

THE INNISFREE POETRY JOURNAL

An Online Journal of Contemporary Poetry



The Lake Isle of Innisfree

I will arise and go now, and go to Innisfree,
And a small cabin build there, of clay and wattles made:
Nine bean-rows will I have there, a hive for the honeybee,
And live alone in the bee-loud glade.

And I shall have some peace there, for peace comes dropping slow,
Dropping from the veils of the morning to where the cricket sings;
There midnight's all a glimmer, and noon a purple glow,
And evening full of the linnet's wings.

I will arise and go now, for always night and day
I hear lake water lapping with low sounds by the shore;
While I stand on the roadway, or on the pavements grey,
I hear it in the deep heart's core.

—William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

With *Innisfree 10*, we continue our series of Closer Looks at the poetry of an exceptional contemporary poet, this time with a generous selection of poems from the books of John Koethe.

As usual, you can enjoy this issue in three formats: (1) online, here at www.innisfreepoetry.org, (2) as a PDF download, and/or (3) as a handsome trade paperback, at cost from Lulu.com, an online publisher. Just navigate to the Current Issue page, where you can begin reading the issue or click on the “PDF Version” link to download the PDF of the entire issue for reading or printing, or click on the “Print Version” link to go to Lulu.com, where you can order a copy of the issue. Using print-on-demand technology, Lulu will ship you one or more perfect bound copies of *Innisfree 10*.

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The Editor
editor@innisfreepoetry.org

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Masthead

Editor, Greg McBride

Greg McBride's chapbook of poems, *Back of the Envelope*, appeared from Copperdome Press in 2009. He won the 2008 *Boulevard* Emerging Poet prize. His work appears in *Arts and Letters*, *Boulevard*, *Cimarron Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Harvard Review Online*, *Hollins Critic*, *New York Quarterly*, *River Styx*, *Salmagundi*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. A retired lawyer and Vietnam veteran, his website is at www.gregmcbridepoet.com.

Publisher, Cook Communication

Cook Communication provides support for new writers who seek publication of their work and publishes the work of emerging and established poets in the pages of *Innisfree*. Its website is at www.cookcom.net.

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Submission Guidelines

The Innisfree Poetry Journal welcomes submissions of original, previously unpublished poems year round. We accept poems for consideration only via email from both established writers and new writers whose work is excellent. We publish well-crafted poems, whether in free verse or in traditional forms, poems grounded in the specific, which speak in fresh language and telling images. And we admire musicality: we welcome those who, like the late Lorenzo Thomas, “write poems because I can't sing.”

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Deadlines:

February 1 for the spring issue, August 1 for the fall issue.

Details:

1. In **ONE** Word document, submit a brief bio and up to five poems attached to an email addressed to editor@innisfreepoetry.org. (If you do not have Word, please use rich text format.) Format all poems flush with the left margin—no indents other than any within the poem itself.
2. Include your name, as you would like it to appear in *Innisfree*, in the subject line of your submission.
3. Simultaneous submissions are welcome. If a poem is accepted elsewhere, however, please be sure to notify us immediately at editor@innisfreepoetry.org.
4. Please submit only once per issue.

Assurances:

By making your submission, you assure *The Innisfree Poetry Journal* that the work is your own original creation; that it has not been published, electronically or in print; that it has not been accepted for publication elsewhere; and that you are 18 years of age or older.

Rights:

By accepting a poem, *Innisfree* acquires first publication rights, including the right to publish it online and maintain it there as part of the issue in which it appears, to make it available in a printer-friendly format, to make the issue of *Innisfree* in which it appears downloadable as a PDF document and available as a printed volume. All other rights revert to the poet after online publication of the poem in *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*.

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Innisfree 10, spring 2010

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John Koethe

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A CLOSER LOOK: John Koethe



Utterly recognizable, John Koethe's voice is unique among American poets. In language that is often discursive, often plangent, always mesmeric in its lyricism, he explores how we experience our lives, taking the reader along, absorbing him or her in the motions of a mind that wonders, describes, celebrates, and laments. Now approaching 65, Koethe's most recent collections, *Sally's Hair* (HarperCollins, 2006) and the just-published *Ninety-fifth Street* (HarperCollins, 2009), limn the contours of a life in retrospect: "The afternoon / Is full of memories and silent passion," the "Sadness of a world . . . / Held together by memory" He again posits the primacy of memory, as well as its beauty, beautifully:

I love the way remembering lets the light in, as the sullen gray
Of consciousness dissolves into a yard, a pepper tree, a summer day.
And minor moments and details that had been buried in the past
Take on the clarity of dreams, with a transparency they never had in life.

("The Lath House," *Ninety-fifth Street*)

A few comments on Koethe's books that illustrate his place in American poetry:

To describe with uncompromising candor the inner life of a man adrift in the waning of the twentieth century is one thing, but to do it without a shred of self-pity is another. John Koethe, with a riveting and limpid intelligence, manages to do both. The poems of *Falling Water* are like no one else's. In them, even the most extreme exertions of consciousness are transformed into the luminous measures of beautiful speech.

—Mark Strand, on *Falling Water*

In this ravishing and haunted book, John Koethe comes face-to-face with the time when "more than half my life is gone," and must try to find the meaning of a "childish / dream of love, and then the loss of love, / and all the intricate years between." As funny and fresh as it is tragic and undeceived, *Falling Water* ranks with Wallace Stevens's *Auroras of Autumn* as one of the profoundest meditations on existence ever formulated by an American poet.

—John Ashbery, on *Falling Water*

John Koethe is an immensely literary and profoundly philosophical poet whose poems never seem literary or philosophical: they seem true—true to how it feels to have a mind, to live in its movement, to think and feel through a lifetime's accumulation of experience. Koethe sounds like nobody else, and *Sally's Hair* is his best book—at once his most intimate and his most worldly.

—James Longenbach, on *Sally's Hair*

The voice is sober, meditative, rising now and then to the austere lyrical. The intelligence is lucid, unsparing, yet infused with love of the world, the only world there is.

—J.M. Coetzee, on *North Point North*

For more extended considerations of John Koethe's poetic achievement, I recommend Robert Hahn's critical writing, first, his penetrating essay, "Drawing by Michelangelo, Color by Titian: Of Originality, Influence, and the Poetry of John Koethe" (<http://www.cstone.net/~poems/essahahn.htm>), which appeared in the fall 2004 issue of *The Kenyon Review*, and second, Hahn's review of *Sally's Hair* (<http://www.cstone.net/~poems/essakoet.htm>), which appeared in the May/June 2006 issue of *Boston Review*. Also, an essay by Paul Kane titled "Philosopher-Poets: John Koethe and Kevin Hart," which appeared in *Raritan*, can be downloaded [here](#).

From 1973-2009 John Koethe was Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and the first Poet Laureate of Milwaukee. In 2005 he was a fellow of the American Academy in Berlin, and in 2008 he was the Elliston Poet in Residence at the University of Cincinnati. He is currently the Bain-Swiggett Professor of Poetry at Princeton University. John Koethe generously shares 24 poems from seven books with the readers of *Innisfree*:

Domes (Columbia University Press, 1973)
winner of the Frank O'Hara Award for Poetry
Tiny Figures in Snow
Domes

The Late Wisconsin Spring (Princeton University Press, 1984)
The Late Wisconsin Spring
Partial Clearance
In the Park

Falling Water (HarperCollins, 1997)
winner of the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award
The Secret Amplitude
Songs My Mother Taught Me
Falling Water

The Constructor (HarperCollins, 1999)
Threnody for Two Voices
What the Stars Meant
The Constructor

North Point North (HarperCollins, 2002)
The Proximate Shore
Moore's Paradox
Gil's Café
North Point North

Sally's Hair (HarperCollins, 2006)
The Perfect Life
21.1
Sally's Hair
16A
Hamlet

Ninety-fifth Street (HarperCollins, 2009)
Chester
On Happiness
This is Lagos
Ninety-fifth Street

from *Domes*:

TINY FIGURES IN SNOW

Cut out of board
And pinned against the sky like stars;
Or pasted on a sheet of cardboard
Like the small gold stars you used to get for being good:
Look at the steeple—
All lit up inside the snow
And yet without a single speck of snow on it.
The more I looked at it, the harder it became to see,
As though I tried to look at something cold
Through something even colder, and could not quite see.
And like the woman in the nursery rhyme
Who stared and stared into the snow until
She saw a diamond, shuddering with light, inside the storm,
I thought that we could see each snowflake wobble through the air
And hear them land.
Locked in her room
With yellow flowers on the wallpaper
That wove and welled around her like the snow
Until she almost disappeared in them,
Rapunzel in her cone let down the string the whole world could
have climbed to save her.
"Oh, don't save me right away," Rapunzel said, "just visit me,"
But only dead ones listened to her.
Only the dead could ever visit us this way: locked in a word,
Locked in a world that we can only exorcise, but not convey.

DOMES

for John Godfrey

1. Animals

Carved—indicated, actually, from solid
Blocks of wood, the copper-, cream-, and chocolate-colored
Cows we bought in Salzburg form a tiny herd.
And in Dr. Gachet's etching, six
Or seven universal poses are assumed by cats.

Misery, hypocrisy, greed: A dying
Mouse, a cat, and a flock of puzzled blackbirds wearing
Uniforms and frock coats exhibit these traits.
Formally outlasting the motive
Of their creation with a poetry at once too vague

And too precise to do anything with but
Worship, they seem to have just blundered into our lives
By accident, completely comprehending
 Everything we find so disturbing
About them; but they never speak. They never even move
From the positions in which Grandville or some
Anonymous movie-poster artist has left them,
A sort of ghostly wolf, a lizard, an ape
 And a huge dog. And their eyes, looking
At nothing, manage to see everything invisible

To ours, even with all the time in the world
To see everything we think we have to see. And tell

Of this in the only way we really can:

With a remark as mild as the air

In which it is to be left hanging; or a stiff scream,

Folded like a sheet of paper over all

The horrible memories of everything we were

Going to have. That vanished before our eyes

As we woke up to nothing but these,

Our words, poor animals whose home is in another world.

2. Summer Home

Tiny outbursts of sunlight play

On the tips of waves that look like tacks

Strewn on the surface of the bay.

Up the coast the water backs up

Behind a lofty, wooded island. Here,

According to photographs, it is less

Turbulent and blue; but much clearer.

It seems to exercise the sunlight less

Reflecting it, allowing beaten silver sheets

To roam like water across a kitchen floor.

Having begun gradually, the gravel beach

Ends abruptly in the forest on the shore.

Looked at from a distance, the forest seems

Haunted. But safe within its narrow room

Its light is innocent and green, as though

Emerging from another dream of diminution

We found ourselves of normal, human size,

Attempting to touch the leaves above our heads.

Why couldn't we have spent our summers here,
Surrounded and growing up again? Or perhaps
Arrive here late at night by car, much later
In life? If only heaven were not too near
For such sadness. And not within this world
Which heaven has finally made clear.

Green lichen fastened to a blue rock
Like a map of the spot; cobwebs crowded with stars
Of water; battalions of small white flowers.
Such clarity, unrelieved except by our
Delight and daily acquiescence in it,
Presumably the effect of a natural setting
Like this one, with all its expectations of ecstasy
And peace, demands a future of forgetting
Everything that sustains it: the dead leaves
Of winter; the new leaves of spring which summer bums
Into different kinds of happiness; for these,
When autumn drops its tear upon them, turn.

3. Domes

"Pleased in proportion to the truth
Depicted by means of familiar images." That
One was dazed; the other I left in a forest
Surrounded by giant, sobering pines.
For I had to abandon those lives.
Their burden of living had become
Mine and it was like dying: alone,
Huddled under the cold blue dome of the stars,

Still fighting what died and so close to myself I could not even see.
I kept trying to look at myself. It was like looking into the sun and I went blind.

O, to break open that inert light
Like a stone and let the vision slowly sink down
Into the texture of things, like a comb flowing through dark,
Heavy hair; and to continue to be affected much later.
I was getting so tired of that excuse: refusing love
Until it might become so closely mated to its birth in
Acts and words of love; until a soft monstrosity of song
Might fuse these moments of affection with a dream of home;
The cold, prolonged proximity of God long after night
Has come and only starlight trickles through the dome;

And yet I only wanted to be happy.
I wanted rest and innocence; a place
Where I could hide each secret fear by blessing it,
By letting it survive inside those faces I could never understand
Love, or bear to leave. Because I wanted peace, bruised with prayer
I tried to crawl inside the heavy, slaughtered hands of love
And never move. And then I felt the wound unfold inside me
Like a stab of paradise: explode: and then at last
Exhausted, heal into pain. And that was happiness:
A dream whose ending never ends, a vein

Of blood, a hollow entity
Consumed by consummation, bleeding so.
In the sky our eyes ascend to as they sweep
Upwards into emptiness, the angels sing their listless
Lullabies and children wake up glistening with screams
They left asleep; and the dead are dead. The wounded worship death

And live a little while in love; and then are gone.
Inside the dome the stars assume the outlines of their lives:
Until we know, until we come to recognize as ours,
Those other lives that live within us as our own.

from *The Late Wisconsin Spring*:

THE LATE WISCONSIN SPRING

Snow melts into the earth and a gentle breeze
Loosens the damp gum wrappers, the stale leaves
Left over from autumn, and the dead brown grass.
The sky shakes itself out. And the invisible birds
Winter put away somewhere return, the air relaxes,
People start to circulate again in twos and threes.
The dominant feelings are the blue sky, and the year.
—Memories of other seasons and the billowing wind;
The light gradually altering from difficult to clear
As a page melts and a photograph develops in the backyard.
When some men came to tear down the garage across the way
The light was still clear, but the salt intoxication
Was already dissipating into the atmosphere of constant day
April brings, between the isolation and the flowers.
Now the clouds are lighter, the branches are frosted green,
And suddenly the season that had seemed so tentative before
Becomes immediate, so clear the heart breaks and the vibrant
Air is laced with crystal wires leading back from hell.
Only the distraction, and the exaggerated sense of care
Here at the heart of spring—all year long these feelings
Alternately wither and bloom, while a dense abstraction

Hides them. But now the mental dance of solitude resumes,
And life seems smaller, placed against the background
Of this story with the empty, moral quality of an expansive
Gesture made up out of trees and clouds and air.

The loneliness comes and goes, but the blue holds,
Permeating the early leaves that flutter in the sunlight
As the air dances up and down the street. Some kids yell.
A white dog rolls over on the grass and barks once. And
Although the incidents vary and the principal figures change,
Once established, the essential tone and character of a season
Stays inwardly the same day after day, like a person's.
The clouds are frantic. Shadows sweep across the lawn
And up the side of the house. A dappled sky, a mild blue
Watercolor light that floats the tense particulars away
As the distraction starts. Spring here is at first so wary,
And then so spare that even the birds act like strangers,
Trying out the strange air with a hesitant chirp or two,
And then subsiding. But the season intensifies by degrees,
Imperceptibly, while the colors deepen out of memory,
The flowers bloom and the thick leaves gleam in the sunlight
Of another city, in a past which has almost faded into heaven.
And even though memory always gives back so much more of
What was there than the mind initially thought it could hold,
Where will the separation and the ache between the isolated
Moments go when summer comes and turns this all into a garden?
Spring here is too subdued: the air is clear with anticipation,
But its real strength lies in the quiet tension of isolation
And living patiently, without atonement or regret,
In the eternity of the plain moments, the nest of care
—Until suddenly, all alone, the mind is lifted upward into

Light and air and the nothingness of the sky,
Held there in that vacant, circumstantial blue until,
In the vehemence of a landscape where all the colors disappear,
The quiet absolution of the spirit quickens into fact,
And then, into death. But the wind is cool.
The buds are starting to open on the trees.
Somewhere up in the sky an airplane drones.

PARTIAL CLEARANCE

Barely a week later
I'd returned to myself again.
But where a light perspective of particulars
Used to range under an accommodating blue sky
There were only numb mind tones, thoughts clenched like little fists,
And syllables struggling to release their sense to my imagination.
I tried to get out of myself
But it was like emerging into a maze:
The buildings across the street still looked the same,
But they seemed foreshortened,
Dense, and much closer than I'd ever realized,
As though I'd only seen them previously in a dream.
Why is it supposed to be so important to see things as they actually are?
The sense of life, of what life is *like*—isn't that
What we're always trying so desperately to say?
And whether we live in between them,
Mirror each other out of thin air, or exist only as reflections
Of everything that isn't ours, we all sense it,
And we want it to last forever.

IN THE PARK

for Susan Koethe

This is the life I wanted, and could never see.
For almost twenty years I thought that it was enough:
That real happiness was either unreal, or lost, or endless,
And that remembrance was as close to it as I could ever come.
And I believed that deep in the past, buried in my heart
Beyond the depth of sight, there was a kingdom of peace.
And so I never imagined that when peace would finally come
It would be on a summer evening, a few blocks away from home
In a small suburban park, with some children playing aimlessly
In an endless light, and a lake shining in the distance.

Eventually, sometime around the middle of your life,
There's a moment when the first imagination begins to wane.
The future that had always seemed so limitless dissolves,
And the dreams that used to seem so real float up and fade.
The years accumulate; but they start to take on a mild,
Human tone beyond imagination, like the sound the heart makes
Pouring into the past its hymns of adoration and regret.
And then gradually the moments quicken into life,
Vibrant with possibility, sovereign, dense, serene;
And then the park is empty and the years are still.

I think the saddest memory is of a kind of light,
A kind of twilight, that seemed to permeate the air
For a few years after I'd grown up and gone away from home.
It was limitless and free. And of course I was going to change,
But freedom means that only aspects ever really change,

And that as the past recedes and the future floats away
You turn into what you are. And so I stayed basically the same
As what I'd always been, while the blond light in the trees
Became part of my memory, and my voice took on the accents
Of a mind infatuated with the rhetoric of farewell.

And now that disembodied grief has gone away.
It was a flickering, literary kind of sadness,
The suspension of a life between two other lives
Of continual remembrance, between two worlds
In which there's too much solitude, too much disdain.
But the sadness that I felt was real sadness,
And this elation now a real tremor as the deepening
Shadows lengthen upon the lake. This calm is real,
But how much of the real past can it absorb?
How far into the future can this peace extend?

