out of breath.

We rode together in silence, the flattened walrus slung over one of my knees. Something in my unconscious had led me to buy this hideous thing.

of the Battle of Atlanta. July twenty-second eighteen sixty-four really was a whole other time and universe, and my great-grandfather was, presumably, somewhere over there behind my present office, rescuing the wounded under shellfire from the Federal batteries on Battery Place.

I'll never know, of course, but it somehow pleases me to think that family history comes around again, *the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce*. . . . Karl Marx's Eighteenth Brumaire comes in handy so often.

Tired witticisms of a tired art critic. I hear that skateboarding is popular these days in Sarajevo, Snipers' Alley being a favorite spot for death-defying feats of acrobatics. When Susan Sontag came to direct *Godot*, her first symbolic act was to decline the wearing of a flak jacket.

De Gress's guns were right up there. Under those historical circumstances I would not have recommended standing in this particular railroad cut. Hood's men advanced over there by the jogging trail.

Who, if I cried out, would hear me then among the non-angelic orders? Skateboarding in Sarajevo, like playing the cello where a shell struck, is an obvious last affirmation of the survival of a cultured, ironic city.

Lately the citizens have grown tired of irony and begun making babies as a form of resistance. This does not change, in any case, the skateboarders or the cellist. In these corners of skeptical Europe symbols still count for more than population data.

Bullets fly here too, actually, too many nights a hundred feet or at most three or four from most of the east-west MARTA stations. On, say, any ordinary evening in Atlanta, does anyone play cello or a sweet jazz trumpet where local children fell in a crossfire?

Civilization, or some pathetic facsimile of it, depends on such stuff that (and I quote) *makes nothing happen*: a long poem at Duino; skateboarding past snipers; producing Beckett in a besieged city; or any act that interferes with our daily distraction.

No wonder our own polite, historically appropriate response to the drawn-out destruction of some of eastern Europe's most significant centers of art and intellect is "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn."

Well, Hell. The MARTA train is finally coming. *Another opening, another show*. Another six newspaper column inches. No high explosives will fall tonight on the High Museum. Murders and rapes occur at the Arts Center station no more than once or twice a year. And, in any case, everyone knows nobody but an art critic would come by public transport.

Who, if I cried out, would hear me then in any public orders whatsoever? Skateboarding in Sarajevo, the cello player rescuing the souls of the dead, pools of blood at certain street corners, and a damned cold wind hustling me onto MARTA, where *your next station is King Memorial, exit here for the Martin Luther King Historic District and Oakland Cemetery*. Leaves whirl by outside, and I write a stupid opening sentence I will never use:

"It's hard, at most receptions for the artist, to see what's really happenin *For beauty's the beginning of terror we can barely endure, and these days even the animals know it, that we aren't securely at home* in our media-mediated universe. *Who, if I cried*. . . .

Five Points station. Transfer point for the north-south line. . . . *Who, if I*. . . . Skateboarding, the cellist of Sarajevo, and Susan Sontag were all most elegantly documented by Annie Leibovitz in an autumn issue of *Vanity Fair*, whose cover story was "Julia Roberts: Happy At Last."

## Angel Dances

It's not like you think.  
They wear cracked brogans  
and throw down plywood  
so that the clogging raises hell.  
They slip out to the car  
for the pint in the glove box  
and make water under the stars,  
curlicues smoking in the frost.  
They favor bluegrass  
for the pungent fiddle tunes:  
Lard in the Skillet  
Slapping the Mud  
Break Me Off a Switch  
The Girl from Janktown  
Cuttin the Young Hog

*Michael Chitwood*

## Skateboarding in Sarajevo or, a prelude to an ordinary evening in Atlanta

*We seek*

*Nothing beyond reality.*

—Wallace Stevens, "An Ordinary Evening in New Haven"

*Wer, wenn ich schreie, hörte mich denn aus der Engel  
Ordnungen?*

—R. M. Rilke, *Duineser Elegien*

*Who, if I cried out, would hear me then  
among the angelic orders? Rilke's old question  
at Duino, just a little ways up the Adriatic  
from the current south Slavic unpleasantness.  
Bombs over Dubrovnik, the prolonged siege  
of Sarajevo, and the more or less complete obliteration  
of a great deal of lately existing medieval architecture.*

*The things I do . . . squeezed into black tie at six p.m.,  
already late for a midtown "reception to meet the artist,"  
and waiting for a MARTA train. . . Please be patient.  
We are experiencing, as they always say,  
no more than a momentary interruption.*

*We ought to be more sympathetic, here in Atlanta,  
to the imminent demise of a recent Olympic host,  
even if a century and a quarter of later nastiness  
has long since shifted our regional obsessions  
away from the doings of William Tecumseh Sherman.*

*It is, in Sarajevo, as if rednecks from a five hundred mile radius  
had gathered to obliterate the Balkans' most singularly successful  
multicultural experiment.*

*Through months on months of the siege, a solo cellist  
would play for fifteen minutes daily on the street  
where women and children died from shellfire.  
Standing on the eastbound platform in the Inman Park MARTA station,  
I could, if I turned, survey the town houses built atop the central sites*

While the deacons  
crawfished into place,  
one could scan the bank of faces,  
almost hear people calling up Scriptures,  
favorite prophets to deliver us.

The sister in the blue crepe de chine  
sees Joseph released from Potiphar's prison,  
and the old man there  
with Stetson still on  
is remembering Daniel in the lion's den.  
Over there Jonah is being spat up . . .  
Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.  
Everywhere shields were rising,  
going forth against the tree.

A few boys with the story  
of David and Goliath  
burning their hearts,  
gathered stones to make war,  
aimed to chuck the devil down  
into the cloudy waters below,  
but Pastor Gamble, an old hand  
at this sort of thing, cautioned  
"Leave him be, chillun.  
Long as he up there,  
we knows where he at."

*Claude Wilkinson*

## Hunting Dead

Son, one more favor  
for the old man.

Take this body and burn  
it, burn it up,

and seal the ashes  
in a 12 gauge shell.

Bolt it in the cool  
chamber, aim behind

the horns of an 8 point  
buck, standing alert

with its ears up.  
Wait, then squeeze,

let me rip flesh, crack  
bone, drop him like a

vice. One last kill  
for the old killer.

*Gay Brewer*



## God's Acre

From the chain of backsliders  
that show up each year  
just before third Sunday in May  
to work the dirt  
into cultivated mounds, get rid of  
honesuckle and kudzu, to sweep  
and whitewash dusty headstones,  
one can feel the weight of blood.

The cemetery floods  
with sisters who'd  
long ago parted ways  
over caches of china  
and company sheets,  
black sheep cousins, the outside child  
people whispered about. Everywhere,  
an unction of shovels  
and joblades toil in a kind  
of Protestant Ferialia for the good  
of common ground.

The toads and spiders stampede  
toward a beautiful refuge  
of tombs unscathed by duty or love.

Here, even among friends,  
there is hardly ever more  
than cautious chat of weather,  
how tight the soil has grown.  
It takes too much to forget  
harsh last words, how thin and silent  
one can become, too much  
not to dwell on heaven or hell,  
just to survive till these sparse Sundays  
when remnants come with iris and roses,  
big yellow and pink kleenex mums,  
when the hard ghosts of living  
are buried for awhile  
under a covenant of blooms.

