

## Making a Woman

Listen to me. Even if you have no memory of this,  
the woman you call Mother sits behind you, slowly working  
the knots out of your hair. Her other children scream,  
knock each other on the head, waste butter  
by smearing it on the walls. She might as well be deaf  
the way she's ignoring them, your hair and its untangling  
could be God, she's separating the strands so slowly,  
never once glancing at her watch. It doesn't hurt much,  
a short tug here and there, some small bird maybe,  
pretending your hair is grass. *Too soon, too soon,*  
it whispers, and suddenly, your head half-done, she's lifted away  
from you like an eagle's grabbed her by the heels.

You look up but the sky is empty, the same instant  
you feel your lap filling up with daughter. You look down—  
*Her hair what a mess!* How the comb got into your hand  
you don't know, but you try to do what the little bird says:  
*First you cry and cry,*  
*then you sigh...*  
*then you start somewhere.*

*Francette Cerulli*

## The Third Little Pig

They say happiness is an invitation  
to your own pig roast. Not since the wolf  
stopped breathing heavily at my door  
have I had a visitor, an invitation.

I know—I know—pigs are not exactly popular.  
And the old sow said there'd be days like this  
sitting by the fire looking through snapshots  
of my two brothers' disaster-ridden houses.

Still, you can say construction has been  
very, very good to me. It's kept the wolf  
at the door from coming inside, although,  
I sometimes think it would have been better

to be wanted, to have felt hunger's  
hot breath on my neck just once more  
in my life, to have been consumed by fire—  
fear—love—the apocalypse—or even the wolf

at my door—anything—but this lonely, comfy  
boredom without even a good bedtime story.

*Timothy Mayo*

## Baking Pies

Such fat satisfaction:  
half a pound of butter  
in each pecan confection,  
syrup & bourbon. Is this  
Damnation or Pure Joy?  
The witch's pre-heated oven,  
the sickly sweet concoction—  
Oh the power in the kitchen  
with its warmth and knives,  
its heart of home and careful  
tools, and its temptations:  
the round erotic plump  
of pumpkin flesh, steamed  
& pureed & spiced;  
the exact amounts of butter  
& flour & milk to make  
a crust; the rolling pin,  
the haggard wife's stump;  
the perfect skin of dough;  
the peel & core & slice  
of apples. We are goddesses.  
We are fat-thighed, fertile,  
bleeding and nourishing.  
We are milky and sweet  
and we know secrets  
and we know lives; we are  
the midwives, the bakers.  
We are also the practical ones:  
we have counted the eggs  
and laid out exact plates  
at the table. We will  
feed & feed & feed.  
There is always enough.  
We know this, how there's  
always more at the feast,

more than enough.  
So when he comes to the door  
shoeless, torn shirt, wild  
with fright, we know  
we must not hesitate. Vagabond  
mystery our soul would die  
without it the bread  
would not rise. *Come in,*  
we whisper, *come in and eat.*

*Gwen Strauss*

## In Seclusion

1.  
January 5. I'm having an eremitical pang on the feast day  
of St. Simon or Simeon looniest of all the desert fathers  
I who couldn't get away from parents husbands children  
dogs and cats who could never just walk  
over any horizon into any sunset have read a poem  
so beautiful it cracked my ribs and sent me to the bio page  
to find the poet the unknown wonder "now living in seclusion"

which is somewhere south of Scranton maybe a location different from  
solitude from living alone or being dumped or having the little ones  
leave the nest Seclusion is the nest with a Dutch-door cottage  
open to long walks the time to read and write and healthful lunches  
of grains and sprouts time to enjoy those decorator touches  
flowers in a blue bowl probably trillium a recorder a music stand  
the music *Giunge 'l bel tempo* Who wouldn't sign on

But not for my likelier scenario to crawl along the silhouette  
of mountains taller than the lid of the mind's eye or wash up  
on a beach that must be Nova Scotia or the gray NJ shore  
head for a house inland a clearing in the woods not gingerbread  
but Unabomber mode a cabin curtainless and filthy windows  
plastered with the classifieds and inside a table with an odd triangular  
stain bare mattress stone for a pillow a clutch of poultry  
waiting to be eaten needing care

2.  
To get away a way away from it all from some of it  
or any of it better change your name and look for  
a new backyard in Iowa The plaid shirt on the clothesline in a color  
you would never wear will wave hello and in less pain than it takes  
to lose your fingerprints you will make a new life where everything  
has changed except your memories There in that alien corn  
keep a low profile eat in stay out of churches Private devotions

will bring you to the saint of the day Simeon looking to be alone  
traveled to the desert For a hideout he built his first pillar  
just 9ft high and made the climb The curious came to see him  
standing tall

So two more columns higher every time his fourth and last  
at 60ft built by the crowd itself his audience  
for solitude as spectacle groupies who liked a good long-running show  
Clever of him to find that hermitage to weather like a rock  
The serial stylite turning in whatever direction put the wind at his back  
the sun on a face he no longer remembered

*Annette Sloan*

## River

On Cockspur Island the white shell paths  
wind through a hammock of wax myrtle,  
cedar, cabbage palm, liveoak, all  
clattering loud in the southerly wind.

Branches *thunk* together  
inventing percussion.

Hammock and tidal marsh shimmer the song  
of invisible life: cicadas humming their  
rare passion,  
frogs and birds unseen, refined  
to pure sound.

Dragonflies stitch the air above a seameadow,  
orb weavers catch strips of rainbow in their webs,  
lazy creeks shine blue questions between green  
banks studded with seedheads the once  
and future blooms of beach coreopsis  
I feel the pleasure and fullness of knowing  
that fish rest hidden there, with turtle and alligator  
and in the thickets, raccoon, possum, rabbit, fox...  
unobserved, observing me.

I'm just wishing a ship would appear  
looming like a moving city, blocking out the sky  
as it slides by downchannel to the sea,  
massive and silent as the river's body beneath its keel  
red and yellow smokestacks raked back to mime speed  
to recall the masts of my great-grandfather's schooner:  
I would be another Waving Girl  
I think, and feel  
my mother and grandmother,  
aunts and great-aunts  
rise up ready in me, ready here  
on this spit of land—tidal island  
and home turf—to lift their arms and offer greeting  
beside this flood that washes and drains  
homeplace, nursing home, burial ground, my bare feet.

Instead, a deer—  
big whitetail doe—  
preceded by a startled mockingbird  
leaps across the path  
hangs an instant in the air  
eye swiveled to take me in  
almost close enough to stroke  
filling up sight and mind  
leaving  
a hot swirl of her scent and  
a leaf  
skittering on the path after her.  
Then, a stillness so complete  
I hear my own blood beating in my ears.

*Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin*

## The Thing Maslow Forgot to Mention

Lying in my lap these stray kittens, sharp little bones  
barely softened by dirty fur, faces smeared  
and ears wet with potions against the  
ills of neglect and lovelessness  
bellies distended from their  
broken fast, finally  
purr  
because my thighs are warm  
because my hand moves firm  
and gentle from triangular faces to  
tail tips gone limp with bliss. The smoky one  
lifts her bleary eyes to search mine as if seeking  
Truth and, finding it, sleeps within the curl of my palm.

I whisper  
*This is it isn't it?*  
The Touch, never mind  
warm beds, safety, food or  
rest or pink droplets of antibiotic:  
this, the healing draught I pour out on you.  
(And who will come lift this cup to *my* lips?)

This is the mortar  
this, the cornerstone.  
At the base of the spine,  
at the roots of the tree of life,  
at our birth when we are stroked  
from one strong holding into another, everything  
is Touch:

the foundation of the pyramid  
the center of gravity  
the basis of Life.

Death  
is the place  
where we no longer feel  
the laying-on of hands.

*Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin*

*Maslow* Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist who developed  
a hierarchy of needs.

## Sheepdog Trials at Bleinau Ffestiniog

At the bottom of the field, like woolly boats,  
three sheep appear. They're unaware, of course,  
that this is a race, and the first one's gently drifting  
off to the left, and another bobbles and floats  
the other way, when something—a gale? a force—  
tears at them—veers—its direction shifting, shifting—

a black and white Hermes, fur and motion spurred  
by a single message, a single mission: to herd.  
A centrifugal ewe like a prodigal yacht  
sails out in a stately and leisured trot  
but huffily reconsiders, deterred  
by the scouring dog; and the second and third

who are heading off—confronted, stop:  
he's there; and the trio slews around,  
jibing in unison, parallel. Then,  
in a climax of ecstasy—he drops  
suddenly, puddle-flat, onto the ground  
and sends the flotilla of sheep to the pen.