I love the way the light falls over the suburbs
Late on these summer evenings, as the buried minds
Stir in their graves, the hearts swell in the warm earth
And the soul settles from the air into its human home.
This is where the prodigal began, and now his day is ending
In a great dream of contentment, where all night long
The children sleep within tomorrow's peaceful arms
And the past is still, and suddenly we turn around and smile
At the memory of a vast, inchoate dream of happiness,
Now that we know that none of it is ever going to be.

Don't you remember how free the future seemed
When it was all imagination? It was a beautiful park
Where the sky was a page of water, and when we looked up,

There were our own faces, shimmering in the clear air.
And I know that this life is the only real form of happiness,
But sometimes in its midst I can hear the dense, stifled sob
Of the unreal one we might have known, and when that ends
And my eyes are filled with tears, time seems to have stopped
And we are alone in the park where it is almost twenty years ago
And the future is still an immense, open dream.

from *Falling Water*:

THE SECRET AMPLITUDE

I

Perhaps the hardest feeling is the one
Of unrealized possibility:
Thoughts left unspoken, actions left undone

That seemed to be of little consequence
To things considered in totality;
And yet that might have made a difference.

Sometimes the thought of what one might have done
Starts to exhaust the life that it explains,
After so much of what one knew has gone.

I guess that all things happen for the best.
And that whatever life results remains,
In its own fashion, singularly blest.

Yet when I try to think about the ways
That brought me here, I think about places
Visited, about particular days

Whiled away with a small handful of friends,
Some of them gone; and about the traces
Of a particular movement, that ends

In mild effects, but that originates
In the sheer "wonder of disappointment,"
Ascending in an arc that resonates

Through the heavens, before a dying fall.
I don't know what Wittgenstein might have meant
By *nothing is hidden*, if not that all

The aspects of one's life are there to see.
But last month, coming back on the Métro
From the Basilica of Saint-Denis,

My sense of here and now began to melt
Into a sensation of vertigo
I realized that I had never felt.

II

Start with the condition of the given:
A room, a backyard, or a city street.
Next, construct an idea of heaven

By eliminating the contingent
Accidents that make it seem familiar.
Spanning these polarities—the stringent

Vacuum and the sound of a lawn mower—
Find the everyday experiences
Making up our lives, set on the lower

Branches of the tree of knowledge. Is this
What people mean by living in the world?
A region of imaginary bliss,

Uncontaminated by reflection,
Rationalized by the controlling thought
Of simple beauty, of the perfection

Of the commonplace through acquiescence?
Think of a deeper order of beauty,
A kind of magnificence whose essence

Lies in estrangement, the anxiety
Of the unrecognized, in resistance,
And in the refusal of piety.

Nothing comes of nothing: what ideals
Alter is the look of things, the changing
Surfaces their argument reveals

To be illusory. Yet one still *tries*,
Pulled inward by the promissory thought
Of something time can never realize,

Both inexhaustible and self-contained;
Of something waiting to be discovered
In the dominion of the unattained.

III

I always think about it in a way
So inflected by the thought of places,
And of my distance from them; by other

People, and the measure of another
Year since they departed, that they get hard
To separate, like the thought of a day

From the day itself. I suppose the proof,
If there is one, is by analogy
With the kind of adolescent "knowledge"

I had on those afternoons in college
When I'd go to New York, and the evening
Deepened, and then the lights came on. Aloof,

Yet somehow grounded in the real, it's
Like an abstract diagram of a face,
Or the experience of memory

Drained of its vivifying imagery
—Of Geoff's cigars, for instance, or Willy's
Collision with the pillar at the Ritz—

Until the pure experience remains.
For over time, the personal details
Came to mean less to me than the feeling

Of simply having lived them, revealing
Another way of being in the world,
With all the inwardness it still sustains,

And the promise of happiness it brought.
So it began to take over my life—
Not like some completely arbitrary

Conception someone had imposed on me,
But more and more like a second nature;
Until it became my abiding thought.

IV

How much can someone actually retain
Of a first idea? What the day was,
Or what the flowers in the room were like,

Or how the curtains lifted in the breeze?
The meaning lies in what a person does
In the aftermath of that abundance,

On an ordinary day in August
In the still air, beneath a milk-white sky—
As something quickens in the inner room

No one inhabits, filling its domain
With the sound of an ambiguous sigh
Muffled by traffic noises. Underneath,

The movement starts to recapitulate
Another season and another life,
Walking through the streets of Barcelona,

Its alleys and its accidents combined
Into an arabesque of feeling, rife
With imprecision, blending everything

Into a song intended to obscure,
Like the song of the wind, and so begin
To repeat the fallacy of the past:

That it was pure, and that the consummate
Achievement is to bring it back again.
Would it make any difference? Each breath

Anticipates the next, until the end.
Nothing lasts. The imperative of change
Is what the wind repeats, and night brings dreams

Illuminating the transforming thought
Of the familiar context rendered strange,
The displacement of the ordinary.

V

I hadn't been to Paris in six years.
My hotel room was like a pleasant cell.
On the plane I'd been bothered by vague fears

Of being by myself for the first time,
Or recognizing the sound of the bell
Of St. Germain-des-Prés, or a street mime

At Deux Magots, and being overwhelmed
By the sensation of being alone.
Even with a friend, from the distant realm

Of Rome, I couldn't shake the impression
Of exile, as though I'd come to atone
For some indescribable transgression—

A state of anonymity, without
Anonymity's deep sense of pardon.
We ate, and walked about, and talked about

The true nature of the sentimental.
Later, as I imagined the garden
Of the new Bibliotheque Nationale

Drowsing in its shade of information,
I felt the peace of insignificance,
Of a solitude like a vocation

To be inhabited, to be explored
With the single-minded perseverance
Of a blind man whose sight had been restored.

Everything seemed so mindless and abstract,
Stripped of the personality I knew.
The evening was like a secret compact,

And though it was May, the night air felt cold.
The sky was black. The sky was gold and blue
Above an Eiffel Tower lit with gold.

VI

What is the abstract, the impersonal?
Are they the same? And whence this grandiose
Geography of a few emotions?

Think of an uninhabited landscape,
With its majesty rendered otiose
By a stranger's poverty of feeling;

Then contemplate that state without a name
In which something formless and inchoate
Stirs in an act of definition, like

A thought becoming conscious of itself,
For which the words are always late, too late.
The motion spreads its shape across the sky,

Unburdened by causality and death.
Where is that paradise? Where is that womb
Of the unreal, that expansiveness

That turned the mountains into vacant air,
The empty desert to an empty tomb
On Sunday, with the body set aside,

The sense of diminution giving way,
Through the oscillations of the sublime,
To an infinite expanse of spirit?

If only one could know, at this remove,
The private alchemy, obscured by time,
By which an inhospitable terrain

Became an open space, "a fresh, green breast"
Of a new world of such magnificence
That those who entered were as though reborn,

And everything they heard and saw and felt
Melted into shape and significance;
And what that secret amplitude was like.

VII

But is there even anything to know?
Linger over the cases: the dead friends,
And what the obituaries omit

And one can only imagine: what it
Must have felt like at the end, suspended
Between two impossible tasks, as though

The burden of each day were to rebut
A presumption of disillusionment
And a sense of hopelessness, deflected

By the daily routine, yet protected
By the cave of the imagination;
Until at last the inner door slammed shut.

When did it all become unbearable?
The question begs the questions of their lives
Asked from the inside, taking for granted

Their very being, as though enchanted
By the way the settings, in retrospect,
Make up the logic of a parable

Whose incidents make no sense, and by how
Time tries to project a kind of order,
And the terrifying clarity it brings,

Into the enigma of the last things—
A vodka bottle lying on the floor,
An offhand remark ("I'll be going now")—

With everything contained, as in a proof,
In a few emblems of finality:
The bullet in the mouth. The sharp report

That no one else can hear. The sharp report
That only someone else could hear. The long,
Irrevocable transport from the roof.

VIII

If God in Heaven were a pair of eyes
Whose gaze could penetrate the camouflage
Of speech and thought, the innocent disguise

Of a person looking in the mirror;
If a distant mind, in its omniscience,
Could reflect and comprehend the terror

Obscured by the trappings of the body—
If these possibilities were real,
Everything would look the same: a cloudy

Sky low in the distance, and a dead tree
Visible through the window. The same thoughts
Would engage the mind: that one remains free

In a limited sense, and that the rough
Approximation of eternity
Contained in every moment is enough.

What sponsors the idea of a god
Magnificent in its indifference,
And inert above the shabby, slipshod

Furnishings that constitute the human?
What engenders the notion of a state
Transcending the familiar, common

Ground on which two people walked together
Some twenty years ago, through a small park?
The benches remain empty. The weather

Changes with the seasons, which feel the same.
The questions trace out the trajectory
Of a person traveling backwards, whose name

Occupies a space between death and birth;
Of someone awkwardly celebrating
A few diminished angels, and the earth.

IX

It's been nine years since the telephone call
From Mark, and a year since the one from John.
And it's as though nothing's *changed*, but that all

The revisions were finally over.
And yet now more than half my life is gone,
Like those years of waiting to discover

That hidden paradise of the recluse
I was always just about to enter—
Until it came to seem like an excuse

For the evasion of intimacy.

At Willy's memorial last winter,

Edward Albee spoke of his privacy,

And how at last he wandered up the stairs

To a "final privacy." And perhaps

The illusions that keep us from our cares

Are projections of our mortality,

Of the impulse inside the fear it maps

Onto the sky, while in reality

The fear continues underneath. I guess

That despite the moments of resplendence

Like the one in Paris, it's still the less

Insistent ones that come to rest within.

I don't know why the thought of transcendence

Beckons us, or why we strive for it in

Solitary gestures of defiance,

Or try to discover it in our dreams,

Or by rending the veil of appearance.

Why does it have to issue from afar?

Why can't we find it in the way life seems?

As Willy would have said—*So, here we are.*

SONGS MY MOTHER TAUGHT ME

There was nothing there for me to disbelieve.

—Randall Jarrell

Dvorak's "Songs My Mother Taught Me,"
From the cycle *Gypsy Melodies*, anticipates
The sonorous emotions of the Trio in F Minor,
Though without the latter's complications.
The melody is simple, while the piece's
Mood looks backwards, carried by the sweet,
Sustaining rhythms of the mother's voice
Embodied in the figure of the violin, until,
Upon the second repetition of the theme
And on a high, protracted note, it suddenly
Evaporates, while the piano lingers underneath.
The world remains indifferent to our needs,
Unchanged by what the mind, in its attempt to
Render it in terms that it can recognize,
Imagines it to be. The notes make up a story
Set entirely in the kingdom of appearance,
Filled with images of happiness and sadness
And projected on a place from which all
Evidence of what happened once has vanished—
A deserted cabin on a lake, or an isolated
Field in which two people walked together,
Or the nondescript remains of someone's home.
The place endures, unmindful and unseen,
Until its very absence comes to seem a shape
That seems to stand for something—a schematic
Face that floats above a background made of
Words that someone spoke, from which the human

Figure gradually emerges, like a shifting pattern
 Drifting through a filigree of flimsy clouds
 Above the massive, slowly turning globe.
 Beneath the trees, beneath the constellations
 Drawn from the illusions sketched by sight,
 The tiny figures move in twos and threes
 To their particular conclusions, like the details
 Of a vision that, for all it leaves to see,
 Might never have existed—its conviction spent,
 Its separate shapes retracing an ascending
 Curve of entropy, dissolving in that endless
 Dream of physics, in which pain becomes unreal,
 And happiness breaks down into its elements.
 I wish there were an answer to that wish.
 Why can't the unseen world—the real world—
 Be like an aspect of a place that one remembers?
 Why can't each thing present itself, and stay,
 Without the need to be perfected or refined?
 Why can't we live in some imaginary realm
 Beyond belief, in which all times seem equal,
 And without the space between the way things are
 And how they merely seem? In which the minor,
 Incidental shapes that meant the world to me
 —That mean the world to me—are real too?
 Suppose that time were nothing but erasure,
 And that years were just whatever one had lost.
 The things that managed to remain unchanged
 Would seem inhuman, while the course life took
 Would have a form that was too changeable to see.
 The simple act of speech would make it true,
 Yet at the cost of leaving nothing to believe.

Within this field, this child's imagination,
 An entire universe could seem to flicker
 In the span of one's attention, each succeeding
 Vision mingling with the rest to form a tapestry
 Containing multitudes, a wealth of incident
 As various as the mind itself, yet ultimately
 Composed of nothing but its mirror image:
 An imaginary person, who remained, within that
 Seamless web of supposition, utterly alone.

All this is preface. Last May my mother died
 And I flew back to San Diego for her funeral.
 Her life was uneventful, and the last ten
 Years or so had seemed increasingly dependent
 On a vague and doctrineless religion—a religion
 Based on reassurance rather than redemption—
 Filled with hopes so unspecific, and a love so
 Generalized that in the end it came to seem
 A long estrangement, in the course of which those
 Abstract sentiments had deepened and increased,
 While all the real things—the things that
 Used to seem so close I couldn't see them—
 Had been burnished away by distance and by time,
 Replaced by hazy recollections of contentment,
 And obscured beneath a layer of association
 Which had rendered them, once more, invisible.
 And yet the streets still looked the same to me,
 And even though the incidents seemed different,
 The shapes that still remained exhibited the
 Reassuring patterns of a natural order—
 The quiet rhythms of a world demystified,

Without those old divisions into what was real
 And what was wishful thinking. In a few days
 Everything had altered, and yet nothing changed—
That was the anomalous event that happened
 In the ordinary course of things, from which the
 Rest of us were simply absent, or preoccupied,
 Or busy with arrangements for the flowers,
 The music, the reception at the house for various
 Cousins, aunts, and uncles and, from next door,
 Mr. Palistini with his tooth of gold. At
 Length the house was empty, and I went outside.
 It struck me that this place, which overnight
 Had almost come to seem a part of me, was actually
 The same one I had longed for years to leave.
 There were differences of course—another
 House or two, and different cars—and yet what
 Startled me was how familiar it all seemed—
 The numbers stenciled on the curb, the soap-dish
 In the bathroom, the boxes still in the garage—
 As though the intricate evasions of the years
 Had left their underlying forms unchanged.
 And this is not to say those fables were untrue,
 But merely that their spells were incomplete—
 Incomplete and passing. For although we can't
 Exist without our fantasies, at times they
 Start to come apart like clouds, to leave us
 Momentarily alone, within an ordinary setting—
 Disenchanted and alone, but also strangely free,
 And suddenly relieved to find a vast, inhuman
 World, completely independent of our lives
 And yet behind them all, still there.

FALLING WATER

I drove to Oak Park, took two tours,
And looked at some of the houses.
I took the long way back along the lake.
The place that I came home to—a cavernous
Apartment on the East Side of Milwaukee—
Seems basically a part of that tradition,
With the same admixture of expansion and restraint:
The space takes off, yet leaves behind a nagging
Feeling of confinement, with the disconcerting sense
That while the superficial conflicts got resolved,
The underlying tensions brought to equilibrium,
It isn't yet a place in which I feel that I can live.
Imagine someone reading. Contemplate a man
Oblivious to his settings, and then a distant person
Standing in an ordinary room, hemmed in by limitations,
Yet possessed by the illusion of an individual life
That blooms within its own mysterious enclosure,
In a solitary space in which the soul can breathe
And where the heart can stay—not by discovering it,
But by creating it, by giving it a self-sustaining
Atmosphere of depth, both in the architecture,
And in the unconstructed life that it contains.
In a late and very brief remark, Freud speculates
That space is the projection of a "psychic apparatus"
Which remains almost entirely oblivious to itself;
And Wright extols "that primitive sense of shelter"
Which can turn a house into a refuge from despair.
I wish that time could bring the future back again
And let me see things as they used to seem to me

Before I found myself alone, in an emancipated state
 Alone and free and filled with cares about tomorrow.
 There used to be a logic in the way time passed
 That made it flow directly towards an underlying space
 Where all the minor, individual lives converged.
 The moments borrowed their perceptions from the past
 And bathed the future in a soft, familiar light
 I remembered from home, and which has faded.
 And the voices get supplanted by the rain,
 The nights seem colder, and the angel in the mind
 That used to sing to me beneath the wide suburban sky
 Turns into dreamwork and dissolves into the air,
 While in its place a kind of monument appears,
 Magnificent in isolation, compromised by proximity
 And standing in a small and singular expanse—
 As though the years had been a pretext for reflection,
 And my life had been a phase of disenchantment—
 As the faces that I cherished gradually withdraw,
 The reassuring settings slowly melt away,
 And what remains is just a sense of getting older.
 In a variation of the parable, the pure of heart
 Descend into a kingdom that they never wanted
 And refused to see. The homely notions of the good,
 The quaint ideas of perfection swept away like
 Adolescent fictions as the real forms of life
 Deteriorate with manically increasing speed,
 The kind man wakes into a quiet dream of shelter,
 And the serenity it brings—not in reflection,
 But in the paralyzing fear of being mistaken,
 Of losing everything, of acquiescing in the
 Obvious approach (the house shaped like a box;

The life that can't accommodate another's)—
As the heart shrinks down to tiny, local things.