## Baptism with Water Moccasin

*And the Lord said to Satan, "From where do you come?" So Satan answered the Lord and said, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it."*

—The Book of Job

His bulk amazed us,  
the way he'd maneuvered his folds  
onto a switch of elm  
directly above the baptizing hole.  
After all, Cedar Creek offered  
numerous spots for a snake  
to wile away a Sunday, but only one  
fit to baptize in.

Not even the brilliance  
of proselytes, a rite of sheets  
fluttering about them  
in the early morning breeze,  
had moved him. Not the most  
floral, feathered, tasseled of hats,  
nor the highest notes of a Doctor Watt  
being held till the last thread  
of their power—  
nothing made him so much  
as shift that plated lozenge of head,  
shovel through the chilly fork of his tongue  
to even feel us out.

It was as if he already knew  
what was going on, as if  
he had been returning for ages  
to blaspheme the Creek.

Turner Cassidy  
11/14



## A Blade, Stropped

The man alone in the barbershop at dusk  
by only the light of the striped pole  
that drips its ensigns of blood and water  
among the piles of different-colored hair is  
Mace, the master barber. He closes his eyes  
remembering when he practiced shaving balloons:  
hollow grins expressed in black marker;  
necks squeaking at the slightest touch.  
He held his breath and pulled the razor  
over their whipped cream coiffures,  
the bitter bite of the septic comb in his mouth  
as he trimmed their sideburns. The dabs of stubble  
around their crudely drawn blue smiles.  
How all the while the nervous balloons  
casually nodded.

*Philip Kobylarz*

## Sitting Down Down

The drumbeat sets the oar-stroke, cruelly;  
But then we do not choose our heartbeat.

Manacles confine us. Who, however,  
Can be really said to venture?

If in the battle it is row or drown,  
We row. The lash is often on us.

It is an incentive, in its way.  
The rowing builds up shoulder muscles.

I've a tan. I look at backs a lot.  
I deeply understand teamwork.

I live in filth. Was I fastidious  
When I was free? Here sharks will have us;

It's not as though elsewhere there are no jackals.  
Bear up. Hand and heart grow calloused.

*Turner Cassity*

## Place Name, Proper Name

On the side roads  
the banks feather  
into scrub pine  
and juniper,

slope down  
to intimacies  
dark from last night's rain,  
the frazzled stems

of goldenrod  
and poison ivy,  
occasional clumps  
of wild blackberry.

I could name the town  
and place it on a map,  
but someone would be bound  
to misunderstand

my meaning.  
Believe they could find it here.  
Forget a town  
isn't a place

but a journey.  
Ripe with patchwork fences  
(some your own),  
whatever's stray,

and creeks that only  
local children name.  
Driving this road  
I remember

I never learned  
the name to,  
I want to say  
that now I'm part of this;

I've lived here long enough.  
That sometime back,  
some afternoon  
we both forgot,

my name became  
indigenous.  
Its sound  
in your mouth,

even when I hold you,  
now weathered  
to the smoothness  
of the front porch sway.

Its syllables  
as familiar  
and unmappable  
as gravel scattered after rain.

*Jack Stewart*

## My Mother Teaches About Apricots

Taut skin never could fool her.  
Her fingertips detected fraud in  
ruby-red tomatoes, bursting purple plums.  
From her, I learned alertness to the pale flesh  
below the surface, the disappointment  
lurking, unseen.

Although I longed for milk chocolate bunnies,  
she taught me the tart bite of an apricot,  
the rough skin that makes the tongue  
attempt retreat. A child could never  
be too tender, she said, to learn  
the taste of grief.

*Enid Litwak Baron*

## Lines for a Visitor in Space

*for C.M.\**

When I looked for the sky  
It wasn't there  
I breathed within a faultless lung  
My weight grown lighter than my final skull  
Every star I ever memorized gazed back at me  
From somewhere in the pages of my roll  
Hands flew up and clutched the universe  
But every name I called on echoed light  
Where was time going?  
Shouldn't I be grading?  
The whirl of density made galaxies  
Of loss, of tomorrow, my lift-off infinite  
As eyes of children staring at my chart

*Larry Rubin*

\*Christa McAuliffe, the schoolteacher who died  
in the Challenger disaster in 1986.

## Development

Woods forbidden by parents—  
snake-filled, tick-ridden,  
vine-strangled and razor-stalked,

our secret home, escape  
from home, war zone  
and shelter, nighttime

hide-and-peek's most feared  
and daring hiding place,  
shape for our unshaped

imaginations, where poison  
sumac and honeysuckle  
flowed over each other.

One morning on our way to school  
we saw two yellow trucks pull up,  
four men get out and start to measure.

Behind our backs it turned into  
the corner house that never sold,  
the seeded yard picked bare by birds.

The darkness there at night was all  
one shade, square as the picture window  
we dared ourselves to look through once.

Nothing we could see looked back  
at us, an emptiness within  
that none of us had known before.

*Eric Nelson*

## Woman with an Orange

*for ST*

Simple as a ball, it absorbs her.

She rolls it in her palms, senses  
the pressure she needs  
to peel away the firm  
protective layer without  
puncturing the flesh within.

The rind unrolls from her hands,  
reveals the ball inside the ball.

She goes deeper, slides  
her thumbs inside the dimple,  
pushes to the center and pulls  
the whole into halves, a single  
bead gliding toward her wrist.

One by one she frees  
the perfect crescents  
and gives them to her mouth,  
her lips swelling and darkening  
with each disappearing.

Consumed, it remains—  
an aura of orange around her.

*Eric Nelson*

## Mrs. Moore, in Biology

There she stood, extolling trillium,  
while we were fifteen, watching her  
rooted to the spot beside the desk,  
its shadow reaching us, to stunt  
our growth. This Woman of the Plants,  
as we called her, denied us our blood;  
we wanted passion to course through us  
faster than xylem can flow, faster than light  
can turn its green miracles with chlorophyll.  
We nodded to one another like daisies  
caught in the early breezes of spring,  
until one morning Mrs. Moore was replaced,  
as though out of season, by Rupert Frank,  
Vice Principal in Charge of Chastisement.  
We found out and believed much too late  
the truth of her absence, of her flight  
into a country we still dreamed of, her  
journey with Vincent Panelli, local  
disc jockey, fueller of flames, grower  
of the most secret orchid of all.

*Robert Parham*

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## Unemployed

Daffy Duck throws his deck chair into the blue pool;  
tees off on a dynamite stick. Featherless and smoking  
to the laughter of three mice in sombreros with guitars  
and maracas who planned it that way.

Daffy Duck's problems aren't as great however as the Coyote's  
who has just been hoodwinked by the Roadrunner and who is  
just now realizing the light at the end of the tunnel is  
a nuclear blast.

Ch. 2: A car chases another car.

Ch. 4: A car and a helicopter chase a truck.

Ch. 6: A car, a helicopter and a truck chase a motorcycle.

Ch. 8: A car, a helicopter, a truck, a motorcycle, four SWAT-  
teams and six black and whites with flashing lights  
chase a man on foot.

