Yalobusha Review

Volume 4 Article 50

3-1-1998

Volume 4 (1998): Complete Issue

Journal Editors

The Yalobusha Review

The Literary Journal
of the
University of Mississippi

Volume IV,
1998

Featuring:

•

An
Introductory
Essay
by
Randall
Kenan

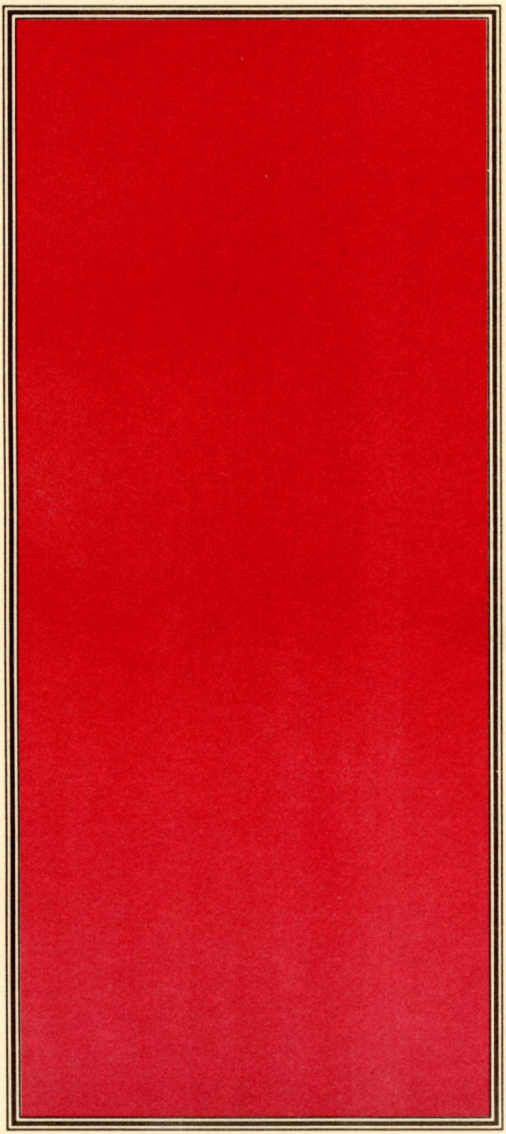
•

A Visit
With
Eudora
Welty

•

Special
Mississippi
Poets
Section

•



The Yalobusha Review

The Literary Journal of the University of Mississippi

Volume IV 1998

1998 EDITORIAL STAFF

The Yalobusha Review is the annual literary journal of the University of Mississippi. We seek fiction, poetry, and creative essays locally and from across the nation. Submissions should be addressed to The Yalobusha Review, P.O. Box 186, University, MS 38677-0186. Please include sufficient return postage with your manuscript. We also accept submissions via email at yalobush@sunset.backbone.olemiss.edu. We consider fiction and essays under 20 pages and poetry of any length. We do not accept previously published works or simultaneous submissions. Please note that we do not read submissions from May to December. Annual deadline is March 1. *The Yalobusha Review* buys First Serial Rights of all manuscripts accepted for publication. Single issues are available for $8.00 (includes postage) from *The Yalobusha Review*, P.O. Box 186, University, MS 38677-0186. Libraries and other educational institutions receive a discount. Multiple-year subscriptions are available for $7.00 per year. Please make checks payable to *The Yalobusha Review*.

Founded in 1995 by Cecilia Hartley, Dwayne Lively, and Beth Spencer in association with The University of Mississippi Department of English.

Dr. Evans Harrington
(1925 - 1997)

This issue of *The Yalobusha Review* is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Evans Harrington, (1925 - 1997), department chair, professor, author, critic, and constant friend of literature, who through his lifelong dedication to the written and spoken word influenced hundreds of students and writers associated with The University of Mississippi and its Department of English over the span of three decades.

The Yalobusha Review
The Literary Journal of the University of Mississippi
Volume IV 1998

POETRY

Randall Kenan

Love and Labor

And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour.
Ecclesiastes 2:10

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.
Ecclesiastes 9:10

He that laboureth , laboureth for himself; for his mouth craveth it of him.
Proverbs 16:26

In the end it's all about play, isn't it?

Of course those of us who are supposed to take ourselves seriously—take what we do seriously—must cower in fear of being found out—found out by the bankers, the grocers, the lawyers, who frown with secret contempt anyway at the idea of a writer. What is that? You bake no bread, you mend no bones, you birth no babies, you tend no busted carburetors, you build no houses—what is it exactly that you do but sit around and make up things in your head? You, grown man, grown woman, you do nothing but play all day.

Suppose you've published something. Suppose you're one of the luckier ones who's been hired to presume to teach the craft. Suppose a bit of ink has been spilt in your name and in your favor. Just suppose.

(Oh, and dear possums, forget it if you're the genius-in-hiding, working at the video store, or the brilliant lass who waits tables by day, both of you dedicated Flauberts and Hurstons by night, hunched over laptop or IBM Selectric or Underwood--Because, honey, you've got a whole lot of proving to do; first of

all to yourself; second of all to the world. But of course you do work, I mean real work, and there are W-2 forms and Social Security taxes to prove that hallowed point. Convince anyone that those stacks of paper, both the ones on the desk and the ones wadded up in the garbage can are more than play, and I'm certain Hillary Clinton has a job waiting for you in public relations. Just forget trying to be taken seriously. It ain't apt to happen. But take yourself seriously. Take what you do even more seriously. That's what matters. That's what's important. That's what gets you through the nights of editing, re-writing, re-casting, reading, pulling you hair out, cussing at the blank page, and the full page, and dumping your girl/boyfriend who never even heard of James Agee.)

But suppose that fleeting, wonderful, at-times-agonizing, at-times-joyful, but always productive days, weeks, months, years—and yes, for some of us, alas, decades—are come to an end: *Granta* has bought two of your stories, your poem will be included in an anthology of young poets, a bright young editor at Simon and Schuster has paid you more than five nickels for your racy and well-written bildungsroman, which Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* will call a dazzling debut; you're invited to the Miami Book Fair along with 150 other authors—yeah, you're an author now, and someone actually gives a flapdoodle about what you're tapping away at on your laptop, your IBM Selectric, your Underwood. Yes, Jean, you've been taken seriously, as an artist, as a craftsperson, as a writer. Let us just suppose.

Say your name is Toni Morrison, or Cynthia Shearer, or David Mamet, or Richard Howard, or Larry Brown, or Arundhati Roy, or this one or that one. Oh, yes, all those brilliant little daydreamed eggs have finally hatched and they're sprouting glorious feathers. Let's just suppose.

Now what?

At some point, sooner or later, a writer must confront this frightening question, a question that goes well beyond the goodies and bangles of material success. This crossroads, as I see it, is the crux at the center of writing. Almost Zen in its simplicity/complexity, yet so many people—including myself—so often peer around it, over it, beyond it, but never really at this most simple of truths: a) writing is a tremendous amount of work; b)

writing is a tremendous amount of play. The best writing comes after a great deal of labor; the labor a writer puts into her or his work, must come from a type of love: a writer must love what he writes, what she actually does, or the work is not even born a still-born thing: rather it is an embryo that never develops legs, let alone wings.

Or, as someone once wrote, A man labors for that which loves, and loves for that which he labors.

A question I ask my students, my fellow writers, and myself most often:

Take away the Nobel Prize, and the Pulitzer too; take away massive advances, movie rights, foreign rights, and bestseller lists; take away *The New Yorker* and *The Paris Review* and *The Yalobusha Review*; take away excellent book jackets and beautiful type; take away readings, Broadway,
radio interviews and all the vanity associated with authordom—take it all away. Now ask yourself: Would you still write?

Why do you write? Why does anyone?

I think of Michel de Montaigne. A Spanish nobleman of the late 16th Century, he wrote out of a need to understand, to express himself, to grapple with his mind and its relation to the world. . .or so he writes.

Here is Montaigne on death:

Wherever your life ends, it is all there. The advantage of living is not measured by length, but by use; some men have lived long, and lived little; attend to it while you are in it. It lies in your will, not in the number of years, for you to have lived enough. Did you think you would never arrive where you never ceased going? Yet there is no road but
has its end. And if company can comfort you, does not the world keep pace with you?

I enjoy reading Montaigne, for I feel I can see his mind at work. There is a grace, there is a bold honesty, there is a special brand of wisdom. Four hundred years later, his words seem uncannily fresh and relevant. Mind you, fellow traveler, Montaigne could not count on Oprah's Book Club to rescue his works from so-called obscurity. He surely didn't sit by the phone

either, waiting for James Cameron to call about a movie deal. To be sure, Montaigne was a man of material means—not a fact to let slip by easily—yet the fact remains: He wrote. Why?

I think of Jane Austen. A few years ago, at the Academy Awards, the British actor, Emma Thompson, upon accepting an award for her work on a movie adaptation of a Jane Austen novel, said something to the effect: "I don't know if she knows it, but Jane Austen is big in Paraguay right now."

Indeed, 181 years after her death, the novels of Jane Austen are "big." Her readership could populate entire countries. Today. But we often forget that during her lifetime the number of people who read her books numbered fewer than the readership of one well-received first novel published today; that is to say, only a few thousand. Why on earth did Jane Austen write?

Folk write for various and sundry reasons, obviously. Some write for fame and fortune, and some happily achieve these elusive and powerful goals. Some write to exorcise (or exercise) their personal demons, and some succeed in that exercise. Some write to calm or even hear a calm voice within, or to realize some pageant, some drama taking place in their brain, to find meaning in the beautiful chaos of life. Some succeed. Many do not. But those who fail and those who succeed all engage in the same activity: writing: why?

Nowadays, to speak of what is "good"can get a person frowned upon, or worse. For better or worse, "good" has been re-defined, democratized. For example: my earlier use of Montaigne and Austen could be viewed as the most reprehensible for of Eurocentric, essentially paternalistic, canonical propaganda. There can be some merit to that non-exclusive point of view. Granted, so-called genre work —police procedurals, westerns, romances, humorous sketches, fantasy, science fiction, popular song lyrics, comic
books—can all be done excellently, and even in the least rigorously realized stuff (i.e. trash—and yes, that is a value judgment) some work went into creating it, some something can be taken out of it, either learned, felt, or understood.

But there again is my rub: whatever the form, whatever one's objective goal, whatever levels of accomplishment one uses as a measure—there is a degree of work involved. Saul Bellow may have worked a little harder and a little longer on *The Adventures*

of Augie March than did Neil Gaiman on his latest issue of the *Sandman* comic, but they both did some work, a certain type of work, a mental work which ultimately came together in the form of squiggles and dots on a page. Let us lay aside, for the moment, issues of quality, for I am about something more fundamental, something about the nature of putting pen to paper.

What is this thing we do when we write? I do not presume to have any special authority to speak knowingly on the actual mechanism within our brains that makes and forms sentences, characters, scenarios, ideas. I have no Oliver Sacks-like learning on the mind, nor any Howard Gardner-like hypotheses on how the brain works. Rather I can speak on the value of that work, of that mysterious labor which, as aforementioned, is marked by no physical change in the wide world. Often quiet, often un-known, un-seen, un-felt.

A writer must, at some point, admit to the self that there may be no pay-off at the end of the Yellow Brick Road; that more trouble might be invited into the life than abated or banished; that the words set down might not quite work, ever; that the fickle, questionable—and purely subjective—Muse of Talent may never ever visit their none-the-less deserving cranium or soul. However, at some level, at some propitious time, the writer must make a faithful decision: to honor the work. To take seriously that peculiar labor of talking to one's own self on the page. To honor the actual labor involved in composition of whatever and however. To love the labor of the work of writing. I speak not of the artifacts of the trade—the pens, the pencil sharpener, the fresh ream of Hammermill paper, the 24 megs of RAM and the 18 pixelated screen attached to the 5 gigs of memory and the pentium chip and Wordperfect, Word, Write —right; no, I speak of what goes on in the brain. Folk who've done this type of work know that the process of writing is work. Real work.

We live in a society, just at this moment of the world, where we are taught to put a great deal of value on Product. On visible Service. We are taught also to disparage the value of the process. In fact we spend time and energy and money trying to find ways to reduce the process, make it more efficient, speed it up, cut to the chase.

Question: How, exactly, do you speed up the imagination?

Love and Labor

Vladimir Nabokov once gave a lecture at Cornell University on what he called Uncommon Sense. Common Sense, according to Nabokov, was not what a writer needed, or wanted; common sense surrounds and abounds at car dealerships, beauty salons, on military bases, at Wal-Marts and at casinos. Common sense, quite literally, rules the world. Uncommon sense, however, is rare and powerful. Think of the uncommon sense of *Crime and Punishment*, of*Beloved*, of*All the King's Men*, of *The Color Purple*, of *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, of *West with the Night*. And please, let's not leave out Batman, Spiderman, the Roseanne Show, Richard Pryor's comedy, and the stories of the late beloved Isaac Asimov. Strange, curious works, from strange, beautiful imaginations, full of uncommon sense.

And, as I mentioned earlier, though I have no special dispensation to make this case stick, I do feel in my bones that only in the imagination—outside and away from the paper-minded men and women with their credit-card eyes— can uncommon worlds be achieved, realized, thought-up. Only in the imagination can such ideas be played with. Ah, play! —such fun. But such serious fun. The writer labors within that fun of the imagined. She labors to put down what she has witnessed in the realm of her imagination: of how a little girl got lost in the woods and encountered a snark or a phear, and did battle for her life; of how a poor fellow of honest heart fell in love with a princess of surpassing beauty and intelligence and proved himself worthy of her hand; of how three sisters turned on their youngest sibling and had her cast from the family; of visions of castles and wars and magical goings on down by the river; dramas of betrayal, malice, hubris, sickness, love—sweet, sweet loves —bitter-sweet success, happy failure; of memories most precious, like jewels; of other ways of living life, coping, learning, being. . . .But without first having played there in the fields of her mind, she has little of value to say.

But here is the dilemma: For grown folk to admit that such a thing is to be visited by guilt—a guilt imposed, directly and indirectly, by society.

For we must be held accountable for the time spent, the electricity burned, the money gone. Are you writing a best-seller? Some undying prose to win grand awards? Some poesy for your

beau? Some ephemeral gobbledy-gook? What exactly are you doing, Mary? Is it of value?

Value? In the real world, it is simply not possible to keep questions of quality and worth at bay for too long. We structure our lives based on a system of priorities: What's more important? What's better? How much does it cost? I have no intention of wasting anybody's time trying to debate whether *Moby Dick* is more or less valuable than Action Comics, or whether Paul Simon's song lyrics should stand beside Gwendolyn Brooks's poems—That's another game. The truth is I'm glad we have them all.

But I do contend that the act of writing—more often than not, a labor of love, mysterious, uncommon, painful, rewarding, on the page, with each unfolding, new, revealing, exciting, dangerous sentence—is, in and of itself, of more worth than most living and breathing Americans are willing to accord it, let alone say out-loud. The process, more than the product. The actual imagination, more than its remnants. True, the remnants are precious, but we must never forget these words are treasures brought back from Other-worlds. We must never forget to honor the traveler's moxy for taking that brave journey.

By the same token the writer has no right to whine—No one appreciates how hard I work! No one gives me my just due!—Nope. And why should anyone? As the novelist Mordecai Richler once observed: Nobody asked you to do it anyway. You volunteered. (He that laboureth laboureth for himself.) So forget about the banker's sneer and the grocer's quibble and the lawyer's scoff, for, when done right, the writer's work is rewarded by its own fealty. External validation is tertiary at best. For the weary sojourner of the mind has discovered: We truly do contain multitudes:

If you don't believe me, the proof is there on the page. . .

In the end, for writer, reader, mom, dad, lover, employer, idle looker-on, fellow citizen, the decision of which I speak —to honor the process and keep it Holy—in this workaday, give-and-take, get-what-you-can-while-you-can, hurry-up-and-wait world, is actually more easily said than done.

The avowal, too, takes work, but it is work well worth the effort.

Richard O. Moore

Miss Eudora Welty: A Reminiscence

"You will never receive her permission to make a documentary film on her work. Eudora Welty is an extremely private person, almost a recluse in Jackson." This is what I was told on several occasions in Washington, D.C. and in New York when, in 1976, I was attempting to raise money for a series of films on American writers. Eudora Welty headed the list which included Toni Morrison, John Gardner, Wright Morris, Muriel Rukeyser, Ross MacDonald, and Robert Duncan.

With the funding in place, I was given Miss Welty's phone number in Jackson, Mississippi. She had been a member of the National Council on the Arts. The number was accompanied by more doubts and wishes of "Good luck."

Back in my production office in Mill Valley, California, I took a deep breath and called the number. The telephone was answered by the "reclusive" Miss Welty. I explained why I was calling and she asked that I write a letter explaining the project and my approach to making documentary films on writers. It was a very quiet and pleasant first encounter.

My letter explained that first and foremost we were interested in the work and hearing it read by the author as one means of arriving at an appreciation of the matter of language, rhythm, and voice. Secondly, we hoped to explore place and its relationship to the writer; and that, finally, we hoped to discover something about a writer's working methods and "workplace." The documentaries were to be edited from the writer's perspective, with no interpretive comments by the filmmaker or anyone else.

I received a letter in reply inviting me to Jackson.

I was still on guard against rejection by this famous but "reclusive" author as I approached the front door of her home in Jackson. The door was opened by Miss Eudora Welty, no maid, no secretary, no "security." Almost immediately we began talking about visiting various sites near Jackson, some of which she hadn't seen since her WPA days. She asked me when the crew

would arrive and I told her they were waiting in the station wagon parked in front of her house. As if she had, somehow, been inhospitable, she exclaimed, "Well, invite them in!" We were off and running.