And the lumbering trainer, rubber-shod,  
closes the gate with his crook and slogs  
across to the dog who, you could say, ran  
because he was told to. You could say the man  
created the dog. But no—the dog,  
who was made by the wind, is a little god.

Deborah Warren

## Beyond *Verdad*: A Spring Poem with High School Spanish

*For Columbine and Kosovo*

*Las niñas* sprawled among the bloody books,  
*Los niños* tossed in the stinking ditch,  
if I could give you this pristine day, I would.  
But dumb luck has me ambling this walk, smack  
in the middle of workday tedium,  
pondering *primavera* and *amor*.

The air is a simile, soft as the brush  
of shy lips. The verbs *besar* and *lavar* come to me.  
Periwinkles scribbled on the lawns are *azul*  
as the sky and dandelions bob the breeze,  
insisting on a wacky *amarillo*.  
Dogwoods frisk, blossoms pink as little girls'  
dresses on a small town Sunday.

I'm *stupido*, lack *profundidad*,  
won't admit to the bloody notch  
in each dogwood petal, a bumpkin  
at the *fiesta* for Our Dear  
Lady of Perpetual Gore.

Just tapping along, tossing in a clog or two.  
I'm thinking of a lover's sundress, that one  
with little gold cotton balls on the hem, how they  
swayed, flirting with her brown knees. How a thousand fields  
sown with butchered children would not turn spring aside.  
How, there's little for the living but to walk  
*con silencio—con compasión—*  
*sin lágrimas*—without tears,  
through spring's tender *verde*.

Mark Defoe

## Green Tea in a Black Bowl

I.  
The day before the earthquake, a monk announces  
that the turtles have abandoned the temple pond;  
the water quivers with emptiness. The following night,  
neighbors sift through what remains of the house  
next door. In the dark, crows are hoarse from trumpeting  
over tangerine peels curled like chrysanthemum petals,  
the black peat of tea leaves still moist, and pickled  
white radish, gone limp and bitter with salt.

II.  
Three years later, our house rocks us as we sleep;  
we wake into a blackness ingesting itself:  
black turned inside out—a tarry mucous  
membrane, these mushroom gills of darkness  
through which our longing whistles with too little  
air. The earth coughs; its sides heave. We turn in bed  
and touch beneath the blankets, our limbs  
like fingertips meeting in prayer or in parting.

III.  
We dream of what is missing before it leaves us. We taste the dust  
in wine before it's gone blood-brown. Our mouths are dry;  
this night's an arid, wind-swept place. We're clinging to the husk  
of things, cicada song still droning in brittle, abandoned shells.  
In Tokyo University archives, three hundred empty human skins  
unfurl with neck-to-ankle tattoos: all the reds, greens and blues of lust  
and loss translated into dragons, snakes, tidal waves,  
and Fudo, Hell's fanged guardian, wreathed in a halo of flames.

IV.  
Kichizaemon Raku XV turns his family's 400 year old  
tea bowl round and round in his hands.  
He says that black holds within itself all colors:  
it is as if this teabowl has thrown away its own blackness,

and gone beyond what we could perceive as black.  
April is here now. The black-eyed willow  
in our garden is starting to bud again,  
and the stones are green with moss.

*Melanie Drane*

## The Planet First Observed

Of the nine,  
it is the one blunt utterance  
among the august, classic names,  
that of a yeoman farmer, broad-backed,  
thick-bodied Anglo-Saxon  
among the Roman gods,  
knowing not much more than what to do  
with where he stands,  
the next job to be done.  
He might have given himself the name,  
joined as he is to the blessed stuff,  
yielding or hard-won,  
that feeds his flesh, takes his weight  
and measure.

Patriarch or *pater familias*?  
The children, calling him by many names,  
*Dunia, Tierra, An Domhan, Chikyu,*  
the ones who revere,  
the ones who take,  
those who sit near him quietly,  
are stunned, each time, by his rages,  
breathe when they subside.

Those photographs taken from far off  
show nothing that we recognize,  
a face that could be hours old,  
pure and closed away.  
Amazement rises and falls back  
to what we know:  
birthright, homeplace, oldest forebear.  
Of the nine,  
most mortal, most alive.

Marjorie Mir

## POETRY 2000 CONTRIBUTORS

**William D. Barney**, author of seven books of poetry, won the Poetry Society of America's Robert Frost Award (awarded by Frost himself) in 1962, and is former Poet Laureate of Texas. Born in 1916, he has been married for 64 years and has four sons.

**Richard Broderick's** collection of poems, *Woman Lake*, is just out from New Rivers Press. Co-editor of *The Great River Review*, his poetry has appeared or is forthcoming from *Prairie Schooner*, *The Laurel Review*, *Greensboro Review*, and *The Nebraska Review*.

**Jeannette Cabanis-Brewin** is a business and technology writer and editor who writes for a number of print and online publications.

**Shulamith Wechter Caine** is a winner of the Gerald Cable Poetry Contest (Silverfish Review Press). She has poems in *The American Poetry Review*, *American Scholar*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Negative Capability*, and *The Southern Poetry Review*.

**Francette Cerulli's** new poetry book is *The Spirits Need to Eat* (Nine-Patch Press 1999). She teaches creative writing in Vermont's schools and prisons, has won prizes from *The Louisville Review* and *Negative Capability*, and has poems in *Vermont Life* and *Calliope*.

**Susan Dane**, a classically trained pianist who studied at the Paris Conservatory, now writes and edits fiction and nonfiction, as well as composing for film. She is currently developing two feature films.

**Mark DeFoe** is Professor of English at West Virginia Wesleyan College, where he teaches writing. His three poetry books are *Bringing Home Breakfast* (Black Willow Press), *Palmate* (Pringle Tree Press), and *AIR* (Green Tower Press). His poetry appears in *Paris Review*, *Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and in many anthologies, including *Urban Nature* (Milkweed Editions) and *Points of Contact: Disability, Art, and Culture* (University of Michigan Press).

**Melanie Drane** is an alumna of creative writing programs at Interlochen Arts Academy and Princeton University. Since 1985, she has lived in Germany, Austria, the UK, and Japan. For the past seven years, she has been a resident of Tokyo, where she serves as a newspaper wine columnist. She received a 1992/93 PrePress Award for Emerging Michigan Writers, and a commendation in the 1997 National Poetry Competition from the Poetry Society (UK). This year, she was a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize.



**Rhina Espaillat's** two latest poetry collections are *Lapsing to Grace* (Bennett & Kitchel 1992) and *Where Horizons Go* (Truman State U. Press 1998), winner of the 1998 T.S. Eliot Prize. Winner of the 1998 Howard Nemerov Award and many other prizes, she appears in two dozen anthologies, including *Introduction to Poetry* (Heath, 6th edition 2000) and *The Muse Strikes Back* (Story Line 1997).

**Glenda Fawkes** is a widely published New Zealand poet who has also been translated into Arabic. Her first book of poetry, *A Talent for Flight*, was published in 1999 by Steele Roberts, Wellington.

**Jon Fink** has received numerous awards, including an AWP Intro Journal Project Award. Featured poet for *Analecta 25*, his poetry also appears in *Salt Hill Journal*, *Willow Springs*, *New Texas 98*, and *The Texas Observer*.

**Connie Hershey** is the founder of Artifact Press in Concord, Mass. Her poems appear in *American Writing*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *Atom Mind*, *Onthebus*, and four anthologies.

**Rod Jellema** is the founding Director of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Maryland. He has three books of poems, the latest being *The Eighth Day: New and Selected Poems* (Dryad Press), and two volumes of translations from the Frisian (Pieter Jelles Prize, Columbia University Translation Award). He is the recipient of two NEA grants for literature.

**Naomi Lazard** is author of six books of poetry, including *Cry of the Peacocks* (Hiram Haydn with Harcourt Brace), *The Moonlit Upper Deckerina* (Sheep Meadow), and *The True Subject, translations from the Urdu poetry of Faiz Ahmed Faiz* (Princeton University Press). She has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Harpers*, and the anthology edited by Czeslaw Milosz.

**Diana Lingren** is a Registered Play Therapist who works with abused and traumatized children. Her poetry appears in *Rattle* and the *Nebraska Poet's Calendar*.