On Ch. 9 Mister Rogers changes shoes; tells me he likes me  
just the way I am.

The Three Stooges, on 88, after serving cornbread made from  
cement mix to the ladies of high society, fall asleep  
in a single bed, snoring at each other's feet.

My daughter wants to know why they sleep with their shoes on.  
My wife brings me a hamburger with an olive eyeball. Wimpy  
reaches out of Ch. 90, snatches it off my plate and swallows it.

I run out the door into the street which has turned into a  
tunnel. Featherless and smoking. Wishing everyone felt  
about me the way Mister Rogers feels.

*Seaborn Jones*

## The Snow Is Also Here for Scribbling

### I.

I pointed past the kitchen window  
 Sunday morning. Darling, look how beautifully  
 it covers everything. Yet snow is rare  
 in Georgia. Only every hundred years or so  
 a blanket deep as this one floats down  
 like a miracle in mid-March, baffling the eyes  
 with all its whiteness, opening the ears  
 with so much silence. Now it hid the mangled patch  
 of sod and splintered bark behind the porch  
 where, clumsily, I'd split our last three logs  
 late Friday. *Oh*, the crocuses are dead, I thought  
 and, opening the front room curtains, sighed  
 to see the deep drifts burying the daffodils,  
 just now in bloom, the tulips, tall as rabbits' ears,  
 forsythia and coral pansies bedded since December.  
 Seven days before official spring: our lawn,  
 our cars, hell, almost everything of shape and color  
 swallowed by the white-tailed dog of winter.

### II.

Even so, the silvery glow was overcoming  
 as the radiance of birth—or seeing someone's soul  
 if that were possible. I thought of Mrs. Beemer  
 and our chalky fifth grade blackboards. Punishment  
 back then was keeping us an hour after class  
 and making us erase the sentences she'd diagrammed,  
 the music teacher's lessons, fractions,  
 long division exercises, names of birds and trees.  
 She made us wipe away the leaves we'd traced:  
 the shiny, gentle-fingered *Quercus alba*,  
 saw-toothed beech and star-shaped sweet gum—  
 even *Acer saccharum*, the gold-veined  
 maple hands we'd held and drawn. Erasing them  
 that spring was sweet and sad. Just like the snow  
 this morning, covering impartially  
 the young with old, the good with bad:  
 a painted flower pot, a gaping driveway crack,  
 a green narcissus stem, a long-neglected, rusted bike. . .

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### III.

It didn't mind that I forgot to prune last week—  
 or that another pink-toed 'possum found our compost pit  
 and made a feast of buried cabbages and bacon fat.  
 Last autumn, from an aircraft cabin  
 twenty thousand feet above the North Atlantic,  
 coming on the frozen coast of Greenland  
 and its vast immeasurable unbrokenness—  
 I thought I saw the scattering  
 of well-worn paths, the zig-zag trails  
 where walrus and seals had left the ocean,  
 crossing small peninsulas of white  
 to reach a neighboring inlet. This was far  
 too beautiful a thing to be erased,  
 I thought: warm-blooded chalkmarks in a wilderness.  
 I couldn't take my eyes away from it. Nor from  
 the solitary path I later saw, meandering  
 across the snow plain toward the ice-encrusted shore,  
 the bright red circle where it ended: polar bear.

### IV.

Beneath the arbor seat I built last year  
 three rufous-sided towhees scratch and jitterbug.  
 They're looking for the seed I scattered  
 by the handfuls yesterday. Beyond them, squirrels  
 are tunneling for corn. And Carolina wrens  
 and titmouses contend for peanut butter perches.

Later, when the neighbor's kids have dragged  
 their obsolescent sled a hundred times across the yard,  
 slicing the jonquils, battering the English ivy,  
 when their tracks look more like lawyers'  
 endless cross-examinings, I guess I could be sad  
 or angry—yell out "Damn it all!" But no,

the snow is also here for scribbling. Remember,  
 Darling, how a pair of chipmunks wrote their little love song  
 while we sipped our tea this morning? It reminded me  
 of Vogel Park last winter. Fireplace and cabin,  
 camping naked in that weekend blizzard, how we rushed  
 outside and blessed the unwalked white like fallen angels.

Jack Hayes

## Falling Asleep with Your Children

*for Victoria Speckman*

Such pleasure in weariness!  
the week falls away, falls  
away—and you are safe  
in the ambulance of Friday.

Such weariness in pleasure!  
It is joy to drop the world  
at last, to let it bounce  
into some uncharted corner.

And goodbye to death  
in the small arms  
of your children, goodbye  
to pettiness in their petite  
desires. Such pleasure  
in this easing back, this late  
surrender. Oh, it is good to yield  
to what is sweet and genuine—  
  
this lull in the storm of breath:  
to feel their heads fall back  
against you, to feel the world  
fall back.

*Charles Fishman*

## Discovering the Old Language

I stalk this room of no windows and one door  
While my students ponder and scribble.  
She doesn't notice when I stop  
To watch over her shoulder.

She makes a list of metaphors  
As the assignment calls for  
And counts them on her fingers  
To be sure the number is right.

She cups them in her hand,  
Tumbles them all together  
And rolls out a new alphabet  
Like hieroglyphic dice.

Sensing a pattern in the world of chance,  
She stirs a line and shapes a sound.  
Suddenly the old language laughs a deep laugh  
And pushes a poem like a pie in her face.

Clusters of images cling to her lashes;  
Phrases fall from her lips and drip down her chin;  
A splatter of cryptic footprints crosses the blank page.  
She follows them out a different door,  
Forgets to ask her grade.

*David Hightower*

A child in your family makes you understand how really unimportant your life is. If I had my choice of being a great writer or a great parent, I'd always opt for the latter. I think any parent would. Having a daughter rather than a son has also been a very interesting education for me. It's made me much more aware of the ways our culture discriminates against women. It's made me aware of a lot of ugliness that I'd never noticed before and perhaps had even participated in.

**Browning:** Is there a place for poetry at the end of the twentieth century and what do you think that place might be?

**BOTTOMS:** I hope so, but I don't know. Our culture places so little importance on the arts and even on a liberal arts education. I'll give you an obvious example. I read in the paper a few days ago that the legislature is thinking about revising the requirements for a high school diploma because graduates can't get decent jobs. There's something very strange about this attitude, I think. College, also, is constantly pitched to students for the purpose of landing a job. The purpose of education, especially higher education, is not to land work. The purpose of education is intellectual and emotional growth. The arts play a significant role in this, but they're threatened in our culture because we emphasize the wrong things.

**Limehouse:** And how do we change that?

**BOTTOMS:** For one thing, all of the arts need to be more accessible. I heard on NPR yesterday that Joseph Brodsky and a friend have started a new program to put poetry in hotel rooms, right beside the Gideon Bible. I think that's a great idea. As they said, instead of a little mint on your pillow, you get Emily Dickinson or Walt Whitman. And maybe Robert Frost too. That's great. The folks distributing these books are even encouraging people to steal them. This is the kind of activism we need in the arts. People are hungry for cultural significance in their lives, and the serious arts are too inaccessible. Artists have an obligation to do everything they can to correct that.