All of the readings from her work were filmed at home, but much of the time was spent filming in locations to be found in *One Time, One Place.* Miss Welty expressed a willingness, I might say an enthusiasm, for accompanying us on many of these one-day trips and it was at this point that I learned the reason for her undeserved reputation as a recluse. Miss Eudora Welty is a Mississippi "celebrity." This unfortunate phenomenon makes of one a "commodity" and everyone wants a piece: a snapshot, a sighting to report, a request to talk to the next meeting of the garden club or whatever. The only defense was to erect a screen. The crew and I were to become the guardians and the guarantors of anonymity.

We visited Rodney, Port Gibson, Mendenhall, Vicksburg, Simpson County, Natchez, several spots along the Pearl River, and other locations I have probably forgotten. Once I made a serious mistake and broke the pledge of anonymity.

Embarrassment has eliminated the town from my memory, but we had stopped at the local newspaper office for possible directions to sites imaged in *One Time, One Place.* "Miss Eudora Welty" was mentioned with Mississippi pride and reverence. "Too bad you won't get to meet her," was one comment.

Forgetfulness, vanity, stupidity—call it what you will—without a pause I replied "Oh, but I have. She's in the station wagon with us outside." Immediately, everyone, and I mean everyone, in that office bolted for the front door and the street. When I finally got out, I found the car surrounded. Explaining that we were late for our next location I carefully put the vehicle in motion, parting the excited crowd. I apologized at length. She forgave me, but I was left with the vivid image of Miss Eudora Welty as a prisoner in her own home, in her home state, due to her celebrity status as a Mississippian.

Eudora Welty made a rare visit to the West Coast to view the rough cut of the documentary. We both took great pleasure in the progress of the film. However, Mississippi was closer than either of us thought. My wife and I picked Eudora up at her hotel in Sausalito for breakfast. We were standing on a corner of

the small bayside town next to the ferry slip and talking about a wonderful restaurant in Mendenhall where customers sit at a large circular counter while a lazy susan filled with every known southern delicacy passes, more or less at nose level, before one's eyes. When you see what you want you simple put out one hand to stop the turning, but sometimes you have to be quick about it or you will have missed your chance and must wait until the plate, hopefully, comes around again. While we talked, passengers from San Francisco were disembarking from the ferry and I noticed a group of women intently looking in our direction. Finally one woman detached herself from the group, came up directly to Eudora and asked, "Aren't you Miss Eudora Welty?" My recollection is that Miss Eudora Welty fled immediately to the safety of her hotel. Somewhat to my surprise the woman was not upset, she was delighted. There was a Eudora Welty sighting to report.

In the finished film, Eudora Welty remarks, "I just write stories." And her stories tend to flow from good talk.* The art of conversation as a primary means by which people amuse themselves and each other has largely disappeared from the American scene. Its last stronghold was the Deep South. As Eudora reports in the film:

People that live in a small town, and that included Jackson when I was little, amused themselves by dramatizing everything. . .I used to listen to people talk when I was just a little girl, and my mother says that I used to come and sit with a bunch of ladies and say, "Now start talking." And I would hear these exaggerated (not from my mother, I may say!) but these wonderful exaggerated tales of hurt feelings. . .it's just pure. . .you've got to amuse yourself somehow.

The truly great storytellers, from Homer onward, have not bothered to carry in their working imagination the immense baggage of symbolism, myth, and theories of the human condition that the critics discern in their work. Of course, it's undoubtedly there in the story for generation after
generation of critics and readers whose interest lies more in meanings and signification than in stories. It's all there in the flow of talk, and the critics will have their say, but the gifted

storyteller always gives us more than the most elaborate critical exegesis can ever hope to offer. The storyteller's voice rings true as good talk itself.

When I first read a Eudora Welty story, I must confess that my tone-deaf Yankee ear didn't really hear the story. Oh, I was impressed with the lively characterizations, the solid structure, and the "social commentary" of the story (it happened to be "Petrified Man"), but I was nowhere near the story itself in my reading. Then I heard a recording of "Why I Live at the P.O.," a Welty story I had read many times. As I listened, I began to "read" the story anew, because a wholly fresh world of sound, of rare good talk, opened up for me. Now I try to read all stories, as all good readers should, with the ear as well as the eye.

**What follows is taken, in part, from liner notes I wrote for the Caedmon recording of Eudora Welty reading "Petrified Man" and "Powerhouse."*

Alicia Hokanson

Teaching Homer to Eighth Graders

What appeals to them most is that Odysseus
was one horny guy
moving from goddess to nymph,
not that he kept his vision
of Ithaka like a flame in his gut.

And Telemakhos—that wimp—
turned out to be okay,
he could have strung the bow
if hsi dad had let him.

Argos, on the dungheap, rolls
his eyes and dies, joy in his doggy heart
when he hears his master's voice.
And Eurylokhos-a fool to eat those cattle—
got what he deserved.

Nausikaa? An idiot to let a naked man
from the bushes by the river
hug her about the knees.

But with what glee they read
the bloody battle in the hall.
How cool that Antinoos
got it in the throat, and that Melanthios
was strung up by the balls.

How far we've come when they begin
to feel the complications of return
to greening Ithaka, and kneel in the orchard
with Laertes weeping. The old guy
fooled by a son just beginning
the ship-wrecked journey home.

Odetta D. Norton

Shadow Aspects

"All the muscles of the foot act upon the toes"
—*Gray's Anatomy*

Look, see skinny boy tap.
Mmm, yes. Those arrows, his extremities!
Metatarsal articulations.

Black is
solder melting and metal, the way
alloys fuse. Long

before I knew how to fly,
I knew how to fall. Oh, yes.
Abductors,
flexors,
eight, seven, six, five...

Forever patter that jive, boy,
Set
divine tempo, clack
like counters on the abacus.

Plan the shuffle, ball, change
And unexpected ricochet.

On his last leg, he's still
definitive hop-
scotch. The drummer is also a dancer,
n'est-ce pas, Siva?

Mmm, destroy that beat, boy.
With bottle caps, some scatter of sand:

whatever you need, get it
and start from your feet.
Fit percussion between your arch
and heel, you see, it's all in the delicate proportion of contact

to disengagement. Show you love the floor, boy-
it's the floor that keeps us from falling.
That's it, thank the floor, boy.
Thank your toes all over the floor.
Bless it, mmm,bless it.
Set your step so.

Cynthia Hogue

A Letter from Hungary

Furious the roses where he drew blood.
Cutting oneself, opening up feels new
(*and new my soul*).

Still, one reasons,
The remarkable
gets by us, not sleight of hand
but subtle. We flit about,
hummingbirds,
our hearts
reft with nebulous longing.

Who is this person?
Where did he come from?
How does one know
when not to drop to
ground level,
nearer the new
blossoms, bury
one's face in them?

He writes of new love
(*I know you told me not to!*).
We have no memory or desire,
we simply read the letter.

It is not our life.
We do not bleed.

Forrest Hamer

Location

The place is in disarray. Photographs lie
restless with receipts, thread, small colored bottles,
the programs of funerals and choir anniversaries.

As necessary as another's body. Left alone
Sunday afternoons, I looked in my grandparents' dresser
for what has waked me stark nights.

What you looking for, son?
Don't know, sir.

My grandfather's pockets are as deep as the dark, light
shining quick as nickels to buy me a honey bun
and him a pickle from Miss Pearl's store. He is as hungry as I
am.

I'm broke and busted. Can't be trusted.

In the drawer, I miss seeing it again.
I touch each thing as if it is asleep, place it
back, thinking it is hiding.

Is arranging things.

Joyce Sutphen

Song and Questions

A man is wondering about an old song.
Everything in the song puzzles him:
Why is Billy "charming"? Is it his mother
who is asking about this girl he's met?
The man assumes that baking a pie
is a sign of domestic competence, that
"mother wants to know if the girl can
cook." Noting the girl's attachment to
her own mother he asks, "Will Billy have
to make a home for the girl's mother also?"
Is Billy's mother asking about baking because
"in her experience, Billy has become
interested in one flake after another
who can't light the stove or wash a dish?"
What is the girl's name? Why are we
given Billy's name and not the girl's?
Is the girl's goodness (the song—as
he remembers it—distinctly states "she's a
good girl and will not leave her mother")
in *addition* to her not leaving her mother?
or won't she leave her mother because she's a
good girl? The man wonders this since,
as he goes on to say, he likes to imagine
that if goodness and staying with mother
are simply contingent, Billy may have been
testing more than pie. The man says
the song and these questions arrived
unexpectedly and claimed room in his
brain. He sends them on, mysterious and
filled with gaps, for further questioning.

Mitch Cohen

Job

Job fingers the cross that hangs around his neck. The cord is rough, leather. Checks the speedometer; says an almost silent prayer at the sight of it.

The girl across the seat from him, driving, she can't be much older than his daughter. Two, three years maybe. Four tops. She won't stop talking. Won't stop talking, that is, until the music on the truck's radio catches her and sets her to bobbing and nodding. But even then, it's nothing but a momentary silence, and then she starts again.

. . .so I just told him to go fuck himself, that I'd be just fine without his sorry ass hangin' around. Y'know. . .I don't get it. My mother always, always, told me that I needed one around, a man I mean, but whatever—She's such a weak little bitch anyway. Do you have the time?

—The clock's out. Jimmy fucked it up when he put the stereo in.

Job checks his wrist. Still no watch. He turns to her and shakes his head. Reaches between his legs into his bag for his cigarettes. Finds one and the lighter. You don't mind if I smoke, he asks, do you?

—Fuck no, she says. You got one you could spare?

Job hands her a Camel. Lights it for her, then lights his own. So, you were saying?, he says.

—Oh. What? About Jimmy? Fuck him. I've talked about him plenty. Enough is enough. Last thing I'm gonna say is, fuck him, fuck that goddamn baby, and fuck the clinic. She reaches forward and turns the volume up on the stereo. Loud.

Job rubs his forehead. You can't be choosy, he tells himself, about who gives you a ride. Raindrops begin to speckle the windshield. He considers her again and he is thankful. Thank you Lord, you do provide.

His body is stiff and the truck is unforgiving in its size. Japanese.

His knees almost level with his chin. Roof of the cab scratching his baseball cap. Every so often, though, in spite of discomfort, he drifts off in to a sort of sleep.

He dreams quick, nighttime, passenger dreams. He watches the crowds of people rushing back and forth in droves across the surface of the water.

Some of them, he knows, are inching towards a pit of fire. He opens his mouth to warn them, to scream some recognition into the equation, but the sound he produces is nothing but a low, scratchy squeak of impotence.

There is a terrific whine from the sky and in his dream, Job turns his head towards the heavens but then thinks better of it and hides his face from what might be there. The whine grows louder and louder and Job can almost feel his soul being sucked up by God.

The whine of the engine wakes him. It is night, still raining. The road screams softly out beneath him. She is across from him, fingering the ring in her belly button. Her belly is flat and tan. Even in the dark of the, truck, he can see that her belly is tan.

How many dreams of a firm and taut young blonde girl has he had in his life? Job shifts in his seat, tries to push the thoughts away, out of reach. Thinks of his daughter quickly and the building heat is gone. Just like that.

—Oh, she says, I thought you were sleeping. I never get tired. Not ever when I'm driving, anyway. That's the only time I really feel alive, y'know? I always say that. And y'know, I always say that too. . .that I'm always saying that, whatever it is. Funny, huh?

She reaches between her legs and finds a bottle of whiskey. Braces the wheel with her knees. Uncaps it, takes a long hit off the bottle. Offers it to Job.

Taking the bottle, Job is suddenly aware of how drunk this young lady is. He hates people who drive when they're loaded. Hates them with everything he has. He himself has three DUIs under his belt. Takes a shot and hands her back the bottle. The needle on the speedometer has passed ninety.

—Y'know, he says, you might wanna slow down, y'know, drinking and all. Don't wanna get pulled over. I don't know about you, but me, I don't have the best luck with the police. They just don't like me. So, y'think maybe you wanna slow it down a bit?

—Oh. Fuck the police. I'm fine to drive. Who the hell are they to tell me what I can or can't do? Fuck that.

Mouth like a sewer, this girl. Job wonders if another ride would have come by if he'd have just waited. Someone a little less volatile, maybe. He's just too tired. The truck hits the shoulder of the road on the passenger side. Gravel flies up into the night. In his head: Our Father, who art in heaven. . .

She talks.

—The only thing I can't figure out. . .uh. . .did I forget your name? I don't think I caught your name.

Job tells her again. My name is Job, like the book.

—Oh yeah, she says, I love that book. He can really write, that guy.

Yeah. Well, anyway Joe, the thing is this: I really thought I loved him.

Y'know? That fucker. How could someone be that way, say all those things

. . .I mean, really make you think they love you and then just. . .just jet like that? Some people are just...so...so...so wrong, don't you think?

Well, says Job, things are always happening for a reason.

Nah, fuck that. There ain't no reason. You don't run off and leave your girlfriend like that. That's just wrong. What kind of man would do that, just run off and leave behind his girlfriend like that, all pregnant and alone?

Job pauses a minute to let the wound settle. He remembers all the work it's taken to forget that nineteen-eighty-one ever existed. Forces that picture of his daughter from his mind.

—Sometimes, he says, people just don't know what else to do. Sometimes life just comes up on them. Comes up so goddamn strong that you just can't see any other way out than to just get out. Don't you see that? Sometimes your only option is to leave.

—It's not an option. In my eyes, he ain't nothing but a punk ass bitch, leaving us. . . me like that.

—But that's no good for you, he tells her. Forgiveness can be—

—Fuck Forgiveness. He's a scumbag. A lowlife. Don't even try to tell me any different. Didn't even have the decency to give me any money.

Mitch Cohen

Forget coming with me. He's too chickenshit for that. But money? Anybody can do that part, can't they?

—Well...I don't know. Have you ever tried to see it from his point of view? I mean—

She's banging the steering wheel with the heel of her left hand.

—His point of view? What kind of shit is that? Let me ask you something mister. Have you ever, ever, watched a woman get one? An abortion? I doubt it. Fuck, the sound alone would probably scar you for the rest of your life.

He almost gives in to the image of it, holding her hand, trying to be there. But then: Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom—

—I mean, Jesus Fucking Christ! My mother had one once. She told me how horrible it was. Said she'd never been the same after that. Like something was. . .I never knew what she meant until. . .

She takes another hit from the bottle. Jams it into her crotch. Job fingers the cross around his neck. Speedometer reads one hundred plus.

—Darlin', he says, considerate, compassionate tone, this might sound like a load of horseshit to you, coming from someone who couldn't possibly understand what it is you're going through—and, in a way, that's completely right. But listen to me, please.

—Don't give me—

—Just please, he says, please listen. I've seen a lot of things in my life. Whole lot of shit's happened to me. Bad things, mostly, but some good too. And I believe, I really do believe that whatever happens to you is supposed to. Sometimes, I know it, it doesn't make any kind of sense,
but you've got to try and get something from it. Y'know? You either use it to grow or it just eats at you and eats at you and eats until you're nothing but hollow on the inside.

—Hollow? Hollow? Fuck you Joe. Fuck you, fuck you, god fucking damn you. Hollow? You want to know about hollow? Try having a vacuum rammed up inside of you. When it's done sucking the life out of you, then you tell me about being fucking hollow inside.

She's not crying.

—God bless you, he says.

—Oh Jesus.

There is silence, long, heavy, and uncomfortable silence.

Job reaches:

—Can I have another swig of that bourbon?

She hands him the bottle. Twisting the cap:

—How old are you?

She snorts. How old are you? Fucking Methuselah.

—Thirty-three, he says. Thereabouts anyway.

-- Older than dirt aren't you? Laughs. I'm seventeen years old, and I don't want none of that oh my child, you poor young thing shit from you.

Alright?

—Yeah, sure. It's just that, well, my daughter's almost your age.

—Yeah?

—Yeah.

—Got any pictures?

More gravel flies as she slides into the shoulder on her side. Job decides there's a very good chance this might well be the last ride he ever hitches. He checks to make sure his seatbelt is fastened.

—No, no pictures. I haven't seen her in quite a while. Years. A lot of years.

—Divorced?

—No. Actually, me and her mother. . .we never did get married official.

—That don't matter, she says. Papers don't mean shit anyhow.

—That's what I always said.

—Do you ever get to talk to her? Your daughter, I mean. Not your wife. . .her mother. . .whatever.

—No, I don't. In fact, the last time I saw her, she couldn't have been no more than two or three. Beautiful little angel. Her grandma said she had my eyes. I'll always remember that. I don't know though, I'm not quite sure what my eyes look like. Y'know what I mean?

She turns to Job, takes his chin in her hand. Considers his face. Scratchy four or five day growth casting a heavy shadow on him.

—Your eyes, she says, are dark. Mysterious. Boy, that's been done to death, hasn't it? Let's see. . .your eyes. . .you have good eyes. They go back pretty far. You're right, she says, you look like you've seen a lot of things. He grunts a sort of laugh. She turns her eyes back on the road. Finds her place between the lines. Loses it. Finds it again. Joe?
she asks.

—Yeah?

—Do you want to kiss me?

Without a second's pause: No.

-Good.

She's doing well over a hundred now. Job crosses himself in the dark of the truck. Prays to God to keep her safe. To keep him safe. She's swerving something awful now. On earth as it is in heaven.

—I do wish you'd slow down some. She doesn't hear him. She's drinking. Bottle end up towards the sky. Her throat in action reminds him of the waves hitting the beach in Northern California. When it comes down, he takes the bottle from her and drinks some more.

He lights two cigarettes and hands her one. His movement shakes her. She'd started to doze off. Job feels a wave of fear smack him. He is afraid now for the first time in a long time. It doesn't feel good.