**Timothy Mayo** has taught English, Math, and Creative Writing in Southern Vermont, and was a semi-finalist in this year's "Discovery"! *The Nation Poetry Contest*.

**Marjorie Mir's** poems have appeared in *Yankee*, *Light*, *Press*, *Caprice* and *New Monhegan Press*. She has spent her working life as a children's and reference librarian in the New York City and Westchester County public libraries. Throughout that time and longer,

poetry, reading and writing it, has been a constant and a source of great pleasure. She lives in Bronxville, NY with two fine cats.

**Jean Monahan** is the author of two books of poetry: *Hands* (Anhinga Press 1992), and *Believe It or Not* (Orchises Press 1999). A Creative Director in the Internet world, she has published widely and won numerous awards. She lives in Salem, MA.

**Barbara Paparazzo** is a writer living in Conway, Massachusetts. Her work has appeared in *Peregrine*.

**Gregory Schraw** is a professor of educational psychology and research at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

**Brenda Serotte's** poetry appears or is forthcoming in *Literature: An Introduction to Reading and Writing* (Prentice Hall, 6th edition), *The Kit Kat Review*, *Kinesis*, and *The Marlboro Review*. She is working on a memoir about growing up Sephardic in the Bronx.

**Annette Sloan** placed first in the Chester H. Jones Foundation Competition (1995), and was a visiting poet in the Paumanok Poetry Series. She appears in *The North American Review*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Columbia*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.

**Gwen Strauss's** book of poems, *Trail of Stones*, was published in 1990 by Knopf in New York and Walker Books in London. Her children's book *The Night Shimmy* has been translated into five languages. Her poems appear in *The New Republic*, *Kenyon Review*, *Antioch Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*.

**Susan Thomas** recently won the *Spoon River Poetry Review* Editors' Prize. Recipient of a 1999 Vermont Arts Council grant, her work appears in *Nimrod*, *Columbia*, *Kalliope*, and *Lullwater Review*.

**Deborah Warren** has poetry in *The Formalist*, *Cumberland Poetry Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Orbis* (UK). She was the runner-up for the Robert Penn Warren and T.S. Eliot prizes.

**Ellen Wehle** is an editor at a Boston advertising agency. A performance poet who reads frequently, her work appears in *The Ohio Review*, *Icarus*, *Willow Review*, and *River Styx*.

**Wanita Zumbunnen** has taught creative writing at Kinnaird College in Lahore, Pakistan, and at military bases in Japan and Germany. Her work has appeared in *The Pakistan Times*, *Slate*, *The Cloverdale Review*, and previously in *Atlanta Review*.

## Ever After: a Paradelle

He lies on his side like a glass knocked over.  
He lies on his side like a glass knocked over.  
Only a little sweetness left, poor boy.  
Only a little sweetness left, poor boy.  
Only his little lies, a glass-like sweetness.  
Poor he, a left boy knocked over on side.

Now she loves him more, but won't come back.  
Now she loves him more, but won't come back.  
In dreams she cries and paints his face like a girl's.  
In dreams she cries and paints his face like a girl's.  
A girl's more in dreams. She won't like him now,  
but loves his face. *Come back*, she paints and cries.

It rains and falls dark on the house they lived in together.  
It rains and falls dark on the house they lived in together.  
She is alone there, afraid when it falls and breaks over the roof.  
She is alone there, afraid when it falls and breaks over the roof.  
It is on the roof. Rains and falls. The house afraid  
when it lived alone. There she breaks and falls over in dark.

Now, in the dark, he dreams.  
She is like a sweetness in his side; she loves him back.  
But it paints more lies. Afraid, his face won't come together.  
Little boy lived there on and on alone, only a girl's poor roof  
knocked over. When it breaks, the house cries like they left.  
She rains. And a glass falls and falls.

*Kim Addonizio*

## It

I can still remember it, that sensation of being shaken  
by something that gripped me and wouldn't let go  
until my daughter was born, sliding toward the blanket  
spread on the floor of the hospital room where I squatted,  
the doctor squatting too, waiting to catch her,  
until she was completely outside of me, and the creature—  
thing—that had held me helpless  
simply dropped me and turned away,  
as though I were no longer interesting to it,  
or tasted bad, as though it suddenly remembered  
it had urgent business elsewhere. And I felt I was again  
the agent of my life, it was mine, and the new life  
laid on my stomach after I'd staggered to the bed and lain down  
was mine too, I would have to learn  
what she needed and how not to harm her.  
But how could I protect her  
from whatever had mastered me so completely,  
opening my body ruthlessly to bring her down  
into this world, how could I keep her  
from that thing if it wanted to unmake her—  
that morning of her birth I felt it close to me,  
forcing out the sweat and screams, and I knew  
it would have killed me if it had to, for her sake,  
for those few hours it loved her  
like a mother, as it had once loved me in order to get me out.

*Kim Addonizio*

## She

*Organizing pneumonia* is the diagnosis for her lungs sick with emphysema. Rails at her cortisone sentence for six weeks hundreds of pills, a moon face, fatigue under frantic energy, she is hard as nails on the phone resisting all suggestions attributing everything to the hospital emergency room treatment for allergy someone recommended—maybe I did weeks ago. I am hard as nails listening.

This blessed morning of midwinter spring after a full night of stories on tape, good ones, I am still hard as nails wrapped in cellophane ready to put one booted foot after another on the blessed ground, soft air, soft color sky, soft skin lotion hands in parka flannel pockets her sick lungs in my chest, emphysema, packed and crinkling under my own flushed wings.

*Hilda Raz*

## My First Garden

In my first garden there were radishes, baby's-breath, two bald tires, the bartender's '41 Packard and cases of empties, stacked in a column one and a half times my height. The dirt lot behind my father's bar and grill—that's where I staked my claim. I was ten that spring.

It was the year I began to notice growing things, to dissect fat brown buds and marvel at the stiff, pleated silk of new leaves. I took an old knife I got from the cook, my mother, and carved deep, crooked rows into the brittle crust. Half my allowance got me two seed packets that rattled like baby toys.

*Plant in full sun, in well drained soil, after all danger of frost—and falling-down drunks—is past.*

In three weeks the scars sprouted bold green shoots, pushing straight up as if they couldn't get enough of the stink of stale beer and bathroom disinfectant that rolled like invisible fog out the back door.

The sun shone all day on pebbles and patchy grass and blue-gray puddles of scrub water and on my brave, new living things. At night the moon crept through the baby's-breath and radish leaves and caressed the fenders of the beat-up Nash where Mister Ryan, one of the regulars, always slept it off.

Summer came. The baby's-breath filled a pickle jar that Mama put on a high window sill in the kitchen. It was grand. My father said, Honey, don't you eat those radishes. We don't know about that soil. I won't, I said. I washed them in the ladies' room sink and ate them, in secret, with salt. They were fine.

*Arlene Eager*

## The Moviegoer

Mother's on the sofa, pressing ice  
to her migraine. My father's restless,  
itching, as usual, to get out. He pulls me  
from my bed—never mind  
it's a school night—and soon we're sitting  
under stenciled stars at the Tivoli,  
watching Grace Kelly in *High Noon*.  
"Take a good look," he whispers,  
pointing up. "Tonight, she's beautiful.  
You'll see. Hollywood will ruin her."

She's high and cool  
beside Gary Cooper in an open wagon,  
regal even in black and white,  
and I'm trying to imagine the taste  
of ruin, hot as the point of a neon star,  
rotten as an old gardenia.  
Or maybe something so subtle,  
so vague, only my father could name it.

I've thought of that night for years—  
how proud I was to be his confidante,  
to know a man who could predict  
a starlet's fate  
before a prairie shadow  
ever stained her shoulder.  
I believed my father  
knew things about women  
women didn't know about themselves.

Yet something sly and chill  
as movie air had weaseled in. I've never  
been able to erase my mother at home,  
in pain, married to a man  
who could sit beside his daughter  
under stars, staking out another woman,  
claiming her pure noon for his own.