**Limehouse:** Does that mean the Atlanta Symphony doing free concerts, or the Alliance Theater giving away free tickets, or poets doing free readings?

**BOTTOMS:** Yes, to a certain extent. And arts groups do this already, though not nearly enough. After all, it's in everyone's best interest to reach out to audiences who haven't been able to reach us.

**Browning:** So what do you think the function of a literary magazine should be?

**BOTTOMS:** To do what we've just been talking about. To reach out to an audience and make good poetry and fiction available and accessible.

NOW, SINCE

Now, since he's had children, my brother's become them, rises in the body of our father to brush the girls' hair, clean their fingernails with his silver penknife.

He fixes breakfast for everyone, holds them close to the table like a man working horses, feels a pain in his chest, as our mother did, when they scatter to school. Like her, he sits in the car stretching his mind after them, folding his body into a student's desk, and raises his hand behind each one to clarify what's too complicated for a child.

But then like our father he goes to work and forgets the children, spends whole days winding himself in ropes of his own manufacture until by dark when the girls come in he is exhausted and touchy. By now his house is unfamiliar to him. While supper dishes clatter like an overture, he lies in the darkened bedroom, a caricature of himself as a child, waiting for one of the beautiful girls, the one who looks like our mother, to come get him.

*Charlie Smith*



sight of the Golden Arches, the Burger Kings, and the Pizza Huts. But yes, Montana has a very strong and individual feel for me. It's one of the most unique places I've ever been. First of all, the landscape is amazing. The open spaces are overwhelming, and they make you feel totally insignificant. And the wildlife is, of course, very different from the wildlife in the South. You don't feel a great sense of history there, but you feel a much greater intimacy with the wilderness. They have grizzlies and mountain lions, so the woods can be very dangerous. And so can the winters. If you aren't careful, the elements can kill you. But living there for a couple of years was very good for me. I got a new perspective on my life and on my poems. I had a new country to work with and some pretty good work came out of it. I'm grateful for that.

**Limehouse:** When you were talking a little bit earlier about the South as a place, the traditions, and using this as material, a phrase came into my head, "a sense of sin."

**BOTTOMS:** Well, we live in the Bible belt.

**Limehouse:** But maybe sin also has to do with racial issues, and maybe with the whole Faulknerian family stuff, and maybe somehow with the density of the landscape, with the land being almost too green, too lush.

**BOTTOMS:** I don't know how much of that I feel personally. Probably not much. Certainly, I don't feel any racial guilt, though I feel the cultural burden of that, which is a different thing. Someone asked me in an interview once why I didn't write about racial issues. My response was something like "Wouldn't it be great to write *To Kill a Mockingbird*?" But Harper Lee already did that, and I don't believe I could top it.

**Limehouse:** Talking about the Bible Belt brings up something else. You use a lot of religious imagery—*In a U-Haul North of Damascus*, *Any Cold Jordan*, *Easter Weekend*.

**BOTTOMS:** Yes. I was raised in the Baptist Church. I'm a Christian, so that's a natural bag of images. If I were a Buddhist the images would be different.

**Limehouse:** Of course, you're not going to find that in the average *New Yorker* poem.

**BOTTOMS:** No, no. You're not. Which is neither good nor bad in terms of the poetry. But it may be a comment about the country we live in. It's a fairly secular place. And I don't like that much. I appreciate the mystery. And that's another thing I believe good poems do, they define the mystery for us. Not solve it, of course. But they teach us the right questions to ask.

**Browning:** What about religious music? Do you think there is any connection between religious music and the sound in your poetry?

**BOTTOMS:** No, not really. I think most Southern writers are influenced by the music in the King James Bible, but beyond that, I don't know. I don't

the years to trust my ear, and I'd be back and forth. I can hear these vowel sounds "Yes, there are sound devices working here. I can hear these vowel sounds operating, I can hear this happening." But I don't think consciously about it, not in the first few drafts anyway. I just let my ear operate. Mostly what I'm after, again, is dealing with something that's important to me, getting it on paper, and making the language work figuratively.

**Limehouse:** Does trusting yourself as a poet get easier?

**BOTTOMS:** It gets easier. That doesn't always mean you're right in doing it. I think as I've gotten older I spend less time at the typewriter searching for poems. Twenty years ago, I had the fire. I'd write a poem one afternoon and get it out in the mail the next morning. I'd keep 15 batches of things out in the mail. If I didn't have 15 out, then I was a failure. And if I didn't write constantly, I was a failure. One thing that's happened over the years is I've learned to do more editing in my head. I've learned what's going to work and what's not, so I don't beat myself up. I trust this sort of internal editor to tell me whether I need to go sit down at the typewriter.

**Limehouse:** I was just thinking when you were talking that there's a quote from Auden in *The Dyer's Hand*. He talks about a poet only knowing that he or she is a poet at the moment of finishing a poem. Up until that moment they were someone who was about to write a poem, and after that moment they are someone who has written a poem and may never write one again. Can you speak to that?

**BOTTOMS:** That's true, in a sense. When you know you're writing a good poem, you don't want to let it go. You don't want the whole creative process to end. It's euphoric. Another thing that's happened to me over the years is that I've learned to take a lot longer with a poem. I sort of relish the whole business of tuning it up. It's nothing now to tune one for six or eight months.

**Limehouse:** You wouldn't have done that when you were young?

**BOTTOMS:** No. Not enough patience. And I felt a terrific urgency to publish then that I just don't feel anymore. Now I'd rather get it right before I send it out.

**Limehouse:** Is that a function of maturity?

**BOTTOMS:** It's a function of understanding that you're never going to be rich anyway. Or famous. Or if you think you're famous, you'll never be famous enough. And what does all that account for? I think it's just a matter of settling down and understanding what's really important—and that's simply making the poem as solid as it can be.

**Limehouse:** That leads to another question. How has having a child affected your work or your perception of your work?

**BOTTOMS:** It's changed my perspective a great deal. I'm not the center of my universe anymore. I used to think the story of creation ended with

your stereo has an FM receiver. But you don't get the poem all at once the way your stereo picks up something off WABE. What you get from the world is an initial signal that a poem needs to be written. You take that signal, that idea or image, and you take it to your typewriter or your word processor or your No. 2 pencil and you flesh it out. You apply what you know about writing and try to make a poem out of it. The trick, I think, is learning to recognize the signal. Tuning in.

**Browning:** And how do you do that?

**BOTTOMS:** I think it has to do with the way you lead your life. First of all, you read and you learn how poems work. Then you simply make yourself as receptive to the world as you can. You watch for the signals to come in, and you wait. Jarrell described it as standing out in a thunderstorm. Seamus Heaney talks about the same thing in a very fine essay called "Feeling Into Words." But you don't sit down at the typewriter cold and expect to write a poem. You'll be there all day staring at a blank page, or just simply at a collection of words that don't mean very much.

**Limehouse:** I'm interested in the time issue, maybe because we are basically the same age. I wonder about this thing of being middle-aged. It seems to me we live in a culture where it's difficult to be a middle-aged poet. I don't know what we're supposed to be when we're over 40. Do you ever get that sense?