Really, he says, everything happens the way it should. No answer. Job tenses as an oncoming diesel passes them, making the truck shake. Thine is the power, he thinks. Thine is the power. Job hands her back the bottle and then undoes his seatbelt. Fingers the cross around his neck. Ignores the whine and the climbing needle.Puts his hand on her shoulder. She drives. He puts his foot up on the dash and wishes, quick and futile, that the seats in this thing would just recline.

James Scannell McCormick

Día de los Muertos

In Adam's fall,
We sinned all.
—The New England Primer

Satan has set his writing-desk among the winged skulls
Of the tombstones. *I don't understand what you're asking,* he

Says. I've come for the fruit, the sin. He's used
To having to wheedle. He's set his chipped-gilt desk

Under a flowering crab. Or it is, in spring. It's
Fall now. Behind me the graveyard gate rusted open and

Air still as glass. Bric-a-brac sits on the
Leaf-red leather desktop. A yellowy silver fork. A half-

Burnt beeswax candle (no holder) and a hurricane-glass. A
One-legged starling that looks like taxidermy, but then it

Cocks its head. The faint odor of vinegar. I tell
Him again that I've come for the fruit. To eat

Of the Tree of Knowledge, etc. Maybe I've disturbed him.
He's handsome, tanned. His skin pleats at the eye-corners.

He's crossed his legs at the knee, and I find
Myself trying to catch a glimpse of his left foot,

The cloven one. I can't tell if it is, though.
Does he brood, does he tally? He already has me

Under Sloth (form: acedia) and Pride (the intellectual kind).
Listen,
He says. He has a small wen under his lower

Lip. *The sun highlights your hair both red and blue.*
His voice is roughish, deep.
Somewhere tempera-flat saints roll

Their eyes, drum their fingers on their insignia-Catherine and
Her broken wheel, John and his goblet with the serpent

Twining out of it. *I love just talking with you.*
Are you free right now? From somewhere he's produced wine

And little powdered cakes firm as pectorals. In the distance
The mosquito-whine of music, then glass splintering on stone.

No, I insist. Just the fruit. *Done,* he says, with
A smile and a level look. He drops a crabapple

Into my hand. I notice he's wearing on his pinky
My grandmother's wedding ring.
"Better the devil you know,"eh?

Luisa Villani

The Station at Donetsk, Sometimes Called "Don't Ask"

Stillness at the heart
  and yellow rays all around,
not your typical existentialist poem
  but something trembling on the edge
of a table. Hear the undertow
  of a passing train. I detest messy afternoons
but sometimes the fruit does speak
  before it falls. Then the world rises,
the whole hulking machinery of the day,
  a low grumble in the throat.
What to say? In the crowded dissolution of dialects,
  the passing inflection of seconds,
what could stop a woman
  from falling off a platform
like so much cut lumber? Not that I
  thought about it. Not exactly.
I tell you even when poems come upon me
  I'm usually doing something else.
And I have no concept of time
  except to know that it passes. This
was not my appointed train, not my
  country, not my job.
Exposed to all that nothingness
  when she gave way in front of me
I did what I've always done
  in the face of every nightmare
I've ever known. I reached for cover
  and pulled, as if one mighty tug
could muster all of safety's
  safety around me. Like a banana
putting back on its peel. Like a book

closing its cover. No words
passed between us as she half-turned,
my fist still gripping the waist-belt
of her coat. No words as the light diffused
through her yellow scarf
and train doors appeared behind her,
open, waiting. *Nyecht,*
just her eyes half-closed
as if any end to fatigue
was a fitting end, then she sank
into a tide of passengers.
I backed away, set adrift,
loosed from context
and I'm still floating. My face
in the bathroom mirror
just now seemed detached, unfamiliar
like a photo not quite developed
wavering in a tray. I tell you
these lips that don't work
are not mine, nor these caged teeth.
These eyes belong to someone else,
someone swimming far above me.
My clothes are weighted,
unwieldy, my arms, useless for hours
which I recollect to have been three.
Every quarter turn of the sun's rays
a train shakes the surface
of the street. Twelve now. An even
dozen. Someone should grab
my shoulders and say, *Yes, yes, alive!*—
but there's no one here
only the watcher watching
as the groceries reverberate
on the table,
and the yellow tomatoes
occasionally fall.

Jessica Fisher

Pomona against Redlands, February 9, 1965

for my father and his father

I.

Even now my father whistles when he breathes through his nose.
Before three-pointers and strict time limits on holding

he was a great guard, would run the court with his mouth
wagging open. She and her man loved to go to the games

but their boy was an embarrassment to her, sweating and
gaping even when he was standing still, even when

the cameras turned to him. She'd wave till he looked her way,
then open and close her mouth like a fish. For a few

minutes he'd remember, would clench his jaw shut
though he didn't give a damn how he looked out there.

II.

They figured their father didn't give a damn about them, so why
should they bother going to bury him? One of the seven

let go of it enough to make the drive, took a handful
of dirt and let it drop. I don't know if that changed it

for him or if it was just the right thing to do. But I think
the old man cared: the last time I saw him he showed me

a photograph of his boys at that game, Dick shooting,
John pulling down Dick's shorts. Or maybe it was the other

way around. Whoever captured that was brilliant, that
must have been the way they always were, one having

his moment, the other mocking him. The old man kept that
photo though he gave the rest of it away, the love seat

and crystal, the white scalloped dishes and all the food
left in the cupboards and fridge after she died, the hundreds

of matchbooks. He wanted none of it, wanted to drink
in a room of his own, watned not to have to say

he was going out for a long walk, didn't care for supper.
But he wanted the photograph; that ought to count for something.

That ought to mean more than the years of bullshit he gave them,
more than drinking away the inheritance, fucking up so bad

their names fell out of the Hollywood blue book and got lost
in the white pages, back to back with everyone else in the Valley

who was no one. That photo made the old man laugh, he
remembered the night when the Fisher boys went up against

one another at Redlands and nobody could stop the younger,
nobody could stop John-fourteen points to the lousiest shooter,

hatchet man wearing his brother out, watching him to see if
he'd rebound to the right or to the left of the basket, getting there

in front of him, squaring off, putting him at his back
and holding him there. Making the ball bounce.

Ann Wood Fuller

The Last Resort

How easily the Cayman sky
opened up its dawn, conch-pink,
and we, having already had our first drink
out on our lanai,

the heat-crowned palms fanned-out,
the sun-beaten bougainvillea, a height
just right
for us to go about

without our clothes-
and you, already bored with the shells, the native straw, the shops
of George Town, dropped
like the breadfruit drops into a chair and closed

yourself so quickly with your robe, against the leeward wind, which must be
while we were inside we
never felt the heat on our sunburned skin

through all those sticky nights
when even the furniture would sweat
and you kept
walking the sandy floor of sleep to spite

the bed, but somehow through it all I didn't mind
the wind,
or, for that matter, the sand-
how easily it filled a wound, one grain at a time.

Nina Lindsay

Hobbyhorse
after Schumann's Scenes from Childhood

Speeding home from dinner in the truck
to catch the last night's coverage of the Tour de France

we watched the pelicans, with long faces to the wind,
sweep against the sky as it scuttled back.

Meanwhile, the cats at home hurtled through their food
in apprehension of the raccoon's hour

and the world tore round, trying to align
itself against the night in time.

Was it Coriolis, or just the turns you took
that pulled me to your side?

As we took off over cow grates, I counted my luck:
You, the sleepy heat of countdown, this synchronic ride.

Bronwyn Lea

Orthograde

I have pictured her from the back
A curving coming down the spine
Through the hip & then reversing
To a graceful S-bend
As it travels down the weight-bearing foot.
A figure standing *contraposto*
A plumbline dropped from the base of the neck
The upward hip-swing exaggerated
The matching shoulder slightly dropped.

A life contoured with a fine stick
Of willow charcoal
An ingres envelope of living
A nude with all its lines and glances
Adding up to a faint facsimile of god.
I say, "your eye sockets
Are midpoint on your face, your beauty
Pronounced in the curvature
Of your mouth, your head surprisingly deep,"
As if by recounting the lines
I might be excluded from their mystery.
And though what my eye follows is the form,
The pubis reproduced with its soft assertion,
I cannot see the pelvic bone
Stacked like a high-backed saddle
A scaffolding for some ancient plan.
Yet I know it is the unseen
That is the principle thing.

I'm most unstable when upright
Dizzy with each unfolding complication
Of walking-the deliberate displacement

Of balance-the continual loss
And recapture. But in running,
I've known the moment
When both feet are off the ground
Momentum thrusting even further forward
Balance point always leading
Heedless of the requisite fall.

Susan E. Barba

To the Artist of the Quattrocento

It is night and the black windows
collect white underbellies of bugs,
map the ordered geography of dining table, chairs-
insects pressed, swarming over the flattened surfaces.
I hear a stream murmuring through woods
beyond this strange collage, spilling night
secrets after running hushed by day.

Too many distractions under the sun's bright eye-
eyes everywhere at once and multiplied.
You'd think our other senses would be sharpened,
seeing as we do, half-blinded by the glare
objects attract, bathing in description:
light explodes from a corn field,
and the eye yields up its harvest to the sun.

But once the towel is thrown over that brilliant bird,
veiling a purple grackle, busy in furrows, tearing
kernels from the cobs, sun dipping low, and absurd-
how it disappears to light the other hemisphere,

I see that truth and change are braided grasses
in a Chinese handcuff tightening to the pull,
or the unbordered puzzle of light becoming dark becoming light-
that to paint this canvas vibrantly by day
is not to guard against indefinite paling
...grass giving up green beneath snow,
but to ensure a darkening, no, deepening with age.

David McKenna

Boy Or Girl?

Shanks looks north and south for methedrine as the stars come out. Bob Dylan is at Broad and Snyder, scrounging for butts in the gutter. Miles Davis is at 52nd and Market, sparring with an imaginary foe. Iggy Zeitz, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Henry Kissinger, is distilling a lifetime of experience into a major speech to the bartender at the Boot n' Saddle. America needs a great man to strike a balance of power in the post-Cold War era. Someone who shows an instinct for distinguishing between the permanent and the tactical. A Richelieu, supremely realistic, with an aversion to moralizing and a talent for adapting to adversity.

Shanks can barely make out the words, Iggy's accent is so thick. He creeps closer to the bar, waiting for a chance to speak.

"Eliminate weaklings, and those who champion them," Iggy says, turning to point at Shanks. "Power should rest with a man of power, period."

Shanks sidles up, puts his foot on the rung of Iggy's barstool and whispers politely, "You got that ounce of meth you promised to hold?"

The pudgy policy wonk eyes him coldly through horn-rimmed glasses. "Every choice has a price," he croaks, pointing a stubby finger. "Great men do not make favorable assumptions about the future."

"Yes, but where's the meth?"

"I have Grade-A her-ion, but no methedrine," Iggy snaps, dismissing Shanks with a back-handed wave. "Balance must be restored."

Shanks regrets braving the late-night trip to Philly. Fighting a case of the sniffles, he retreats to his rusty Thunderbird and strikes out in all the other dives on Broad Street. The Queen's Bee Hive is deserted, Luster's Fun Spot burnt to the ground. Richard Pryor raves empty promises at the Utopian Pub. No meth or even bootleg Beauties. Donna Summer is vamping at

the Terminal Lounge. She's got cocaine, a waste compared to meth, even when its not cut with baby powder or something worse. Good for a nervous buzz that never blossoms to a full-blown high. Coke is like almost getting laid.

Shanks hovers like a praying mantis, tall and bent and still. Donna sits him down just like Reba used to and plops a big black hand on his skinny thigh. "I got sumpin' make you forget that fairy dust."

Chin stubble peeks through her heavy makeup. Shanks backs from the bar and says, "An incurable disease."

Donna laughs. "Don't be such a fag, hon."

It's a long drive home to Atlantic City. He cat-naps at the wheel, dreams of sex and food, and wakes wanting neither. Dozing muffles his true desire. Asleep at 60 miles an hour, he's like an amputee feeling pain where his leg used to be. Chastity, who once asked to have his babies, is pregnant by one of the Amazing Alou Brothers, Dominican triplets who juggle butcher knives and basketballs, and look exquisite in spandex. Swifty Agamemnon, his bartender/lifeguard friend, caught the Virus and has to be wheeled down to the beach to watch the ocean.

Sickness breeds resolution. Pushing the gas pedal to the floor, Shanks vows to sober up and save cash. He'll quit the A.C.-Philly loop, look sharp and live large. Sunbathe on volcanic ash in Costa Rica. Eat kangaroo pizza baked in ovens fueled by brush from the outback. He'll find the beach on Cyprus where Aphrodite was born out of the sea's foam. It's just up ahead, he can smell the salt air. A group of pale swimmers is testing the waters. Andreas, the innkeeper at the crowded clifftop tavern, beckons him with a backgammon board.

The usual suspects on Pacific Avenue are holding only heroin. Shanks' casino sources are no help. Roger the floorperson hanged himself with his socks, and Vincent the bookish bartender has been missing for weeks. If all else fails, he'll try Bad Sal.

Don Rickles is in Avalon's main bar, pointing at a scrawny, four-eyes porter struggling with a huge bag of ice. Look, it's Woody Allen's son!"

Everyone laughs. It really is Rickles, on his way to perform in the upstairs theater where Chastity met her jugglers, and where Shanks once let her climb over the bar to escape a panther who'd bolted off-stage from the wild animal act. Tired from

the hunt, Shanks watches Woody dump ice into a steel sink and orders a double bourbon. Booze will do till he finds a better parachute.

His apartment is a stone's throw from TropWorld. He finds a bottle of Jack Daniels and, after a ferocious search, a single 10-milligram Valium. Just in time. Heartache he can stand, but a speed crash is like being flayed and rolled in a bed of salt. He slumps at the kitchen table as the elegant blue pill dissolves in his knotted gut. The benzodiazopene courses through him, numbing a billion neurotransmitters. He flutters like an apple blossom, reading People magazine, humming his grandmom's favorite hymn. There is a balm in Gilead.

Now he's strolling in the Easter parade, in a pink crushed velvet and white lace dress, holding hands with Reba and her friend Flo, wearing five pounds of dried flowers on her head. The baby's breath is his favorite.

Last year, Shanks won the Pre-School Girls prize. It's Reba's annual Easter joke; only the three of them know. She says he'll be a star someday, the prettiest star, and don't worry what his father has to say about it. The good-for-nothing bastard dresses like an undertaker, even on holidays, and isn't man enough to make fashion decisions for anyone.

The low rumble of a chopper brigade disturbs the peace. Harleys roar up South Street, and the parade becomes a stampede. Bassets shake off their baskets and bonnets, synchronized skaters collide and fall. Musicians scramble up church steps, and Shanks slips in just before they slam the door. Rampaging bikers use a phone pole for a battering ram. The church echoes and shakes with each attempt at forced entry. Shanks dips his long, slender fingers into holy water and says a prayer to St. Theresa.

The rhythmic thudding shifts to the ceiling, then smacks him in the chest.

He lifts his head from the table and reaches for more bourbon, awed by the force of the collisions. Bad Sal, the landlord's son, is in the bedroom above with one of his whores. Sal's headboard is banging against the wall
and shaking the flimsy seashore house to its foundations. Shanks squeezes his hands between his thighs and shudders. The noise persists for anywhere from ten minutes to two hours. When it

stops, Shanks hears a door slam and the clatter of high heels on wooden stairs.

Good Sal is the landlord's legitimate son. Bad Sal is his son by a woman he never married and is mortal enemies with the landlord's wife and with Good Sal. Bad Sal is in constant trouble with the law, but the wife can't persuade the landlord to banish Bad Sal and his motorcycle. The landlord,
ever eager to divert blame, will evict Shanks in a second if he finds him socializing with his bastard son.

Discretion is essential. Shanks creeps upstairs and asks Bad Sal if he's holding. Bad Sal washes down a handful of blue Valiums with a beer and belches. "All I had was a few tens."

It's an emergency for Bad Sal too. His girls can't make money fast enough to feed his $200-a-day heroin habit. He owed every white dealer on the island. Shanks drives him to Kentucky Avenue, where they hail a black guy called Sugar Pop. Bad Sal does the talking. He's wearing jeans and a T-shirt, with his greasy hair in a ponytail. Snow flurries swirl around him in the T-Bird's headlights. Shanks can feel himself wasting away, but Bad Sal radiates greatness. Conan the Barbarian with needle marks.

Sugar Pop directs them to the Boardwalk. Bad Sal commiserates with E-Ram outside the Serene Custard and Golf, then pulls Shanks aside. "We're in business if you front me."

The Valium has worn off. Shanks is shivering. His belly muscles coil like razor wire. He hands Bad Sal a wad of bills. "Get me something will take the edge off."

Bad Sal snaps his fingers and fidgets. "Boy or girl?"

A challenge. Shanks retreats to a tin-roofed Caribbean hotel, to watch green fields of sugar cane roll to the sea. A pink sun is setting. Dinner is served: melon sweetened with Madeira, swordfish filet, lemon sorbet. Over coffee, Johnny Mathis invites him to spend the night at a gray-shingled mansion with manicured gardens.

Bad Sal repeats the question. Boy is an opiate, girl is m methedrine. Bad Sal, like Iggy, condemns stimulants and anyone who favors them. He says meth makes him flutter his eyelids and chatter like a canary.

Shanks is feeling swishy, truth be told, and wants to toughen up. "Boy," he says.

Money and product change hands. E-Ram slips away after engaging Bad Sal in an elaborate handshake. Bad Sal leads

David McKenna

Shanks off the boards to a dim motel and unlocks the door of a unit that smells like sex and seaweed. He has six rock-hard pellets. Shanks wants to crush one and snort it, but Bad Sal pooh-poohs him. "You'd puke for three days."