*Dannye Romine Powell*

## SEVEN SCENES

from *The House on Eccles Road*

Judith Kitchen

Molly usually listened to the radio as she drove, humming along with the music, or listening to the endless talk shows, people's odd opinions on politics, or their absurd questions of Dr. Laura. Molly disagreed with Dr. Laura on almost everything, though not about having a sense of responsibility. It was just that Dr. Laura seemed so certain, so absolute, when Molly would have been more inclined to listen and to try to find a solution that allowed parents to think of their own happiness as well. Dr. Laura seemed to think that having a child meant you had to put all your own desires on hold. Molly didn't agree, felt that sometimes people fell in love, a bit the way she'd fallen in love with Leo, and that this was not a crime, not even a misfortune, certainly not something you simply willed away. So she often found herself, as she did today, talking back, saying "nonsense," saying "she has a right to think of herself too," thinking that she'd thought of herself and that she wasn't irresponsible, not in any sense of the word. People had fallen in love, or simply had affairs, for years, for centuries. Marcie would just have to learn to accept it too. It wasn't as though she had stolen Leo from her mother. They'd already been in the process of the divorce—though she had to admit they had been having the longest process in living memory. He'd come up to her that night in the pub, after she'd finished singing. He'd come up to her with the grey in his hair and his penetrating eyes and had said she reminded him of his grandmother. That was pretty original, for a line, so she hadn't taken it for one. Had taken him seriously from the minute he broke away from the crowd and walked toward her.

Dr. Laura was wrong about babysitters, too. There was nothing wrong with getting away, having some adult entertainment. She'd always felt she was lucky that they had enough money for sitters or she'd have gone crazy. Who wanted a two-year-old in a fancy restaurant? And what was wrong with wanting to go to a fancy restaurant every once in a while? No, Dr. Laura was too child-centered, too fanatic, but Molly loved to listen to the way she didn't listen. It made her feel just a bit superior, forming the answers she would have given, or the questions she would have asked in order to discern what was really

at stake. And today was no exception. She was thinking about how people were almost paranoid about their children speaking to strangers (some of her best early encounters had been with strangers, she seemed to recall) when the traffic suddenly halted. Stopped dead. There in the middle of the middle lane, and nothing was moving ahead of her. And then nothing behind, as the cars filled in and stopped. All three lanes, which seemed odd, so she supposed that an accident had just happened somewhere up ahead and that soon they'd find a way to divert one of the lanes. Happened all the time.

\*

Too bad she was stuck between those walls. It would have been better to be somewhere else, near one of those stands of trees, if she was going to have to wait. This wall was so high, frightening really, and the heat radiated from its concrete sides in little shimmering waves. Reminded her of that one time when she was so young, twenty maybe, hitchhiking across Europe with her friend Nan. They hadn't been afraid, though now she realized there were times they should have been. Like the time in Greece when the two truckers told them there was something wrong with the engine and they needed to get out so they could get the tools from under the seat. There was nothing wrong with the engine, they'd known enough to know that, and so they'd pretended to cry and pretty soon the two men got back in and drove them on through the night to the ferry. But what she was thinking of was the Berlin Wall, the way she and Nan had somehow ended up going through Checkpoint Charlie and found themselves in East Berlin. She wondered what they had been thinking, couldn't quite recall the mood of the day, what they had wanted, adventure probably, because it was lost in what happened later. No sooner were they walking on the other side than two young soldiers, maybe twenty or twenty-two, stopped them, asking for their passports. When they fished them out of their purses, the soldiers had taken them and walked away. Of course they'd followed, weren't as naive as all that, knew they needed those passports to get home. Followed them into a long, low building, down corridors, into a tiny room where they asked them to take everything out of their pockets and handbags, made them put everything—lipsticks, tampax, coins—on a little table. They'd been scared, then. More scared than in Greece. They looked so young, those soldiers, too young for the machine guns they were carrying, too young to kill and thus probably why they could kill and they had seen pictures of people trying to cross the wall, people cut down in the no-man's-land between the wall and safety. Because they were scared, they hadn't been able to cry, but their

faces reflected fear, mirrors of fear, and then the two young men had begun to laugh. Loud, friendly laughter. Two young men flirting with two young women. Nothing more. And then they'd helped them put their things back in their purses and showed them the long string of bullets on their belts and walked them back through the corridors to daylight, laughing, waving, dipping their guns in mock salute. Two young men not unlike them, now that they didn't think they could kill. But they turned back anyway, and retreated to the other side of the wall.

Odd to be remembering that day, so long ago, everything changed, the wall dismantled and shipped in little sections to places like Portland where she'd seen a piece of it last summer. Chunks of a past that contained her. That was before Vietnam, even, so nothing had happened yet to make her aware of what ordinary people could do under extraordinary circumstances. What a great thing it was to be young and unafraid. She'd always thought that experience would make her less afraid, but really it made you more cautious. Less certain.

\*

And the traffic simply didn't move. Sat there and sat there and up ahead there were a few impatient honks that got nowhere, and every so often the clink of a car door as someone stepped out and shaded his eyes to see if he could tell what was going on. Nothing. Simply stoppage. And she could imagine the cars filling in behind and behind until she could envision the cars backed up clear to her driveway on Eccles Road, no one getting in or out, trapping them all in their little individual worlds. She wished now that she'd bought the cell phone Leo had urged on her. But she hated watching people talking on the phone as they drove. Hated thinking that they carried their days with them that way. The car was an oasis. A place where thought flowed freely, wherever it chose. She hadn't wanted to become one of them. But now it would have been handy to telephone Ted, tell him she'd be late, or even change her plans. He'd be waiting, and there was no way to get to him. Maybe, if this didn't clear up soon, she'd see if any of the neighboring cars had one she could borrow. Look at the way she thought of the cars as owning the phones, not the people in the cars. It was hard to approach complete strangers, impose your life on theirs. Still, she looked to either side. A truck. No good. And a bright blue Honda, with a blonde about thirty, looking annoyed. Still, maybe she had a phone, later, if she needed it.

Four cars ahead, a young man, probably a teenager, was climbing onto the roof of his car. Shading his eyes. She wondered what he could see. Most likely nothing. They hadn't had to slam on their brakes, so

whatever it was was probably out of sight still. She envied him his view, though, the sea of shimmering metal. A gleaming snake of cars, coiled motion waiting to move again. And then she heard the sharp stiletto wail of an ambulance. Couldn't tell whether it was from in front or behind. How would anything get there? The cars were packed in so tightly, and the walls so constricted, no real shoulders, so how could they thread their way to whatever unfortunate event had taken place? Molly hated that sound. It reminded her of hospitals. Not of the quiet of the hospital room, which had its own heavy smells and sounds that sometimes woke her in the night, its too quiet intensity. But the sounds of coming and going. Of arrival and departure. The sounds that punctuated her days when she came and went, came and went, watching, watching, watching, what no one should ever have to watch.

It would be quite a while, she knew that now, now that she'd heard the sirens and imagined their slow progress through the stalled lanes. It would be quite a while and she needed to rethink her plans. She'd have to call Ted and skip her plans, go straight to Leo's office. What should she sing for the audition? There'd be the songs from the show, of course, but they usually asked the singers to give them something they knew, something that could show the range of the voice or the depth of the feeling. It would depend on whether there was a pianist. But her best songs were sung without piano. With fiddle and flute, or nothing at all. She liked it best when the flute seemed like an echo, higher and frail, like a trail of melody, slightly lost as it followed her home. She'd choose something for the voice alone. Humming now. *Down by the sally gardens, my love and I did meet / She passed the sally gardens, with little snow-white feet / She bid me take love easy, as the leaves grow on the tree / But I was young and foolish, with her did not agree.*

\*

The afternoon that had stretched so sensuously before her was shrunken now, reduced to the steady minute-by-minute turnover of the car's digital clock and the wavery sense of fumes on the rise, tailpipe after tailpipe spewing its colorless gases into the atmosphere. The highway ahead was a haze of exhaust, of sun glinting on metal, ricocheting off metal in fitful sparks and harsh streams of light. Even with the air-conditioner on, the car was growing warmer by the minute, the sun beating like a hammer on its roof. Molly pitied the people who didn't have air-conditioners, but did they make cars without them any more? She supposed they must, for people in Vermont or Maine or North Dakota, maybe even Seattle, places where it didn't ever get too hot for

too many days in a row. With global warming, even they'd need it soon enough. She wondered about global warming, though. It certainly seemed to be happening and the theories made sense, but the statistics themselves seemed questionable, too sketchy, too recent to account for anything but possible trends, nothing definitive. It was only a few years ago they'd been predicting a new ice age. Science, which had always seemed so immutable in her childhood, now seemed as flawed as any other discipline, as subject to whim and whimsy and manipulation as anything else. She'd shocked herself the first time she thought that, the first time she'd questioned what an expert was saying on the television, but now she found herself questioning all the time. Pertinent questions, as though the experts had put on blinders and refused to see the other side of the story. They were always so certain—red meat is bad for you, only two eggs a week—and then, a few years later, they were taking it back, eggs suddenly had “good” cholesterol, but she'd gone on eating them in the intervening years simply because her body liked eggs, sometimes craved eggs, and now it turned out that she had been smart all along. Not her, exactly, but her body's irrefutable sense of itself. First they wanted women to take hormones to prevent osteoporosis, then told them the hormones might cause cervical cancer, then found they helped prevent breast cancer, then they worried about hormones in chickens, and pretty soon she didn't care. She'd learned one thing in her lifetime: people died. People died of a number of causes and in a variety of ways and at every imaginable age, but they died. She couldn't see spending her time reading labels for the least amount of salt or refusing to eat a steak or driving all the way across town for the latest herbal tea when, really, there was more to be doing with her time which was running out like everyone else's.