Why can't the more expansive ecstasies come true?
I met you more than thirty years ago, in 1958,
In Mrs. Wolford's eighth-grade history class.
All moments weigh the same, and matter equally;
Yet those that time brings back create the fables
Of a happy or unsatisfying life, of minutes
Passing on the way to either peace or disappointment—
Like a paper calendar on which it's always autumn
And we're back in school again; or a hazy afternoon
Near the beginning of October, with the World Series
Playing quietly on the radio, and the windows open,
And the California sunlight filling up the room.
When I survey the mural stretched across the years
—Across my heart—I notice mostly small, neglected
Parts of no importance to the whole design, but which,
In their obscurity, seem more permanent and real.
I see the desks and auditorium, suffused with
Yellow light connoting earnestness and hope that
Still remains there, in a space pervaded by a
Soft and supple ache too deep to contemplate—
As though the future weren't real, and the present
Were amorphous, with nothing to hold on to,
And the past were there forever. And the art
That time inflicts upon its subjects can't
Eradicate the lines sketched out in childhood,
Which harden into shapes as it recedes.
I wish I knew a way of looking at the world
That didn't find it wanting, or of looking at my

Life that didn't always see a half-completed
 Structure made of years and filled with images
 And gestures emblematic of the past, like Gatsby's
 Light, or Proust's imbalance on the stones.
 I wish there were a place where I could stay
 And leave the world alone—an enormous stadium
 Where I could wander back and forth across a field
 Replete with all the incidents and small details
 That gave the days their textures, that bound the
 Minutes into something solid, and that linked them
 All together in a way that used to seem eternal.
 We used to go to dances in my family's ancient
 Cadillac, which blew up late one summer evening
 Climbing up the hill outside Del Mar. And later
 I can see us steaming off the cover of the Beatles'
 Baby-butcher album at your house in Mission Bay;
 And three years later listening to the Velvet
 Underground performing in a roller skating rink.
 Years aren't texts, or anything like texts;
 And yet I often think of 1968 that way, as though
 That single year contained the rhythms of the rest,
 As what began in hope and eagerness concluded in
 Intractable confusion, as the wedding turned into a
 Puzzling fiasco over poor John Godfrey's hair.
 The parts were real, and yet the dense and living
 Whole they once composed seems broken now, its
 Voice reduced to disembodied terms that speak to me
 More distantly each day, until the tangled years
 Are finally drained of feeling, and collapse into a
 Sequence of the places where we lived: your parents'
 House in Kensington, and mine above the canyon;

Then the flat by Sears in Cambridge, where we
 Moved when we got married, and the third floor
 Of the house on Francis Avenue, near Harvard Square;
 The big apartment in Milwaukee where we lived the
 Year that John was born, and last of all the
 House in Whitefish Bay, where you live now
 And all those years came inexplicably undone
 In mid-July. The sequence ended late last year.
 Suppose we use a lifetime as a measure of the world
 As it exists for one. Then half of mine has ended,
 While the fragment which has recently come to be
 Contains no vantage point from which to see it whole.
 I think that people are the sum of their illusions,
 That the cares that make them difficult to see
 Are eased by distance, with their errors blending
 In an intricate harmony, their truths abiding
 In a subtle "spark" or psyche (each incomparable,
 Yet each the same as all the others) and their
 Disparate careers all joined together in a tangled
 Moral vision whose intense, meandering design
 Seems lightened by a pure simplicity of feeling,
 As in grief, or in the pathos of a life
 Cut off by loneliness, indifference or hate,
 Because the most important thing is human happiness—
 Not in the sense of private satisfactions, but of
 Lives that realize themselves in ordinary terms
 And with the quiet inconsistencies that make them real.
 The whole transcends its tensions, like the intimate
 Reflections on the day that came at evening, whose
 Significance was usually overlooked, or misunderstood,
 Because the facts were almost always unexceptional.

Two years ago we took our son to Paris. Last night
 I picked him up and took him to a Lou Reed show,
 And then took him home. I look at all the houses as I
 Walk down Hackett Avenue to work. I teach my classes,
 Visit friends, cook introspective meals for myself,
 Yet in the end the minutes don't add up. What's lost
 Is the perception of the world as something good
 And held in common; as a place to be perfected
 In the kinds of everyday divisions and encounters
 That endowed it with integrity and structure,
 And that merged its private moments with the past.
 What broke it into pieces? What transformed the
 Flaws that gave it feeling into objects of a deep and
 Smoldering resentment—like coming home too early,
 Or walking too far ahead of you on the rue Jacob?
 I wish that life could be a window on the sun,
 Instead of just this porch where I can stand and
 Contemplate the wires that lace the parking lot
 And feel it moving towards some unknown resolution.
 The Guggenheim Museum just reopened. Tonight I
 Watched a segment of the news on PBS—narrated by a
 Woman we met years ago at Bob's—that showed how
 Most of Wright's interior had been restored,
 And how the ramp ascends in spirals towards the sky.
 I like the houses better—they flow in all directions,
 Merging with the scenery and embodying a milder,
 More domestic notion of perfection, on a human scale
 That doesn't overwhelm the life that it encloses.
 Isn't there a way to feel at home within the
 Confines of this bland, accommodating structure
 Made of souvenirs and emblems, like the hammock

Hanging in the backyard of an undistinguished
 Prairie School house in Whitefish Bay—the lineal,
 Reduced descendant of the "Flameproof" Wright house
 Just a block or two away from where I live now?
 I usually walk along that street on Sunday,
 Musing on how beautiful it seems, how aspects of it
 Recapitulate the Oak Park house and studio, with
 Open spaces buried in a labyrinthine interior,
 And with the entrance half concealed on the side—
 A characteristic feature of his plans that made it
 Difficult to find, although the hope was that in
 Trying to get inside, the visitor's eye would come to
 Linger over subtleties he might have failed to see—
 In much the way that in the course of getting older,
 And trying to reconstruct the paths that led me here,
 I found myself pulled backwards through these old,
 Uncertain passages, distracted by the details,
 And meeting only barriers to understanding why the
 Years unfolded as they did, and why my life
 Turned out the way it has—like his signature
 "Pathway of Discovery," with each diversion
 Adding to the integrity of the whole.

There is this *sweep* life has that makes the
 Accidents of time and place seem small.
 Everything alters, and the personal concerns
 That love could hold together for a little while
 Decay, and then the world seems strange again,
 And meaningless and free. I miss the primitive
 Confusions, and the secret way things came to me
 Each evening, and the pain. I still wonder

Where the tears went, standing in my room each day
 And quietly inhabiting a calm, suspended state
 Enveloped by the emptiness that scares and thrills me,
 With the background noise cascading out of nothing
 Like a song that makes the days go by, a song
 Incorporating everything—not into what it says,
 But simply in the way it touches me, a single
 Image of dispersal, the inexhaustible perception
 Of contingency and transience and isolation.
 It brings them back to me. I have the inwardness
 I think I must have wanted, and the quietude,
 The solitary temper, and this space where I can
 Linger with the silence curling all around me
 Like the sound of pure passage, waiting here
 Surrounded by the furniture, the books and lists
 And all these other emblems of the floating world,
 The prints of raindrops that begin as mist, that fall
 Discreetly through the atmosphere, and disappear.
 And then I feel them in the air, in a reserved,
 More earthly music filled with voices reassembling
 In a wellspring of remembrance, talking to me again,
 And finding shelter in the same evasive movements
 I can feel in my own life, cloaked in a quiet
 Dignity that keeps away the dread of getting old,
 And fading out of other people's consciousness,
 And dying—with its deepest insecurities and fears
 Concealed by their own protective colorations,
 As the mind secretes its shell and calls it home.
 It has the texture of an uncreated substance,
 Hovering between the settings it had come to love
 And some unformulated state I can't imagine—

Waiting for the telephone to ring, obsessed with
 Ways to occupy these wide, unstructured hours,
 And playing records by myself, and waking up alone.
 All things are disparate, yet subject to the same
 Intense, eradicating wills of time and personality,
 Like waves demolishing the walls love seemed to build
 Between our lives and emptiness, the certainty they
 Seemed to have just two or three short years ago,
 Before the anger spread its poison over everything.
 I think about the way our visions locked together
 In a nightmare play of nervousness and language,
 Living day to day inside the concentrated
 Force of that relentless argument, whose words
 Swept over us in formless torrents of anxiety, two
 People clinging to their versions of their lives
 Almost like children—living out each other's
 Intermittent fantasies that fed upon themselves
 As though infected by some vile, concentrated hatred;
 Who then woke up and planned that evening's dinner.
 It's all memories now, and distance. Miles away
 The cat is sleeping on the driveway, John's in school,
 And sunlight filters through a curtain in the kitchen.
 Nothing really changes—the external world intrudes
 And then withdraws, and then becomes continuous again.
 I went downtown today and got a lamp with pendant
 Lanterns made of opalescent art glass—part, I guess,
 Of what this morning's paper called the "Wright craze."
 I like the easy way the days go by, the parts of aging
 That have come to seem familiar, and the uneventful
 Calm that seems to settle on the house at night.
 Each morning brings the mirror's reassuring face,

As though the years had left the same enduring person
Simplified and changed—no longer vaguely desperate,
No longer torn, yet still impatient with himself
And still restless; but drained of intricacy and rage,
Like a mild paradox—uninteresting in its own right,
Yet existing for the sake of something stranger.
Now and then our life comes over me, in brief,
Involuntary glimpses of that world that blossom
Unexpectedly, in fleeting moments of regret
That come before the ache, the pang that gathers
Sharply, like an indrawn breath—a strange and
Thoughtful kind of pain, as though a steel
Band had somehow snapped inside my heart.
I don't know. But what I do know is that
None of it is ever going to come to me again.
Why did I think a person only distantly like me
Might finally represent my life? What aspects
Of my attitudes, my cast of mind, my inconclusive
Way of tossing questions at the world had I
Supposed might realize another person's fantasies
And turn her into someone else—who gradually became
A separate part of me, and argued with the very
Words I would have used, and looked at me through
Eyes I'd looked at as though gazing at myself?
I guess we only realize ourselves in dreams,
Or in these self-reflexive reveries sustaining
All the charms that contemplation holds—until the
Long enchantment of the soul with what it sees
Is lifted, and it startles at a space alight with
Objects of its infantile gaze, like people in a mall.
I saw her just the other day. I felt a kind of

Comfort at her face, one tintured with bemusement
At the strange and guarded person she'd become—
Attractive, vaguely friendly, brisk (*too* brisk),
But no one I could think might represent my life.
Why did I even *try* to see myself in what's outside?
The strangeness pushes it away, propels the vision
Back upon itself, into these regions filled with
Shapes that I can wander through and never see,
As though their image were inherently unreal.
The houses on a street, the quiet backyard shade,
The rooms restored to life with bric-a-brac—
I started by revisiting these things, then slowly
Reconceiving them as forms of loss made visible
That balanced sympathy and space inside an
Abstract edifice combining reaches of the past
With all these speculations, all this artful
Preening of the heart. I sit here at my desk,
Perplexed and puzzled, teasing out a tangled
Skein of years we wove together, and trying to
Combine the fragments of those years into a poem.
Who cares if life—if someone's actual life—is
Finally insignificant and small? There's still a
Splendor in the way it flowers once and fades
And leaves a carapace behind. There isn't time to
Linger over why it happened, or attempt to make its
Mystery come to life again and last, like someone
Still embracing the confused perceptions of himself
Embedded in the past, as though eternity lay there—
For heaven's a delusion, and eternity is in the details,
And this tiny, insubstantial life is all there is.
—And that would be enough, but for the reoccurring

Dreams I often have of you. Sometimes at night
 The banished unrealities return, as though a room
 Suffused with light and poetry took shape around me.
 Pictures line the walls. It's early summer.
 Somewhere in *Remembrance of Things Past*, Marcel,
 Reflecting on his years with "Albertine"—with X—
 Suggests that love is just a consciousness of distance,
 Of the separation of two lives in time and space.
 I think the same estrangement's mirrored in each life,
 In how it seems both adequate and incomplete—part
 Day to day existence, part imaginary construct
 Beckoning at night, and sighing through my dreams
 Like some disconsolate chimera, or the subject
 Of a lonely, terrifying sadness; or the isolation
 Of a quiet winter evening, when the house feels empty,
 And silence intervenes. But in the wonderful
 Enclosure opening in my heart, I seem to recognize
 Our voices lilting in the yard, inflected by the
 Rhythms of a song whose words are seamless
 And whose lines are never ending. I can almost
 See the contours of your face, and sense the
 Presence of the trees, and reimagine all of us
 Together in a deep, abiding happiness, as if the
 Three of us inhabited a fragile, made-up world
 That seemed to be so permanent, so real.
 I have this fantasy: It's early in the evening.
 You and I are sitting in the backyard, talking.
 Friends arrive, then drinks and dinner, conversation . . .
 The lovely summer twilight lasts forever . . .
 What's the use?
 What purpose do these speculations serve? What

Mild enchantments do these meditations leave?
 They're just the murmurs of an age, of middle age,
 That help to pass the time that they retrieve
 Before subsiding, leaving everything unchanged.
 Each of us at times has felt the future fade,
 Or seen the compass of his life diminished,
 Or realized some tangible illusion was unreal.
 Driving down to Evanston last week, I suddenly
 Remembered driving down that road eight years ago,
 So caught up in some story I'd just finished
 That I'd missed the way the countryside was changing—
 How in place of trees there now were office towers
 And theme parks, parts of a confusing panoply of
 Barns and discount malls transfiguring a landscape
 Filled with high, receding clouds, and rows of flimsy
 Houses in what used to be a field. I thought of
 Other people's lives, and how impossible it seemed
 To grasp them on the model of my own—as little
 Mirrors of infinity—or sense their forms of
 Happiness, or in their minor personal upheavals
 Feel the sweep of time reduced to human scale
 And see its abstract argument made visible.
 I thought of overarching dreams of plenitude—
 How life lacks shape until it's given one by love,
 And how each soul is both a kingdom in itself
 And part of some incorporating whole that
 Feels and has a face and lets it live forever.
 All of these seemed true, and cancelled one another,
 Leaving just the feeling of an unseen presence
 Tracing out the contours of a world erased,
 Like music tracing out the contours of the mind—

For life has the form of a winding curve in space
And in its wake the human figure disappears.
Look at our surroundings—where a previous age
Could visualize a landscape we see borders,
Yet I think the underlying vision is the same:
A person positing a world that he can see
And can't contain, and vexed by other people.
Everything is possible; some of it seemed real
Or nearly real, yet in the end it spoke to me alone,
In phrases echoing the isolation of a meager
Ledge above a waterfall, or rolling across a vast,
Expanding plain on which there's always room,
But only room for one. It starts and ends
Inside an ordinary room, while in the interim
Brimming with illusions, filled with commonplace
Delights that make the days go by, with simple
Arguments and fears, and with the nervous
Inkling of some vague, utopian conceit
Transforming both the landscape and our lives,
Until we look around and find ourselves at home,
But in a wholly different world. And even those
Catastrophes that seemed to alter everything
Seem fleeting, grounded in a natural order
All of us are subject to, and ought to celebrate.
—Yet *why*? That things are temporary doesn't
Render them unreal, unworthy of regretting.
It's not as though the past had never happened:
All those years were real, and their loss was real,
And it *is* sad—I don't know what else to call it.
I'm glad that both of us seem happy. Yet what
Troubles me is just the way what used to be a world

Turned out, in retrospect, to be a state of mind,
 And no more tangible than that. And now it's gone,
 And in its place I find the image of a process
 Of inexorable decay, or of some great unraveling
 That drags the houses forward into emptiness
 And backwards into pictures of the intervening days
 Love pieced together out of nothing. And I'm
 Certain that this austere vision finally is true,
 And yet it strikes me as too meager to believe.
 It comes from much too high above the world
 And seems to me too hopeless, too extreme—
 But then I found myself one winter afternoon
 Remembering a quiet morning in a classroom
 And inventing everything again, in ordinary
 Terms that seemed to comprehend a childish
 Dream of love, and then the loss of love,
 And all the intricate years between.

from *The Constructor*:

THRENODY FOR TWO VOICES

—This is my complaint: that
 Humiliation in the snow. I've carried it
 This far, made hate so much a part of me
 The past seems riddled with despair, and my life hurts,
 And the words that find me curl up at the edges.
 You keep asking me where, and yet I see it everywhere,
 I see it here at home: in the arguments after dinner
 And the tense confinement of the living room; the sudden
 Ringing of the telephone; the anger that wells up in me each morning.

I feel it in my bones. This secret life
 Whose language is the melancholy sound the heart makes
 Beating against its cage—why can't you feel the
 Emptiness I see reflected in your face, why can't you
 Sense this overwhelming thing I have no name for?
 The present is a dull, persistent ache, the future an impersonal expanse
 In which I'm tentative and old, and my life has come to nothing.
 I want to keep the emptiness away, to realize the
 Sense of what it's like to be alive—instead of just existing
 In a frozen atmosphere of rage, where the thoughts go
 Swirling through my mind like snowflakes.
 —Yes. And yet some days seemed different.
 I remember the enchantment and the peaceful light
 That used to settle on the yard on summer evenings.
 Couldn't some of that return? My world feels broken,
 And the world that you describe is one that I can't see,
 In which there isn't any happiness, and where the sky became
 Opaque and lost its tenderness, and what had seemed like
 Poetry became two separate monologues, imprisoning each of us in a name.
 Why can't the truth be like a dream from which two people can wake up and kiss?
 Why can't our separate lives share *this* illusion:
 Rounded by contentment and well-being, infinite and free
 And yet at peace within the boundaries of our life
 Together, in a language that contains us like a shell?
 I don't know—perhaps there isn't any peace
 And everything I say is futile. Maybe we're alone
 And what you say is merely confirmation, further proof
 That all that lies between the poles of solitude and death
 Is the rhetoric of loss, of feeling cheated by a world
 That whispered quietly of love and left us with this incoherent
 Thing that love has brought us to despise.