Bad Sal uses water, spoon and butane lighter to cook up a pellet, then draws some of the liquid into a syringe. Shanks wraps a rose-colored stocking around his upper arm and pulls it tight. Bad Sal steadies Shanks' bony forearm, pokes it, pulls blood into the syringe, pushes everything into the vein. The thumping resumes. Shanks huddles with Reba on the marble floor in the vestibule. The Best-Dressed Family tramples him. His petticoat rips. There, there, Reba says as the battering ram slams his chest.

Shanks lets go the stocking, exhales and nods. Bad Sal shoots up on the sofa. The door opens and one of the girls enters with a middle-aged john.

Their progress is blocked by Shanks, on hands and knees, gasping.

The girl stops chewing her gum and looks at Bad Sal, who says, "I think he likes you, Meg."

She and Bad Sal laugh. Shanks gulps air. "I can't breathe."

The john says, "It's indigestion."

"Drink some baking soda and lie down," Meg suggests.

"Take a Bromo, wake up a homo," Sal says. "I hear you got a crush on Cesar Alou."

Shanks staggers out the door toward the boards. Invisible blows to the midsection double him over. It's an unusually cool night for the islands. He hikes past palm-shaded bungalows, among red gum and bastard apricot trees, breathing the sea breeze, anticipating warm beige sand and turquoise waves at daybreak. Dustin Hoffman is rooting through a trash bin on the outskirts of the mangrove swamp. Shanks would pump him for tips on breaking into the business, but he's shy. Stage fright is destroying his career hopes. He worked one day in the wild animal show, then went back to the bar.

At least it's not high season. He can stroll the golf course to the mansion, with its oval swimming pool and sculpted hedges, or hike a dirt road to the knobby hills and watch the sun rise. With any luck, the custard stand will be open by then. Just the thing for indigestion.

Mississippi Poets: A Showcase

Evans Harrington, professor, author, and mentor in whose memory this volume is dedicated, once told this story.

Some time in the 1950s the English Department at the University of Mississippi invited a northern poet to campus. Two professors arrived in Memphis to meet him, but missed the poet among those who disembarked, so they went for coffee. When they returned they found a man standing at a window dressed as they imagined a poet might be dressed. It was indeed the poet, looking out at the Mississippi River. He pointed at the Big Muddy, and said, in a dryly understated way, "That's some creek you guys have here." This visit got off on the wrong foot and never improved, apparently, since one elderly professor confessed to Dr. Harrington, "I prefer my poets dead."

Perhaps it was apocryphal. Mississippi is undeniably an Eden of fiction-writing. But, as you will discover in the following pages, poets, too, are alive and writing in Mississippi. Here you will find poems about Mississippi, its weather, its music, its people; poems about Vietnam; poems about matters of the heart; matters that turn us inward and matters that pull us out into the world.

I hope you will enjoy this gathering of poems by Mississippi poets as much as I have enjoyed discovering them.—*A.K.*

Angela Ball

A Death

At the beginning of summer,
the violent season, your body's summer
gives up to the lushness
of a tumor your hand discovered
apropos of nothing—like a note
that turns up in a coat pocket
the first cold day, an urgent matter
you don't remember.

When you enter ignorance, die
after fifty-three years, seven months,
five days, when you die at noon
in summer, the sun is featureless,
full of itself. Nurses take lunches
outside, a sharp smell of cut grass,
an airplane chalking its flight—
the first things to exist without you—
your hearse travelling
the narrowing highway to where you once lived, and past—
maybe the nights sleepless with blossom,
maybe the dazzling, transparent light.

Angela Ball

Replacement Sunflowers

My yard: where a garden was—
plum trees, apparently. The iron posts
of a clothes line. One example
of a blue pick-up.

Family memories: father sneezing
heroically, one sneeze after the next.
Mother tying flowers together like arrows.
Sister walking pinned to one side
by a water bucket, its drops following
in archipelagoes. A tomb-shaped
freezer's jerky, glimmering hum.

My childhood, the heyday of combing and brushing.
Centered on dressing tables, combs and brushes
carved from rosewood and ivory, very quiet.

The town has a coffee shop with hats
that never leave their pegs.
They can be seen together at night
through gray windows—a strange
suspension of movement, like someone falling.

A doctor listened to my heart: "Did you know
you had a murmur?" Immediately it began murmuring
questions I used to ask: How
did the fire start? What's this river?
What did the prostitute's daughter
say to Uncle when he left for war?
"Goodbye." She said "Good-bye."

Steven Barthelme

You Demand an Explanation

Go back and say to your skin
why are you doing this to me?
And then ask your teeth,
where are those other fellas
used to be there and there?
Ask your eyes
what happened to your blinking vision?
And bones should tell
why they ache
and blood
explain its sluggardliness,
your will
its weakness,
your mind
its shrinking,
your heart,
its unease.
Ask why you weren't advised
ahead of time.
Ask why no one asked
whether you were paying attention
when your father died,
your mother decayed,
the cat grew old,
began to limp and stumble.

Ask anything, ask whatever
comes into your head.

D.C. Berry

Piggyville

Two teenage pigs, Porky and Miss Peaches,
were gifts from Arkansas. We escorted
these two lovebirds to a tiny village

that touted its honeymoon shed,
no moldy motel with a shower stall.
Mr. & Mrs. Ham had a whole mud

hole. The couple would be a small
whoopee factory and soap
opera. The poor folks in the ville

would get rich selling the piglets—
buy radios and eat like Mama Cass,
swap their buffaloes for golf carts.

Two weeks later we're back
to call on Mr. and Mrs. Whoopee,
see if their mud stinks plush,

their tails curly.
We heard no grunts
and found their whirl

pool out-of-order, unstirred, covered with
a sheen of grease. The pork
factory had been eaten. Because they ate

too much. They'd rather eat than poke,
so the comrades threw the village a barbecue:
chitlins, spare ribs, pork chops,

soup bones. The tails made glue
and soap. The hides, leather luggage—
great for excursions to Moscow,

Peking, or Miami. The whole village
was grateful, said, "We like having choices.
Next week we'd like two more democracies."

D. C. Berry

The Guard Reports of Seeing the Light

So dark my eyes
go tunnel blind like rat holes stuffed
with sticks of dynamite.

I squint and wait.
And Nguyen might be squatting
ten feet away,

picking his teeth, scratching his dong, waiting
till I can't tell if I can smell his rice
cologne and woodsmoke tang or not, waiting

to light me up like I'm Liberace.
And, sure enough, I fall asleep.
I wake to find a purple French

tickler. It sheaths
the tip of my rifle.
Nguyen's joke, maybe,

been known to bowl a skull
into your knees.
Or the cap on my rifle could

be a buddy's
rubber, showing me how
easily

Nguyen could sneak up and blow
dry my wet dreams in a twinkle.
Or this prank might be the faggot's

tickler,
his telegram—I could be his all-night
candle.

Somebody's always got
to be showing you the light a
way you never forget.

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Papa Legba

I can't shake that devil
got to shake that devil and ride
I can't shake that devil
got to shake that devil and ride
I wake up in the darkness
devil still by my side

Met him at the crossroads
devil he sup with a long spoon
met him at the crossroads
devil he sup with a long spoon
took my ruby heart away
left me with this ragged tune

Devil he wear a black coat
his tail is five miles long
yeah he wear a black coat
tail five miles long
he wrap that tail around me
devil gone do me wrong

I can't shake that devil
got to shake that devil and ride
I can't shake that devil
got to shake that devil and ride
I wake up in the darkness
Lord you know that devil still by my side

Devil he put the stars out
take away the moon
devil he put the stars out
take away the moon
if I don't see my baby
devil gone take me soon

Ann Fisher-Wirth

Shorty

Under the neighbor's plum tree,
Shorty, *dum-de-dum* casual, drops fruit
into a grocery bag. Or slips up from the garden,
knobs beneath his shirt,
one hand waving vaguely as if shooing flies before him.
Tells me, *These be green. I was jus walkin through,*
I was thinkin I be checkin on yo tomatoes.
Tells me where he lives:
shack behin Isaiah Busy Bee Cafe
on that hillside down by Kroga. On his kudzu-swaddled porch,
a blue sprung chair. From cut-down milk
bottles and rusted gallon cans, scraggly stalks of geraniums
spring, and salvia, splotched coleus, red clover.

When his shack burns, what does he live on,
where does he sleep?—Bandy-legged, bright in a
handmedown lilac-turquoise-black-plaid shirt, he trails
a rusty mower door to door.
Next year I pass him by chance, in Baptist Memorial to visit a
baby. Sweat-slick on a high white bed,
he clutches his stomach
and tells me, *they cuttin on me.*

Trickster, spirit of place...

He vanishes, appears; vanishes, appears,
at the mouth of a steaming woods.
Grizzled, knob-kneed, like a holograph
or smoke, he turns his hands out,
turns his hands out:
his leaf-green hospital gown
in shreds beneath a torn plum-purple blazer.
Trumpetvine snakes to the edge of the sky.
Great red branches bend down to him like fever.

Joshua Gordon

View From Algiers

All afternoon we've got the place to ourselves,
drinking beer and listening to this jazz band
accented, like some tin-ear Miles Davis,
by car horns blaring past outside. Every time
you whisper in my ear, the sax player grins
and elbows the trumpeter, not missing a beat.
Towards five o'clock, they call it quits as
the Saks Fifth Ave. boys flood in. Everyone's
a player, with tie askew and top button open,
building a crescendo from under-the-table
trading to raised glasses. Over the din, I
suggest we cut out and catch the ferry to Algiers,
make out on the levee where we can watch
their carpools pile up like Mardi Gras beads.

Blair Hobbs

Tomato

At the field's wooded edge
a crow talons a limb

and startles a gust of dead leaves
into the morning breeze.

Wings folded, he gives me
a bossy-eyed stare. A flirting wink.

Each gesture, a promise to sweep
down and snap straw

from my bread-basket hat
or tug threads from my unraveling shoulders.

I am the makings of a nest.
Nailed to this planted broomstick,

I am an aproned frock full of needles.
A passing flock cackles

at my sewn grimace
and pea blossoms mock

my button-eyed glare. At my hem,
green beans, long as fingers,

are laced with aphids.
The frilled lettuce heads nod and rot

in their bored soil.
The wind whistles through me—

the lady of this land.
One ripe tomato dangles

by a vein-green stem. It could be
my heart, soft side to the condescending sun.

The fruit sweetening like a come-on
for the trees' worm-throated scavenger.

Blair Hobbs

Kidnapped

Anna, in Sunday school
we learned that God was everywhere—
cloaked in the sky's nimbus,
yawning in a wood knot, stretched
across the skin
of the cat's cream saucer.
Camouflaged, he was
our spiritual soldier.

Remember the time
we asked your mother's teapot
for Christmas dance dates?
God was glazed in the porcelain,
like a genie,
and granted our wishes.

We had escorts to the church
basement that was transformed
by a ceiling of paper snowflakes.
We slow danced
our tuxedoed boys
with pearl-pinned orchids
crushed to our chests.

Tell me, Anna—
when the stocking-faced man
stole you from your bed
with a gun barrel
to your temple, did you see
God's eyes snagged into
that nylon face?
Was his flowing beard zipped

into a wind breaker? Were his hands
gloved, or did he have
fingerprints to dust?

In these hide-and-seek woods,
I can still find
you in the blue-eyed sky,
feel you in the soil
beneath fall's red-handed leaves.

Emory D. Jones

Sacred Music

A gloss on the following lines from "The Eolian Harp" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge:

> *Methinks it should have been impossible*
> *Not to love all things in a world so filled;*
> *Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air*
> *Is Music slumbering on her instrument.*

Methinks it should have been impossible
Not to feel the rhythm of the spheres,
The joyous music of the Lord's which still
In undertones so permeates our ears—
Methinks it should have been impossible

Not to love all things in a world so filled
With symphonies of His created score
With chords so firm and melody that's trilled
By every living thing that we adore—
Not to love all things in a world so filled

Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air
Is but the pause before the music swells
Again in great crescendo of our prayer
Of praise to Him from everyone who dwells
Where the breeze warbles, and the mute still air

Is music slumbering on her instrument
In dreams of the eternal song to Him
Who orchestrates the harmonies He meant
To elevate our souls—our silent hymn
Is Music slumbering on her instrument.

Richard Lyons

Enclosed Backyard

We're obsessed with local color, local weather.
Like Mexican villages it's a wonder we don't have local saints.

Saint Jerome or Saint Paul facing off. Saint Francis
who could hold his arm so still a swallow dipped to its
branch.

A remote mossy fort, history just rushes around our borders
and we're not the worse for wear, raising the garden wall
another rock.

Even for a split-second no one and nothing levitates
unless it's the birds who are our allies in the fade-away,
in the rising-up.

The swallows even full grown call to others in the ditch
beyond, *contact call,* or is all this calling the secret loneliness
of song?

Loneliness doesn't give out offerings, its cup always full.
Clouds darken where the mimosa flaunts its pink eyelashes.

After a downpour, a rainbow bends the sky above.
What's wrong is we radiate only for an instant,
then there's our lives.

What's wrong is we remain in our bodies, the row of cilantro
paling to tiny white flowerets. Gone to seed, the century plant

lifts its spike as if, like me, it had just swallowed some
disgusting pill.

St. Paul knew the relentless decrepitude of the human engine.

At one edge of the yard a hill of red ants rises, at the other,
crawdads muscle the earth into rings. Inland silent oceans,

we keep on talking, scratching our fingernails on the stones.
At the far end of the yard rise nine black lodgepole pine.

Richard Lyons

It Must Move

Trying to keep speechless is like barricading a stream
with mounds of dirt & sand, the trickles

leak from the chinks in your fingers, around the heel of
your hand.

For all I know, Patrick, the blond boy next door, is mute.
The lines move in his face like a vocabulary

only the taciturn Taoist monks could follow, line for line,
its various cadences broken the way the wind breaks off
suddenly,

continuing in a wave of silence I have no way of attesting
to except to say I suspect silence does, like water, like
wind,

move without purpose, with no idea of gain, unfearing
loss or wear.
It must move, like love, invisibly—the shadows
flickering,

the hair fibers nervous beneath the vault of leaves.

Greg Miller

At the Window

White calla lilies gathering like flocks,
gold tongues extended to the glozing sun
outside her kitchen window, she can see
beyond them, in a field of Queen Anne's lace,
her husband, son, and daughter, soapy water
splashing up from the pressure cooker lid
catching her in the corner of one eye
as steam rises from the still running rinse.
Starting to cry almost against herself,
she turns to the porcelain angels on the wall,
each one a wooden step above the next
on a wooden emblem of the crescent moon.
But why should she cry now, she asks herself,
the cancer thriving in her small son's head
removed, the worst of the danger past?
The redbuds burst like barnacles from the bark.

Greg Miller

Heat

His cane in one hand, he
balances against the stone,
his free hand pulling weeds—
    her name, his own
name too cut where he stoops and reads
        the lines,
seeing them joined as they should be.
The stones make a strange sight,
he frets: the head and foot
should be laid square.
    The workmen set
their load down just anywhere—
        twin stones
—hers, his—awkwardly anchored—not right.

He'd almost like to be
with her. A rain crow cries.
The sun glares. Inching down
    —wedged there—he tries
to ease himself against that gown
        of grass,
unmindful that no one will see,

and slips, thrusting his cane
against the base to right
himself. His wrist
    smarts, the tight
nerve needling him where his grip missed
        to toss
him back, furious with the pain,

to stand up straight again,
but still, like them that dream.
Bareheaded in the sun,
    he starts to seem
strange to himself. He walks back, done,
        to pass
his car's bright hood, stop, and get in.

Gary Myers

Tales of Grief and Destruction

I am watching my hands closely today
Sometimes they want to fly like birds
North south
It's a problem to which everyone has an answer

Put your hands in your pockets they say wash them
Pet your dog he has come home at last
But things are not so simple anymore
My dog died during yesterday's hurricane
Strangled by a scarf from a neighboring town

I sat in the corner of the room hands over my eyes
Thinking of wheelchairs careening down rain-soaked streets
There was a loud siren from a passer-by
My dog was thrown from a sinking ship by a reluctant sailor
And I could not get my hands to do what I wanted

It had been raining for days
My dog licked my hands feverishly circled the room
I thought about moving south or north
I whistled an hour on the veranda
A distant roar crept through the suburbs
My dog was struck by a bus and died in the
hands of a tearful passenger

Loving a killed dog involves the hands
It can't be helped
Folded hands like a haystack in one's lap
All night I was thinking to the sound of crickets
The hollow whistle of nighthawks overhead

Whenever my hands are those tame pigeons in the front yard
I am sad
Though I've grown used to tame pigeons
The way I've grown used to my tired feet
The summer swings of my weak legs running after my dog

In the distance there was a tail of smoke rising
My dog ran into a burning house and could
be seen dashing from room to room
He licked the windows wildly
I wore gloves and felt hopeful

Hands in the guise of hands appear subdued harmless
Though capable of imaginative acts
The men who pulled my drowned dog from the river
wore gloves
I watched from the road hands in my pockets
A neighbor's scarf around my neck
Buildings tumbled along the surface of the earth

Marvyn Petrucci

Paris, 1978

It wasn't post-war tragedy
in black-and-white,
but Paris was cheap.

Hidden wine came up
from the cellars. The bells
of St. Surplice rang the hour

of each day we had left—
one hundred of them.

We weren't *Jules & Jim*:
we could fly
at any time.

The life ahead of us caught
the one we lived,
steaming with warm bread,
green bottles of wine.

J. E. Pitts

Five

I.

Evergreen sways in moonlight
crow in high branches
blinking in and out tonight

II.

Windsong sings a lullaby
whipping this rooftop
bare of chalky ashen leaves

III.

Stream is a river spread thin
river is a sea
sea is something else itself

IV.