\*

She didn't know why she was suddenly thinking of a summer morning when she was around five, probably sometime before the flood, judging by the photo she still had, the apricot tree in the background in new leaf and the flowers in the hedge—they looked like peonies in the black-and-white photo, but then in black and white all flowers look a bit like peonies—blooming. She is sitting on the very top of a tall stepladder, her feet resting on the step below, the fifth step. Behind her, the sky, white and fathomless. She is wearing a sweatshirt and her brown oxfords and on top of her pigtails, a straw hat. On the bottom step, seated demurely by any standards, is her friend Gail, who is probably around seven. If they were playing dress-up, Gail has certainly got the best of the deal. She is wearing a long skirt and over her shoulder is a

colorful South American woven belt. On her head, too, a straw hat, bigger and in better shape than Molly's. Gail has had rheumatic fever and is newly allowed out of her house, which is why she is sitting on the bottom and Molly, her little body so sturdy and full of health, is on the very top. Odd, though, because when Molly remembers the moment without the aid of the photograph, she is always sitting on the bottom step, with Gail towering above her. She cannot remember the view from the top step, what it was she was watching so intently.

There were several moments like that in her repertoire. Moments, shaken from their continuity, that seemed to reside in a tense of their own. Her memory had always caught her by surprise, overtaken her with its intensities. And yet this particular memory seemed to float free, to be without emotion, simply to be. That, she thought now, was the essence of childhood. She wondered how Andy and Jacob would remember this day, the day their brother or sister was born, whether they would remember it as the day they put a bathing suit on a fish, whether it would be infused with her fragmentary presence, the day that nice woman cooked us macaroni, or whether it would divide itself from the others, become a fleeting sense of nestling into the arms of a strange woman who smelled like gardenias, or the sensation of a ball leaving the foot and crossing the grass with a life of its own.

She wondered how she'd remember this day, in the years to come. The day Leo forgot their anniversary. Or the day she rekindled something with Ted. Or the day she remembered to bring the blocks down from the attic.

She wondered if she'd remember sitting in a long stream of traffic, something unexpected that changed the shape of her life to come. Changed her plans. Diverted her from her appointed rounds. She'd felt that sensation many times, of course, the idea that if you took one direction your life would unfold uneventfully and if you took the other it would never be the same. She supposed that everyone contained a multitude, certainly a cautious and a reckless self, one who would hold back, one who would wade in.

\*

Old, she was thinking, everything looks so dusty and old, stopped like this in the middle of the highway. The treetops she could discern beyond the sound barrier looked ancient, scarred. She supposed the constant exhaust damaged them somehow. Certainly made them yellowed at the edges. She imagined the houses at the other side of the wall, their yards like neat square napkins set out along the table of the street. She imagined the children squirting hoses at each other and the

young mothers sitting around the picnic table with lemonade, but that was another era, she was sure, and now those same children would be in daycare centers, in the regulated playgrounds of the daycare centers, and the mothers would be steamy in their navy suits in some corporate suite, frantic on the computer, downloading the latest statistics on whatever was needed for the day, or else staring out of the sealed windows, thirteen floors down to where they could see people walking on the sidewalks, trying to get some sense of how hot it was, whether to brace themselves for the onslaught of evening traffic, the schedule, their day to pick up the kids, and then what to do with them for supper and bedtime, maybe take-out Chinese, though the little ones didn't like it, but they could have McDonald's. That's what it had come to now, hadn't it, at least in her own neighborhood. Yards empty of children because they were elsewhere, empty of mothers because they were elsewhere, so why did they own those large yards? For the dream, she was thinking, for the dream of what they ought to be able to be. For the dream of their parents' generation, visited on them through some elaborate convocation of status: a yard and a dog and two cars and you're in.

Then the cars began to move, just a foot or two, one lane and then another, inching forward. This sorting and weaving and jockeying for position was going to take a long time. She had no idea how far ahead the accident was—if it was an accident, but what else would keep them this long—so it was impossible to predict. She'd always been interested in the way traffic could crawl past something, then instantly spring back to life, becoming itself again with the proper intervals between cars, the proper speeds. And how long it could take to sort it all out for something as simple as repairing a bridge (one lane shut down) or taking a toll (change, she supposed, was time-consuming) or even just watching something odd in the distance, like the time there had been a hot-air balloon over the highway and everything had suddenly gone into slow motion.

She was always in the wrong lane, whenever anything like this happened. The other lanes seemed to get somewhere, one or two cars moving forward, while hers stood still. She decided to gauge her own progress by the maroon car ahead of her in the right lane. If it got too far ahead, then she'd know she was right, that she was jinxed, that nothing good would come of the day. But if she caught up with it, then she'd know she'd been in the right groove, that things would work out. She didn't believe in things like that, but she needed something to keep her occupied as she inched herself forward, hovering in first gear, but

wishing she could just shift into second so the engine wouldn't rev so much, but if she did, instantly realizing that she wasn't going fast enough and that there was no acceleration, so shifting down again to where it sounded too fast for its speed, if that made any sense, and it did to her ear. She needed to think about something other than the time and what she was missing by being here and the tensions she caused herself over things that couldn't be helped. Relax, she told herself, he'll understand that it was unavoidable. But he wouldn't, would he? He'd think she'd made it up. Think she was backing away from the world all over again. And she wasn't. Truly wasn't. So she hoped the accident had been big enough it would make the evening news, or at least the morning paper, the radio—if he'd just listen to the traffic report he'd already have heard about it, but she knew he wouldn't think to listen to the traffic report, he wasn't like that, never aware that he was living in a real world full of real worries. He wasn't like that, and that was what she liked most about him. So she shouldn't expect it of him this time just because it would be convenient for her. Should she?

The maroon car had made it now to six car lengths ahead of her. It wasn't fair. Shouldn't the policeman she imagined at the other end of all this direct things evenly? If he let two or three go, then he should stop them and let her lane go too. And the left lane still hadn't moved at all, as far as she could tell. If she removed herself and thought of it all as one large organism, it seemed like a powerful animal just waking from sleep. Flexing its muscles, flicking a tail, blinking an eye or two, maybe licking its paws. Tensing as its eyes moved over the savanna. Tensing as it waited for something to come into sight when it might spring into motion, using all its power and skill, or else settle back for an instant uninterested. Was all of life an either/or? As though every moment divided itself into the happening and not happening, the is and what might have been. So that a ghost life followed you, branching off at every minute, replicas of the self dividing and dividing like cells, so that somewhere, in the not so distant past, a what might have been of a what might have been is going on leading a completely other life, lost in choices you yourself could not even imagine making, but might have imagined if, at some past turn, you'd opted for or instead of either. She'd have to get moving soon or her brain would divide, one at Ted's apartment and one at Leo's office and who knew if ever the twain should meet again? See, this waiting was really getting to her, was causing her to think things she'd be embarrassed to admit to, so she watched the maroon car as it neared the bend and was lost in the welter of traffic, swallowed in the silvery sheen of sun on the metallic river of her thoughts.



\*

The car like an oven with the air-conditioning turned off. She looked at the fuel gauge, half a tank, lucky for her, because it had been almost an hour of idling. Her line moved again, this time a bit faster, as though water were suddenly going through a sluice. And then she could see what she hadn't wanted to see—the flashing lights, the chaos of lights, both sides of the highway. Too many to count. Something terrible must have happened. Something terrible on a summer day in June when, a minute before, everything had been fine. And then...