—The truth is smaller. What you mean by love
 Isn't anything I recognize. You mean a style of contemplation,
 Or a monument encapsulating everything you cling to
 Like a first certainty—things which to me are merely
 Emblems of obscurity and death: the hurt bewilderment;
 Your maddening inability to see; your breathless concentration
 And these rambling explanations filled with a grandiose
 Self-pity and a sadness on the scale of the universe.
 What's missing is the dailiness, the commonplace
 Engagements that could make this formal universe a home.
 I had the thought that what was called a "normal" life
 Was really a form of cruelty, and that the people who could stand it lived in hell.
 One time I even thought you might agree with me,
 And come to me in my head, and start to understand me.
 It doesn't matter now. What matters are these syllables
 That shape the endless argument in which we live.
 Is this the peace you bring me? I hover between two minds
 As in an endless space, I feel my body drift through
 All-consuming layers of anxiety, still harboring a wish
 That you might cling to me, and then let me go.
 —I know that I can bring you nothing but my own
 Uneasy mix of insight and illusion, and a voice that
 Beckons like a distant singing in the trees, and no delight.
 I think that what might free you is the effortless
 Forbearance which I haven't the capacity to give. To
 Rest in peace, inspired by the simple breath of happiness;
 To remain indifferent to the frame of one's existence—
 These aren't compelling ways to live. Life has to hold the consciousness of death,
 Or it isn't life, but something featureless. This
 Thing you call your soul is just the music of a solitary quest

Inexorably approaching, through layers of frustrated magic,
The dead core. It sings more clearly in the air, more
Urgently in the darkness, floating through the bare trees,
Coursing with the thrill of anger through the veins . . .
My song is simpler: disappointment, and the pain of isolation,
And the hope that something in its underlying tenderness
Might still appease you, might approach you in a calm and
Restless voice that sings more sweetly as the summer wanes;
And still more silently in autumn, as the grave opens
And the earth makes ready to receive its guest.
—And sets me free. For did you think that all the
Force of my conviction, all the strength of my prolonged dissatisfaction,
Might amount to nothing? That what started as a way of
Fighting back the emptiness I felt encroaching on my heart
Might be simply in vain? I can't go back to that romantic
Wilderness again, in which my passions felt like questions
And my dreams were private motions in a universe of one.
This impasse may be lasting. It may ultimately heal.
What matters is that something in my soul began to breathe
As I began to see your words as merely part of my experience,
And to feel that almost none of what they said to me was true.
What freedom means to me is not depending on the world,
Or on you, or on some fantasy to tell me how to live. It's
Not enough to mirror my despair, and give it back to me.
I want to see myself as what I am, and look at you the way you are—
Is that a form of hatred? Or an intricate form of care
That lets another person be? Or a form of self-deception
Leaving both of us alone, but with our disparate lives
Uneasily together at the end, within a blank and
Intimate expanse? Maybe now you see.
Come to see that figure as my own; or leave the ghosts

Behind and take my place as part of the surroundings.
 Right now I float above the line that separates the
 Two perspectives from each other and divides my life.
 A future is emerging in the distance. Is it mine, or
 Merely one I've dreamed about? Life flows around me
 While my own remains unchanged by the advancing years,
 As faces I can't recognize appear and disappear and
 Come at last to rest. Is this how one survives? In
 Someone else's memory? My soul is all but gone but
 Where? I know that what is left will keep a minor
 Part of me alive by just existing—either as this
 Thing that by the force of sheer despair begins to
 Move and breathe and then to turn away from here
 And stare into the world and see it whole, yet
 Distantly; or else as something that remains
 Beside itself, and paralyzed with fear.

WHAT THE STARS MEANT

On a backwards-running clock in Lisbon,
 By the marble statue of Pessoa,
 On an antique astrolabe in London
 Tracing out the sky above Samoa,
 Thousands of miles away—in time, in place,
 Each night conspires to create a myth
 That stands for nothing real, yet leaves you with
 The vague impression of a human face.
 The fragments fly apart and shift, trembling
 On the threshold of a kind of fullness:
 The minor wonder of remembering;
 The greater wonders of forgetfulness.
 For one looks back as someone else might yearn

For a new life, and set his course upon
 The polestar, bid his adieus, and move on.
 The journey takes a solipsistic turn,
 Forsaking starlight for an inner glow,
 And reducing all human history,
 All human culture—highbrow, middle-, low- —
 To one reflecting surface, one story.
 What fills the heaven of a single mind?
 The things that used to fill Kant's mind with awe
 —"The starry heavens and the moral law"—
 Seem distant now, and difficult to find
 Amid the message of satiety
 Issuing from the corners of the sky,
 Filled with monotonous variety:
 Game shows, an interview with Princess Di,
 And happy talk, and sitcoms and the news,
 The shit that floats across your living room
 Each weekday evening. Waiting in the pews,
 Out in the desert where the cacti bloom,
 Something else was forming, something stranger
 Gathering in the gulf below the stairs—
 As though the mystery of the manger
 Were written in the day-to-day affairs
 Of a world consecrated to Mammon,
 Yet governed by those sacred absences
 That make the spirit soar, and presences
 At one remove, like the sound of Cuban
 Drumbeats issuing from the Ricardos'
 Love nest on the television station
 Like distant thunder; or Leonardo's
 "Wave that flees the site of its creation."

In the desert far beyond the city,
 One hears the cadences for which one longs,
 The lyrics of those half-forgotten songs,
 —Some of them poignant, some of them witty—
 Brimming with the melody of passage;
 One feels the wind that blows the soul about,
 Repeating its inscrutable message;
 And as night falls, one sees the stars come out.
 I found myself beneath a canopy
 Of scenes left out of someone else's life
 —The dog that didn't bark, Rosebud, Cain's wife—
 Arrayed above me in a panoply
 Of glittering debris, gigantic swirls
 Of stars, and slowly moving caravans
 Of stars like tiny Christmas lights or pearls
 Of tapioca, floating in a danse
 Macabre across the heavens as I stood,
 Watching the pageant in the sky unfold.
 I felt the chill of something much too old
 To comprehend—not the Form of the Good,
 But something inchoate and violent,
 A Form of Darkness. Suddenly the songs
 Floating through the revelry fell silent,
 As in The Masque of the Red Death, as throngs
 Of the dead twinkled at me from above.
 The intimate domain of memory
 Became an endless field of entropy
 Transfigured, inking in the outlines of
 Eurydice entombed, Orpheus immured,
 And, in the center of their universe,
 That subtler diadem of stars obscured

By the brighter constellations, the Hearses.
 Standing off to one side, as though bereft,
 There was a figure with averted eyes,
 Gesturing in a language of surprise
 That took possession of my heart, yet left
 The question of her meaning unresolved.
 I looked at her. It was time to begin.
 The apparitions in the sky dissolved,
 Leaving me alone, and growing old. In
 The wide, unstructured heavens overhead
 The stars were still shining. When I got home,
 The message light was blinking on the phone.
 I don't remember what the message said.

THE CONSTRUCTOR

They strike me less as actual persons than as abstract
 Ghosts of an idea: that life is the external part of
 Its emotions, of the small, evaporating sentiments; but
 That in isolation there might be a place where you could
 Live eternally behind the high, intimidating walls of art.
 They knew that in the end the parts were unimportant—that
 Even as the world receded language fell away until the body
 Shook with feeling and became intangible; that eventually
 One's soul would be absorbed by its surroundings, breath by
 Simplifying breath, advancing towards that moment when its
 Work would be completed and its past restored; as though
 Swept forward on a quiet, undulating wave of meaning, and
 As in a trance. And so they floated through their lives,
 Protected by the great, exhausted themes of the romantics:
 That understanding lay in childhood; that in emancipated
 Language one possessed a real way of merging opposites, of

Joining the discursive tone of reason with the weight of the
 Emotions to create a finite, earthly music; that any person,
 By a simple act of will, could meld the substance of his life
 And the seclusion of the mind together in a single testament
 Suffused with light and feeling and reverberating with the
 Fundamental rhythms of the heart, and never break the spell.
 But those ideas are shells now, empty as those stories of the
 Soul inhabiting its lost utopia—that bright, fictitious era
 When a glance could take it in, a word could start it, and
 The merest touch could lead it backwards through the narrow
 Ways of the imagination to a paradise of innocence and peace.
 Sometimes I feel this hollow sense of satisfaction at their
 Disappearance, at the loss of that seductive power to make
 A world seem real and bring one's individual fantasies to
 Life; but other times I feel like someone living in a fable
 Of his own construction, waiting in some bleak, completely
 Isolated country with no hope or history, where the minutes
 Come and go and memories displace each other, leaving nothing
 For the soul to do but feel them as they flow, and flow away.
 I know the forms of care, and understand the grammar of desire.
 I understand that life is an affair of words, and that the
 Hope of duplicating it is a delusion. There is a mood that
 Drains it of significance, reducing all its aspirations to
 A single state of mind, and all its tenderest emotions to
 An empty sense of self-importance fostered by the primitive
 Confusions of some distant place and time. Is this how life
 Was meant to feel? For this is how, increasingly, it does.
 You want there to be something more than just these tedious
 Realities of disillusionment and anxiousness and care, and
 Then you see them rising in the distance, luminescent forms
 Ascending from these categorical expressions of unmeaning

In a curve that sweeps up like the graph of an obsession.
More and more their presence comes to dominate your dreams
At night, or linger in the corner of your mind by day. You
Close your eyes and something filters into consciousness;
You try to read, but with a sense of someone watching you.
One time I'd thought they'd gone away, but gradually they
Reappeared, permeating the surrounding atmosphere with
Music swirling in and all around me like a deep refrain.
And for a while they almost seem about to welcome you, to
Show you into their imaginary garden and to tell you how
Life felt, and how the world appeared before it started:
Everything melts away, until in place of the familiar
Inessential background you begin to see the image, slowly
Coming in and out of focus, of a face you never saw before
As though behind this wall of words there were a solitary
Presence with an unfamiliar name and with the abstract,
Heightened features of a ghost. And then the noise stops
And the language disappears, and the semblance on the page
Stares blindly back at you until it almost starts to seem
That there might be a vision of yourself that real too—
A vision of the soul, or God, or something merely human
That could live forever with the strength of an illusion.
But when I turn away and look I see myself, by contrast,
As a purely local person, temporal, not quite complete,
Unequal to the numinous desires that brought them back to
Earth and made their world seem new again, and beautiful.
I want to feel things burst again, to read life as it was
Before its truth became apparent and its youth had faded
And the doors closed on the future. I wait here in the
Narrow dispensations of the moments, mired in a state of
Vague anticipation, working through the days as through

The pages of a schoolbook, drifting through these subtly
Recursive grammars of the heart by rate, in fragments,
As though suspended in the first, uncertain stages
of some distant happiness; in private terms and notes
That show myself to me, but which create a personality
Half-Ariel, half-real, that lives in phrases, and whose
Animus is word association, mingling those things it
Might have been with those that one can't see or even
Consciously imagine. One gets resigned to them, but
In the way the blind become resigned to the invisible,
Or the mind to finitude. One becomes sufficient. One
Even finally attains—though only at the level of the
Personal—an empty kind of freedom, mired in disbelief,
Beset by contradictory feelings, looking back at them
Sometimes in awe, and with a sense of the impossible,
Sometimes in anger; now and then in gratitude. Yet
Now and then I find myself methodically rehearsing
One or two stock narratives, and one or two ideas,
In unadorned, discursive terms and cadences that
Seem to be inspired by the breath of God, by waves
Of silent, urgent sound proliferating through and
All around me, as the past, like some mysterious
Ventriloquist, announces them in enigmatic ways.
And then I feel a part of their confusion, and at
One with them in aspiration, sharing those desires
That fostered their illusion of a poetry of stark,
Unmediated passion that revealed the soul directly;
And their faith in its redemption through a reckless,
Youthful art, begun in gladness as a kind of refuge
From the never-ending disappointments of the ordinary,
And as solace for its fall from grace into the human.

Was that all unreal? Another obsolescent exercise in
 Self-delusion, nurtured in the heart and now exhausted?
 Life is what you call it, but I find no words for it
 In what it has become, a language emptied of its vanity
 And echoing a truer rhetoric, but a despondent one:
 That the burden of a poem is to recall it to itself;
 That what was said and done is all there is, and that
 There are no further heavens—not even earthly ones—
 Beyond the ambiguities of what actually existed; that
 The notion of the soul, and reaching out in desperation
 For another one, are merely versions of the beautiful;
 And that the present is a prison and the past a wall.
 Yet once I thought I sensed a different way of feeling,
 One of bare simplicity, a respite from these solitary,
 Powerful abstractions and these melodramas of the mind.
 I thought I felt a moment opening like an unseen flower
 Only to close again, as though something else had called it,
 Or as though, beneath the disaffected surface, something
 Limpid and benevolent were moving at a level of awareness
 I could not yet find; and so I let the moment slide away.
 One reaches back in eagerness, but in an empty exercise,
 For what one might have done. One reads the histories
 Of art and solitude for what they say about tomorrow,
 And deciphers the illusions of the past for what they
 Might illuminate about today, for they were once alive.
 One tries to penetrate the different dreams of reason
 Buried in their tablaturs, to translate the universal
 Language of their faces and the outward aspects of a
 Finite, inner universe. Why is it that as one gets
 Closer their incredible diversity reduces to a smooth,
 Impregnable facade? Whatever else their codes might

Show or say—a mood, a moment, or a whole cosmology—
 Their private meaning is a person, and it fades away
 As page by page or note by note one comes to hear the
 Novel's ending, not the soul that wrote it, or to hear
 The music of a dead composer, not a living one; and
 Then to see them as emotions that in time, or someplace
 After time, might gradually give way to something real.
 Why must there be so many ways to disillusionment, of
 Coming to believe that no one else can feel and that
 One really *is* alone? Sometimes I feel like nothing in
 This world or any other one, now like an exile,
 Now a subject of the kingdom of the inconceivable.
 I wanted to look past them into what their world was
 Like before they finally called it home, before there
Was a state of nature to ascend from, or a pretext for
 These differences I feel. I tried to kid myself that
 I could talk to them directly, mixing their traditions
 With the vague one of my own to conjure the imaginary
 Figure of these songs without a context; carefully
 Constructing one in long, erotic sentences expressing
 An unfocused state of sadness, one whose proof remained
 Inviting and unknown; phrasing their encouragements
 Too reasonably; fashioning their reassurances that
 Someday soon my time was going to come, but meanwhile
 Rearranging things to make them more believable, and
 Going through the sweet, hypnotic motions of a life.
 There was this chorus of strange vapors, with a name
 Something like mine, and someone trying to get free.
 You start to see things almost mythically, in tropes
 And figurations taken from the languages of art—to
 See your soul as sliding out of chaos, changeable,

Twice blessed with vagueness and a heart, the feelings
 Cumbersome and unrefined, the mood a truly human one
 Of absolute bewilderment; and floating up from that
 To an inanimate sublime, as though some angel said
Come with me, and you woke into a featureless and
 Foolish paradise your life had gradually become; or
 From a dense, discordant memory into a perfect world
 As empty as an afterthought, and level as a line.
 One day a distant cloud appears on the horizon, and
 You think your life might change. These artifacts,
 Whose temper mirrors mine, still argue with the same
 Impersonal intensity that nothing personal can change;
 And yet one waits. Where did the stark emotions go,
 Where are the flowers? Mustn't there be something to
 This tenderness I feel encroaching on my mind, these
 Quiet intimations of a generous, calm hour insensibly
 Approaching day by day through outwardly constricted
 Passages confused by light and air? It starts to seem
 So effortless, and something slides away into the artless
 Afterlife where dreams go, or a part that all along had
 Been too close to feel begins to breathe as it becomes
 Increasingly transparent, and then suddenly alive.
 I think I can at last almost see through them into
 Everyday unhappiness, my clear, unhampered gaze
 No longer troubled by their opaque atmosphere of
 Rational irrationality, their reasonable facade
 An ordinary attitude, their sense of consequence
 Merely illusory. Why should it matter whether
 One or two of them survive? They calm the days
 With undirected passion and the nights with music,
 Hiding them at first, then gradually revealing them

So differently—these things I'd thought I'd never
 Have—simply by vanishing together one by one, like
 Breaths, like intermittent glimpses of some incomplete,
 Imperfect gratitude. How could this quiet feeling
 Actually exist? Why do I feel so happy?

from *North Point North*:

THE PROXIMATE SHORE

It starts in sadness and bewilderment,
 The self-reflexive iconography
 Of late adolescence, and a moment
 When the world dissolves into a fable
 Of an alternative geography
 Beyond the threshold of the visible.
 And the heart is a kind of mute witness,
 Abandoning everything for the sake
 Of an unimaginable goodness
 Making its way across the crowded stage
 Of what might have been, leaving in its wake
 The anxiety of an empty page.
 Thought abhors a vacuum. Out of it came
 A partially recognizable shape
 Stumbling across a wilderness, whose name,
 Obscure at first, was sooner or later
 Sure to be revealed, and a landscape
 Of imaginary rocks and water
 And the dull pastels of the dimly lit
 Interior of a gymnasium.
 Is art the mirror of its opposite,

Or is the world itself a mimesis?
This afternoon at the symposium
Someone tried to resurrect the thesis
That a poem is a deflected sigh.
And I remembered a day on a beach
Thirty-five years ago, in mid-July,
The summer before I left for college,
With the future hanging just out of reach
And constantly receding, like the edge
Of the water floating across the sand.
Poems are the fruit of the evasions
Of a life spent trying to understand
The vacuum at the center of the heart,
And for all the intricate persuasions
They enlist in the service of their art,
Are finally small, disappointing things.
Yet from them there materializes
A way of life, a way of life that brings
The fleeting pleasures of a vocation
Made up of these constant exercises
In what still passes for celebration,
That began in a mood of hopelessness
On an evening in a dormitory
Years and years ago, and seemed to promise
A respite from disquietude and care,
But that left only the lovely story
Of a bright presence hanging in the air.

MOORE'S PARADOX

I don't like poems about philosophy,
But then, what is it? Someone
Sees the world dissolving in a well,
Another sees the moving image of eternity
In a shard of time, in what we call a moment.
Are they philosophers? I guess so,
But does it matter? G.E. Moore
Maintained we dream up theories
Incompatible with things we really know, a
Paradox which hardly seems peculiar to our breed.
Poets are worse, or alternately, better
At inhabiting the obviously untrue and
Hoisting flags of speculation in defiance of the real--
In a way that's the point, isn't it?
Whatever holds, whatever occupies the mind
And lingers, and takes flight?
Then from deep within the house
I heard the sound of something I'd forgotten:
Raindrops on the window and the thrashing
Noise the wind makes as it pulses through the trees.
It brought me back to what I meant to say
As time ran out, a mind inside an eggshell boat,
The elements arrayed against it:
Reason as a song, a specious
Music played between the movements of two dreams,
Both dark. I hear the rain.
The silence in the study is complete.
The sentence holds me in its song
Each time I utter it or mentally conceive it,
Calling from a primitive domain

Where time is like a moment
And the clocks stand silent in the chambers,
And it's raining, and I don't believe it.

GIL'S CAFE

For now the kingdom feels sufficient and complete,
And summer seems to flow through everything:
A girl slides by on roller blades,
The flags flap on the flagpoles, and across the street
The afternoon holds court at Gil's Cafe.
There is this sense of plenitude and peace
And of the presence of the world —
Wasps on the driveway, and purple flowers on the trees,
And a bicycle goes rolling down the hill;
And at length it starts to deepen and increase.
And even as it deepens something turns away,
As though the day were the reflection of a purer day
In which the summer's measures never ended.
The eye that seeks it fills the universe with shapes,
A fabulist, an inquisitor of space
Removed from life by dreams of something other than this life,
Distracted by the bare idea of heaven,
Suspended in the earthly heaven of this afternoon
As off the lake a light breeze blows
And all there is to see lies dormant in the sun.