Cloud cover does not cover
the sun which is a
soldier marching in darkness

V.

Pageant of the animals
ends in dusk
two by two they vanish slow

Jean-Mark Sens

Southern Rain

What the rain has consumed tonight
in the Southern hotness
hues of humidity licking over branches
the body of myself I bare through this atmosphere
as one walks out of oneself
lampposts merely incandescent from the other side of the hill
the feeling that here death comes into knowledge
the dessication of a rose bouquet in a garret—
a number on a combination lock that will snap open
in a last gasp
humidity pulls in my lungs
and exhausts breath
air feeds oversensuous plants
scalpels of petals, laminates of pistils
the cloy, suffocating abundance of honeysuckle
ensnaring greenness, so nefarious, of kudzu.
How one rests here bathed in the atmosphere—
one with one's sweat inescapable in every pore.
You breathe low in breathing rhythm
each insect a twinge in the night's orchestration
discrete callings converge under sweetgum trees.
Later, you find it is the moon that exhales its pallor
touch of a far finger
and over the fields tractors harrowing yellow beams
swarm suspended in furrows
    boatlights' tilting sways
fading wake raise smell of earth, kelp-like:
night, vast and so close to the skin.

Ovid Vickers

Miss Emma

She was as shapeless
As a carved cathedral saint.
Her long arms and thin fingers
Could grasp wiggling worms,
Reach high bullaces,
And pick berries from briers.

Sometimes she stood barefoot
Among the cypress knees,
Minnow schools darting about her legs
And purple water iris brushing
Yellow pollen on her skirt.

If she was needed,
People searched the swamp.
She could take off warts
And talk out fire.

Ovid Vickers

Anticipation

One lazy July afternoon,
as sunlight caught
the wings of dragonflies
and heat shimmered
above the wire grass,
I went with Bill Charles
across the back forty.

We passed
the sun bleached bones
of some long dead cow,
painted tattoos on our arms
with purple pokeberries,
and walked from sunshine
into cyprus shade.

Schools of silver minnows
stirred sand at the creek's edge,
while water iris stood tall,
pointing to loops and coils
of yellow trumpet vine
embracing the lower limbs
of tulip trees.

Bill Charles threw stones
at a squirrel,
and I ate a handful
of huckleberries.
We shed our clothes,
looked at each other
for signs of manhood,
and dived from a cyprus stump.

Jerry W. Ward

Mary and Martha in Bridgeport/Chicago

(for Lenard Clark, with thanks to Take 6 and Sterling D. Plumpp)

Mary did not weep
his blood migrated from body to wall
Martha did not moan
his black skin sang Caliban's song
Mary didn't weep, Martha didn't moan
his accusation slept in a coma

Mary did not weep
tears on the hand Kwidzinski,
red meat of the pope's common cousin
Mary did not weep
gentle rain on the hand Caruso,
the mafia muscle of Mediterranean arias
Mary did not weep
a waterfall on the hand Jasas,
the sweatsmeared palm of Bosnia
Mary didn't weep; she saved her holy water.

Martha did not moan
for Chicago's catholic sins
Martha did not moan
for any disgust profound or angry shame
Martha did not moan
for a nigger boy beaten into pulp fiction
Martha didn't moan; she conserved her voice.

Martha did not weep
she's in Pharaoh's army
Mary did not moan
she told Clark to call 911 for his pain.

Julie Wolf

In Between

Raymond's the only poet in Between. He knows as well as anyone in this town that pets aren't allowed in the diner, but he brings that little mutt on in just the same. He comes in at the same time as always, as I'm about to go on break, and nods at me from the doorway. Personally, I don't care if every dog in the state of Georgia walks in and helps itself to a bowl of grits, but I'm still on duty and have to enforce Harlan's rules.

"Raymond," I say, "you know that dog is strictly prohibited."

Raymond always tells me what I say is important, but he slides into a booth with the dog right beside him anyway. 'Rose Red,' he says, which is what he calls me even though my hair is blonde and my name tag says "Rosalie" on it plain as day, "let the dog stay and I'll keep my pants on."

I'm not sure what he means, but it seems like a fair exchange. Business is slow enough as it is without Raymond sitting here bare-assed to drive the customers away.

"Your pants? What are you on about now?" I say, giving the dog a scrap of bacon from the dirty dish I'm holding. Then I lower my voice a little, setting the dish on the floor. "At least put him under the table. Harlan'll make him buy a cup of coffee otherwise."

Raymond shakes his head but does what I ask him to. He should listen to me; I'm nearly old enough to be his mother. I look around the diner, checking for customers I know aren't there, and sit down in the booth opposite Raymond.

"Harlan!" I yell. "I'm going on break!"

Harlan comes stomping out from behind the counter, drying a plate with the bottom of his t-shirt. "Make it quick. I'm not paying you to sit around and smoke cigarettes with him." Then he marches back into the kitchen, muttering.

"Damn that Harlan," I say, lighting a cigarette, but Raymond just looks at me with a look that says, "It doesn't matter."

Raymond doesn't seem to mind that no one around here likes him much. He's unusual, that's for sure, but I've always tried to take the time to understand him anyhow. "Now, Ray," I say, "what's all this about pants?"

Raymond pushes an ashtray toward me and says, "The sign doesn't say anything about pants." He points at the two signs hanging next to each other in the front window, one with a red line through a snapshot of a puppy, probably one of the strays Harlan Jr. is always trying to find a home for, and the other one that says, in Harlan's handwriting, "No sherts, no shoes, no servace."

"So? It doesn't say anything about pants," I say. "They're just understood."

"No, Rose Red, nothing's just understood."

"The pants, Raymond," I say. "What about the pants?"

He shrugs. "Think of them as insurance."

"Insurance? For what?" I say.

"Insurance against what, Rose. It's against." He runs his hand though his hair. "Prepositions," he says, staring at me hard with those sunken eyes, "are more important than people here would have you think."

Raymond still hasn't gotten it through his head that most people in Between don't think about prepositions at all, but I go along with him regardless. "All right," I say, "insurance against what?"

"That sign doesn't say a thing about pants. I could come in here without pants on and Harlan would have to treat me like any other paying customer. I took it upon myself to wear pants." He glances back toward Harlan, who's sneering off into space. "I figure I go the extra mile, I wear the pants, I can bring the pet."

"Lord, Raymond," I tell him, "it's no wonder everyone round here thinks you're crazy."

I thought he was crazy, too, the first time he came in to Harlan's, because he just stared at me for a long time before saying a word. Then he said, "I know; I can tell." I asked him what exactly it was he knew, and did it have anything to do with what he wanted to eat, because booths were for paying customers only. He sighed, covered his face with his hands, and ordered a cup of coffee.

Julie Wolf

That boy, I remember thinking, could use somebody to help him get dressed in the morning. Poor thing, wearing a ratty black knit cap and a torn flannel in the heat of summer. I sat down with him during my break and asked him who his relations were, and he said, "I am unrelated of late." I took that to mean he wasn't here on a visit, so I asked him what made him come to Between, because no one comes to Between—if you're born here, you most likely won't die here —and he said to me, "We're all in between. Where are we if not in the middle?" I must have looked at him like he had two heads, because then he said to me, "That's with a lowercase." A few days later, though, he told me he'd left Fulton County in a stolen car looking for a place to buy pecans, but the car ran out of gas on 78, at the turn-off to Between. He liked the name, ditched the car, and stayed.

Raymond's always talking about words, never about the weather or Sunday's sermon or Harlan's special of the day. That's what bothers people about him. He's been in Between going on two months now, and Harlan's customers still watch him, but not gentle, the way he watches me. They look mean, like they're burning on the inside with something spiteful to say to him.

Instead, they just say it loud enough for him to hear.

I don't like the way they treat Raymond. I've known everyone who comes in here my whole life, I've always gotten along with them, but lately, they don't say much to me, either. They're happy to let me pour their coffee without so much as a "Morning," and I don't mind in the least. My husband tells me, "Rosalie, people are talking about you. They're saying you're as crazy as him." Harlan must tell Billy I spend my break sitting with Raymond, though it could be anyone, because Between's so small, you can't step in a pile of dog crap without someone being there to see it and tell your husband about it. Billy doesn't love me to pieces like he once did, so it can't be he's jealous; he just doesn't trust Raymond. "He ain't like a regular man," Billy says, which I tell Billy is maybe why I like sitting with him.

The bell on the front door jingles, and Leland Morrison walks in, dropping his empty mail sack in the doorway as if expects his mother to pick up after him here, too. He huffs and puffs his way to the counter, where I see him and Harlan looking back at me and Raymond every so often, saying words like "lunatic" and "faggot." Raymond's looking under the table, at the dog I

reckon, and I think maybe the tip of his ear turns red, but he doesn't say a word. He never does, not about them.

Raymond uses words I've never heard before, words like "besmirch" and "aplomb," which send me running for the dictionary at the end of the day, but most folks in Between couldn't lay their hands on a dictionary if they had all night to look for one. I've asked Raymond before what's keeping him here, with no family needing looking after and no one else like him. I tell him all he would have to do is haul his skinny ass in one direction or the other and he'd could land someplace people might not call him a queer.

Stand in front of the diner and look over one shoulder, you're facing Atlanta; turn your head the other way, you're looking at Athens. Between's right in the middle. He never gives me a straight answer, though, just says, "We stay." Billy says it's crystal clear, and I must be blind and crazy if I can't see Raymond doesn't know he's not wanted, that Raymond hasn't got the sense God gave a Tic Tac. Could be he just doesn't care about the same things as other people.

Harlan clears his throat, which means, "Say good-bye to your little friend, Rosalie; I've got a business to run." I light another cigarette and say to Raymond, "Bossman's calling. You got anything to read me today?" He reads me new poems every day. I'm never sure if they're good or bad, but I know they're his, because they almost never rhyme. Raymond doesn't like constraints. Trouble is, sometimes I wouldn't know they were poems except for the fact that Raymond's a poet. If I don't understand, though, it's nice just to listen; something different anyhow.

Raymond knows I haven't read a poem since high school, but he says he likes the way his work "falls on my ears." He calls it his work, which may be why he has no job to speak of. One time he said to me, "You understand, Rose Red, that the fog does not come in on little cat feet." I said he was right about that, that then you'd hardly even notice it, and you can't help but notice fog, particularly when you have to drive through it; and he grabbed my hands and said, "Perhaps if the cat were wearing work boots."

Sometimes when Raymond gets going like that, I'm not certain even he understands what he's saying. All I can do is try.

Julie Wolf

Raymond's always been a little shy reading to me, ever since that first time he came in and I asked him what was in his notebook. It took me a while to get it out of him, but finally he read me something he said was about death and I thought was about a lawn mower. Now I think maybe he just acts shy to make him seem more like a poet, but I don't let on that I know. Raymond says poets are private people.

He reaches into his pocket and pulls out a wrinkled piece of paper, smoothes it on the table in front of him. He says, "The pain of exposure is exquisite," to which I say, "Is that why you were so eager to drop your drawers before?"

"Oh-Rose-you-make-my-cheeks-red," he says, like it's all one word. I can tell he wants me to think it's poetic, but it sounds to me more like a fancy way of telling me to keep quiet. I don't say that, though. Raymond has a heart of gold; he just likes to hear himself talk, is all. He touches the corners of the paper, and I say, "Come on now. I haven't got all day."

Raymond sighs. "This is a poem for anyone who is a slave to the clock."

I look at my watch and laugh a little, but he doesn't react.

"It's called 'Alarm Clock,'" he says.

I stare at the top of his head as he leans over his poem and wonder about the brain in there. His finger moves along under every line as he reads.

Out
Out, damn spot I say.
I say, Spot
what's that you've got
in your mouth?
A shoe?
My shoe?
I take issue with that.
I am not ready yet
to get
up.
Now shoo.

Raymond always keeps his head down for a minute after he's done, which is good for me because I almost never know

what to say. He writes a lot about shoes. Once I asked him why, and he said, "Have you ever walked a mile in another man's acrylic sweater?" You ask me, I think it's because "shoe" rhymes with a lot of other words, but I could be wrong, because, like I said, often as not his poems don't rhyme at all. I wish they did sometimes, because then I could at least point out a nice couple of lines.

Come to think of it, though, this one does rhyme, and I'm stumped anyway, so when Raymond looks up at me, I start to push the salt shaker in a circle on the table. "Sometimes it's hard just hearing it," I say.

He turns the paper toward me so that I can have a look for myself.

"That's all right," he says, his voice thick, as if he's about to cry. For a second I think it's because I haven't said anything about the poem, but then he says, "I always feel a little speechless when I hear good poetry, too."

"Mmm," I say, nodding but not really looking at him.

"It's meant to be sung, you know," he says, and I sit straight up. Harlan would never let Raymond back into the diner if he started singing.

"You know Harlan doesn't like music," I tell him. "He doesn't even have a juke box."

"I don't mean literally, Rose," he says. "But you hear the music, don't you?"

"Well, I'm not too musical, Raymond," I say, turning the salt shaker again. "Billy always says he'd rather listen to cats mating than hear me sing."

Raymond touches my hand, and the salt shaker wobbles a little. "Billy's a fool, Rose Red," he says.

Billy says I'm a fool for spending all my time with a poetry-writing city boy half my age, in public, where everyone can see me. Still, I probably shouldn't let Raymond talk that way about my husband, but some things it's hard to argue with, so all I say is, "It's all right, Raymond. I think I know what you mean, about the music." I almost forget to pull my hand away.

Raymond looks sadder than I've ever seen him look, and sighs. "There's music in all of us," he says. "Billy just can't hear it."

Julie Wolf

Harlan's stomping around behind the counter, clearing his throat again and picking up napkin dispensers and setting them back down, hard, so I say,

"Looks like I've only got time for one more."

Raymond pulls a folded envelope out of his pocket. "You might want to read along with this poem, Rose Red," he says, sliding it across the table.

"This one's got a more complex structure than the last one. It's an urban drama."

I'm looking at Raymond, but I can feel Harlan's eyes on me.

"Okay," I say, taking the envelope. I've seen urban dramas on TV, and I'm not sure I can concentrate on a poem about poor people or pollution with Harlan staring at me like that. I'm willing to bet he won't wait till close to tell Billy Raymond touched my hand.

Raymond pulls his knit cap out of his shirt pocket.

"Raymond!" I say. "It's August! What do you need that for?"

He clears his throat. "Exposure, remember?" He puts the cap on and presses his hands into his temples, as if he had history's worst headache and Harlan was banging pots and pans and making all the noise in the world.

Raymond looks right at me when he starts, not like he did for the last poem, when he barely lifted his head off the table. Now I look down.

"This one's called 'Put Your Money Where Your Mouth Is."

He starts:

'Your lips are red
like the lining
of my guitar case.

Look at it, poor gaping maw,
empty, open
like a mouth waiting for a kiss.

But wait. What's this?

Alas! It is fed
and see how the red
is now dotted with dimes.

In Between

These are changing times.

You smile and I see how
brightly your teeth shine,
like the change you throw in my case.

You look old to be wearing braces.'

Before I can ask him what a maw is, Raymond takes his hat off and keeps staring right at me. "Rose Red," he says, "I wrote that one for you."

I try to light one last cigarette but fumble a little with my lighter.

"That's sweet, Raymond," I say, "but do you think Billy would like knowing another man's writing me poems?" Truth be told, Billy wouldn't care and if I did tell him, most likely he'd just laugh and say, "I didn't think he liked girls."

Raymond looks serious, like a little boy who's too old for his age and says, louder than he's said anything all day, "Billy's the one who ought to be writing you poems. That man doesn't know what he's got."

"He's got a wife who's a waitress who's about to lose her job, is what he's got," Harlan says from the counter.

I hate to think of Billy having a laugh with Harlan at Raymond's expense, but with Billy out of work, I have to do as Harlan says. I put my cigarettes and lighter in my apron pocket, thinking about that last line about being too old to be wearing braces. "You know, Raymond," I say, "you need a girl your own age, not some old lady like me."

"O sweet flower," he says—and I know it's 'O' and not 'O-h' because Raymond explained to me once that the 'O' by itself is used for love and worship—"a muse has no age."

There's a crash from the kitchen, and Harlan yells, "Get your ass in here, Rosalie! And tell your friend booths are for paying customers only."

I stand up. "I'm sorry, Raymond, but you heard the man." I know I've got to go back to work, but I don't want Raymond to leave just yet; he's safe when he's here with me. I walk over to the coffee pot and fill a mug for him.

"I'll pay for it," I say, "with my change, like the braces on my teeth." I grin at him, showing him a mouthful of teeth that were never made straight.

"Thank you, Rose Red," he says, putting his cap back in his shirt pocket.

Raymond drinks his coffee, but he and the dog don't stay much longer. When Raymond rises to go, he says, "The diner ceases to exist for me when you are not in it." I say, "I most certainly am in it. Who do you think filled up all those ketchup bottles?" And he says, "You know what I mean."

And I do know what he means. I understand him. If he reads me a poem tomorrow about ketchup bottles, I won't say, "Raymond, what are you doing writing poems about ketchup bottles?" I'll say, "I know, Raymond, that those bottles represent Billy and Harlan, because they need me to take care of them, too." And then I'll think it, but I won't say it: Raymond, the irony isn't lost on me that there are two bottles and not three; I realize this apparently minor detail means one day you'll leave me here the way I was before, with my husband and my job and my ketchup bottles and my coffee break.

He stands in the doorway a second longer than normal. If he's waiting for me to follow him, he knows I'm not going anywhere. And as Raymond walks through the door, with that dog at his heels, the two of them going Lord knows where, I want to tell him I would miss him if he ever took off in one direction or the other, like I always say he should. I want to tell him, "The diner ceases to exist for me, too, when you are not in it," but I don't. Instead, I just wave and say, "See you tomorrow." The door's closing behind him when I say it, but I think he can hear me anyway.