Molly hated scenes like this, but she had to admit she looked hard, took in the details, when she came across an accident. They startled her, the thought of something so unforeseen. And so she looked as though she could memorize what not to do, where not to be. When, of course, that was not the nature of the beast, or else they wouldn't be called "accidents." So she looked now, ahead of her to where the highway started to widen at each side of a median strip, as the lights stirred the daylight to a frenzy, wondering what had happened on such a bright afternoon. She could see movement, policemen with flares directing traffic, and a truck that had jackknifed, folded across the guardrail. And on the other side of the median, spilling into a lane going the other direction, what looked like three crumpled cars and several ambulances. More ambulances, actually, than she ever remembered seeing at once, six or seven, two of them just pulling out with their plaintive wail, their spinning sounds. They were squeezing all three lanes into one, painfully complicated, but by now there was a pattern and she could see that soon she would be passing the scene, trying to reconstruct what must have happened by whether the cars were damaged in front or behind, the skid marks on the pavement, the tangled mess of machinery.

She was frightened, in an odd kind of way, at the thought of passing so close to such destruction. It unnerved her. The very innocence of it. The way it might have been her if she had not stopped to make the phone call. That was the feeling she hated, yes, the sense that she had fooled her own fate. Closer now, she saw two stretchers, one empty, one with someone strapped in, head rigid in its harness, an IV already in place. Oh dear, she thought, oh dear, oh dear. Seven ambulances. And it looked like six or seven cars, spun out at odd angles, ripped open like cans of fruit, or crushed and tossed aside by the weight and momentum of the trailer truck.

Then there they were, three bodies laid out on the narrow strip of grass. Covered with sheets, so you knew they were bodies. No hurry

to rush them into the waiting cave of an ambulance. No need for plasma or oxygen. Nothing to be done. Three sheeted forms. Were they all from the same car? Or had fate divvied them up, spread grief around? Oh! One was so small. A child. It must be a child. Oh no. And then she was past.

The policeman was motioning her to keep moving, over here, over here, now go. But her hands would not stop shaking. She held them away from her, into the sunlight splayed across the windshield, and they would not stop trembling, so fast it was almost imperceptible, like a hummingbird's wings. Her hands would not stop and her mouth was quivering. It had been a child. She'd seen enough to know. And somewhere its mother was facing a whole life without it, maybe unconscious at the hospital to awaken to the news, maybe huddled in the back seat of a police car, weeping and weeping. But she was probably hurt, so that she would have to bear the double burden of healing, and how could she possibly do it? How could she have the strength? Molly couldn't pull over because the traffic was, by now, solid and heavy as it unfolded from its narrow stream and rushed toward the city. She couldn't pull over, but she couldn't go on. Though she did. Found herself moving farther and farther away, though in a moment they were all slowing again as yet another ambulance made its way past them, heading for the hospital. There would be another, and maybe another, and she'd have to keep her eye on the rearview mirror, her ear attuned, but her hands would not stop shaking.

What had happened back there to alter the course of someone's history? Something as innocuous as a bee in the car. Or tuning the radio. Or a child kicking another child in the back seat, something to deflect the attention. Or a trucker going just a bit too fast for conditions, but the conditions were perfect. A perfect day. Or maybe nothing at all, as if a hand had passed over and nudged one car, just slightly, into another until they toppled like dominoes. Nothing you could predict, and therefore prevent. Nothing at all. No one's fault. No one to blame. And still it was tragic.

And she was alive. She'd been singing, thinking her own strange thoughts, and she was alive. It was time to think of her own life. What did she want from it? Too fragile a thing to let slip through the fingers. She was alive on a perfect day in June and her hands would not stop shaking.

## Doing Laps

The legs move in morning light, stretched steps, taut  
citizens, men whose elbows cut and dig  
rounding the park's edge where the traffic slows,  
their pace not youth's, but boyish faces ghostly  
as they bloom out of dim camellia walls.

The heart thuds that leans and remembers low  
wheezing, fists slammed on helmets, the sweet pig  
drill a coach loved. He's long dead, whose famed gut  
seemed to vanish day by day, and still he called  
out insults to make boys rage in their dreams.

Then he was gone. And gone the forbidding fields.  
But not the legs that would drive, ache, and peel  
away the mornings, the chill of memories  
where silent he stood, your stopwatch heart ticking.

*Dave Smith*

## Emigration

One of the last buffalo. Village women  
dismember it, parcel its meat, begin  
working its hide. At night,  
all asleep, beneath the moon

the stretched hide receives such light  
as if it were a city, every hair a splinter,  
a nail, a stained glass window, a steeple  
that fills with Christian hymns:

in their dreams, the villagers hear  
Old World organs swelling nearer over the bones.  
It's Christmas in Dublin, London, & Berlin  
whose melodies yearn for the plains.

*William Heyen*

## Abortion, 1962

*...up in Pennsylvania, I met a little man,  
not Rumpelstiltskin, at all, at all...*

—Anne Sexton

After Sunbury we began to see signs—  
pyramids of coal like black office buildings—  
town after town of them—  
a metropolis that is always there  
in the interior, as if the terrain itself  
were undergoing an abortion,  
its womb being scraped and what  
had been inside  
piled on its flanks, on its belly  
and left in the wan sunlight.

We had come to Ashland.  
Cramped between two ridges, strung  
out along its main street, like a slum Aspen,  
its side streets petered out into the mountain.

Was this the heart of darkness at the interior  
of America? Was this Mistah Kurtz  
in a white lab coat? No.  
It was only the famous Dr. Spencer—  
this tiny owl-like man whose daughter  
had once died from a botched abortion  
and who had dedicated his life to doing it  
correctly. He made a quick, bird-like appraisal  
of us and decided what we could afford.

One of the side-streets  
off Main dwindled to a gravel road  
which chewed its way laterally up  
the side of the valley. I took it to its conclusion,  
a gravel turn-around with a picnic bench  
an oil drum for garbage.  
It was quiet up there, deserted. Dry grass. Dandelions.  
Stubborn little daisies. The hum of flies.  
No sound reached me from the town.  
I killed time in the silence of the hillside  
until it was time to go down.

*Jonathan Holden*

## Hopper

i.

To admire Edward Hopper  
is to love melodrama:  
his grand opera of light,  
to revisit *Nighthawks*:  
to watch the redhead in scarlet  
about to slip something in her right hand  
into her scarlet mouth, eternally,  
her scarlet coloratura the memory  
of a trill  
held in the rusty brick storefront  
across the street.

Or maybe what the light still holds  
is her scent.

It's the wee hours of the night.  
Both she and her hawk-faced pal  
(he is smoking) are absorbed  
in the music—  
the interior music which is always  
and only the memory of music,  
the memory of her fragrance  
across the street.

ii.

When I was a boy  
years before I knew of Edward Hopper  
I had become, like him, addicted  
to the moods of sunlight on walls  
of a bare room.  
I wonder, still: what is it  
that gives us devotees of his light  
such a sense of kinship?

As if he had found us out,  
as if somehow he knew  
that we, like him, like all students of mood  
had also become addicted to his moods,  
and could understand his glee  
at discovering Paul Valery's  
essay on Stendal:

*The authors of confessions or memoir  
are taken in by their own desire  
to shock.  
And we ourselves are the dupes  
of such dupes.  
A real person writes the confession  
as somebody else,  
as somebody who is purer, blacker, livelier  
and even more himself  
than is permissible.*

How sadly unsurprised I was to learn  
that, habitually, Edward Hopper  
beat his wife, Jo.  
In her diary's words  
*new dress all dirty from floor  
where he held me down by his knee  
& got his face well scratched—  
2 long scratches down his face—  
the face that other whiles  
I'm so fond of. And there's  
a black & blue bruise on my thigh.*

Then to recall Edward Hopper's own words:  
"Great art is an outward expression  
of an inner life in the artist."

iii.

What we crave in Hopper  
we crave  
in certain landscapes—

*déjà vu*—as in poetry by Dick Hugo:  
*Some places are forever afternoon.*  
Such an odd strength in a painter,  
unless we remember the cruelty  
of John Ruskin's "pathetic fallacy":

"All violent feelings have the same effect.  
They produce in us a falseness  
in all our impressions  
of external things.  
They rowed her in across the rolling foam—  
The cruel crawling foam."