*

The sun shines on the houses and the churches and the schools,
On restaurants and parks, on marriages and love affairs,
The playground with its monkey bars and slides,
The bench where someone sits and thinks about the future,
The accident in which a person's life abruptly ends.

The world is like the fiction of a face,
Which tries to hide the emptiness behind a smile
Yet seems so beautiful—insignificant,
And like everything on which the sunlight falls
Impermanent, but enough for a while.

NORTH POINT NORTH

I

In these I find my calling:
In the shower, in the mirror, in unconscious
Hours spent staring at a screen
At artifacts complete unto themselves.
I think of them as self-sufficient worlds
Where I can sojourn for a while,
Then wake to find the clouds dispersing
And the sidewalks steaming with the
Rain that must have fallen while I stayed inside.
The sun is shining, and the quiet
Doubts are answered with more doubts,
For as the years begin to mirror one another
And the diary in the brain implodes,
What filters through the theories on the page
Is a kind of settledness, an equilibrium
Between the life I have and what time seemed to hold—
These rooms, these poems, these ordinary streets
That spring to life each summer in an intricate construction
Blending failed hopes and present happiness—
Which from the outside seems like self-deception.

*

There is no end to these reflections,
To their measured music with its dying fall

Wherein the heart and what it seeks are reconciled.
 I live them, and as though in gratitude
 They shape my days, from morning with its sweetest smile
 Until the hour when sleep blows out the candle.
 Between, the present falls away,
 And for a while the old romance resumes,
 Familiar but unrecognized, an undiscovered place
 Concealed within the confines of this room,
 That seems at once a form of feeling and a state of grace
 Prepared for me, written in my name
 Against the time when time has finally merged
 These commonplace surroundings with what lies behind the veil—
 Leaving behind at least a version of the truth
 Composed of what I felt and what I saw outside my window
 On a summer morning; melding sound and sense,
 A music and a mood, together in a hesitant embrace
 That makes them equal at the end.

II

There may be nothing for a poem to change
 But an atmosphere: conventional or strange,
 Its meaning is enclosed by the perception
 —Better, by the misperception—
 Of what time held and what the future knew;
 Which is to say this very moment.
 And yet the promise of a distant
 Purpose is what makes each moment new.
 There may be nothing for the soul to say
 In its defense, except to describe the way
 It came to find itself at the impasse
 Morning reveals in the glass—
 The road that led away from home to here,

That began in wonderment and hope,
 But that ended in the long slope
 Down to loneliness and the fear of fear.
 The casuistry is all in the event,
 Contingent on what someone might have meant
 Or might still mean. What feels most frightening
 Is the thought that when the lightning
 Has subsided, and the clearing sky
 Appears at last above the stage
 To mark the only end of age,
 That God, that distant and unseeing eye,
 Would see that none of this had ever been:
 That none of it, apparent or unseen,
 Was ever real, and all the private words,
 Which seemed to fill the air like birds
 Exploding from the brush, were merely sounds
 Without significance or sense,
 Inert and dead beneath the dense
 Expanse of the earth in its impassive rounds.
 There may be no rejoinder to that thought.
 There may be nothing that one could have sought
 That might have lent the search significance,
 Or even a kind of coherence.
 Perhaps. Yet closer to me than the grandeur
 Of the vast and the uncreated
 Is the calm of this belated
 Moment in its transitory splendor.

III

Someone asked about the aura of regret
 And disappointment that surrounds these poems,
 About the private facts those feelings might conceal,

And what their source was in my life.
I said that none of it was personal,
That as lives go my own life was a settled one,
Comprising both successes and misfortunes, the successes
Not especially striking, the misfortunes small.
And yet the question is a real one,
And not for me alone, though certainly for me.
For even if, as Wittgenstein once claimed,
That while the facts may stay the same
And what is true of one is true of both,
The happy and unhappy man inhabit different worlds,
One still would want to know which world this is,
And how that other one could seem so close.
So much of how life feels lies in the phrasing,
In the way a thought starts, then turns back upon itself
Until its question hangs unanswered in the breeze.
Perhaps the sadness is a way of seeming free,
Of denying what can change or disappear,
Of tearing free from circumstance,
As though the soul could only speak out from the
Safety of some private chamber in the air.
Let me try once more. I think the saddest moments
Are the ones that also seem most beautiful,
For the nature of a moment is to fade,
Leaving everything unaltered, and the landscape
Where the light fell as it was before.
And time makes poetry from what it takes away,
And the measure of experience
Is not that it be real, but that it last,
And what one knows is simply what one knew,
And what I want is simply what I had.

These are the premises that structure what I feel,
The axioms that govern my imagination,
And beneath them lies the fear—
Not the fear of the unknown, but the fear of growing old
Unchanged, of looking in the mirror
At a future that repeats itself *ad infinitum*.
It could be otherwise so easily.
The transience that lectures so insistently of loss
Could speak as clearly of an openness renewed,
A life made sweeter by its changing;
And the shadows of the past
Could seem a shade where one could linger for a while
Before returning to the world, and moving on.
The way would be the same in either case,
Extending for an unknown span of years
Experienced from two perspectives, a familiar course
Accessible to all, yet narrowing,
As the journey nears its end, to one.
The difference isn't in the details
Or the destination, but in how things feel along the road:
The secret of the quest lies all around me,
While what lurks below the surface is another story,
One of no more consequence or import than the last.
What matters isn't what one chances to believe,
But the force of one's attachments,
And instead of looking for an answer in a dream
Set aside the question, let the songs continue
Going through the motions of the days
And waking every morning to this single world,
Whether in regret, or in celebration.

IV

Each day begins as yesterday began:
 A cat in silhouette in the dim light
 Of what the morning holds—
 Breakfast and *The New York Times*, a man
 Taking a shower, a poem taking flight
 As a state of mind unfolds
 So unpredictably.
 Through the hot summer air
 I walk to a building where
 I give a lecture on philosophy
 In the strict sense; then go home to the cat.
 A narrow life; or put another way,
 A life whose facts can all
 Be written on a page, the narrow format
 Of this tiny novel of a day,
Ulysses written small,
 A diary so deep
 Its rhythms seem unreal:
 A solitary meal.
 Some records or a movie. And then sleep.

V

At the ending of the remake of *The Thing*
 Kurt Russell and one other guy
 Are all that's left of what had been the crew
 Of an Antarctic outpost. Some horrifying presence
 —Some protean *thing*—establishes itself
 Inside the person of an ordinary man
 And then, without a warning, erupts in devastation.
 The two survivors eye each other slowly,
 Neither knowing whether one of them

Still holds the horror. "What do we do now?"
 The second asks, and Russell says,
 "Let's see what happens," and the movie ends.
 "Horror" is too strong, but substitute the fear
 I spoke about before, and the scene is apt.
 I don't know, as no one really knows,
 What might lie waiting in the years to come,
 But sometimes when the question touches me I feel afraid—
 Not of age, but an age that seems a prolongation of this afternoon,
 That looks ahead, and looks instead into itself.
 This is the fear that draws me back inside:
 That this is all there is, that what I hold so easily
 Will vanish soon, and nothing like it will be given me again.
 The days will linger and the nights rehearse themselves
 Until the secret of my life has finally emerged—
 Not in devastation, but in a long decline
 That leads at least as surely to a single end.
 And then I turn away and see the sky
 That soars above the streets of North Point North,
 Reducing everyone to anonymity, an anonymity
 In which I find a kind of possibility, a kind of freedom
 As the world—the only world—rolls on its way,
 Oblivious to anything I might say, or that might happen in a poem.
 A poem can seize and hold a moment fast, yet it can
 Limit what there is to feel, and stake a distance from the world.
 The neighborhood around me wakes each day to lives
 No different than my own, lives harboring the same ambitions
 And regrets, but living on the humbler stuff of happiness.
 The disappointments come and go; what stays
 Is part of an abiding presence, human and serene.
 The houses wait unquestioning in the light

Of an approaching summer evening, while a vast
Contentment answers from the air.
I think I know where this is going to end,
But still my pleasure is to wait—
Not wait, perhaps, for anything within,
But for what lies outside. Let's see what happens.

from *Sally's Hair*:

THE PERFECT LIFE

I have a perfect life. It isn't much,
But it's enough for me. It keeps me alive
And happy in a vague way: no disappointments
On the near horizon, no pangs of doubt;
Looking forward in anticipation, looking back
In satisfaction at the conclusion of each day.
I heed the promptings of my inner voice,
And what I hear is comforting, full of reassurance
For my own powers and innate superiority—the fake
Security of someone in the grip of a delusion,
In denial, climbing ever taller towers
Like a tiny tyrant looking on his little kingdom
With a secret smile, while all the while
Time lies in wait. And what feels ample now
Turns colorless and cold, and what seems beautiful
And strong becomes an object of indifference
Reaching out to no one, as later middle age
Turns old, and the strength is gone.
Right now the moments yield to me sweet
Feelings of contentment, but the human
Dies, and what I take for granted bears a name

To be forgotten soon, as the things I know
Turn into unfamiliar faces
In a strange room, leaving merely
A blank space, like a hole left in the wake
Of a perfect life, which closes over.

16A:

The apartment on Francis Avenue
We lived in for three years in graduate school
In the nicest—or maybe second nicest—part of Cambridge,
On the third floor of Joe and Annie's house
Just up the street from the Divinity School.
John Kenneth Galbraith lived next door;
Julia Child's Kitchen was across a backyard fence
I'd hang around trying to look hungry,
And emulating her we rented a meat locker at Savanor's,
Where I'd stop to pick up a pot roast or a steak
Before coming home to Jeeps waiting for me in the window.
Everything happened then, in two or three years
That seemed a lifetime at the time:
The War and SDS and music; the confusion in the streets
And Nixon; poetry and art and science, philosophy and immunology,
The dinners at Bill and Willy's loft in Soho—
Yet what still stays with me is the summer of 1973,
The summer before we moved to Milwaukee, with my dissertation done
And time to kill, suspended on the brink of real life.
I would read the first draft of "Self-Portrait"
John had let me copy, and *Gravity's Rainbow*,
And every afternoon I'd ride my bike to Bob's house
Where I'd watch the hearings on TV. And on a Saturday in June,
With the living room awash in the late yellow light

That filtered through the western dormer window,
 We watched, just out of curiosity, this horse I'd read about
 —And what I knew about the Sport of Kings was nil—
 Turn what till then had been an ordinary day
 Into one as permanent as anything in sports or art or life,
 As Secretariat came flying through the turn with the announcer crying
 "He's all *alone*—he's moving like a *tremendous machine*,"
 And Susan shouting "Look at that horse! Look at that horse!"
 The summer sort of dribbled away. We took a last trip to New York,
 John and Rebecca stopped over on their way to somewhere,
 James and Lisa too, whom I hadn't seen in years,
 And then we packed our stuff and took the cat and drove away.
 Nixon hung on for a while, and then—but that's history,
 Real history, not this private kind that monitors the unimportant
 For what changes, for what doesn't change. Here I am,
 Living in Milwaukee twenty-nine years later.
 Susan lives about a mile away, and just last Saturday
 The latest wonder horse, War Emblem, stumbled in the Belmont Stakes.
 What *makes* a life, if not the places and the things that make it up?
 I know that *I* exist, but what about that place we lived? Is it still real?
 —Of course it is. It just gets harder to see
 As time goes by, but it's still all there. Last month in Rome
 The first thing Lisa said was that I looked just like myself, but with white hair.
 And there it is: look at the tiny strawberries and the
 Flowers blooming in the garden of the house next door.
 Look at John Dean, still testifying on that little screen, and Rogers,
 Who died in May, still talking in our small blue dining room.
 Look at Savanor's, the unkempt lawn, the mailbox by the back porch,
 Jeepers waiting for me in the window. Look at that horse!

21.1

What I remember are the cinders and the starter's gun,
 The lunging forward from a crouch, the power of acceleration
 And the lengthening strides, the sense of isolation
 And exhilaration as you pulled away, the glory at the tape.
 I never really got it back after I pulled my thigh my sophomore year.
 I still won races, lettered and was captain of the team,
 But instead of breaking free there was a feeling of constraint,
 Of being pretty good, but basically second-rate—
 Which Vernus Ragsdale definitely was not. When he was eligible
 (He was ineligible a lot) no one in the city could come close—
 No one in the country pretty much, for this was California. We had our
 Meet with Lincoln early in the spring, and he was cleared to run.
 I was running the 220 (which I seldom ran) and in the outside lane,
 With Ragsdale in lane one. *The stretch, the set, the gun—*
 And suddenly the speed came flowing back as I was flying through the turn
 And all alone before I hit the tape with no one else in sight.
 Friends said he looked as though he'd seen a ghost (a fleet white one).
 The atmosphere of puzzlement and disbelief gave way to
 Chaos and delirium when they announced the national record time
 Of 21.1 and I stood stunned and silent in a short-lived daze—
 Short-lived because the explanation rapidly emerged:
 They'd put us in the quarter-mile staggers by mistake, to be made up
 Around two turns, not one. I'd had a huge head start on
 Everyone, on Ragsdale on the inside most of all. By the meet's end
 Lincoln was so far ahead they didn't even bother to rerun the race,
 And so we ran the relay, lost, and everyone went home—
 Leaving me wistful and amused and brooding on the memory
 Of my moment in what was now a slowly setting sun.
 There's a story that I read my freshman year in college
 Called "The Eighty Yard Run," by Irwin Shaw. It's about a football player

Who makes a perfect run one afternoon and feels a heightened sense of
 Possibility and life: the warmth of flannel on his skin, the three cold drinks of water,
 The first kiss of the woman who is going to be his wife. All lies before him,
 Only it never measures up: gradually at first, and then more steeply,
 It's a long decline from there, until he finds himself years later on that
 Football field again, a traveling salesman selling cut-rate suits.
 I'm not immune to sentimental cautionary tales: the opening door
 That turns out to have long been shut; the promissory moment,
 Savored at the time, with which the present only pales by comparison,
 That tinctures what comes later with regret. I'm safe from that—
 Track wasn't everything, but even minor triumphs
 Take on mythical proportions in our lives. Yet since *my* heightened moment
 Was a bogus one, I can't look back on it with disappointment
 At the way my life has gone since then. Perhaps all public victories
 Are in some sense undeserved, constructed out of luck
 Or friends or how you happened to feel that day. But mine took off its mask
 Almost as soon as it was over, long before it had the chance
 To seem to settle into fact. I'm human though: sometimes I like to
 Fantasize that it had all been true, or had been *taken* to be true—
 The first of an unbroken string of triumphs stretching through to college,
 Real life, and right down to today. I ran that race in 1962,
 The year "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance" was released,
 A film about a man whose whole career was built upon a lie.
 James Stewart thinks he killed—and everyone *believes* he killed—
 Lee Marvin, the eponymous bad guy, although he never actually killed anyone at all:
 John Wayne had shadowed him and fired the fatal shot,
 Yet governor, senator, ambassador, and senator again
 All followed on his reputation. He tries at last to set the record straight
 —The movie's mostly one long flashback of what happened—
 But the editor to whom he tells the real story throws away his notes:
 "When the legend becomes fact," he orders, "print the legend,"

As the music soars and draws the veil upon the myth of the Old West.
Print the legend: I'd like to think that's what *my* story was,
Since for a moment everyone believed that it was true—
But then it wasn't anymore. Yet it's my pleasure to pretend
It could have been: when Willis Bouchee at the end affirms the fairy tale
With "Nothing's too good for the man who shot Liberty Valance,"
I hear in my imagination "who beat Vernus Ragsdale."