Dawn McGuire

Old Lovers Take the Long Way Home

I

This last ride to the lake,
to the wood, the fountain,
to any lake
or wood or fountain, it is all one

or to this lake, this reservoir,
this patch of Jeffrey Pine
up Mayhew Flat

or Lourdes, or Santiago de Compostela,
the good fountain
at Lincoln Center, or anywhere
the life spilled fast into your mouth
and was, for the moment, enough
You choose, it is your right, you are the one dying

II

as long as I have loved I have loved you

III

In the sewer creek behind where we lived your blood
curled in the water like smoke. I untied your sandal,
rubbed your cut foot, a wishing lamp
and you held your breath because it hurt and I
held my breath because it was you, there,
releasing not into the Great Water of our wish
mothers, tireless and big enough to carry us across
but to the crawdads in the silt. It would do.
I carried you though you were bigger but I did take

the shortcut. Your blessing briefly
turned the water pink, rose and fell
as rain in the Danakil and we flourished and our wish
children flourished

IV

You become a thick tree of a man
and love other men
I become a loud bird of a woman
junco, plover, woman lover
kept moving to endure. I kept
the sandal thong. Stretched and stretched between us
never once broke

V

So on this day
I carry you to the car or the cab
or if movement is spark
to the now frail papyrus of your body

Sing you there, or just
accompany you
on the smoky scales of your breath

or just remind you, pour
over your special senses
a little wish water
and this time take the long way home

VI

I do this for you
as
when it is my time for the crossing
you will come back from anywhere, everywhere
at whatever cost
carry me

Richard Godden

Valerian Chudovsky: In Defence of the Old "E"

ß: an ancient written sign which could neither be pronounced nor read, known as the silent "E," and called by Chudovsky, "a sublime eucharist."

"The Winter Palace burns. I annotate;
high on charred timberwork a logos gusts
in strawberry emberpoint, 'Pterosaur.'
Yet, when they roped and pulled the Eagle down
of every Tsar, and snapped its double neck,
they all unknowing choked themselves, because
behind the bird, the throne, the secret police,
the Dynasty...back of Byzantium,
the egg from which the icon grew was safe,
netted in an 'e' gone mute. 'Pterosaur'
[lit., 'of pteric ruins']. Enunciate—
"Pterosaur;" scaled birds whose earliest serfs
are not recalled in any document,
between the 'p' and 't' in hosts you hide
on plosive lips, ('pt)'—hear them, perhaps? A hole
so holy that any vowel just veils the 'pit,'
'pet,' 'pat,' 'put,' 'pot'—the rusty flocks rustle
towards a counter-sign. Invert 'p' ('b'):
press 't' through it ('ß'); much as wind-weltered grass
holds at its root a palimpsest of storm,
so ('ß'), lips the mute egg of origin.

Of course, having bloodied a velvet wall,
levelled some tombs, and tried to prove each thing
again from the beginning, new fire-faced men needs must
enter our mouth, as though it were
a Ministry, and they, Commissioners
entrusted to protect the future perfect

compositors and pupils of the State
from any silent sign (rut on the road
to National Literacy). Memos will pass:
"Cut out the mother tongue." Response, "It's lost."
"Try Nikolai 2, under Romanov:
the iron death mask's mouth." "Mouth gone."
Crated Romanov heads, "For Dental Frisk,"
pack corridors in the Academy.
Ambitious clerks, discovering that the mouths
of monuments are to be limed, stock pile
iconic lips. The Enlightenment
becomes impassable. Among the grit
and whitewash scabs, their pamphlets for *Day One*
rot, unissued, odd editorials stained
as though by droppings. Our mother tongue recedes
back through the loop of an outmoded sign,
latch-key to vast and solemn orthographies,
whose corridors of breath palatially
extend into the night-spit of the clerks;
clerks, from the Academy of Sciences,
who broke the eagle's neck. Under their tongues
an earlier origin still waits for them."

The essay "In Defence of the Old E," by Valerian Chudovsky, was published in Apollon, nos. 4-5 (April-May 1917). Apollon closed down in 1918. That the 'p' should be sounded in 'Pterosaur" is a conceit, by and within whose silence the silent "E" is imagined.

Frank Ridgway

Credo

The railroad men are striking:
a picket-line in the sullen morning.

I recall a kinswoman from
Arkansas humming *Just As I*
Am in our kitchen at midnight;
I have since learned another song—
I believe, I believe my time
ain't long-that I sing upon awaking,
when I turn to face the sun
with its wreath of rough tin points.

The railroad men are striking:
a breakfast shared with blackbirds.

I first saw the ascendant
sun from a hospital window,
and I could hear the whiskey in
my father's bloodstream singing
with the solar chorister
as the last pools of night in
those astringent corridors
were burned away.

The railroad men are striking:
trash-fires that burn hot as diesel.

It was eight o'clock, and there
was still dew on blackberry
brambles. On a siding, a line
of six black tank cars stood—
mourners. They were stained with
rust like traces of dried tears,
and they watched the eastern sky
awaiting their long thirst's return.

Sarah Wolbach

The Sea Mammal

You swallow him whole—barnacles, all—
and then he is swimming the dark sea of you
he swims from the North Sea
to the Falklands of you
in unsounded darkness
volcanoes crumble the ocean of you
the land and the fire below the biology of you
oh he is wailing in you
harpooned and lost and unmated in you
a little fish behind his ear in you
the ships always chasing behind him in you
rising to whitecaps and blowing in you
leaping slaptailflat he is racing in you
he is the swimmer and the container in you
the ocean wet stars islands in you
sharp teeth that bite with whale love in you
the mammal the great one migrating in you.

Patricia Corbus

Natural History

Regard the earth's shape round
like my head full of molten rock
sliding eruptions tempests catarrhs

of gurgling waters my blue eyes
its canopy of sky my teeth its whited
amphitheatre my tongue its birds

wading in rushes my legs rolling
along poor as snakes its eloquence
and thirst my feet a stand of live

oaks my heart a bee beating short
strong wings my breath its atmosphere
and weather my cells and bacteria

its animals its royal palms and dirt
daubers mine my front Terra Cognita
my back Terra Incognita my soul

crude and eloquent its moon juggled
by the hands of a secret sun its magic
tricks my magic tricks music played

but not yet heard a flock of monarchs
grazing on carrion a painstaking sand
painting poured into the Lake flecks

of my skin twirling the globe my jungles
and ice floes its poetry and science
my conception its Big Bang and every

jot of my life a slow motion explosion
the atomic matter of the word spewing
circling settling out every last scorpion

of beauty my wings whirring its wings
its sparkling stars my sparkling eyes
burning out the geranium scented night.

Craig Loomis

During The Fall

The largest window in his house is in his study—what he calls his study: one splintery picnic table with chair and typewriter, with small mounds of books, papers, magazines scattered, stacked, leaning. In fact, he is standing in front of the window now, arms folded, looking out. He is watching the trees begin their autumning and the neighbor's two yellow cats cruise the garden and the smear on the glass that is on the outside and unreachable. Farther down the streets, he can see the mailman sitting in his truck, sitting there with the windows rolled down, eating his lunch, with thermos and morning paper. A tint riot of leaves whirls,. . .stops,. . .whirls,. . .stops,. . .whirls past his truck; and he gives up eating, chewing, long enough to watch. Still looking from his upstairs window, letting his arms slowly unfold, and if he cranes his neck just right he can see a sliver of the graveyard—a smooth wooden fence with sign; now on tiptoes —hearing something like a popping in his ankles—he sees the traffic light on Kendall—a tiny redround looking back at him. A leaf, magenta and as big as his hand, bigger, flutters down. He watches it dip and twist and for a moment go magically up instead of down, but then, finally, getting it right and drifting down, disappearing. He holds up his hand,. . .and yes, it was bigger than his hand. The mailman continues to sit and eat and read.

And so he's spending more time upstairs in his study, at the window, with the door locked, even bolted. That, and he no longer feels guilty when the girls rattle the doorknob, asking when Daddy will come out, wondering if they can come in, just for a while, until dinner, promising not to touch anything. But he, through bolted door, says, no, later. Leave Daddy alone now. And while the ten-year old almost always gives up too easily—slouching down the stairs to tell Mommy that Daddy won't play, won't let them in, it isn't fair—the four-year old hammers at the door, saying, I want in right now. Right

this minute. But even she—the one who can't understand why Cinderella doesn't have a last name—she won't let in.

In the end, she, too, gives up on him, and placing her little mouth against the doorknob, says, "I don't friend you."

Not too long ago, he never used to bolt, lock, shut the door, but left it wide open, the girls rushing in to share a story, a complaint, to demand an answer: Why does Mickey wear gloves? Why is Pluto named after a planet?

Not so very long ago, he never used to spend so much time at the window, watching.

In the mornings, with nothing more than a whiskey-light in the sky, he leaves the house. As he walks the three blocks down and four blocks over, the birds are just beginning their peepings; the same lanky kid on a bicycle saddlebagged with newspapers hurries by, as does the jogger, and here comes the walker of dogs—a poodle and something resembling a hairy-brown scurry.

On the corner three blocks down and four blocks over is a restaurant, and he goes there to sit at the same table and eat the same breakfast—coffee with toast. Not even a breakfast really, just something for him to do while he sits and watches.

He watches the truck drivers—big-bearded and tattooed—saunter in, talking their loud talk, telling their louder jokes. The waitress who wears nylons on Tuesdays and a gold bracelet on Fridays no longer asks him what he wants. Instead, when she sees him coming she plunges through the big swinging kitchen door and almost immediately re-plunges, carrying coffee and toast. She gets everything done in one visit: good morning, and how are you? Here's your coffee. Enjoy. In a flutter of skirt—the rub-swish of nylons, if it's Tuesday—she shuffles to another table, more refills, "Bill, please." It's right about then, when she bends just right, that he can see the lines of her panties. But there's more, because as she moves away from him—leaning to pocket a tip—he can easily see the white of her bra, the way it clips in the back. Holding the coffee cup at his lips, he is almost certain he can see the brown of her nipples when she turns to laugh at one of their jokes. Almost certain he can see them, the way they've pushed through the stuff of her bra. The hot coffee washes over his lips but he dare not sip, not yet.

During The Fall

So he gets up early, while wife and daughters are still sleeping hard, and walks the necessary blocks to sip coffee and nibble toast so he can catch a glimpse of shadowy bra, the soft outline of panties. Of course nothing ever comes of it. It's nothing like that. Yet there's something,. . .something in watching and waiting and being patient, missing nothing,
until finally he'll almost spy a ripple of unclothed flesh, of elastic made visible. It's rewarding. That's the best he can do, even for a professor of English—rewarding. It has to do with winning some kind of small victory.

His wife is screaming at the daughters to stop screaming, their voices booming up through the ceiling, his floor. His sweater has holes at the elbows and some mysterious stain at the neck. It's getting colder, and the girls are already beginning to talk of Halloween, of what to be and not to be. He is standing at his window again, looking out into the bright night.

Some of the trees are stark, their branches witchy, and if he looks just right he can see the lights and windows that he cannot see during the leafygreen of springtime. He glances toward the graveyard, but of course there is nothing to see but a bigger double-darkness. Somebody's dog is barking, and another answers, and then another. The screaming has not stopped. The floor quivers. Putting his cheek against the cool glass helps a little.

After giving a damn good lecture on Stephen Crane, he asks two students to stay after for a moment. They do, and he begins: Why do you want to wear jeans with gaping holes at the knees? Does it have something to do with migrant workers? No? With the homeless? Forgotten vets? No? The perhaps it's symbolic. . .? What, then, is the advantage of looking war-torn and dispossessed, like some Eastern European refugee? You've been to war? No? Then you've seen war—what bullets and bombs can do? Have you ever seen the beast of battle outside the fluff of newspapers and films and. . .?

No, of course you haven't. Have you heard the screams, seen what napalm can do to flesh and bone? Seen what it does to babies? No, again. You just know about jeans with holes in the knees and baseball caps worn backwards and earphones screwed into your ears, and. . .Saying all this and no more, he speaks in a soft even voice, lecture-like; saying it slowly, looking them

straight in the face so they won't forget. All the while, the students—a pimply boy and a not so pimply girl—remain wide-eyed, moving only to nod at the right times. Finally, as another class begins to filter in— something to do with economics—she clears her throat and says, yes, we see. Will that be all, professor? He, smiling, already feeling good about Stephen Crane, and now this, says, of course. Don't let me keep you.

But not much later, once back in his office, with door firmly locked, he puts his head in his hands, and thinks, no, no, that wasn't it either. Not even close. He reaches to turn off the lights so it will look like he is not in—no office hours today. Head in his hands.

It's been weeks since the last time, she says.

He gives her words a moment, nodding, hearing sidewalk shouts, giggling, and then slowly runs his hand through his hair. He is going bald. But because it has been such a slow, tedious process, he can almost fool himself into believing it isn't so, that it's all a matter of bad haircuts and miscombings. Still, in the end, it is so: he's going bald. And
there once would have been a time not too long ago when he would have done something about it, when he would have looked for help, advice, treatment, lotions, oils. But that was once. Actually, there's nothing so terribly wrong with going bald. Haroldson is aiming in that direction, while Meyers and Barton are already there—have arrived, nothing but a fuzz around thears.

Again he runs his hand across his head, feeling the warm slick of his scalp. It is only then that he looks over at her, saying, I know.

I know, I know. She mimics. You always know, but you don't care, do you?

Do you?

He thinks about giving this a moment too, but then quickly decides against it. He looks down at his hands, as if there might be something there to help him. No, he says. I really don't care.

The sun is bright, the air still; it feels like July but Halloween is only two weeks away. She carefully places her elbows on the table and turns to look out the window. It's nothing like his upstairs window. This one is smaller and cluttered with cur-

tains. Over the trees, in the deep October blue, a line of frayed jet stream hangs over the afternoon.

He gets up and walks up the stairs and into his study. There is a small electric fan at the end of the picnic table and he switches it on. As he waits for its humming to warm to words, again he goes to his hands, turning them over. At the knuckles is something like a liverspot—brown, stainlike; he doesn't remember it being so large. Turning his hands over.

The fan is now humming, pushing cool air first this way, the that; blowing cool air across his face and then coming back to do it again and again, it speaks to him: Good to see you. Good to see you. Good to see you. Good to...

The ten-year old, who is now full of no big deals, I have no ideas and good for yous, comes home two days before Halloween hysterical. She cannot find her clarinet. She had it before she got into the car, had it in her hand, and now, now it's gone—disappeared, stolen, lost. How can that be?

In the beginning her sobbing is soft, half-hidden. He can hear her through the vents. But as she begins to think about it, the sobbing grows bigger. That, and the mother is there to remind her of how much a clarinet costs, how much lessons cost. Does she have any idea? With mouth quivering, her face red-wet with tears, the ten-year old slumps to the floor. He doesn't have to go downstairs to know this is the scene; he
has seen it before—six months ago with a puppy who, one May morning, decided to curl up and die behind the washing machine. The ten-year old squirming on the carpet, bumping into table legs, chairs. My clarinet. All the while the mother slants in the doorway, reminding her of the cost.

In the morning, before he begins his walk, he will go to the garage, unlock the car, search and find the clarinet wedged in under the seat. He will take it into the house and set it tower-like on the kitchen table. He will then walk the three blocks down and four over with his head down, crushing hundreds, maybe thousands, of leaves and twigs as he goes. He will feel a kind of sadness, and then something else, something bigger, fuller than sorrow. All he can do is walk faster. Once at the restaurant, he will slip into his chair, out of breath, the air refusing to go into his mouth fast enough. He presses his head on the table. He is

trying desperately to regain his breath when she brings his coffee and toast.

The next night, during mid-shower, he looks down and sees a strand of white in the tangle of his pubic hair. He quickly plucks it, thinking nothing of the tiny dot of pain that follows. He has strands of white hair on his head, on his chest, probably on his back. But there? He turns so the water will hit his back and leave him alone with his one hair. He looks at it closely, as if there is something to be found out. He has never thought about white pubic hair—not once. Only when the ten-year old thumps at the door, saying she has to go, can't wait much longer, hurry, does he flick it from his fingers, watching it spin in the water and cling to the side and spin some more before dropping into the black of the drain.

Except for his early morning walks to the restaurant and a sometimes bus ride to the university, he stays home. Almost overnight the small town has grown thick with cashiers, clerks, waiters and attendants who can't wait to take his money, and then when they do, not even having the common courtesy to say thank you. An entire army of cashiers and clerks who don't know how to say thank you, who don't know how to do simple addition and subtraction without using a calculator. The there are those old women who think nothing of elbowing their way onto the bus, making it impossible for him to get off, for others to get on. Old Chinese women with brightly-colored shopping bags. Finally, there's the grocer who almost always goes out of his way to say, Hello. How are you. Good to see you. But he doesn't mean it. The words aren't even out of his mouth—half in and half out—and he's back to his grocering—stacking and ordering and checking. Not really caring how he is, was, might have been.

As he hurries home, he sees some boy—no older than his ten-year old—drop a chewing gum wrapper on the ground. It isn't even a drop, but more like a throw. And just like that, he grabs the boy by the t-shirt, spins him around, and in his best policeman voice, says, pick it up.

During The Fall

When he gets home his throat is throbbing. He bolts the door and turns on the fan. Shaking his head, wondering what's going on, wondering why he can't get it right.

As he talks about Ernest Hemingway, his life and times, his writings, not even ten minutes into Oak Park and the Italian Front and Paris, and already students are glancing at their wristwatches, turning to see out the window, into the naked branches, staring over his shoulder, at the blank wall, at the blanker blackboard. Still, he goes on. There is a girl in the front row whose knees always seem to shine, to glisten, and when he takes his Hemingway to her—standing directly in front of her sparkling knees—she smiles, nods and writes something in her notebook. A heavy flutteringinterrupts. Someone in the corner has dropped a book, papers—a boy who is trying to grow a mustache. He quickly steps over, taking his Hemingway to him, standing over him, until, finally— his book and papers now neatly back on the desk—he, too, looks up, smiles and nods.