And I think, again, of Paul Valéry's  
opera libretto *Cantate du Narcisse*,  
how, when Narcisse cannot tear  
his gaze away from his own  
beautiful face in the pool,  
Echo and her nymphs plead with him  
to risk his body:

*Narcisse, Narcisse,  
Que te sert d'être beau?  
Amour est autre chose  
Que de baiser sur l'eau  
Le reflet d'une rose...*

And I remember the cruelty  
in Hopper's late  
*Sun in an Empty Room*—  
the desire for purity.  
The room is like a bare stage, all  
of whose actors are naked  
emotions. Across it stride and lean  
shades of amber.  
It is a boy's desire for his boyhood  
back, it's almost pathetic—  
to be paralyzed by such longing  
for the ideal:

*That is the way I feel  
about sunlight. I would like to do  
sunlight that was just sunlight  
in itself. Such purity! Edward Hopper,  
like Narcissus, has been transformed  
into a flower.*

*"In vain the world of the wild,  
The somber Masters of Azure  
Have given what Narcisse willed  
So his pride be kept pure.  
In vain they speak in the thunder,  
Do they threaten him to dismember,  
To reduce him to some flower  
This fate will not be so dire  
If sometime you might be inspired:  
My sweet shade awaits a tear."*

*Jonathan Holden*

## Aftermath

In the beginning, blue light  
traced the hills. Time's  
snagged thread married blue  
and light from the beginning's

beginning, so night fell,  
and spring, and the worm,  
expanding its universe, began  
unweaving through the fallen

oak leaf's veil its own narrative  
lace of decay. Genesis is always  
the story of separation. No  
other reason she awoke, haloed

in light, her spine still a perfect  
constellation of china; no rhyme  
for morning's never fracturing  
his sleep. The clock

once wound, all days  
are sixes, creation the cancer that just keeps on  
blooming the body as morning  
wings noon and horseshoe posts  
spiking the lawn dial the sun

towards erasure. Since night  
spun itself into a funnel  
of dust, what's left but the rhythm  
of rootlessness, unbraided trees

clutching shrouds of earth, nights clocked waiting  
for that ascension up the stairs—  
the ghost of his face  
hovering, a remnant of day. Torn

between seasons, the fireplace's pilot light  
strung pearls of flames; the storm  
whined against glass,  
a bottled mosquito distant

as a star. Nostalgic thorns,  
birds stitched our morning drive  
down the mountain.  
As the radio spooled the names

of the confirmed lost,  
dogwoods bleached into bloom,  
the woodpecker's staccato knock  
went unanswered.

What is the half life of hunger?  
The amulet for absence?  
One day from spring, one beat from ruin's  
resurrection, I didn't want

apples for breakfast, to remember the coming  
morning when I'll be left searching  
rubble for the paper bits of a face memory  
will always seam

I don't want to join her  
in the uprooted garden, unnamings  
the animals, amazed how weightless  
the stillness of air. Against

swords of sun flashing  
between surviving trees,  
the rapid pulse of perfectly  
marred blue light,  
I held your remembered  
breath in my hair, my  
unraveling name—

postponing arrival, all the way down.

*Sandra Meek*

## Ginkgo, the Temple-tree of China

Overhead, its half-moons flutter,  
leaves bright as the fans of concubines  
who swoon at their god-king's death.  
The end of an age. But not yet.  
It's merely autumn, a month or so  
before the great dark, and the ginkgo  
waxes saffron, then gold with putrid fruit.

At curbside on Penn Street,  
an ancient squats, her head wrapped  
with a scarf the blue of sky  
into which a flock of cranes  
might fly. She gathers fruit unbruised  
by the purple mottle of rot,  
strips off its vomitous flesh  
and squeezes delicate seeds  
into a cast-iron pot.

On her fingers the stink of  
the village of her birth  
where, under the temple ginkgo,  
her sister toasted its seeds  
on a brazier. Always that  
small hand drops them,  
fragrant embers, into hers,  
the sweetmeats of season  
she is toasting on a gas grill  
for the children of her children.  
"Eat," she will tell them, eaten by love.

Under the ginkgo, her sister's  
streaming hair a firestorm,  
incandescent leaps and twists  
the sacred dance of flame  
whose peppery perfume

returns, undercut with sulfur,  
whenever she smells burning.  
Her grandsons in the sidelot  
have dropped a lit match  
into a scumble of leaves,  
its char, the scent of holy ashes  
darkening the *Xi Jiang*.

On her sister's folding fan  
the courtship ruff  
of the golden pheasant  
and the sun-adorned leaf  
of the ginkgo  
would collapse into design,  
a swirl like smoke  
cut through by rising light.

She fishes for a blackened sliver  
between her gold-capped teeth—  
smoke, sweet. Eating,  
there is no dying.

*J. C. Todd*

## Rain / Storm

I want to throw my body into the rain  
and run for miles. I want  
my hair slick-black against my skull, the world  
perfectly drenched in a wet shine. I take  
what I want with steady steps.

The dogs run out,  
wired from the approaching storm. Their fur  
is weighted down with rain, mud and stink,  
their mouths thick with rage.  
I stop and walk, cooing to get them calm.  
Most I win over—fools. For those that hate  
me to the end, I feel a camaraderie  
despite the threat of their quick teeth.  
They hold back. I keep moving on,  
more alive and breathing  
harder as I go.

I call the storm out loud,  
wanting to hear branches crack like bones  
then crash to earth, to feel the sting of rain  
against my fists, these pale wet stones  
out in another storm. I want the trees  
to shake me back to all  
I've lost, to warn, then shed  
pieces of their lives.  
I'm exhaling the time away; it's late.

I was not a girl who dreamed of horses and a barn,  
but when I run upon a horse who's come  
to the field's edge to rub her neck against  
barbed wire that drips with rain,  
I rush.  
Beneath the rumbling sky,

I search the brown grass for any shoots  
of green, tug strands for her, feeling the way  
grass can leave slits in the skin. We shiver  
as the storm begins to break around us  
onto the battered roads.

Breathing, breathing, the two of us—I rest  
grass against her mouth; she's taking it in.  
I'm talking, talking to her through the rain  
that pours while something  
thunders in my hands as they reach and find  
her warm, find her frightening  
and real as her hungry mouth, full of green.  
The dogs are barking madly a mile away.

In a stab of light my body knows how it feels  
to press barbed wire into your skin, to rub  
yourself until you blur into the dusk,  
to forget the night that falls  
fast before you find the way back home.  
I want to throw this body into rain  
and soak it up, drop by drop. I want  
to be the darkest animal that sucks it in  
and roams out in the storm before she sleeps.

*Tara Bray*



## Under Mesquite Trees in the Sun

Late summer water  
Falls from the mesquites—  
It is not water but water  
Mixed with what it brings  
From the leaves,  
Water and silver  
Raining in a dim-yellow light  
Made thick from old blossoms  
In the last of the afternoon, the heat  
Being pushed to the ground  
Wrestled onto its animal back  
But coming up from the raindrops—  
Through the raindrops—  
Not as splash but as steam.

*Alberto Ríos*

## The Problem with This Poem

This poem will not invent anyone.  
Not a woman hiding  
from a storm under a bridge,  
not a man standing  
alone at the edge of a field,  
his family in the stone house beyond.

This poem will not reinvent the field  
as if nature cared and were necessary to it,  
or vice-versa. This poem will not deny pain,  
but neither is pain its essential condition,  
the way sky is essential to rain.  
What happens in that house,

what happens in the nebulae,  
happens very far away.  
What happens under the skin  
happens very far away.  
This is the reason the poem exists,  
if you can call it existence,

its solitary slow being that denies  
our solitary slow moving,  
that defies time and language  
the way corn defies weather  
all night under the stars  
and then, when it must, yields.

*Stan Sanvel Rubin*

## The Arrival

De Soto National Wildlife Refuge  
Missouri Valley, Iowa

*for Judith*

All morning they filled the sky of Northwest Missouri.  
Just after dawn, they came and kept coming  
geese streaking south in their usual way,  
ragged blades splitting the December sky,  
heads honking and bobbing as if riding surf  
while our car sped north beneath them.

All morning they kept coming, wing after wing,  
so that, when we arrived at the refuge,  
I was not surprised to find them departed,  
the Missouri oxbow almost silent,  
the trees bending to empty water.  
“They’re gone,” I told the other watcher,

a graying man like me with binoculars and a knapsack  
who had come from Minnesota and was genuinely disappointed  
at my eyewitness certainty, but whose tired wife waited  
while he took my picture as a favor. And that was it, nothing  
but a photo to indicate their absence, to record  
my ever having been where they had been.