HAMLET

. . . a divinity that shapes our ends.
It was math and physics all the way,
The subjects of the life that I'd designed
In high school, that carried me away,
A callow California youth with Eastern dreams,
From home. The thought of something abstract
And aloof, penetrating to the heart of the unknown
And consigning everything else to the realm of unreality—
I didn't believe it then and don't believe it now,
Yet something in the fantasy felt so complete,
So like the lyrics of a song that spoke to me alone,
I bought it. How quaint that vision seems now
And mundane the truth: instead of paradox and mystery
And heroic flights of speculation that came true,
You had to start with classical mechanics and a lab;
Instead of number theory and the satisfactions
Of the private proof, a class of prodigies manqué
Made jokes in mathematics that I didn't get.
And there were problems with the style,
The attitudes, the clothes, for this was 1963,
The future waiting in the wings and practically on stage—
The Beatles and Bob Dylan and Ali, *né* Cassius Clay,

Who from the distance of today look like clichés of history,
 But at the time seemed more like strangers in the
 Opening pages of a story I was learning how to write.
 The new year brought Ed Sullivan and track,
 But what with winter and the little indoor track
 My times were never close to what I'd run in high school.
 I started hanging out across the hall—they seemed, I guess,
 More "Eastern" than my roommates, closer to the picture of myself
 That called me in the first place: Norwich, Vermont,
 The Main Line and St. George's, and (I guess it figured)
 A prospective civil engineer. And then there was New York:
 I'd been in once or twice, though not for dinner,
 So when James suggested Richard Burton's *Hamlet*
 At the Lunt-Fontanne I fell right in. We went to dinner
 At a place on Forty-sixth Street called Del Pezzo,
 Up some steps and with bay windows and a chandelier.
 We ordered saltimbocca and drank Soave Bolla
 As I listened, Ripley-like, to recollections of three hour
 Lunches at a restaurant on a beach somewhere near Rome.
 And then the lights went down, and when at last
 The ghost had vanished Burton strode upon the stage.
 It was, I think, the first "bare" *Hamlet*—Hamlet
 In a turtleneck, the rest in street clothes, virtually no scenery—
 Leaving nothing but the structure of the play, and voices,
 Burton's resonant and strong yet trembling on the brink of
 Breaking, as for hours, from the first *I know not seems* until
The rest is silence, he compelled the stage. And then,
 The bodies everywhere, the theater went black and we went
 Somewhere for a drink and took the last bus home—
 For by then I'd come to think of it as home.
 By next fall everything had changed. My roommates

Were the former guys across the hall, sans engineer.
 In San Diego Mr. Weisbrod from the science fair
 Was appalled, as math and physics disappeared,
 Supplanted by philosophy. A letter from the track coach
 Lay unanswered by an ashtray, and I took a course
 From Carlos Baker, Hemingway's biographer, in which I
 First read modern poetry—"The Waste Land," Moore, *The Cantos*,
 Frost and Yeats—and dreamed that I might do that too.
 I wish I knew what happened. Was the change
 The outward resolution of some inner struggle
 Going on since childhood, or just a symptom of the times?
 So much of what we're pleased to call our lives
 Is random, yet we take them at face value,
 Linking up the dots. Feeling out of it one evening,
 Staring at our Trenton junk store chandelier,
 I started a pastiche of Frost ("In the mists of the fall . . .")
 And even tried to write a play about a deadly clock
 Styled on Edward Albee's now (alas) forgotten *Tiny Alice*,
 The object of another Broadway interlude, this time a matinee.
Hamlet was forgotten. Pound and Eliot gave way
 To Charles Olson and the dogmas of projective verse,
 To Robert Duncan and the egotistical sublime,
 And finally to "the Poets of the New York School,"
 Whose easy freedom and deflationary seriousness combined
 To generate what seemed to me a tangible and abstract beauty
 As meanwhile, in parallel, my picture of myself evolved
 From California science whiz into impeccable habitué
 Of a Fitzgerald fantasy. It became a kind of hobby:
 Self-invention, the attempt to realize some juvenile ideal
 I cringe to think of now, playing back and forth
 Between the guise of the artiste and of the silly little snob,

A pose I like to think of as redeemed (just barely) by a
 Certain underlying earnestness. Perhaps I'm being too harsh—
 I was serious about the path I'd chosen, one I've
 Followed now for forty years. What life worth living
 Isn't shaky at the outset, given to exaggerations and false starts
 Before it finds its way? Those ludicrous personae were
 A passing phase, and by my senior year whatever they'd concealed
 Had finally settled into second nature. I'd go on,
 But let me leave it there for now. My life after college
 (Cf. "16A" and "Falling Water") more or less continued on the
 Course I'd set there, mixing poetry and philosophy
 In roughly equal parts, vocation and career. My days
 Are all about the same: some language, thought and feeling
 And the boredom of the nearly empty day, calling on my
 Memory and imagination to compel the hours, from morning
 Through the doldrums of the afternoon and into early
 Evening, sitting here alone and staring at a page.
 You're probably wondering what provoked all this.
 For years I'd heard they'd filmed a performance of the play,
 To be shown just once and then (supposedly) destroyed.
 Browsing on the web about a month ago I entered,
 Out of curiosity, "Richard Burton's Hamlet" into Google.
 Up it came, available from Amazon on DVD (apparently
 Two copies had survived). I ordered it immediately,
 Went out and bought a player (plus a new TV) and watched it
 Friday evening, calling up the ghosts of forty years ago.
 I'd misremembered one or two details—it was a V-neck,
 Not a turtleneck, at least that night—but Burton was
 As I'd remembered him, incredible, his powers at their peak,
 Just after Antony and Arthur and before the roles
 Of Beckett, Reverend Shannon, Alec Lemas, George;

Before the dissolution and decline and early death.
 Some nights I feel haunted by the ghost of mathematics,
 Wondering what killed it off. I think my life began to change
 Just after that performance in New York. Could *that* have been the
 Catalyst—a life of words created by a play about a character
 Whose whole reality is words? It's nice to speculate,
 And yet it's just too facile, for the truth was much more
 Gradual and difficult to see, if there to see at all.
 We like to think they're up to us, our lives, but by the time we
 Glimpse the possibility of changing it's already happened,
 Governed by, in Larkin's phrase, what something hidden from us chose
 And which, for all we know, might just as well have been the stars.
 That adolescent image of myself dissolved, to be replaced by—
 By *what*? I doubt those pictures we create are ever true—
 Isn't that the moral to be drawn from this most human of the plays?
 It isn't merely the ability to choose, but agency itself—
 The thought that we're in charge, and that tomorrow mirrors our
 Designs—that lies in ruins on the stage. It isn't just the
 Life of a particular young man, but something like the very
 Image of the human that dissolves into a mindless anonymity,
 Dick Diver disappearing at the end of *Tender Is the Night*
 Into the little towns of upper New York State.
 I know of course I'm overacting. Burton did it too,
 Yet left a residue of truth, and watching him last Friday
 I began to realize there'd been no real change,
 But just a surface alteration. Sometimes I wonder if this
 Isn't just my high school vision in disguise, a naive
 Fantasy of knowledge that survived instead as art—
 Aloof, couched in the language of abstraction, flirting
 Now and then with the unknown, pushing everything else aside.
 This place that I've created has the weight and feel of home,

And yet there's nothing tangible to see. And so I
 Bide my time, living in a poem whose backdrop
 Is the wilderness of science, an impersonal universe
 Where no one's waiting and our aspirations end.
 Take up the bodies, for the rest is silence.

SALLY'S HAIR

It's like living in a light bulb, with the leaves
 Like filaments and the sky a shell of thin, transparent glass
 Enclosing the late heaven of a summer day, a canopy
 Of incandescent blue above the dappled sunlight golden on the grass.
 I took the train back from Poughkeepsie to New York
 And in the Port Authority, there at the Suburban Transit window,
 She asked, "Is this the bus to Princeton?"—which it was.
 "Do you know Geoffrey Love?" I said I did. She had the blondest hair,
 Which fell across her shoulders, and a dress of almost phosphorescent blue.
 She liked Ayn Rand. We went down to the Village for a drink,
 Where I contrived to miss the last bus to New Jersey, and at 3 a.m. we
 Walked around and found a cheap hotel I hadn't enough money for
 And fooled around on its dilapidated couch. An early morning bus
 (She'd come to see her brother), dinner plans and missed connections
 And a message on his door about the Jersey shore. Next day
 A summer dormitory room, my roommates gone: "Are you," she asked,

*

"A hedonist?" I guessed so. Then she had to catch her plane.
 Sally—Sally Roche. She called that night from Florida,
 And then I never heard from her again. I wonder where she is now,
Who she is now. That was thirty-seven years ago
 And I'm too old to be surprised again. The days are open,
 Life conceals no depths, no mysteries, the sky is everywhere,

The leaves are all ablaze with light, the blond light
Of a summer afternoon that made me think again of Sally's hair.

from *Ninety-fifth Street*:

CHESTER

*Wallace Stevens is beyond fathoming, he is so strange; it is as if he had a
morbid secret he would rather perish than disclose . . .*

—Marianne Moore to William Carlos Williams

Another day, which is usually how they come:
A cat at the foot of the bed, noncommittal
In its blankness of mind, with the morning light
Slowly filling the room, and fragmentary
Memories of last night's video and phone calls.
It is a feeling of sufficiency, one menaced
By the fear of some vague lack, of a simplicity
Of self, a self without a soul, the nagging fear
Of being someone to whom nothing ever happens.
Thus the fantasy of the narrative behind the story,
Of the half-concealed life that lies beneath
The ordinary one, made up of ordinary mornings
More alike in how they feel than what they say.
They seem like luxuries of consciousness,
Like second thoughts that complicate the time
One simply wastes. And why not? Mere being
Is supposed to be enough, without the intricate
Evasions of a mystery or off-stage tragedy.
Evenings follow on the afternoons, lingering in
The living room and listening to the stereo
While Peggy Lee sings "Is That All There Is?"
Amid the morning papers and the usual

Ghosts keeping you company, but just for a while.
The true soul is the one that flickers in the eyes
Of an animal, like a cat that lifts its head and yawns
And stares at you, and then goes back to sleep.

ON HAPPINESS

It's a simple question, and I even know what it is
Until you ask me, as Augustine said of time.
It's either too commonplace or too rare, an esoteric condition
You could spend your life attaining, or a waste of time.
Plato thought of it as a kind of balance in the soul
Between its three parts (though he called it something else),
And Freud thought along the same lines, in his role
As the first happiness therapist, only called it unhappiness
Of the ordinary kind. Wittgenstein said the happy
And unhappy man inhabit two completely different worlds,
While Mill equated it with pleasures of all kinds,
From high to low, from the pleasure mirrored in a young girl's
Smile to the consolations of the scholar in his cave.
I'd go on, but you can see the problem: a question posed
A long time ago, to which different people gave
Such different answers, answers concerning different things.
"What *is* X anyway?" I know the sensible course
Would be to drop those kinds of questions, and just stumble along
Whatever road you'd taken, taking the moments as they come.
Yet some of them have been a part of me for so long—
That race, the picnic at the Institute, the night of the science fair.
Were all those moments the fulfillment of some plan
Or deep attachment, however trivial, or of some abiding care?
Is that what it is—the feeling of a life brought to fruition
On its own terms, whatever terms it chose?

It sounds free, and yet it's rife with opportunities for self-delusion
 And bad faith, like the pool of water out of sunlight in the rose-garden,
 An epiphany that seems, in retrospect, like a studied illusion.
 Was Ariel happy that he'd written all those poems?
 He said so, yet beneath them you can almost sense the fear
 Of having lived a skeleton's life, in a world of bones.
 Perhaps it's best to stay at home and read,
 Instead of risking everything for what in the end
 Might be of no more significance than a fascinating hobby,
 Like collecting bottle-caps, or building ships in bottles.
 There are smaller choices to be made: hanging about the lobby
 Of a W Hotel vs. watching the Great Downer Avenue Bike Race
 From Dave's front porch. Why do we feel the need to create ourselves
 Through what we choose, instead of simply sinking without a trace
 Into the slow stream of time? The evening light is lovely
 On the living room wall, with a gentle touch of green
 Reflected from the trees outside. I realize it feels like a letdown
 To be told that this is all it comes to—a pleasant apartment
 On a shady street a few miles north of downtown,
 And yet it isn't all that bad: it offers concrete satisfactions
 In lieu of whatever happiness might be; and though I worry that it's
 Something I've backed into, at least it's free from the distractions
 Of the future, and seems fine for now. As for a deeper kind
 Of happiness, if there is such a thing, I'll take a rain check.
 We could go shopping for those dishes, try out the new
 Pancake House around the corner, or grill something on the deck
 And watch a movie. I guess that's what we should do.

THIS IS LAGOS

. . . hope would be hope for the wrong thing

—T.S. Eliot

Instead of the usual welcoming sign to greet you
There's the brute statement: *This is Lagos*.
If you make it to the island—if you make your way
Across the bridge and past the floating slums
And sawmills and the steaming garbage dumps, the auto yards
Still burning with spilled fuel and to your final destination
At the end of a long tracking shot, all of it on fire—
You come face to face with hell: the pandemonium
Of history's ultimate bazaar, a breathing mass
Whose cells are stalls crammed full of spare parts,
Chains, detergents, DVDs; where a continuous cacophony
Of yells and radios and motorcycles clogs the air.
They arrive from everywhere, attracted by the promise
Of mere possibility, by the longing for a different kind of day
Here in the city of scams, by a hope that quickly comes to nothing.
To some it's a new paradigm, "an announcement of the future"
Where disorder leads to unexpected patterns, unimagined opportunities
That mutate, blossom and evolve. To others it's the face of despair.
These are the parameters of life, a life doled out in quarters,
In the new, postmodern state of nature: garbage and ground plastic
And no place to shit or sleep; machetes, guns and e-mails
Sent around the world from internet cafes; violence and chaos
And a self-effacing sprawl that simply makes no sense
When seen from ground zero, yet exhibits an abstract beauty
When seen from the air— which is to say, not seen at all.
Across the ocean and a century away a culture died.
The facts behind the Crow's whole way of life—the sense

Of who and what they were, their forms of excellence and bravery
 And honor—all dissolved, and their hearts "fell to the ground,
 And they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened"
 (Plenty Coups), meaning nothing they could do made any sense,
 Beyond the fact of biological survival. It's easy to forget
 How much of ordinary life, of what we value, long for and recall—
 Ambition, admiration, even poetry—rests on things we take for granted,
 And how fragile those things are. "I am trying to live a life I do not understand,"
 A woman said, when the buffalo and the coups they underwrote were gone.
 They could have tried to cope. Instead, they found their solace
 In an indeterminate hope, a hope for a future they couldn't yet imagine,
 Where their ways of life might somehow reemerge in forms
 Of which they couldn't yet conceive, or even begin to understand.
 It was a dream of a different life, a life beyond the reservation
 Without any tangible location, predicated on a new idea of the good
 With no idea of what it was, or what achieving it might mean—
 Like listening to a song with no sound, or drawing an imaginary line
 In the imaginary sand in an imaginary world without boundaries.
 It feels compelling, and I even think it's true. But these are things
 I've only read about in magazines and book reviews, and not experienced,
 Which was Plato's point—that poets don't know what they talk about.
 It doesn't matter though, for most of what we think of as our lives
 Is lived in the imagination, like the Crow's inchoate hope, or the fantasies
 Of those who leave a village in the country for the city in the smoke.
 And when I look in *my* imagination for the future, it isn't hope and restoration
 That I find but smouldering tires and con men in a world of megacities
 And oil fields, where too much has been annexed to be restored.
 I have the luxury of an individual life that has its own trajectory and scope
 When taken on its terms—the terms I chose—however unimportant it might seem
 From the vantage point of history or the future. What scares me is the thought
 That in a world that isn't far away this quaint ideal of the personal

Is going to disappear, dissolving in those vast, impersonal calculations
 Through which money, the ultimate abstraction, renders each life meaningless,
 By rendering the forms of life that make it seem significant impossible.
Face me I face you: packed into rooms with concrete beds
 And not a trace of privacy, subsisting on contaminated water, luck
 And palm-wine gin, with lungs scarred from the burning air,
 These are the urban destitute, the victims of a gospel of prosperity
 Untouched by irony or nostalgia—for how can you discover
 What you haven't felt, or feel the loss of things you've never known?
 I write because I can: talking to myself, composing poems
 And wondering what you'll make of them; shoring them
 Against the day our minor ways of life have finally disappeared
 And we're not even ghosts. Meanwhile life regresses
 Towards the future, death by death. You to whom I write,
 Or wish that I could write long after my own death,
 When it's too late to talk to you about the world you live in,
 This is the world you live in: this is Lagos.

NINETY-FIFTH STREET

Words can bang around in your head
 Forever, if you let them and you give them room.
 I used to love poetry, and mostly I still do,
 Though sometimes "I, too, dislike it." There must be
 Something real beyond the fiddle and perfunctory
 Consolations and the quarrels—as of course
 There is, though what it is is difficult to say.
The salt is on the briar rose, the fog is in the fir trees.
 I didn't know what it was, and I don't know now,
 But it was what I started out to do, and now, a lifetime later,
 All I've really done. *The Opening of the Field,*
Roots and Branches, Rivers and Mountains: I sat in my room

Alone, their fragments shored against the ruin or revelation
 That was sure to come, breathing in their secret atmosphere,
 Repeating them until they almost seemed my own.
 We like to think our lives are what they study to become,
 And yet so much of life is waiting, waiting on a whim.
 So much of what we are is sheer coincidence,
 Like a sentence whose significance is retrospective,
 Made up out of elementary particles that are in some sense
 Simply sounds, like syllables that finally settle into place.
 You probably think that this is a poem about poetry
 (And obviously it is), yet its real subject is time,
 For that's what poetry is—a way to live through time
 And sometimes, just for a while, to bring it back.

*

A paneled dining room in Holder Hall. Stage right, enter twit:
 "Mr. Ashbery, I'm your biggest campus fan." We hit it off
 And talked about "The Skaters" and my preference for "Clepsydra"
 Vs. "Fragment." Later on that night John asked me to a party in New York,
 And Saturday, after dinner and a panel on the artist's role as something
 (And a party), driving Lewis's Austin-Healey through the rain
 I sealed our friendship with an accident. The party was on Broadway,
 An apartment (white of course, with paintings) just downstairs
 From Frank O'Hara's, who finally wandered down. I talked to him
 A little about *Love Poems (Tentative Title)*, which pleased him,
 And quoted a line from "Poem" about the rain, which seemed to please him too.
 The party ended, John and I went off to Max's, ordered steaks
 And talked about our mothers. All that talking!—poems and paintings,
 Parents, all those parties, and the age of manifestos still to come!
 I started coming to New York for lunch. We'd meet at *Art News*,
 Walk to Fifty-sixth street to Larré's, a restaurant filled with French expatriates,
 Have martinis and the pre-fixe for \$2.50 (!), drink rosé de provence

And talk (of course) about Genet and James and words like "Coca-Cola."
 It was an afternoon in May when John brought up a play
 That he and Kenneth Koch and Frank O'Hara—Holy Trinity!
 (*Batman* was in vogue)—had started years ago and never finished.
 There was a dictator named Edgar and some penicillin,
 But that's all I remember. They hadn't actually been together
 In years, but planned to finish it that night at John's new apartment
 On Ninety-fifth street, and he said to come by for a drink
 Before they ate and got to work. It was a New York dream
 Come true: a brownstone floor-through, white and full of paintings
 (Naturally), "with a good library and record collection."
 John had procured a huge steak, and as I helped him set the table
 The doorbell rang and Frank O'Hara, fresh from the museum
 And svelte in a hound's tooth sports coat entered, followed shortly
 By "excitement-prone Kenneth Koch" in somber gray,
 And I was one with my immortals. In the small mythologies
 We make up out of memories and the flow of time
 A few moments remain frozen, though the feel of them is lost,
 The feel of talk. It ranged from puns to gossip, always coming back
 To poems and poets. Frank was fiercely loyal to young poets
 (Joe Ceravolo's name came up I think), and when I mentioned Lewis
 In a way that must have sounded catty, he leapt to his defense,
 Leaving me to backtrack in embarrassment and have another drink,
 Which is what everyone had. I think you see where it was going:
 Conversation drifting into dinner, then I stayed for dinner
 And everyone forgot about the play, which was never finished
 (Though I think I've seen a fragment of it somewhere). I see a table
 In a cone of light, but there's no sound except for Kenneth's
 Deadpan "Love to see a boy eat" as I speared a piece of steak;
 And then the only voice I'm sure I hear is mine,
 As those moments that had once seemed singular and clear