In the end, he asks if there are any questions. The wind is blowing, it looks like rain. He has gone overtime, economic students are at the door. Strangely enough, he feels nothing like anger today. Walking down the hall now, and a boy comes up to him, asking, will you be in your office today?

The boy is carrying three thick books. There is nothing familiar about the boy; his face is new. The boy says it's important, and then smiles, as if importance and smiling go together. He looks harder, longer at the boy—a girlish straight-back gloss to his hair, a nose that might have been broken once. He says, why would I want to go to my office? The boy doesn't move, but blinks, waiting for what has to be more, something else.

Finally it occurs to him that there is no more, and he says, yes, why would you. Getting one last grip on his books, he turns and walks away.

As he watches the boy go, he does three things: closes his eyes, sighs, sets his teeth.

Halloween is tonight. From his window he watches his daughters bicycle and rollerskate with their friends. He tries to read but the afternoon is filled with little hurts, bits of screams,

yelps, double-dares, you're its, no ways, unfairs,. . . He has read ten pages but he doesn't know what he has read.

Once the sun goes down, the neighborhood comes alive with cartoon characters, super-heroes, widow-peaked vampires. An occasional ghost. He walks the neighborhood with his daughters.

The ten-year old almost changed her mind, thinking she was too old for this,. . .this kid's stuff. But after a while, when nobody bothered to say yes or no or good idea, she changed back and hurried to decide on a costume—hair back, with lipstick and purplely eyeshadow, perfume. When she's ready, he has to ask her what she is. What's the costume? And she, pouting because he shouldn't have to ask—isn't it obvious—says a little too quickly, too loudly, dancer. I'm a dancer. He nods, saying, of course. Meanwhile, the four-year old is Tinker Bell, with pink fluff and sparkles and a magic wand of cotton and coat hanger and cardboard.

Together, the three of them go door to door.

If it weren't for the candy, the four-year old would have given up after door two. Her Tinker Bell mask is too big and keeps slipping down around her mouth, flapping about her neck. He tells her to take it off, that it's all right, no one will care. Here, I'll put it in my pocket. It's then that she stops mid-sidewalk and looking him straight in the face asks if Tinker Bell wears a mask. Does she? He says he isn't sure, but—let me think—maybe not. Yes or no? she demands. The ten-year old has never stopped walking. Yes or no? When he says no, she lets go of his hand and struggles to put the mask right, to get the eyeholes straight.

They walk on, neither one of them wanting to hold his hand. Their bags grow big, fuller, until, the neighborhood all done, they aim for home. As he takes the stairs to his study, he thinks how nobody wants to dress up like a cowboy anymore. There are no more firemen, no soldiers. He takes the stairs as if he is tired, weary, but that can't be right, because he hasn't done anything.

Later that night, Halloween all but spent for another year, he sits in his study, at the window, reading, when the doorbell rings. He puts the book down, waiting to see if there's been some mistake. But no, it rings again, and then again. He checks his watch and it says eleven. The doorbell

ringing. He gets up and looks out the window. A silent street, with streetlights spilling yellow here and there. He unbolts his door and goes down the stairs. At the front door he places his hand on the doorknob, thinking, I'll leave my hand here until it rings again. He waits, and just when he thinks it's over, the doorbell ringer gone, the knocking starts.

He pulls his hand away from the knob as the big white door quivers. He wants to be angry, ever furious, but nothing comes of it. Finally, there's nothing left to do but unlock the door and open it.

On the porch, stands a skeleton, grinning. A very late trickortreater, he thinks, and so big too, almost too big, for things like this. A skeleton griming, holding out his bag. No cars, no dogs, nothing but the night. Do you know how late it is? And the grinning skull nods. Aren't you a little old for this? How old are you? But the skeleton only holds his bag higher.

He fights back the urge to glance at his watch, to check the time, to see if, in some crazy way, it's all a mistake. All the while he knows he should be getting angry and slamming the door. Knowing all this, but not doing it. Instead, this Professor of English grabs a handful of candy that's there in the bowl by the door and drops it into the outstretched bag. When he does, the bag closes and the skeleton steps back, stopping at the edge of the porch. And now there is something like a waiting, but not even that, more like a holding. A cold October night, and the skeleton has not moved. He slowly shuts the door—all the while thinking how important it is that he close the door softly—and pulls the bolt. He waits for what seems like along time, both hands flat against the door, waiting as if there is one last thing.

Now that all the trees have gone the way of autumn, raw and leafless, he can see a great patch of the graveyard. Wearing the same sweater with holes at the elbows, he watches the November through the window. Not a day goes by that he hasn't thought about that skeleton at the door. He's dreamed it three or four times now: the knocking; in his dreams the door is bigger, darker, wear-worn and there's the knocking but he can't answer it because the ten-year old wants her bicycle fixed, his wife wants him to read this, listen to that, and students keep tapping him on the shoulder, insisting they have to meet with him, if not now when—it's important.

Even now, his chair at the window, arms folded, chin on his chest, he hears it knocking, pounding at the door, demanding to be let in right this minute. You hear me? Right now.

Pamela Steed Hill

All Blue Fails

The saving grace of this stunted family
is the atlas. It lies open on the kitchen table
to any state nervously considered,
red veins of principal highways sprawled thin
under wide blue interstates. With individual fingers
we track a most likely route, if we were going here,
if we were going there. I pretend a cool knowledge
of roads into major cities, and daddy would drive
a hundred-twenty-eight miles into Iowa
to avoid Chicago.

The blue of the lakes and surrounding oceans
is lighter than the blue of the roads.
Politely we point out distance and depths, using
our thumbs and index fingers to measure miles or,
for longer trips, a ruler. Sometimes we return
to the national map, the Pacific falling over
the western edge of the table, Florida hidden
beneath a palm. Even mama calls a truce
over these drawings, their crooked lines a distraction
and a reprieve.

How completely a map can fill up a room.
With something to gaze upon, the eyes are easily trained
to ignore all else, to focus their black holes on highways
and rivers, orange cities, green mountains, the broken
pink lines of foot trails. Daddy prefers
these sparsely drawn squares of Wyoming, Colorado,
blank spaces as wide as a hand. Mama stares
at the crowded dots of New York, ponders how to get there
without going through tunnels. I want only
the thick blue interstates, going anywhere
my finger follows.

To the atlas, I raise a fond glass.
How grateful I am for the hours of ignorance
it has brought this sore family, its pages the finest
table cloth in the house. How good it is not to talk
but to look; to touch the route, convert kilometers
into miles, and follow them to the edge
where all depths of the ocean are never
deep enough, and all blue fails to match the brightness
of leaving.

Joan Baranow

In Glass

Inside the glass pearl & fish
a splash of blood

whereupon there came an explosion
bread rising salt touching
the fragrant flour

O son you were beautiful
waking like that
your moons urging you

to travel the edges of the dish

(pool of clear sand
reservoir of heat)

you must have liked
dividing

liked reaching into
the valleys of my womb

for when the others let go
when blood flooded my os
your heart would not stop

opening. . .closing

no lack of fire
leapt the synapses
of your brain

it was my flesh, failing
brought you forth

you took your first
teaspoon of air and turned
dark rose

a hand on each foot

our world
gave you gravity & a sky

Larry Colker

Sense of Order

When the cupboard is bare
the mind begins to feed on anything,
a stitch,
a flame.
For senses are the heart's attic.
Nothing is lost.
The odor of a woolen scarf,
reflections of light on a fork
can make a person cry.
And why not?
Who hasn't felt the pangs
when time escapes
and washes ashore years later
a lover's toothbrush,
Jack and the beanstalk,
a circus tiger leaping.
These things are always out of place.
Why a duck?
The mind's debris assails the sense of order,
exposing it for what it is,
a cloth of sadness draped over a chair.

Ann Tweedy

Casablancas

little pellets of orange velvet
sprig of white ruffles
purple flecks near the center
these lilies are known for their sugar

when each waxy bud cracks open
a songbird's egg hatching
let me forget the huddle of time
humanity's sour-mouthed aunt

let the stamens laden with sweet velvet
offer themselves, their inner palaces

David Watts

Paper Route

Four-thirty at 8th and Main,
stacks of Star-Telegrams
like folded parables

to speak to front yards
before they shape themselves
in sunlight. My motor scooter

shrugs the turns
as if nothing mattered
in darkness

while every girl I ever wanted
sleeps nearby with a different
schedule than mine, stolen hours

before the body walks
and starts its machinery,
a movement less from instinct

than recollection, keeping company
with wolves and grizzly flap-jack cooks
we force the day on the open end of night,

slip language into the morning.

Jim Natal

Windchime Tantra

Everything we can do with our bodies
already has been done,
patterns of hands or legs described, given names
in tantric texts, little poems with mouths and eyes:
standing cranes,
the grape cluster,
dragonflies.

I know your body so well,
quirks and contours of your skin,
like the tall boy who looks out across familiar
shaded waves of hills, grass prairies
in the wind with one lone tree,
eyelids half-closed sees
a figure that beckons
with finger bent like kestrel beak,
persistent and light as windchimes in the night,
perhaps a lover like you,
and he knows it is time to leave
home,
emerge a man from your embrace,
marry animal and tame,
to sweat in the night
then to sleep
seamless against the backs of your thighs
until body heat throws back the covers
and bedroom breeze brings relief.

River eels,
emperor's delight,
branches intertwined...

I could map your body, and in my mind
I do
when cold and early I'm alone,
a jetstream away in some hotel room
unable to remember my dreams,
and snow is coming down,
trucks picking their way on drifted
dark interstates.
I think of ranchers and their sons
rising intent on chores with
icy pails,
orbs of brown cow eyes, thick tongues,
steaming, lowing beasts inside a slatted wooden barn,
the only light ablaze
for miles.

I think of pleasure when I awake beside
your scent,
the length of you taking my measure:
mantis,
floating lotus,
birdwings,
garden of sighs.

Held notes of windchimes fade on distant porches.
I sleep again, curled in the den of your breathing.

Thomas M. March

Joy

All her hours were yellow sands,
Blown in foolish whorls and tassels;
Slipping warmly through her hands;
Patted into little castles.

Leave for her a red young rose,
Go your way, and save your pity;
She is happy, for she knows
That her dust is very pretty.

—Dorothy Parker, "Epitaph for a Darling Lady"

As Joy pulled her coat more tightly around her throat, she noticed again that it was the inside stitching that was less than quality. Inside the collar, just near the hem, the stitching had almost all unraveled. Only a few tight emergency stitches kept the hem line smooth, the edge seemingly crisp and unbroken, like the seashore seen from the pool behind the house.

She'd had to park on the roof of the parking garage because the only spaces left on the first two floors were reserved for compact cars or motorcycles or doctors. The snow was piled high in eight-foot mounds pushed together by the plows. Snow still fell on them, and some flew off in the wind. The wind blew the snow around her ears, and during the short walk to the elevator, larger bits, harder and frozen, flew into her face from the snow mounds.

They were like diamonds, she thought, those larger, harder bits. The snow mounds were large diamonds, unpolished and hard, gleaming dull in that awkward angle of sun. The wind wore them down, a hard, persistent wind that seemed to come from all directions at once.

The wind wore them down and blew perfect diamonds into one's face. She laughed at it. It was a silly, comforting thought, but she kept it, anyway.

As the elevator door closed, she could feel her face thawing, diamonds melting and rolling down her cheeks, and she licked at them when they reached the corners of her mouth, because there wasn't anyone watching. There was a poem about sand that she'd read on the beach, and it had come so unexpectedly as she turned the page that she had to laugh. How funny it had been to find a poem about

sand and sandcastles, just as one was lying there, watching small children at work in building them. She had laughed out loud, and the children had turned their faces, squinting at her, had shrugged their shoulders and turned around again after seeing her smiling, pointing to the page.

Patted into little castles. What had brought this to mind? Maybe it was the snow, plowed into giant castles. There was more of that poem. But what was the rest? Patted into little castles. It wouldn't come.

The warm air pushed through her coat at the throat, where there was an opening now that she'd relaxed her hands. She could feel half of her chest thawing. The other half wouldn't. It wasn't cold, though, not numb. What was it? Nothing. There wasn't a word for it. There was nothing to compare it to.

She had taken her coat off in the elevator, and by the time she approached the receptionist's desk, it was folded perfectly in half over her arm.

The nurse looked at her sweater and then her face and smiled a thin, wintry smile. Her lips were blue. Maybe she was just tired, or had just been outside herself.

The doctor was running late. She could have a seat.

The receptionist watched as she walked away. Joy knew it because she couldn't hear papers rustling until she turned around again to sit down.

She continued to thaw. The cushions were thin and didn't offer much support. They weren't designed to be sat in for very long. Her hands were still cold. She watched them in her lap, opening and closing. One opened wide, but the other wouldn't quite. It was white, and the other was pink.

But the fingernails were fine, more than fine. She had lacquered them half a dozen times with clear polish, and in this light you couldn't find a flaw.

The warm blood was pushing the last bit of cold from her cheeks. It was like vacation, like Florida and the beach in the late afternoon, cross-legged under a wide, wide hat and sometimes titling back to let the sun fall in past the brim. (The time-share had only cost one hundred dollars a week.) The ocean came right to the back door, and the sand was
so fine that the smallest steps kicked up clouds. It was best not to go into the water, anyway, because you kicked up less sand onto your legs. But she had been, she remembered, such a strong swimmer once.

It only took a touch of water on the toes, as she strolled along the line where the incoming waves disappeared into the sand.

Thomas M. March

The water was brown when you were in it, but such a bright, beautiful blue form the lounge chair, even on overcast days. It really was prettier, in every way, to keep one's distance.

She would scoop sand absentmindedly as she read, holding the book open with one hand, a dead weight against the page, and sifting sand with the other, digging holes and filling them, all in one motion.

Patted into little castles.

She touched her face. It still felt cold against one hand, but warm against the other. She drew that hand away and was about to let it drop into her lap. There was the ring she got from the company when she retired, fourteen carat gold, and diamond chips set in the company logo. She'd meant to have it appraised, but that wasn't the important thing, was it? Forty-five years at the same company and not one bad report, that was what the diamonds said, and, saying it, they shone larger than chips.

She'd lost it all at the beach. It had managed to slide free from her sweaty fingers and fall into the powdery sand. From that height, she thought, it must have fallen half a foot into the ground. So it was a good thing she hadn't gone into the water. As soon as she'd noticed, her husband came over with the metal detector, and after half an hour or so of short beeps and long pauses, there it was, hardly buried at all, diamond chips catching the sun and none of them missing.

Yellow sands. . .through her hands. Patted into little castles. What was the rest of it? It just wouldn't come. She stared at her ring instead, at the diamond chips returning the fluorescent light.

The doctor's teeth had been so white, as white as his eyes. He shone at her as he spoke, his assurances rolling over her and smoothing her out again, crisp and even.

After that vacation, she had kept the ring in a drawer in the condo, alongside the watch they had given her husband. There were diamond chips in it, too, at 12, 3, 6 and 9, but not enough to form the company logo.

The doctor's watch looked heavier. But she couldn't remember how big the diamonds were at the four important stops. The whiteness of the lab coat against the deep green silk of his tie had been distracting. There was sure to be a chance to steal a glance at it later.

He'd said he didn't feel like it, that there was nothing wrong. And then she had felt lucky, and the diamonds in his watch were large enough to wink congratulations at her.

Joy

The waiting room was full. Had all of these old women dared to drive through the snow?

She lifted her feet from the floor and looked at her boots. They were black, and shiny where they were still wet. But at the edges they were grayer, streaked with white, dried salt.

She watched her feet fall softly back to the carpet.

The boots next to hers were shiny and dry. She must have been dropped off at the front door. She'd kept her coat on, green and soft-looking, and the boots disappeared under it. But her gloves were off, and her face was pink. There were only smooth hands and eyes that matched the coat.

Her gloves were folded neatly in her lap, like two separate hands. Her actual hands rested calmly on the armrests without squeezing or tapping. The fingers fell gently over the sides of the armrest, leaving one finger on top, and it wore a beautifully big emerald ring, surrounded by twelve tiny diamonds.

When Joy looked up again, she saw that the woman had noticed her staring.

She looked calmly at Joy, never lowering her gaze past the nose.

"You have a beautiful tan," she said.

Joy felt the heat come into her face again. "Oh," she said, touching her face with her hands, and they were both warm now, so she couldn't feel the burning of her fingers. "My husband and I were just on vacation. We went down to our time-share with some other couples we retired with."

"Really? Where?"

"In Florida, on the Atlantic side. It's so beautiful. Right on the beach, but there's a pool. I never did understand that."

"Well, of course. Some days you just don't want sand in your hair or salt on your skin."

"I suppose," Joy said, smiling. As she spoke, she polished the face of her ring with her thumb. Patted into little castles. Patted into little castles.

"I didn't mean to intrude. The reason I asked was that we just bought into a time-share, too, somewhere else. I thought it would be a funny story, our meeting like this, if we were neighbors." She lifted her hand from the armrest and put it on Joy's arm and just as quickly pulled it back again. Joy looked down and thought that it seemed never to have moved at all. "In fact, we're leaving next week for a month, which is another reason why I hope everything goes well here. I'm hoping to come home with a tan as nice as the

one you've got." She smiled and twisted the ring around her finger a few times.