**BOTTOMS:** I don't know. I edited a book with Dave Smith called the *Morrow Anthology of Younger American Poets*, so I'm at least partly guilty of promoting some of that younger writer stuff. And now I'm not a young poet anymore. Yale sort of defined the term for us, didn't they? After forty you can't win the Yale award. In some ways I don't mind all the emphasis on younger poets—the Lavan Younger poet, the Yale Younger poet, *The Morrow Anthology*—because writers who are starting out need encouragement. But what we middle-aged folks have to remember is simply this—it's not a race. Good poems are written by poets of all ages. And the poem is all that counts.

**Limehouse:** But don't you think there's also this sense in our society, especially for artists, that you have some sort of special creative genius when you're in your early twenties, like Keats, and if you miss that moment, it's just too late?

**BOTTOMS:** Maybe there's some of that. But I don't think of poets in that way. Look at the late poems of Warren. Nothing he wrote in his twenties can stand up to *Now and Then*. I think I know what you mean though. There's a strange phase a writer passes into when he or she can't barter on promise any longer. Suddenly you're not a promising young writer anymore, and you're not distinguished yet either. There you are, just a writer, hopefully a good one, but nevertheless a writer who's stuck between promise and real accomplishment. And it's a frightening phase

there is between promising and good.

**Browning:** Haven't we touched on the question of ambition here?

**BOTTOMS:** Yes, but it's a foolish question. Any ambition beyond the poem itself is a misdirection. And dangerous.

**Browning:** Dangerous in what way?

**BOTTOMS:** In the sense that ambition beyond the page interferes. Too many people in this country see poetry as a career. It's not. Poetry is an art. You don't go to an MFA program to get a degree and get a job. You go to hone your writing skills. There are careerists and politicians in all the arts; poetry's no different. But none of that stuff makes your poems any better.

**Limehouse:** What do you think it means to be Southern in terms of your being a poet? People do tend to label poets as "Southern." Do you think it matters? Also, can you contrast how living in the South might be at work in your poetry versus, say, living in Montana, which also seems to have influenced your work.

**BOTTOMS:** I think it's very strange. We have a real literary heritage in the South, but it's always been sort of at odds with the rest of the country. I didn't really understand this until I moved out of the South for a while. I first started to understand how other folks look at us a few years ago when I went to Columbia University to do a reading. It was a symposium on Southern writers. I was there with Charles Wright and Robert Morgan. Cleopatra Mathis was there too. We had a good audience and they were very receptive, I mean, the place was full. I don't remember any specific questions, but there was a sort of Tobacco Road curiosity. Also, when I lived in Montana, I found out that in many parts of the country, folks don't like Southerners very much. My wife was very prejudiced against Southerners. She had this terrible notion that all Southern men are misogynists and racists and all Southern women are bimbos. So there are liabilities that come with being a Southerner. We're still regarded as cultural primitives. But the South is a fascinating place. We have a culture that's still unique. Wasn't it Faulkner who said that the past isn't dead, it's not even past? I live about a mile and a half from a Civil War battlefield, so I move through a piece of history every day.

**Browning:** What about the poems? How does living in the South affect your poetry?

**BOTTOMS:** Well, the history and the culture obviously enter the poems, but I think that the South has a unique feel to it also. The landscape, the animals, the trees, all give it a special feel. Even the weather. That turns up in the poems. I think that "Shooting Rats" could've only been written in the South.

**Browning:** Did Montana have a special feel also?

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find a poem that's just a little story chopped up into 25 or 30 lines. To me that's not what poetry is all about. I want the poem to suggest something beyond the literal, and the narrative provides an opportunity for that. It provides a context in which the language can work figuratively. What I mean is this—a good poet can find ways of embedding triggers in the narrative surface to make the language leap to another level of meaning.

**Limehouse:** Could you talk about that in terms of "Under the Vulture Tree," say, or "Sign for My Father," poems that seem to be extremely successful in that way?

**BOTTOMS:** Well, that baseball poem depends entirely on word-play. The figurative meaning develops out of a series of puns that come near the end of the poem. By the time the reader hits the last word "sacrifice," he or she has come to understand that the poem is not so much about learning to bunt as it is about the sacrifice the father has made for the son. The narrative surface, the story about the father teaching the boy to bunt, is interesting, of course. But to me it's really important only in the way it works figuratively in the poem. That's what we call in my classes the DHM, the Deep Hidden Meaning, a phrase I lifted from my friend Jim Seay. And it's the word play that allows the figurative possibility to reveal itself.

**Limehouse:** So the narrative just provides a literal level for the poem?

**BOTTOMS:** Yes, usually. It has to work literally first. Another interesting thing about narrative, though, is that it can operate figuratively itself, apart from language. This happens when the narrative pattern touches the mythic or the archetypal.

**Browning:** Can you give us an example of that—one of your poems?

**BOTTOMS:** I'd say that poem "Under the Boathouse." When the swimmer in the poem dives to the bottom of the lake and gets caught on a fish hook, he follows the pattern of submersion, symbolic death, and resurrection. The pattern itself is archetypal—like baptism. I think Jung called it the "myth of the night journey." A good example is Jonah and the whale—the big fish swallows Jonah, takes him down to a symbolic death, then surfaces and spits him out into a new life. The pattern repeats itself in any number of myths.

**Browning:** I heard you say once that people accuse you of having "hard closures." What exactly do they mean? Do they mean the poem ends too neatly?

**BOTTOMS:** Yes, I think so. Maybe "accuse" is not exactly the right word, but people have said that. Often the poems will turn near the end and try to make a figurative leap there. But not always. I've always liked that, though, because it seems to give the poem a final punch, and I've <sup>developed</sup> it steadily over the years. I remember somebody writing in

didn't strain for closure the way some of the earlier ones did, and in fact that. But I don't remember making any conscious effort at that. I haven't experimented much with form or approach in my poems. I hit on what I wanted to do relatively early, I think, and I've been pretty content in my efforts to try to perfect it. And that's okay.

**Limehouse:** We did want to ask a question about how you've changed over the years. Do you feel like you compete with your earlier self in any way or that people maybe expect you to?

**BOTTOMS:** Yes, I think so. If you write some stuff you like and live long enough to look back at it, you'll always feel like you're competing with yourself. I'd like to write another poem as good as "Vulture Tree" or "Under the Boathouse." But maybe I have and just don't know it. After taking time out for two novels, I'm writing poems again, and I like some of them very much.

**Limehouse:** Is that a difficult transition?

**BOTTOMS:** Yes, for me it is. It's a totally different kind of imagination. It's really hard to write fiction, to concern yourself with everything that goes into a novel, the fleshing out of a situation, characterization, plot, then go work on a poem, which is a distilling, a condensing.

**Browning:** So you think that the two processes are more dissonant, that they don't really inform each other?

**BOTTOMS:** To me the two processes are almost opposite. I much prefer the poems to the fiction. Maybe I'm just better at it, I don't know, but I much prefer the poems.