Dissolve into a "general mess of imprecision of feeling"
 And images, augmented by line breaks. There were phone calls,
 Other people arrived, the narrative of the night dissolved
 And finally everyone went home. School and spring wound down.
 The semester ended, then the weekend that I wrote about in "Sally's Hair"
 Arrived and went, and then a late-night cruise around Manhattan for a rich friend's
 Parents' anniversary bash, followed by an upper east-side preppie bar
 That left me looking for a place to crash, and so I rang John's bell at 2 a.m.
 And failed (thank God) to rouse him, caught a plane to San Diego
 The next day, worked at my summer job and worked on poems
 And started reading Proust, and got a card one afternoon
 From Peter Schjeldahl telling me that Frank O'Hara had been killed.
 Ninety-fifth street soldiered on for several years.
 I remember a cocktail party (the symposium of those days),
 Followed by dinner just around the corner at Elaine's,
 Pre-Woody Allen. It was there I learned of RFK's assassination
 When I woke up on the daybed in the living room, and where
 John told me getting married would ruin me as a poet
 (I don't know why—most of his friends were married), a judgement
 He revised when he met Susan and inscribed *The Double Dream of Spring*
 "If this is all we need fear from spinach, then I don't mind so much"
 (Which was probably premature—watering his plants one day
 She soaked his landlord, Giorgio Cavallon, dozing in the garden below).
 It was where Peter Delacorte late one night recited an entire side
 Of a *Firesign Theatre* album from memory, and set John on *that* path,
 To his friends' subsequent dismay, and where he blessed me with his extra copy
 Of *The Poems*, and next day had second thoughts (though I kept it anyway).
 Sometimes a vague, amorphous stretch of years assumes a shape,
 And then becomes an age, and then a golden age alive with possibilities,
 When change was in the air and you could wander through its streets
 As though through Florence and the Renaissance. I know it sounds ridiculous,

But that's the way life flows: in stages that take form in retrospect,
 When all the momentary things that occupy the mind from day to day
 Have vanished into time, and something takes their place that wasn't there,
 A sense of freedom—one which gradually slipped away. The center
 Of the conversation moved downtown, the Renaissance gave way to mannerism
 As the junior faculty took charge, leaving the emeriti alone and out of it
 Of course, lying on the fringes, happily awake; but for the rest
 The laws proscribing what you couldn't do were clear. I got so tired
 Of writing all those New York poems (though by then I'd moved to Boston—
 To Siena, you might say) that led to nowhere but the next one,
 So I started writing poems about whatever moved me: what it's *like*
 To be alive within a world that holds no place for you, yet seems so beautiful;
 The feeling of the future, and its disappointments; the trajectory of a life,
 That always brought me back to time and memory (I'd finished Proust by then),
 And brings me back to this. John finally moved downtown himself,
 Into a two-story apartment at Twenty-fifth and Tenth, with a spiral staircase
 Leading to a library, the locus of the incident of Susan, Alydar and John
 And the pitcher of water (I'll draw a veil over it), and Jimmy Schuyler sighing
 "It's so *beautiful*," as Bernadette Peters sang "Raining in My Heart" from *Dames at Sea*.
 The poetry still continued—mine and everyone's. I'd added Jimmy
 To my pantheon (as you've probably noticed), but the night in nineteen sixty-six
 Seemed more and more remote: I never saw Kenneth anymore,
 And there were new epicenters, with new casts of characters, like Madoo,
 Bob Dash's garden in Sagaponack, and Bill and Willy's loft in Soho.
 John moved again, to Twenty-second street, and Susan and I moved to Milwaukee,
 Where our son was born. I stopped coming to New York, and writing poems,
 For several years, while I tried to dream enough philosophy for tenure.
 One afternoon in May I found myself at Ninth and Twenty-second,
 And as though on cue two people whom I hadn't seen in years—David Kalstone,
 Darragh Park—just happened by, and then I took a taxi down to Soho
 To the loft, and then a gallery to hear Joe Brainard read from "I Remember,"

Back to John's and out to dinner—as though I'd never been away,
 Though it was all too clear I had. Poems were in the air, but theory too,
 And members of the thought police department (who must have also gotten tenure)
 Turned up everywhere, with arguments that poetry was called upon to prove.
 It mattered, but in a different way, as though it floated free from poems
 And wasn't quite the point. I kept on coming back, as I still do.
 Half my life was still to come, and yet the rest was mostly personal:
 I got divorced, and Willy killed himself, and here I am now, ready to retire.
 There was an obituary in the *Times* last week for Michael Goldberg,
 A painter you'll recall from Frank O'Hara's poems ("Why I Am Not a Painter,"
 "Ode to Michael Goldberg ('s Birth and Other Births)"). I didn't know him,
 But a few months after the soiree on Ninety-fifth street I was at a party
 In his studio on the Bowery, which was still his studio when he died.
 The New York art world demimonde was there, including nearly everyone
 Who's turned up in this poem. I remember staring at a guy who
 Looked like something from the Black Lagoon, dancing with a gorgeous
 Woman half his age. That's *my* New York: an island dream
 Of personalities and evenings, nights where poetry was second nature
 And their lives flowed through it and around it as it gave them life.
 O brave new world (now old) that had such people in't!

*

"The tiresome old man is telling us his life story."
 I guess I am, but that's what poets do—not always
 Quite as obviously as this, and usually more by indirection
 And omission, but beneath the poetry lies the singular reality
 And unreality of an individual life. I see it as a long,
 Illuminated tunnel, lined with windows giving on the scenes outside—
 A city and a countryside, some dormitory rooms, that night
 On Ninety-fifth street forty years ago. As life goes on
 You start to get increasingly distracted by your own reflection
 And the darkness gradually becoming visible at the end.

I try not to look too far ahead, but just to stay here—
Quick now, here, now, always—only something pulls me
 Back (as they say) to the day, when poems were more like secrets,
 With their own vernacular, and you could tell your friends
 By who and what they read. And now John's practically become
 A national treasure, and whenever I look up I think I see him
 Floating in the sky like the Cheshire Cat. I don't know
 What to make of it, but it makes me happy—like seeing Kenneth
 Just before he died ("I'm going west John, I'm going west")
 In his apartment on a side street near Columbia, or remembering
 Once again that warm spring night in nineteen sixty-six.
 I like to think of them together once again, at the cocktail party
 At the end of the mind, where I could blunder in and ruin it one last time.
 Meanwhile, on a hillside in the driftless region to the west,
 A few miles from the small town where *The Straight Story* ends,
 I'm building a house on a meadow, if I'm permitted to return,
 Behind a screen of trees above a lower meadow, with some apple trees
 In which the fog collects on autumn afternoons, and a vista
 Of an upland pasture without heaviness. I see myself
 Sitting on the deck and sipping a martini, as I used to at Larré's,
 In a future that feels almost like a past I'm positive is there—
 But where? I think my life is still all conversation,
 Only now it's with myself. I can see it continuing forever,
 Even in my absence, as I close the windows and turn off the lights
 And it begins to rain. And then we're there together
 In the house on the meadow, waiting for whatever's left to come
 In what's become the near future—two versions of myself
 And of the people that we knew, each one an other
 To the other, yet both indelibly there: the twit of twenty
 And the aging child of sixty-two, still separate
 And searching in the night, listening through the night

To the noise of the rain and memories of rain
And evenings when we'd wander out into the Renaissance,
When I could see you and talk to you and it could still *change*;
And still there in the morning when the rain has stopped,
And the apples are all getting tinted in the cool light.

Bruce Bennett

AFTERMATH

Such innocence! Those were the days.
The smallest faintest word of praise
would set my cheeks and heart ablaze!

The merest slightest glance from you.
One eyebrow raised. Yes, such to-do;
such high emotions to work through.

Well, nothing lasts. Time took its toll.
The heart went out of it, the soul.
We lost our bearings, and our goal,

Which was, well, now it's hard to tell.
All seems, in retrospect, some spell:
that innocence, and how we fell,

And little lingers from those days,
although, some small faint word of praise
recalled, still sets my heart ablaze!

AT THE VETERANS CONVENTION

O, what can ail thee, knight-at-arms,
as if I did not know.
You've met her, with her thousand charms.
That glory and that glow
should set off buzzers and alarms!
A toast, before I go.

Let's drink to Beauty. May she reign,
since anyway she will.
Our Queen of pleasure and of pain,
who wounds but does not kill,
may she who brings us bliss and bane
remain our sovereign still.

You saw her, then she went away?
Ah yes, a little more.
She took you to her room to stay
the night, and kisses four

seemed just a start, but then the day
broke on that cold cold floor?

Well, that's the way of it, my lad;
it could have been much worse.
Considering the men she's had,
the power of the curse,
I'd say you got off light. It's bad,
but let's not call a hearse.

You need a little time to think;
to mope, and to recover.
So first, let's have another drink.
Though there are none above her,
her peers lurk at the bar and rink.
Go choose another lover.

Bruce Bennett is the author of nine books of poetry and more than twenty poetry chapbooks. His most recent books are *Something Like Karma* (Clandestine Press, 2009) and *Subway Figure* (Orchises Press, 2009). A chapbook, *Visitation: A Sequence of Sonnets* (FootHills Publishing) came out in Spring 2009, and a new chapbook, *The Holding Stone*, will appear from Finishing Line Press in March 2010. His *New and Selected Poems, Navigating The Distances* (Orchises Press), was chosen by Booklist as "One Of The Top Ten Poetry Books Of 1999." Bennett co-founded and served as an editor of two poetry magazines, *Field: Contemporary Poetry and Poetics*, and *Ploughshares*, and, during the 1980's and 90's, served as an Associate Editor for State Street Press. He has reviewed contemporary poetry books in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Nation*, *Harvard Review*, and elsewhere. He teaches literature and creative writing at Wells College, where he is Professor and Chair of English and Director of Creative Writing.

Jane Blue

PARALLEL UNIVERSES: VILLANELLE

A sparrow zooms perpendicular into an ash tree;
leopard markings, a black head, and it's gone.
Fledgling doves zigzag, suspended, through the street.

An empty hearse glides by, from some secret fleet.
Sparrows skitter, singing their cacophonous, atonal song.
One zooms perpendicular into an ash tree.

Pablo Neruda was tendered a toy woolly
lamb through a fence's hole. He returned with a pine cone.
Fledgling doves zigzag, suspended, through the street.

It surprises me that the boy was still there to receive it.
As though they lived in parallel universes, alone.
A sparrow zooms perpendicular into an ash tree.

It's how old lovers live, parallel, never to see
one another again except bobbing above hedgerows,
as fledgling doves zigzag, suspended, through the street.

We bleed and we slough skin and we heal, particles free
and recombining, eternally done and undone.
A sparrow zooms perpendicular into an ash tree.
Fledgling doves zigzag, suspended, through the street.

END OF SUMMER

1

In July's long heat wave we felt
we were dead, or we were the living dead.
We had no hunger, no hungers.
We couldn't wail. We couldn't smell
or even taste. But now, the aroma of coffee,
the door open, traffic shushing by.
A phone ringing, jazz, blues, gospel in the air.
A fly examines my flesh

for rottenness—grease, dirt, any way in.
It's cold enough in the morning now
to change the trees quickly
like adolescence.

I like the way the sky opens in winter—
another month or two; I expect to live
to see it. But who knows? Who ever knows?

2

The Rose of Sharon, the crape myrtle, opulent
fat and messy at the end of their season.
I love them. They are a part of my life.

I have lived in this place longer than anywhere,
even childhood.

I am planted here, yet every day I think about moving.

CURTAINS

Let us learn to live swaying / As in a rocking boat on the sea.
—Friedrich Holderlin, trans. Robert Bly

The four of us walk in cold light rain—
four umbrellas: blue, blue, rose and beige.
The rose and the beige twirl and bow
at the entrance of the restaurant like a French film.

Then the pale sun of winter curls in, around
and under the canvas curtains
that hang halfway down mullioned
double-paned windows. They sag in places
from the weight of ticking, stitches ripped,
a panel undone. Someone begins a conversation
about the Resurrection.

The single curtain with its folded double
torn away from it, distorts the shadows behind it,
thickening them. The curtain is less opaque
than the others, off-center, that is, *eccentric*.

A fair young woman with crimped golden hair
sits straight up, alone at a table by the window.

She resembles the Flemish virgin of von Cleef's
"Annunciation" reduced on a Christmas card.

A line came to me this morning
from the unraveling edges of sleep: "The lonely,
isolated eyes of God."
He peeks through the curtains and sees us laughing.

RACCOONS

Two raccoons are mating outside my window
in the violets and the rain.
It's February, 8:00 a.m., the clouds
falling down in the side garden, black as wet dusk.
They are tawny and masked, his face
behind and above her face,
a double image. His claws clutch her rump.
She squeals. He bears down.
He'll keep her where he's caught her
between the tupelo and the streaked pine fence
until it's done. This isn't Valentine's Day.
He may stay with her in a den in a tree
until the kits are born, but then he's gone.
Still, I am drawn to them
as to something holy. I put Enya's
"How Can I Keep from Singing" on the CD player
and begin T'ai Chi. They have keen ears,
but I have vanished in their urgency.
One last piercing scream from her and I see
him ambling toward the Joseph's Coat roses
pruned and knobby against the back fence.
She is nowhere to be seen.
The violets have just begun to bloom
sending a musky scent out
through all the backyards of the neighborhood.

Jane Blue's poems have been published recently in *Convergence* and *Caesura*, and earlier in such magazines as *Avatar*, *Poetry International*, *The Chattahoochee Review*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *The Louisville Review*, *Antigonish*, and *Spoon River Poetry Review*. She was born and raised in Berkeley, California, and now lives near the Sacramento River.

Debra Bruce

STUMBLING BLOCK

A woman I once knew is now a man,
or on his way—though I still see her face,
the razzed-up haircut, earlobes that could wake
the masters of the centuries to collect
their colors, wet their brushtips and regard
such beauty as goes forth beneath the clouds

or some such exhalation that could cloud
the summer of a girl becoming a man.
One drop of ice-cream on her lip —regard
another man who stopped to scan her face
as if he'd found a portrait—shrewd collector—
of a banished girlish earl and hoped to wake

the art world up. My friend is lying awake
at dawn her first day back as *him*. No cloud
surrounding him, he hopes—he will collect
all queries, swift and forthwith as a man.
Whatever they think of him he's ready to face.
No reason he should drop in their regard.

Pop him with hellos, or disregard
the obviousness of his awakening?
Does anyone look right into his face?
Some keep their voices muted, in a cloud,
thinking about the woman who was this man,
as they glance down pretending to collect

paperclips from a magnet while they collect
themselves. They must stay wide awake—
They practice saying his new name, regardless,
but stumble on the pronoun *he* for man.
They concentrate like kids who stare at a cloud
until it clarifies into a face.

Newcomers in his life won't have to face
him with such vigilance, recollecting
a woman they once knew, circling in clouds
of ambiguity, a place with no regard

for thumping on solid ground and waking up
in a world of this-or-thatness. He's a man.

He's now a man. The thought keeps me awake.
His voice collects a thickness like a cloud.
Regardless, I see her face.

THE MAGICIAN

You wouldn't believe it! One minute
he's just my husband, soaping a dish,

but when he turns to me, lifting a towel,
I have something to tell you—presto!

My chest is a cavity filling with crushed ice,
the air a shattered windshield I haven't even hit

yet as he steers me over familiar hardwood
to the couch.

How did he do it?
I stared down hypnotized by our braided rug circling
and circling, as it has all these years.
And then it disappeared.

CUSTODY HAIKU

His Dad's specialty —
charcoal-flamed chili burger
followed by bad news.

Mouthful of gravel,
rock dropped in a hole, his Mom
squeezing his hand hard

as if to get tears
out of him. He wouldn't play
any of their games.

His room a gray pit.
She knocked all day, then slipped in
for dirty dishes.

His cellphone's smothered
metallic buzz—can't find it
or maybe he checks

then listens later
to Dad's brand-new chipper voice.
Delete. Or he checks

in his sleep, then rolls
away to stare at the wall
for a few more years.

Debra Bruce's poems have been published in *The Atlantic*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Shenandoah*, and elsewhere. New work is in *The Cincinnati Review* and the forthcoming issue of *Mezzo Cammin: An Online Journal of Formal Poetry By Women*.

Phillip Calderwood

NEAR MISSES

The months without treatment for my malformed heart,
A shunt at one and again at ten,
The accident on Hesperian, when we hit a hatchback,
And more surgery at eighteen—such a mishmash of arteries,
Clotted blood, and lungs heavy with fluid.

That dream of the masked tribesman who plunged a spear in my throat—
Then the fall at school, down eleven concrete steps,
The punk who punched me to the ground and kept kicking,
The flight I booked in September 2001,
And the Continental that ripped through the crosswalk.

I was listening to songs of train wrecks, of Georgie, Casey,
And that treacherous grade between Lynchburg and Danville,
When two trains crashed on the line I take, killing nine, injuring eighty.

Phillip Calderwood's poems have appeared in *The Chabot Review*, *The Berkeley Text*, and *A Magazine of Paragraphs*. He is originally from Northern California, where he received undergraduate degrees in English and history from UC Berkeley. He moved to Maryland in 2004, completed a master's program in history at American University, and now works as an editor and content manager in the District of Columbia.

Ann Cale

NEWPORT NEWS SHIP BUILDER

for my grandfather, Meredith Sherman

There is the sensation of a man's mid-section
and the chain leading up to the pocket in his vest
and his gold watch pressed against my cheek.
There is the scent of summer and
Sycamore trees that run down a lane
that ends near the banks of the James River.
There is the feeling of crossing Huntington Street
and being lowered down to the edge
of some wooden stairs
that pass over a dune
littered with Dixie Cups and shells.
There is the pressure of a spoon
in my hand as I dig the red clay out of the cliffs
that stand in back of the beach.
I will struggle all morning to create
torsos, arms, legs, and heads,
and smiling faces with periwinkles stuck in them for eyes.
Mother and Father, Grandfather and Grandmother, I will name them
as my grandfather names the ships that pass by
on their way to Hampton Roads:
"The Yorktown," "The Hornet," and "The Enterprise."