But later, leaving the Observation Center  
filled with facts and stories and a plate glass view  
of the few stragglers that remained, their wings  
testing light for the moment to arise,  
suddenly, in the parking lot,  
just at sunset, they arrived

—the others, in their tense thousands,  
passing through one another at all angles,

swirling in and out of the sun in delirious circles  
the way fish might be seen underwater  
in vivid schools, one above the other,  
as far down as the eye can go—geese  
streaming and twisting at every instant,  
gathering and breaking their dance of evening

into liquid lines too tentative to hold, but clear  
in its force, its indirection, the cries that raced the air  
as darting shadows raced the ground until  
quick patterns emerged: brown wings  
heading out again until they caught or were caught by the sun,  
banking in a solid wave, each underbelly for an instant lit,

back towards the water which had grown hard  
and throbbing with the bodies of geese.

All this while you slept, hunched over while they gathered,  
amazing me with their arrival, their steady assembly  
no ticket could buy, until I had to wake you, leaning  
through the window of our rented car, had to make you rise and see, too,

though you weren’t pleased to be awakened, after driving all day,  
the angry noise above us, needing your sleep.  
And what does it matter? I only know  
they were there, half light and half darkness.

They knew where they were going.  
The parking lot filled with them after they’d gone.

*Stan Sanvel Rubin*

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Kim Addonizio** is the author of three books of poetry from BOA Editions: *The Philosopher's Club*, *Jimmy & Rita*, and *Tell Me* (July 2000), as well as a book of short stories. Recipient of NEA fellowships and other awards, she is also co-author of *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*. She lives in San Francisco and teaches privately and in the low-residency MFA in Writing program at Goddard College.

**Tara Bray's** poetry has appeared or will appear in *Puerto del Sol*, *Many Mountains Moving*, *New Delta Review*, and *The Southern Review*. She is pursuing an MFA at the University of Arkansas.

**Kate Daniels** (see her conversation with Mark Jarman on page 29.)

**Arlene Eager** left a career in non-profit management two years ago to devote her time to writing. She was awarded the William Meredith Scholarship at the Wesleyan Writers' Conference in June, 1999. She had a poem in the Summer 2000 issue of *Five Points* and in the anthology *Essential Love*. Two poems are due to appear in *The Hudson Review*. She lives in Smithtown, N.Y.

**Rachel Hadas's** *Merrill, Cavafy, Poems and Dreams* (University of Michigan Press, 2000) is a compilation of more than twenty years of prose about poetry. Author of eleven books of poetry, essays, and translations from Greek, and recipient of the Folger Shakespeare Library's O.B. Hardison, Jr., Poetry Prize, she teaches at Rutgers University, Newark.

**William Heyen** lives in Brockport, New York. His books include *Erika: Poems of the Holocaust*, *Pterodactyl Rose*, *Ribbons: The Gulf War*, and *The Host: Selected Poems* (Time Being Books); *Pig Notes & Dumb Music: Prose on Poetry*, and *Crazy Horse in Stillness*, winner of 1997's Small Press Book Award for Poetry, from BOA. A former Senior Fulbright Lecturer in American Literature in Germany, he has won NEA, Guggenheim, American Academy & Institute of Arts & Letters, and other awards.

**Jonathan Holden** is a University Distinguished Professor, English and Poet-in-Residence at Kansas State University. His latest books are *The Old Formalism: Character in Contemporary American Poetry* and *Knowing: New and Selected Poems*, both with the University of Arkansas Press.

**Mark Jarman's** latest collection of poetry is *Unholy Sonnets*. His previous collection, *Questions for Ecclesiastes*, won the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize for 1998 and was a finalist for the 1997 National Book Critics Circle Award. He is coeditor of *Rebel Angels: 25 Poets of the New Formalism* and coauthor of *The Reaper Essays*. His book of essays, *The Secret of Poetry*, is forthcoming from Story Line Press, and another, *Body and Soul*, is forthcoming from the University of Michigan's Poets on Poetry series. He teaches at Vanderbilt University.

**Judith Kitchen** is the author of *Only the Dance: Essays on Time and Memory* (U. of South Carolina). A second collection of essays, *Distance and Direction*, is forthcoming from Coffee House Press. She is editor of *In Short* and *In Brief* (both W.W. Norton). Recently she has begun to write fiction, and the excerpts from *The House on Eccles Road* are her first publications in that genre. She is poetry reviewer for *The Georgia Review*.

**Sandra Meek** is an assistant professor of English at Berry College, where she teaches creative writing and contemporary literature. Her poems have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *The Kenyon Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Mid-American Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Georgia Review*, *Colorado Review*, and other journals.

**Dannye Romine Powell's** collection, *At Every Wedding Someone Stays Home*, won the University of Arkansas Prize in 1994. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The New Republic*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Sow's Ear*, *Yankee*, *Field*, *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *Southern Review*, and *The Georgia Review*. She won a poetry fellowship from the NEA in 1993 and this year received one from the North Carolina Arts Council.

**Hilda Raz** is Editor in Chief of the literary quarterly *Prairie Schooner* and Professor of English at the University of Nebraska. Her most recent books are *Divine Honors* (Wesleyan Poetry Series), and *Living On the Margins: Women Writers on Breast Cancer* (Persea Books). Forthcoming are two anthologies, *The Best of Prairie Schooner: Fiction and Poetry* and *The Best of Prairie Schooner: Essays*, from the University of Nebraska Press.

**Alberto Ríos's** two latest books are *The Curtain of Trees*, a collection of short stories, and *Capirotada*, a memoir about growing up on the Arizona-Mexico border, which was just awarded the Latino Literary Hall of Fame Award. Widely published, his work is regularly taught and translated, and has been adapted to dance and both classical and popular music. Ríos is presently Regents Professor of English at Arizona State University.

**Stan Sanvel Rubin's** poems appeared recently in *Chelsea* and are forthcoming in *Beloit Poetry Journal* and *The Laurel Review*. They have also appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Ohio Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Kenyon Review*, and elsewhere. His literary interviews were collected in *The Post-Confessionals: Conversations with American Poets of the Eighties*. He is director of the Brockport Writers Forum and Videotape Library (SUNY).

**Mary Jo Salter's** fourth book of poems, *A Kiss in Space* (Knopf, 1999) has just appeared in England from Arc Publications. She is Emily Dickinson Lecturer in the Humanities at Mount Holyoke College.

**David Sanders** is the director of the Ohio University Press/Swallow Press in Athens, Ohio. His poems have appeared most recently in a chapbook, *Nearer to Town*, published by Robert L. Barth.

**Louis Simpson** is the author of seventeen books of poetry and also works of criticism and autobiography. His next publication will be a translation of Francois Villon's *The Legacy* and *The Testament*, due out this fall. He has received many honors and awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry and the Columbia Medal for Excellence. He lives in Stony Brook, New York.

**Dave Smith's** newest book is *The Wick of Memory: New and Selected Poems 1970-2000* (LSU, 2000). He is the coeditor of *The Southern Review* and is Boyd Professor of English at Louisiana State University.

**R. T. Smith's** newest book is *Split the Lark: Selected Poems*, from Salmon Publishing in Ireland last year, and the next will be *Messenger*, due next spring from LSU Press. He has a Virginia Poetry Fellowship this year and continues to edit *Shenandoah*. He lives in Rockbridge County, Virginia.

**J. C. Todd's** poems have appeared in *Paris Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and her translations in *Crab Orchard Review*. A contributing editor to the online journal *The Drunken Boat*, she has two chapbooks with Pine Press, *Nightshade* (1995), and *Entering Pisces* (1985). She lives in Philadelphia.

**Michael Walls** is a labor lawyer in Atlanta. He has work published or forthcoming in a variety of journals, including *Poet Lore*, *New York Quarterly*, *Many Mountains Moving*, and *Chiron Review*.

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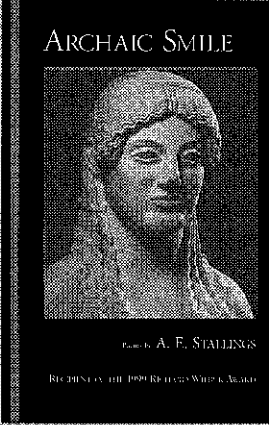
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