**Limehouse:** You said it takes a different sort of imagination. What do you mean by that?

**BOTTOMS:** Maybe sensibility is a better word. Fiction and poetry are just made in different ways. Fiction requires a long commitment to the page. You plot your novel out in a few weeks, and you work on it for two or three years. You don't work eight hours a day for a year on poems. You work just as hard, I think, but it's a different kind of labor. The imaginative experience is much more intense. People who say they sit down at their typewriters every morning at nine to write poems are suspicious to me. Poems just don't come that way.

**Limehouse:** Where do they come from?

**BOTTOMS:** Well, I'm not sure I know. I wish I could just go to the kitchen faucet and turn it on and have a poem come out, but that's not what happens. They come from the world, of course, but they also come through you.

**Browning:** Are you saying that the poet receives poems in some way?

## The Poetry Receiver:

### An Interview with David Bottoms

#### *Deborah Browning and Capers Limehouse*

David Bottoms' first book, *Shooting Rats at the Bibb County Dump*, was chosen by Robert Penn Warren as winner of the 1979 Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets. His poems have appeared widely in such magazines as *The Atlantic*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *The Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *American Poetry Review*, and others, as well as in numerous anthologies and textbooks. He is also the author of two other poetry collections, *In a U-Haul North of Damascus* and *Under the Vulture-Tree*, as well as two novels, *Any Cold Jordan* and *Easter Weekend*. Among his other awards are the Levinson Prize from *Poetry* magazine, an Ingram Merrill Award, an NEA fellowship, and an Award in Literature from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters. This interview was conducted by Deborah Browning and Capers Limehouse on March 17, 1994, in his office at Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he teaches creative writing.

**Browning:** Could we start by asking about your progenitors? I wonder if you can trace specific instances of their influence in your poetry, or is the influence more unconscious?

**BOTTOMS:** The first real influence I remember, and it was a large one, was when I was a student at Mercer University. Everybody at Mercer in the late '60's was writing like Dylan Thomas. And so was I. I was writing very bad, good-sounding poems. My initial impulse was musical, all my poems were coming from sounds. I thought if you came up with a great line and you put thirteen more behind it, you had a sonnet, and a sonnet was a poem. So I wrote a lot of poems like that. Then I'd go back two weeks later and read them again and find them totally incomprehensible. About my senior year, when I was editing the school literary magazine, I found a new direction. I met my very first living poet, a man named James Seay, who teaches now at Chapel Hill. Jim had just published his first book, *Let Not Your Heart*, and he had come to Mercer to do a reading. It was the first poetry reading I'd ever heard, and I was pretty amazed. He's a very sort of striking figure—a tall, thin guy with long, blond hair and a black eye-patch over his eye. Very swashbuckling. Just what you might picture a poet to look like. He was born in Panola County, Mississippi, and his poems had a strong narrative content. I really liked them, and I latched onto him. I was trying to learn something. We spent three or four days together while he was in Macon, and I think he directed me to the poems of James Dickey. Then I started reading Warren and other Southerners. But from that point on I

**Browning:** I'd call that an identifiable influence.

**BOTTOMS:** James Dickey was a big influence also. But that was later on. I think when I was in my early twenties, I was too stupid to know how good Dickey's poems really are. I've heard a number of Southern poets say, poets mostly of the generation before me, that Dickey's work was just so good that they felt discouraged reading it. A professor I had at Florida State told me that once early in his career he was trying to do the same sort of thing Dickey was doing and after reading Dickey he felt like he had to change his whole approach. Dickey intimidated a lot of writers in this way. I'm lucky, I think, because there are 27 or 28 years between us, and I was too dumb to be intimidated. I just went on and did what I felt like doing.

**Limehouse:** I wonder if you were just being self-protective?

**BOTTOMS:** Maybe. But I didn't discover the real force of his poems until I was in my late twenties, I guess.

**Browning:** So you didn't let his influence thwart your early development.

**BOTTOMS:** That's right. I know I learned a great deal from him, but I don't think I knew enough then to let his poems frighten me off my home turf. Does that make sense?

**Limehouse:** Yes. So do you think now that you write like Dickey in any way?

**BOTTOMS:** Actually, I don't. We've written about the same things occasionally—we're from the same part of the country, and we have many of the same interests, and because of that people like to toss us into the same boat—but we don't approach things in the same way. Fred Chappell said one time that he thought Dickey and I were about as far apart as you could get in terms of our approach. I think he's right. He said that Dickey writes these big, expansive poems, and I write these muscular, compressed poems. Dickey tends to expand and I tend to compress. My approach is actually a lot closer to James Wright or to Roethke. But I love Dickey's poems and he's been a great and positive influence.

**Browning:** There's been a lot of talk recently about the role of narrative in poetry. I heard you say something once about the "narrative surface" of a poem. What did you mean by that?

**BOTTOMS:** Well, I meant just that. All of my poems depend heavily on narrative, but I mean it to work only as a surface for the poem. A lot of stuff goes into poetry—I know that. But what has always been most fascinating to me is the way language can work figuratively. Narrative is interesting, but it's not enough. You can read an awful lot of literary magazines these days and

## Mother at 75

An ocean, wild and vast  
is now my mother's mind.  
The pelicans glide in loose  
formation out of her eyes.  
I sit quietly and trawl,  
gather in nets and try  
to read the random tides.  
Sometimes they turn up clues,  
an octopus on a Minoan jug,  
the incense cask of a village  
priest, with bells that still ring  
through the rust. I sift,  
toss back strange whelks,  
the pipefish whose faces I don't know.  
Some snapshots surface, a man  
on a dock in uniform.  
His arm circles the ripeness  
of a woman in summer dress.  
More faded, an older woman  
whose face wears loss like an island  
home, by the mustached man  
who clutches a round-backed mandolin.  
Four children gather at their feet,  
the one girl looking as though  
she knows you, or did once.  
The brine runs out, slips  
between my fingers. I hear  
the distant shorebirds cry.

*Derek Economy*

## Dying in Early Spring

There are things of common beauty  
here: jonquils and cherry blooms.  
I wish that you would bring  
something from Bombay or San Francisco.  
And yourself. The familiar and dear  
faces of friends are not enough.  
If I must, and it seems I must, go  
into that dark cave Oblivion, I think  
it would be loving of you to hold  
a made-in-Taiwan statue of Elvis  
above me, in such a way that children's  
grief could not hurry my leaving.  
For the silly sake of all we are and were,  
sing "Gatherin' o' the Clan" loudly,  
lewdly; unhush this reverent air  
with scandal while I become (My world!  
My friends! My children! All I know!)  
the memory of a lady who made bread.

*Neva Vinetta Hacker*

## The Magic Door

As I grow older  
I grow more alone,  
and lonely  
for something  
I cannot name.  
Like a tree  
fully clothed in sun  
and turning toward the night,  
I search  
for the magic door  
of nakedness.  
A cup  
near the window  
fills with light.  
Green tomatoes  
pulse on the sills.  
Do these pears  
still breathe yellow  
when I turn away?  
Every day  
my eyes paint a world  
and feed it to the fire.  
All day  
wings paint wind.  
The trees  
keep their ivory  
a secret,  
but in the night  
they let it speak,  
an owl of bone  
gleaming in ebony.