Joy couldn't stop watching the ring, disappearing behind the hand and then reappearing for a few seconds as she worked it around again. She tried not to look. It was rude, and it must have been obvious. Each time the woman blinked or looked away, Joy had time to look down quickly to watch the ring, like holding her breath at the poolside and imagining diving fast to the bottom to retrieve something, only to look up again almost instantly, to avoid being caught.

"Are you and your husband recently retired?"

"Yes. Just recently. Has this man been your doctor long? I'm sorry to change the subject. My last doctor was a bit cavalier about these things, surprisingly enough, since it is their job to worry for you, or at least to seem to."

"That's all right. Yes. He's a wonderful doctor. I've been coming to him for over a year, since before the trouble really started. I was worried but wrong at first. But when something did go wrong, I was glad I already knew him. And he wears the most beautiful ties."

"Hmm. Some people have said so. About being a wonderful doctor, that is. I'll have to judge his ties for myself. The last doctor had horrible taste in neckwear, come to think of it. Soothing pastels. They were supposed to put you at ease, I suppose."

"This one likes bold colors, sometimes a simple pattern. They're calming, too, in their way." They were the first thing you saw, and they were solid, predictable. They made sense and you could touch them and they would close around your hand, like the waves dove under the sand as they died.

The nurse stepped out and called a name that Joy didn't hear, and the woman stopped twisting the ring around her finger and gathered up her things. The ring looked as though it had never moved at all.

Joy pulled her sweater down very carefully over her hips. It was bunching up around her stomach. She picked up a magazine and thumbed through it, not reading but looking at the pictures. Advertisements were always sunny, always tropical, especially in Winter.

It wouldn't be impossible to take another vacation so soon. What was there to prevent it? There were discount cruises sometimes, even during the regular season.

The nurse opened the door. "Joy, Doctor will see you now." She smiled her blue-lipped smile.

Joy

As she followed the nurse down the hall, she kept her coat folded over her arm, only the outside showing.

The nurse wore white. Everything was white. The floor tiles must have been mopped three times a day, because the smell was white. Her hands began to tingle with cold again.

She heard a voice from behind one of the closed doors as she passed.

"Your tie is lovely, by the way. But I don't care if you do think it's nothing. I want the tests anyway."

Joy imagined the emerald flashing in punctuation.

"Better the tests now than difficulties later, don't you think?"

She heard some quiet mumbling, followed by the tearing of a sheet of paper.

And then the nurse closed the door. Joy sat on the exam table, on white butcher paper that crinkled as she moved to get more comfortable. It was the sound of her feet on the crushed shell path to the beach. And, remembering where she was, the sound faded, and into its place easily, naturally, rolled a picture of the doctor in his white lab coat, a swirl of rich color beaming between his lapels.

So when the door opened, she was smiling.

"How are you?" he said, smiling at her, looking only at her eyes. "Things have turned out very well, haven't they? You're a very lucky lady. But, then, I told you in the beginning not to worry, didn't I?" His eyes were sparkling at her.

Before he sat down, he had to move her coat, which she'd folded over his chair in the neatest way, nothing of the lining showing. He lifted it with one hand, and all of the folds fell out, leaving the hastily stitched inner hem exposed when he dropped it in a ball onto another chair.

She needed to smother to wince that came to her face. It was time, anyway, to lift the sweater over her head. She was cold again, and she forgot, for a moment, which half of her she should expect not to feel.

It had come! Part of it, at least. All her hours were yellow sands, patted into little castles. Oh, but there was no one to tell it to!

As Joy emerged from under her sweater, the doctor looked puzzled at the length of her smile.

Announcement

Each spring, the University of Mississippi English Department holds an open competition to select the best creative writers of fiction and poetry in a campus-wide competition. These awards are the Evans Harrington Creative Writing Scholarship, for freshmen and sophomores, and the Ella Sommerville Awards for Fiction and Poetry, for juniors, seniors, and graduate students. *The Yalobusha Review* congratulates this years' winners:

Evans Harrington Creative Writing Scholarship:

First Prize: Chris Thompson, for "The August".
First Honorable Mention: Carrie Hendricks, for "Route 9, Box 208".
Second Honorable Mention: Emily Atkinson

Ella Somerville Awards:

Fiction:

First Prize: Wes Berry, for "Slag".
First Honorable Mention: Jim Higgins, for "Curb Appeal".
Second Honorable Mention: Yoshiko Kayano, for "O-do-ri".

Poetry:

First Prize: Billy Albright
First Honorable Mention: Shirley Griffith Brownlee
Second Honorable Mention: Louis Bourgeois

Contributors

Angela Ball's books of poetry include *Kneeling Between Parked Cars, Quartet, Possession,* and the forthcoming *The Museum of the Revolution: 58 Exhibits.*

Joan Baranow has studied at Hollins College, SUNY-Binghamton, and Rutgers University, where she earned her PhD in English. She has won awards from the Academy of American Poets and an Individual Artists Fellowship in Poetry from the Ohio Arts Council. Her poems have appeared in *The Western Humanities Review, The Antioch Review, Cream City Review, The Western Journal of Medicine,* and elsewhere. A native of Ohio, she lives with her family in Mill Valley, California.

Susan E. Barba is a 1997 graduate of Dartmouth College, where she studied with Cleopatra Mathis. She is presently working in New York City.

Steven Barthelme has published a short story collection and stories and poems in journals including, most recently, *The Yale Review, North American Review, Southern Review,* and *Denver Quarterly.* He teaches in the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi.

D.C. Berry's forthcoming book is *Divorce Boxing,* Eastern Washington University Press. He teaches at the University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg.

Mitch Cohen ("Job") is a Brooklyn, New York native who now makes his home in Oxford, Mississippi, where he lives with his wife and young son. He is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and has recently been accepted to the Iowa Writers' Workshop MFA program. He is now in the process of putting the finishing touches on his first book length collection of short stories.

Larry Colker's poems have appeared in *Spillway, Rattle, ONTHEBUS, Blue Satellite,* and *Vol. No.* By day (and some nights) he is an independent technical writer. He holds degrees in Humanities and Education from the University of Chicago, the University of Missouri at Kansas City, and the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana.

Patricia Corbus graduated from Agnes Scott College, received a Master's degree from the University of North Carolina, and an MFA from Warren Wilson's Program for Writers. Her poems have appeared in *The Georgia Review, The Antioch Review, The Paris Review* and elsewhere.

Jessica Fisher is currently a senior at Swarthmore College, Pennsylvania, where she has served as poetry editor for *Small Craft Warnings.*

Ann Fisher-Wirth has recent or forthcoming poems in *The Georgia Review, Feminist Studies,* and *Petroglyph.* She is the recipient of a 1997-1998 Arts Fellowship from the Mississippi Arts Council. Her first book of poems, *Blue Window,* is seeking a publisher.

Ann Wood Fuller has an undergraduate degree in English and a minor in Education from the University of Florida and did post-graduate work in creative writing there. She has taught English and Writing and has other works of poetry published in several issues of *Cumberland Poetry Review* as well as the University of Florida's literary magazine, *Departure.*

Richard Godden teaches American literature in the Department of American Studies at the University of Keele (England). He has written one book of poetry, *Breathing Exercises: An Argument* (Peterloo Poets) and two critical works, the second of which, *Fictions of Labor: William Faulkner and the South's Long Revolution* was recently published by Cambridge University Press (1997).

Joshua Gordon has had poems appear in *Doggerel* and *The Naugahyde Literary Review.* He currently lives near Oxford, MS, where he is poetry col

umnist and staff writer for *Oxford Town*.
Forrest Hamer's first book of poems *Call & Response* (Alice James, 1995) won the Beatrice Hawley Award and was a semi-finalist for the 1997 Poet's Prize.
Pamela Steed Hill earned a M.A. in English from Marshall University in West Virginia. She is an academic advisor and instructor at the Ohio State University. Her work has been published in over seventy-five journals and magazines, including *The Antioch Review, Chicago Review, Fine Madness, Nimrod,* and *South Carolina Review*. Her work was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize in 1994 and she currently writes and publishes book reviews of poetry collections.
Blair Hobbs is an English instructor at the University of Mississippi. Her poems have appeared in *The Laurel Review, Prairie Schooner,* and *The Georgia Review*.
Cynthia Hogue has published two collections of poetry, a chapbook of poems, and a critical book on American women's poetry. For her work she has received a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Seminar Fellowship, and a Fulbright-Hayes Fellowship (to Iceland). She lives in Pennsylvania, where she directs the Stadler Center for Poetry and teaches English at Bucknell University.
Alicia Hokanson lives in Seattle where she teaches English and Drama at Lakeside School. Her first collection of poems, *Mapping the Distance,* (Far Corner Books, Portland, OR) won the King County Arts Commission Publication Prize in 1988.
Dr. Emory D. Jones was born in Starkville, MS, and received his BAE, MA and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Mississippi. He has been a member of the English faculty at Northeast Mississippi Community College in Booneville since 1971. His poems have been published in such journals as *Voices International, The White Rock Review, Number One,* and *Negative Capability*. He is current president of The Mississippi Poetry Society, Inc.
Randall Kenan (Introductory Essay) is the author of a novel, *A Visitation Of Spirits,* and a collection of short stories, *Let The Dead Bury Their Dead.* He was John and Renee Grisham Writer-in-Residence at the University of Mississippi for 1997-8. His latest book, a travel narrative about Black America, *Walking On Water,* will be published in 1999.
Bronwyn Lea lives and writes in Idyllwild, California.
Nina Lindsay is a Children's Librarian in Oakland, California.
Craig Loomis ("During the Fall") lives in Miyazaki, Japan. His work has appeared in such journals as *The Prague Revue, The Iowa Review, Rosebud, American Writing, Berkeley Fiction Review,* and others. A collection of his short fiction, *A Softer Violence: Tales of the Orient,* was published in 1995 by the Minerva Press of London.
Richard Lyons lives in Starkville, MS, and teaches at Mississippi State University. His poems have appeared in *The New Republic, The Paris Review,* and *The Nation,* among others. His first collection of poems *These Modern Nights* won the 1988 Devins Award with its publication by the University of Missouri Press. His second, *Hours of the Cardinal,* won a James Dickey Memorial Award and is forthcoming from the University of South Carolina Press. He also received a Peter I.B. Lavan Younger Poets Award from the Academy of American Poets in 1992.
Thomas M. March ("Joy") lives in New York City where he is a doctoral candidate at New York University. His work has appeared in *Anais: An International Journal and Collages.* His first novel, *A More Artful Liar,* is pend-

ing publication and he is at work on a second novel, tentatively entitled *Curiosity.*

James Scannell McCormick earned a doctorate in creative writing-poetry from Western Michigan University in 1995. Poems from his first collection, entitled *The Song of Lies,* have appeared in *CutBank, TAMAQUA, Poetry Motel,* and elsewhere. He currently lives and teaches in Milwaukee.

David McKenna ("Boy or Girl") is a full-time fiction writer living in Philadelphia. He has participated in workshops at the Vermont Studio Center and in the monthlong Prague Writers Workshop. His first novel, *citywolf,* is being shopped around by his agent. "Boy Or Girl" is from a collection called *Idiot Lights,* for which McKenna is also seeking a publisher.

Dawn McGuire is a San Francisco poet-neurologist (an endangered species) and has one published book of poetry, *Sleeping in Africa.* Her poems have appeared most recently in *Nerve Cowboy* and the Daedalus Anthology, *Between the Cracks.* She is on the Board of Directors of *ZYZZYVA,* the West Coast Journal of Literary Arts.

Greg Miller teaches poetry, literature, and creative writing at Millsaps College in Jackson, Mississippi. His poetry has appeared in *Agni, Berkeley Poetry Review, Paris Review, Threepenny Review, Verse,* and *The Chicago Review.* His first book of poems *Iron Wheel* was just issued by The University of Chicago Press.

Richard O. Moore ("Miss Eudora Welty: A Reminiscence") was bron in Ohio in 1920. He was part of the "San Francisco Renaissance" led by Kenneth Rexroth in the early Forties and worked in non-commercial radio and television beginning in 1949. He has made more than 100 films on writers, musicians, and political figures. Over the years his work has appeared in many magazines, both national and local. He lives on the Norther California coast near Point Arena.

Gary Myers teaches Creative Writing and 20th Century Poetry at Mississippi State University. His poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker, Poetry, Indiana Review, Kansas Quarterly, Louisville Review,* and *The Albany Review.* His chapbook *World Effects* was selected by Naomi Shihab-Nye for the Stanley Hanks Poetry Prize; his chapbook *Lifetime Possessions* won the 1997 Riverstone Press Poetry Award.

Jim Natal's poetry has recently appeared in or is forthcoming in *Spillway, Rattle, rivertalk, Saturday Afternoon Journal, Squaw Valley Review, Blue Satellite, 51%,* and the anthologies *Roadside Distractions* and *Beyond the Valley of Contemporary Poets 1997.* He has written two chapbooks, *Explaining Water With Water,* published by The Inevitable Press as part of the Laguna Poets Series, and *The Landscape From Behind* (with Jamie O'Halloran), published by V.C. Press. He is a co-host of the HyperPoets weekly reading series at the Rose Cafe in Venice, CA.

Odetta D. Norton lives and writes in Brooklyn, New York.

Marvyn Petrucci lives in Hattiesburg, MS, with his wife, Joan. He is a doctoral candidate at USM where he teaches in the English Department. He is the poetry editor of *The Georgetown Review,* and his poetry has appeared in *Zone Three, Louisiana Literature, Spinning Jenny* and *Naugahyde.*

J. E. Pitts is a Mississippi native and an undergraduate English major at The University of Mississippi. His poems have appeared in *The Quarterly, The Oxford American,* and elsewhere. He is currently completing a nonfiction manuscript for publication entitled *Going After Gloria.*

Frank Ridgway is a native of Shreveport, Louisiana. He has lived in Chicago and Austin, Texas. He is an undergraduate Southern Studies major

at the University of Mississippi.

Jean-Mark Sens was born in France and educated in Paris. He holds a degree in English from the University of Southern Mississippi. He is an instructor of English at Ole Miss, Oxford, MS. His poems have appeared in magazines in the U.S. and Canada, including *Qwerty, International Poetry Review, Xavier Review, Painted Bride, Whiskey Island, Descant, Cv2, Queen's Quarterly,* and *Weber Studies.*

Joyce Sutphen's poems have appeared in *Poetry, Spoon River Poetry Review, Loonfeather,* and elsewhere. Her book *Straight Out Of View* won the 1994 Barnard New Women Poets Prize. She is a professor of English at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota.

Ann Tweedy is a native of Massachusetts who recently relocated to Northern California to attend law school. In additon to writing poetry, she enjoys camping, bicycling, and hiking. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *San Fernando Poetry Journal, EIDOS, Lucid Moon,* and the *Georgia State University Review.* One of her poems was selected as first runner by Jane Hirschfield in the *Georgia State University Reviews*'s Third Annual Writing Contest.

Ovid Vickers received the BA, MA and Ed.S. degrees from George Peabody College and Vanderbilt University. After serving in the military during the Korean conflict, he began teaching English at East Central Community College in Decatur, Mississippi, where he retired in 1995 as Chairman of the Division of Humanities and Fine Arts. Vickers continues to reside in Decatur where he writes and adjunct teaches.

Luisa Villani was awarded a fellowship to the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets in 1996. Her chapbook, *On the Eve of Everything,* was recently published by WECS Press. Her work has appeared in *The Northridge Review,* the *Lullwater Review, Luna Negra, Phoebe, Potato Eyes, Muddy River Poetry Review* and *Birmingham Poetry Review.* She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize XXIII, and is currently working on a manuscript of poems titled, *Running Away to Russia.*

Jerry W. Ward, Jr., the Lawrence Durgin Professor of Literature at Tougaloo College, earned the B.S. from Tougaloo and the Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. His poems, essays and reviews have appeared in such magazines as *The Georgia Review, African American Review, Callaloo,* and *OBSIDIAN II.* His work-in-progress includes *To Shatter the Iris of Innocence,* a collection of poems.

David Watts is a Clinical Professor of Medicine at The University of California - San Francisco. He is a recent recipient of a masters degree in English and Creative Writing from San Francisco State University. His poetry has been published in *The Gettysburg Review, The Antioch Review, The Spoon River Poetry Review, The New England Journal of Medicine,* and *Yellow Silk,* among others. With his wife, Joan Baranow, he is currently editing an anthology entitled *Poetry In Medicine* based upon a course that uses poetry to teach medical students the human side of health and illness. A video companion series is entering pre-production and will be offered to PBS.

Sarah Wolbach received her MFA in Poetry from the Texas Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin. She lives and writes in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, where she offers poetry workshops and teaches English at a local mushroom factory.

Julie Wolf ("In Between") lives in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Her story was a prize finalist in both the 1996 Hemingway Days Festival Short Story Contest and the Richard Duprey Awards at Emerson College. Her work has appeared before in the *Beacon Street Review.*

Angela Ball
Joan Baranow
Susan E. Barba
Steven Barthelme
D. C. Berry
Mitch Cohen
Patricia Corbus
Larry Colker
Jessica Fisher
Ann Fisher-Wirth
Ann Wood Fuller
Richard Godden
Joshua Gordon
Forrest Hamer
Pamela Steed Hill
Blair Hobbs
Alicia Hokanson
Emory D. Jones
Randall Kenan
Bronwyn Lea
Nina Lindsay
Craig Loomis
Richard Lyons
Thomas M. March
James Scannell McCormick
Dawn McGuire
David McKenna
Greg Miller
Richard O. Moore
Odetta D. Norton
Gary Myers
Jim Natal
Marvyn Petrucci
J. E. Pitts
Frank Ridgway
Jean-Mark Sens
Joyce Sutphen
Ann Tweedy
Ovid Vickers
Luisa Villani
Jerry W. Ward
David Watts
Julie Wolf

$8.00 published by The University of Mississippi Department of English