*Sarah Patton*

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## Gathering the Light

In the church across from the *jardin*  
in San Miguel, the Mexican women  
walk down the aisle, their dark rebozos  
covering their bowed heads.  
Each woman carries a candle.  
  
I am a tourist here and have no candle.  
Only a sad heart,  
and a walking stick with a curved handle  
on which I rest my forehead when I pray.  
  
This is the summer before the stroke  
that will paralyze my left side,  
leaving me feeling frantic,  
trapped in my own body. But today  
I memorize the strong, determined faces  
of the Mexican women, candlelit and beautiful.  
And I gather the light in my heart  
to take home.

*Margaret Robison*

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## Words That Must Be Whispered

1. The crows,  
and their dark brothers  
the ravens, watch me.  
  
They sit in the green  
curl of the cottonwoods,  
in the glossy blue-black  
above the river's brown  
spine, and they stretch  
their ruffled necks above  
the ragged shroud  
of their wings,  
and they watch me.  
  
2. I know now that the birds  
are waiting  
for me, waiting  
for me to shed the hard skin  
of the past, to grow  
lustrous black wings  
and come to them,  
among yellow leaves  
at the trees' tops,  
come to them  
to hear the words  
they are holding for me,  
for me alone, words  
that must be whispered  
beneath a canopy of leaves.

3. I have watched these birds  
where they knifed across my days,  
ravens as auguries, crows  
as black bits  
broken off from my dreams.  
And I imagined them  
mute, obsessed  
with children, arrogant  
atop helical shafts  
of heated air,  
pitiless,  
these black birds  
  
4. expect too much, are asking  
too much  
of a man  
like me,  
a man  
with children.  
But the birds just watch  
with their crow eyes  
and their crow thoughts,  
and they wait  
with their words  
among the leaf-green shadows.

*Gerald N. Callahan*

# After Lightning

*for J.*

I think of you each time I pass the tallest tree  
beside the lake. It has to do with lightning,  
how a streak cracked its whip so close  
I screamed inside its blind flash and the children  
came racing from their rooms.  
Later we found the tree, upright, but with a deep  
tear from crown to root, huge shards of bark  
thrown down upon the grass. Now when

I look at you, so many months since the death  
of your son, I see the tree, the damp persistent  
wound, the permanent bolt of white in your hair,  
how it flowers in the dark.

*Lisa Horton Zimmerman*

She has learned in her own life how to wait,  
how not to watch the clock.  
She trusts the ticking in her own body,  
trusts the elastic  
of tendon and bone, the way to ease the  
wet cranium, tiny shoulders, the bony  
buttocks of a breech, and how much blood  
is too much.

She brings with her to the house  
direction, endurance, deep quiet.  
Fathers calm in her presence  
sensing she understands this landscape  
and how to shorten the distance.  
Sometimes the women see her  
back on the threshold they've just crossed  
as they whirl down and down  
she is still there, dark figure on the edge  
holding the one rope, steady.

Afterward, when life takes its new shape  
she ties the blue cord, rinses blood away,  
makes tea, always on the periphery,  
intimate stranger.

Unnoticed, she takes herself home  
to her house with its own needs,  
chaos of laundry, supper, tall  
rebellious children, to sleep  
the sleep of the newborn.

*Lisa Horton Zimmerman*



## The Old Folks Remember

1. When we were young  
and had no other place to go  
we made our bed  
in the county cemetery  
and rolled through the summer nights  
oblivious to the buried dead  
though at times we heard them  
bang their low ceilings  
like irate neighbours  
trapped in stuffy tenements. What did  
we care—we were young  
and had no interest  
in the personal problems of corpses.
2. I'm sorry if we interrupted  
the monotonous tune  
the dead hum. Sorry if we broke  
their concentration  
with our thoughtless moans  
and sighs. Sorry  
if we forced them to remember  
what they were trying  
to forget.

3. Now we are old  
and often catch ourselves humming  
that same vague melody. We feel ashamed  
of time, and cannot look each other  
in the eye.

But sometimes in summer  
when the earth smells  
of a woman's love  
the wind blows the years away  
like so many cobwebs  
and we fall back gladly  
to that place  
among the tombs and willows.

Once again I plow  
that fertile ground  
with her long and beautiful  
backbone  
and she groans and whispers  
"We are still alive."

*Jack Evans*

## Public Art

The first lesson in the wax museum  
Is to keep moving. Bend a knee or elbow,  
Blink conspicuously, lest—  
As once happened to my grandmother—  
Someone touches your cheek and recoils  
In terror, crying, "It's alive!"

The man on the museum steps  
Has not learned this lesson;  
He has not moved since morning.  
He is off somewhere else,  
His skin left here to hold  
His place on some invisible line.  
Passersby check to see if  
He is a Segal or a Duane Hanson,  
A random bit of public art.

Secretly, of course,  
That is what he wants.  
He wishes to be mistaken  
For a sculpture of some himself  
He has, just for now, stopped being.  
He is a work in progress,  
Hanging in some warm gallery  
Of the imagination  
Where the floor is softer  
And the draft not quite so chill.

*Ted Taylor*

## Bones in November

Bone weary, still, I half sleep in bed.  
I have no bones.  
It is too early in the day to have bones.  
They don't form until I have coffee.  
I am weary from the sheer motion of the week.

The chimes on the patio move delicately,  
Careful not to make too much noise,  
Like the first one up on Sunday morning.  
The old cat (all bones by now), stirs at the motion,  
Jumps off the bed and begins to eat at last night's food.  
I should move, I should feed him. He'll be sick as a dog.  
Part of my brain says cats cannot be sick as dogs.

Part of my brain is eleven again, in panhandle Florida,  
Six men wait with me in a barbershop.  
They have crewcuts and bib overalls and tattoos.  
They begin to argue why cats have nine lives.  
They debate the whole time I am there.  
Finally, they decide that cats live nine lives  
Because they have no bones.

And early on a November Sunday morning,  
Thirty or so years later, lying still in bed,  
I realize that sharks are always in motion  
Because, having only cartilage,  
They can never be weary down to the bone.

*Ted Taylor*

## 350 Lb. Poem

My sisters appear in monosyllabic bikinis nibbling haiku on beds of lettuce.

Bulimic blank verse girls and centerfolds of prose wearing short words and skimpy devices. You run your fingers down their soft vowels, across their slender stanza bones, watching the line breaks belly dance across the page on Dexatrim.

Remember, they are only figures of speech,

laying out on the page, slathered in sunscreen, wearing punctuation marks that barely cover their assonance.

They part their titles and kiss you villanelle.

I, with my appetite for date-filled description, bite rotund adjectives and bloat paragraphly.

I down the lexicon whole, snarf a raw thesaurus, lick the spell-checker, binge between dark pages,

and break out in boils and ballads.

I put on bulky clothing to cover up my large vocabulary and try to appear in small print.

Tenaya Darlington

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## Circling This Morning the Tall Bright House She Lands and Sings

for P. Carey Reid

Birds everywhere: fluff-finch, cherry-pincher, flustering blue conundrum—not what you called them, yet somehow in your style, that darting quick-alert smile, as you beckon me next to you, leaning at the window midway up your polished stairs. We watch as wee tuft-knitters circle your seed-packed feeders, two-step the tough

March ground and scratch maybe just for the sound of it. “Heart-wings are looking especially bright

this year,” you say, then we pray the shady soulsearchers somehow will stay away

and let the lighter spirits feast. I point out prints in the powdery lawn you can’t explain, which pleases me: it looks as if discoveries can be made from here, and mysteries can unfurl the sky,

the way you open up your palms like wings to me and let me fly.

Diane Wald

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## Ghost Month

It is ghost month in Taipei, Taiwan,  
the gates of the hereafter have opened,  
letting the spirits out to eat,  
sightsee, create mischief,  
whisper to the undead.  
Marriages are down, and  
real estate sales slow.  
Even the doubters offer small feasts  
to hungry ghosts  
in front of store fronts.  
The beaches are less crowded.  
No one wants to be seen in trunks or  
a bikini by deceased grandparents.

Here in Akron, Ohio,  
my future husband has demanded  
my father's ashes not move with me  
when our households join.  
He feels uneasy about  
having an urn in the living room, or hall.  
I have stopped talking to my own reflection  
in the black marble face,  
except for occasional editorials,  
birthday wishes,  
monologues during moments of weakness,  
and honestly, the urn is covered  
in ash-like dust right now,  
in my half-abandoned apartment.  
Anticipating marriage, I  
am planning our Caribbean honeymoon  
from my fiancé's bed  
for when ghost month is over.

Still, before interment,  
perhaps a feast.  
Homemade spaghetti just like  
I made for him the week before he died,  
black coffee and  
a whole pan of fudge.

*Tiff Holland*

4

## Onion

This onion is a god. In its brown wrapper  
It's come to beg for shelter for the night.  
Do not turn it away. It may look like  
A beggar but underneath its wrinkled skin  
It has a strong, firm, tight, smooth body.  
It will leap into action if you cut it.  
Your tears prove its great and hidden strength.  
Its juice will heal your wounds and it will guard  
Your kitchen to the death. Take it with you  
Into battle and you'll remain invincible.  
Your weapons will strike home. No one will stand  
Against you. You'll blow everyone away.

*Peter Huggins*

5

## Men at Work

My father rises from the grave  
at dawn. He always left early for work,  
slammed the door behind him  
with a hammer's bang. I watch him  
vanish once more in the graveyard-colored  
morning, his lunch bucket dark  
with the mysteries of working men's lives.

*Father where's the work you went to?*

This dawn I trace him back  
to the coffee shop where he meets  
with other men who'd worked themselves  
into the grave. As before, I gaze  
at their world through the picture window.  
They shuffle in, large and alone,  
and file past the coffee machine as if  
punching in. Their cups still steam  
like smokestacks; their fingers,  
too thick for handles, are still wrapped  
tightly around the warmth.

*Father I can't find my work.*

Time lets me enter. I sit with him  
sipping the years away. Men speak about  
work, jobs they left unfinished,  
assembly lines that carried them away.  
Men with nothing but time  
watch the wall clock and wait to be  
whistled to work. Men without tongues  
argue about why the sun's so late.

*The machinery's stopped, father,  
the factory's shut down. There's time  
for refills while you toothpick  
the blackness from your nails. Father  
tell me about work.*

Sherman Pearl

2

## A Rose d'Isfahan in Maine

You can cut turf in the grown-over  
weedy dooryard  
of the old farmhouse by the sea,  
turn up a crop of buried stones,  
then snug down  
the tendrils roots of your shrub rose,

sod it in, pour on the necessary  
bucket of water.

Good luck. Neither your rose's pedigree

from the arms of a Norman duchess  
and, before her,

the pleasure garden of a Prince of Persia,

nor its portraits, minuscule on vellum  
or by Gobelin,  
prinked in stitches, will impress the weather.

Leave it to the wind's ministrations,  
to fog as cool

as a seal's breath, and the intermittent

skillet of the sun. So may it thrive with yarrow,  
uncouth dogbane,  
and milky ways of daisies in the rumpled meadow.

Daniel Hoffman

3

## Ferris Wheel

Backing up gently to stars,  
cradled above simmering fairgrounds  
beyond a blare of honky-tonk,  
we hold on to this ride  
before I jump into high school.  
The ferris wheel stops, creaks on the verge,  
and its sway makes me mute  
at earth rumbling beneath,  
constellations a confusion above,  
and father by my side  
huge and solid against gravity  
tugging at my dangling legs.

My father sits unperturbed,  
one who has mastered  
rocks and heavy machinery. He places his great  
calloused hand over my untried one,  
proud, believing I will make  
the head of the class in America.  
He hums a Neapolitan tune of love  
and I sit closer to the bulwark of his chest.  
I am unsure, but I will not tell him.

In silence we rock,  
the gondola high above the Sound's chill  
that blows in traces of rotting alewives,  
caramel corn, diesel smoke, manure,  
an acrid hint of fall.  
I want to say, thank you, father  
for the good ride. But the wheel  
starts its slow-motion shush,  
my knees shake, I am breathless,  
there is no end to our descent,  
no bottom to our separate darks.  
We drop dazed into a blaze of carnival lights.

*Geri Radacsi*

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It's a pleasure to greet you on the front porch of our new magazine. We believe you'll find plenty of good company here—fresh, intelligent, appealing fiction, interviews, personal essays, and, in issues to come, features on the current international literary scene.

But most of all, we are here to bring you that rarest and most endangered of species: real poetry. We have mined through thousands of poems from across the U.S. and around the world, to bring you poetry that does what great literature is supposed to do—refresh the mind, the heart, and the spirit. If the idea of finding delight, even joy, in a literary magazine is a bit shocking, we suggest you sit down before you begin reading the *Atlanta Review*.

There have been complaints lately about the increasing blandness and homogenization of American poetry, what Donald Hall has dubbed the "McPoem." I'm reminded of Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, "The Celestial Railroad." This enterprise, run by a certain Mr. Smooth-it-away, promises to transport modern spiritual pilgrims to the Celestial City in complete comfort, safety, and convenience. The railroad's true destination, however, is a good deal hotter than the one advertised.

Mr. Smooth-it-away will not be our conductor today. Rather, we'll set out, on foot and lighthearted, on the open road, where Walt Whitman promises us, not the "old smooth prizes," but "rough new prizes."

In this issue of the *Atlanta Review* you'll discover an incredible variety of physical, human, and spiritual geography, from "Angel Dances" in Appalachia to "Skateboarding in Sarajevo." We'll traverse every age and stage of human life, from birth to death—and after. This is topography as rugged and inspiring as anyone could wish for. It is also evidence that we have become, to an extent that few of us realize, the vast and varied democracy of poetry that Walt Whitman dared to dream of more than a hundred years ago.

Dan Veach  
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*Atlanta Review*

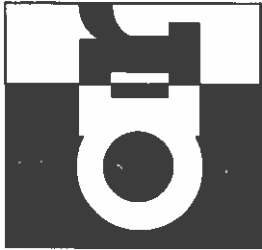




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# ATLANTA REVIEW



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An Interview with *David Bottoms*  
Poetry by *Turner Cassity, Daniel Hoffman, Charlie Smith*