After a long hiatus working as a journalist, Ann Meredith Cale is writing poetry again. In the 1980s her poems appeared in *US1: An Anthology: Contemporary Writing from New Jersey, the U.S. 1# Worksheet*, and the *Berkeley Poet's Co-op Worksheets*. In 1980, she received a grant from the New Jersey Council of the Arts for a poetry manuscript.

Michael Catherwood

RACETRACK

In the vague
cloudy sun, the old man
waits against the rail
where lathered horses
fidget in starting gates,
colors flap
like flags
under the jockeys'
delicate whips.

And here

he scribbles
his wife's name,
her blue eyes
flash, clouds break,
and the song
of the starting bell
dents the hollow air.

CATCHING THE BENDING LIGHT IN BURWELL, NEBRASKA

The dirt is a hollow devil that twists
into one cloud, pulls down the slender sky
where mile after mile lines fall into infinity,
fall into the blue earth, a gold stroke
against a blue abstraction. One man stands

in his field, the thorns of his life in his granite
hands, his steps long into day. All this sky,
he thinks, all this dust, my days are this
equation: my life is geometry
and reaches into time, runs out alone
to the kiss and promise of a bent line.

Michael Catherwood's poetry has appeared in many magazines, including *Agni*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Borderlands*, *Briar Cliff Review*, *Ecletica*, *Georgetown Review*, *Hawai'i Review*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Laurel Review*, *Louisiana Literature*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, *Midwest Poetry Review*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Nebraska Review*, *Pittsburgh Quarterly*, *Red River Review*, *South Dakota Review*. His first book of poems, *Dare*, was published by Backwaters Press in 2006.

Christina Daub

THE POET TOO LONG AT HER DESK

Another crisp and cloudless day,
A small boat drifts to sea.
I have forgotten how to play.

I bend to tasks in my own way,
a gnarled and knot-filled tree.
I don't look out or look away,

I grind lead. I etch worlds gray.
Sometimes I want to flee.
My pencil stubs could fill a tray,

from desk to bed to desk each day.
Some people think free verse is free,
not stalked by rhyme, cliché,

not sought by form, like A B A,
or others' words, Dante's, e.e.'s.
Is there something new to say?

I start a list of foreign nouns: Roué . . .
A small boat drifts to sea.
Another crisp and cloudless day,
and I am here. I have forgotten how to play.

Christina Daub's recent work is included in the anthologies, *Full Moon on K Street*, edited by Kim Roberts, *The Poet's Cookbook*, edited by Grace Cavalieri, and *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day*, edited by Billy Collins. She teaches creative writing at George Washington University.

Nancy Devine

REINS

Some nights
I, a little beetle,
got where my grandfather used to sleep
to listen to my grandmother tell stories.
This old woman nightly
unwrapped her corset as if she were unfolding
a strait jacket
her heavy arms loose as
new sheets hung up in bad winds.
She hoisted me up with her into a carriage in Iowa
where a horse
rattled by the sound of his own breathing
or clouds
or a memory of a devil
went running wild
as if
to spread fire.

Nancy Devine teaches high school English in Grand Forks, North Dakota where she lives. She co-directs the Red River Valley Writing Project, a local site of the National Writing Project. Her poetry, short fiction and essays have appeared in online and print journals.

Paul Fisher

LOCAL IDIOM

Zigzag through nameless woods,
I scan my skies for chimney smoke.
Like beavers that trouble our pond,
I'm comfortable closer to home.
I gnaw only edges of worlds.
When I spit them out, they caulk my lodge
and drip from its cloud-stained dome.
Threadbare firs encircle me
like a nave of blue whale ribs
while wolves chew the full mead moon
down to opalescent bone.

But I was catching other dreams
at our camp by the cold crater's rim,
the night we skipped star-stones.
A fool for you, I tossed the crumpled
wings of this poem into our fire,
then kicked at its coals
with my bare, burning feet
till embers hissed, flared, and sputtered out.
In the land of missed opportunity and stumps
where silence chants its lacquered prayer
and half the language gongs,
I ate our howling ashes – bitter in my belly,
yet sweet as stolen honey
ladled from the Great Bear's tongue.

THE GIFT

Searching for the lost coin,
now stubborn in its hiding,
I sweep the hardwood floor,
scour the cedar deck,
rifle drawers, claw through chests,
rake the garden's tangled depths,
mole-roads, rose roots, blackberry crypts,
corner it at last
– belly-up but breathing –
behind an empty apple box
forgotten in the dream-infested

mushroom cellar, pulsing like a toad
resigned to spit and brood
below the creaking timbers of the house.
Tiny as a redwood seed
and rough as pumice stone, it cries
with the thin voice of a penny
when I bend to pick it up,
as if by pleading in the dark
sown deep around us
it could deflect one thorn or thought,
reverse one whirling atom,
as if by sinking into shadow
it could become the nothing it is not.

NOWHERE

Ship horns ooze slow sound today,
cruel, malevolent, oily.
Smears of grey, wolfish light
erase cliffs, and I can't recall
where the corniche curves
or the walk runs laser-straight.
Cedars anchoring soil to stars disappear.
Wet blades adhere to bare flesh and feet.
All night the fog pressed down
its chloroformed rag.
A trawler faded, a tanker burned,
each greasing the edge of saber-sharp reefs.
Morning finds me facing blank screens,
as lost as I was in unmuzzled sun
before clouds inched east
over old-growth spruce, and the mute tide
swaddled our roughshod beach.

Paul Fisher's first book, *Rumors of Shore*, won the 2009 Blue Light Book Award, and is forthcoming in 2010. Recent poems appear in *Cave Wall*, *Centrifugal Eye*, *DMQ Review*, *Pedestal*, *Umbrella*, *Waccamaw*, and various other publications. Paul is the recipient of an Individual Artist's Fellowship in Poetry from the Oregon Arts Commission, and a graduate of the MFA program at New England College. He lives in Bellingham, WA with his wife, two cats and a dog.

E. Laura Golberg

IN OUR SIXTIES

Evenings, I sharpen pencils, find blank paper,
you pack camera, lenses, film.
We capture orange and pink skies
throwing light, long shadows
on landscapes and faces.

We forget small things: exposures, words.
We're traveling from sharp terrains of memory
to where only distant mountains are recalled.

We live now, setting down our world
before the first stroke or heart attack;
no cancer or disease yet to make us dried, frail.
We are as walkers on snow that may give way
unexpectedly, no sound to say it's yielding, no goodbyes.

MURRAY BRIDGE, SOUTH AUSTRALIA, 1867

for Bill Stacy

They built the bridge in England,
labeled girders,
each pin and hole
like flaps and slots of paper dolls,
undid them all
and shipped each part Down Under
to be fitted to its mate:
thousands of couplings,
lovers from past lives
reunited.

The bridge stands there still,
in tension like a good argument,
in compression like making love afterward.

E. Laura Golberg's work has been published in *The Externalist*, *Main Channel Voices*, *Perigee: Publication for the Arts*, *Pedestal Magazine*, and www.LanguageandCulture.net, among other publications. She has studied at both the Bread Loaf and Sewanee Writers' Conferences, and has held a fellowship to the Jenny McKean Moore workshop of George Washington University.

Erica Goss

SCRAPS

When I was seven food I threw away
reappeared on my plate each day until I ate it,
blubbering, licking tears

from the corners of my mouth. You had a hunger,
have it still, for green potatoes, rubbery turnips,
apples bitten past the seeds.

Dried cheese rinds, cold cups of tea,
and morsels of bread, always bread
littered the kitchen counters of my childhood.

If only I had understood their power,
your crude magic. In the war the neighbors
called you Hamster for your talent.

You scoured torn streets with your little bag
while your mother and sisters lay quietly starving.
"Bitte gehrter Herr, kann ich den haben?"*

At seventeen I drove until I lost sight of you
and flung my lunch from the blue Toyota, watched
it burst open, orange rolling away from the dented

sandwich, the small box of raisins intact.
I did not see you pick up scraps of paper bag
and wet bread hours later.

Had I only known,
I might have been a better daughter.
I might still be your child.

*"Please, sir, may I have that?"

Erica Goss is a writer from Los Gatos, CA. Her poems, reviews, and essays appear or are forthcoming in *Caveat Lector*, *Zoland Poetry*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Pearl*, among others. She has won a number of prizes for her writing and been nominated for a Pushcart prize. She teaches poetry and art in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is the South Bay Arts Reporter for Examiner.com.

Paul Grayson

A BANK IN THE WOODS

There was a bank in the woods I knew
In days long gone where the bloodroots grew,
Alone in the dead leaves, just exposed,
Facing the rumble of the road,
Their petals white and few and frail
Barely surviving by the trail.
For merely a minute in the spring
Was the bloodroot's time for flowering.
No other flower, no other leaf,
It was bloodroot time, so swift, so brief,
At the foot of a gaunt and sunlit tree,
For companions a titmouse and chickadee.
And the years have passed and I still know
The way to the bank where the bloodroots grow.

A prominent, longtime member of the Washington, D.C., literary community, Paul Grayson served as a weather observer in World War II in the U.S. Air Force for four years, including two years in mainland Alaska and the Aleutian Islands. He has a B.S. in botany and an M.S. and Ph.D. in agricultural economics. Prior to retirement, he worked as a statistician and economist for the Census Bureau, Social Security Administration, and the IRS. His poems have appeared in *Mercury*, *Comment*, *Phoenix*, *Quirks*, and the *Statistical Reporter*. He has published research papers in the *Journal of Farm Economics*, *Statistics of Income Bulletin*, and elsewhere. He has been a featured reader of his poetry on satellite radio and at Mariposa, the Kensington Library, and other D.C. venues.

Gabe Heilig

A SONG FOR YOUR BIRTHDAY

I heard the perfect song for you
this morning
at the Palace of Cortez,
and it was, as you would have it,
proud, pleased with itself,
glad to be singing its own name.

It was a slow old man this morning,
at the Palace of Cortez,
playing on his violin—
opening his soiled notebook
of handwritten melodies
to Schubert's "Ave Maria"—
playing it once,
playing it again,
then, pleased, slowly stroking
his bow across his resin,
and playing it again.

His music moved between us
like a distant tide,
and took me with it to some quiet spot
where in this world of trouble
we were easy, whole, and strong.
And I wished you could have been there
for your birthday song—

something simple and eternal,
released like birds to streak
across the passage of the sun
above an old man's morning song
at the Palace of Cortez.

Cuernavaca, 1971

Gabe Heilig has twice been a featured poet on Grace Cavalieri's "The Poet and The Poem." He published by St. Martin's Press and Tarcher/Putnam. He lives Takoma Park, MD, and can be reached at gabe@ideadesign-dc.com.

Heather Hughes

BECALMED

the weight of ocean,
of tides. the weight
beside me, in bed.

the vibrations of a bell
long untouched.
your bare feet, the bone
of my hip.

Heather Hughes has been published in *Cream City Review*, *Grain*, *Prick of the Spindle*, *Saw Palm*, and *Stirring*. She keeps busy as curator of the Imagined Therefore Limitless Readers' Series, editorial assistant at a scholarly publisher, dedicated yogi, and language learner. She would like to live in a lighthouse.

Rich Ives

THE SUPERIOR TALENT

for Gerald Stern

I am a talented man. I can trip in the driveway
with no apparent cause. I have a weak ankle
that betrays me. I can fall hard enough to die.
And I can get back up and not die. I can do that.

And I can do nothing for long periods of time.
I can do that very very well. And I can stay
inside for all that time like a child with its
first toy and I can be happy and not know.

Sometimes I look at the night sky forever
and I think, I should be up there farting around
and seeking the truth. I should be discovering
the meaning of something important besides myself.

Another thing I can do is pass twenty-three kidney stones
one right after the other, a little army of them marching
one at a time right out to my bladder and past, not knowing
it's one flood after another and their kind is doomed.

I'm afraid of needles, even pine needles. I do that well.
But my heart is strong. It puts up with a lot of crap
and it cares for silly little things that others
take for granted. It's good at sighing and thumping.

I'm good at sleeping but not at schedules. Sometimes
when I'm supposed to be sleeping I write poems and
I might be sleeping when you think I'm working or
paying attention like right now while I'm talking to you.

But my real talent is discovering talent. I have found
talent under rocks, fleeing, with too many legs and
I have found something like talent taking its time
in the vertical gait of a cedar heading for the clouds.

And there's more talent than anyone, even you, can imagine
inside the gawky vehicles that challenge us in mirrors
and sit at desks and carry us around. I'm still discovering
how many unexpected songs rise from the smells.

This means, of course, that you too are talented
and need only uncover the deeper odors others may already
be aware of. Celebrate your genius. After all, you read
this poem and didn't once think I smelled better than you.

Rich Ives has received grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Trust, Seattle Arts Commission and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for his work in poetry, fiction, editing, publishing, translation and photography. His writing has appeared in *Verse*, *North American Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and many more. He published a three-volume series of the best of Northwest writing as well as an anthology of contemporary German poetry titled *Evidence of Fire*. He has published a limited edition collection of his own poetry and translated "Yesterday I Was Leaving" by Johannes Bobrowski. He is the 2009 winner of the Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from *Bitter Oleander*. His story collection, *The Balloon Containing the Water Containing the Narrative Begins Leaking*, was one of five finalists for the 2009 Starcherone Innovative Fiction Prize.

Rose Kelleher

WHITE MONKEY

I'm from the tribe that traveled
upriver, hungering mossward
into cloud country.

Past bird tangle and sundust hours,
past the peaks that guard the end of Here
my brothers trooped, the old old family
sawgrass-eaten many bones ago.

We were the color of cave-shade,
dark as shuteye. We became night nothing
when panthers passed, catmouth breathing,
under the cave of treetop-watching eyes.
We were shorthairs too, like you,
in the gone away day.

Cold kills everything not shaggy there,
even the hollow dogs grow thick as yaks
in shiver time, when rain falls white and weightless
as lice, and hills turn silverback.
Now we're like our land,
icicle-furred, moon waders,
but still your kind.
See, we can rut with you.

Rose Kelleher's poems have appeared in *Anon*, *The Shit Creek Review*, *Snakeskin*, and other venues. Her first book, *Bundle o' Tinder*, was published by Waywiser Press in 2008.

Douglas Korb

THE DOCTORS SING TO ME

The doctors sing to me a malediction.
You are to be what you never dreamed
would be.
You.

Do not lie. The world, so general, General,
is at your feet; the dream,
an icicle in
spring.

What is father is future and what is
child: fun. Play is what I'll be
and be will play
me.

Douglas Korb's poems have appeared in *RHINO*, *5AM*, *Poet Lore*, *Mannequin Envy*, and elsewhere. He has held previous posts in poetry as National Poetry Month coordinator for the Academy of American Poets and as critic for GrowlerPoetry.org, a website dedicated to the reviewing of debut poetry collections. He holds a MFA in creative writing from Bennington College and his chapbook, *The Cut Worm*, won Bright Hill Press's 2006 chapbook award.

Mary Ann Larkin

BEING SEEN

for Shirley and Hazel

The old beauties gasp onto cushions
at churches or art shows,
reach for each other's hands.
"Lovely to see you," they say, bending
each to each—once-plumaged birds
after a long migration.
"My daughter . . ." "my son . . ."
they say, or "The house is sold."
Old quarrels shadow away.
A vast tenderness engulfs them
as of survivors
who know what's been lost:
a peacock feather,
rivalries fierce and narrow-eyed,
skin like satin,
the sea, the fires, the dunes,
their babies' flesh.
They become again
vessels in full sail, wind-blown,
sun-struck. Heads move closer,
eyes quench a thirst
they'd almost forgotten.
"Come and see me," they call,
though they have been seen.
"I will. I will," they lie,
as keepers trundle them away.

WANTING

The poet sits in his easy chair,
hope vanishing
like the steam from his chipped mug.
He's waiting for his blue-eyed girl,
the one with the honey-colored hair.
The clock ticks.
She'll stop it
when she comes. And she will come,
except—there's always a last time,

and the tart will never tell him: *This is it*
 or *good-bye*. She's all good news,
 all shimmer and glow, her voice
 bubbling on and on, until
 he's young again, caught up
 in the threads of her hair
 which he'll follow
 into the maze of himself,
 to the place where only she
 knows the turns—the last time
 as good as the first.

Mary Ann Larkin is a poet, writer, teacher, and former fund-raising and publications consultant. *The Coil of the Skin*, a book of poems, was published by Washington Writers' Publishing House in 1982. Publications also include four chapbooks: *White Clapboard*, by Carol Allen of Philadelphia; *The DNA of the Heart*, with Patric Pepper, by Pond Road Press; *A Shimmering That Goes with Us* by Finishing Line Press; and *gods & flesh*, by Plan B Press in early 2007. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry Ireland Review*, *New Letters*, *Poetry Greece* and other magazines, as well as in more than twenty local and national anthologies, including *America in Poetry*, *Ireland in Poetry*, and *Loving*, a poetry and art series published by Harry Abrams of New York. She has taught writing and literature in a number of colleges and universities, most recently at Howard University in Washington, DC. Her involvement with poetry includes co-founding the Big Mama Poetry Troupe, a group of feminist poets, who gave sixty performances from New York to Chicago in the seventies; giving numerous workshops and readings in schools, churches, jails and saloons; and writing for *Foundation News*, National Public Radio, and The Watershed Foundation, producers of literary radio programming. In 2003, she and her husband, Patric Pepper, founded Pond Road Press, which published its third book in 2006: *Tough Heaven: Poems of Pittsburgh* by Jack Gilbert. Larkin grew up in Pittsburgh and now lives in Washington, D.C., and North Truro, Massachusetts.

Lyn Lifshin

ROSE

when it's behind my knees
you'd have to fall to the
floor, lower your whole
body like horses in a field
to smell it. White Rose,
Bulgarian rose. I think of
sheets I've left my scent in
as if to stake a claim for
someone who could never
care for anything alive.
This Bulgarian rose,
spicy, pungent, rose as my
16th birthday party dress,
rose lips, nipples. If you
won't fall to your knees, at
least, please, nuzzle like those
horses, these roses, somewhere

IF THOSE BLOSSOMS DON'T COME

if the tangerine doesn't
fill the house with thick
sweetness. If you put
your hands over your
ears one more time
when I'm talking. If
there's another month
of wanting to sleep all
day, the cat the warmest
sweet thing I can imagine.
If this damn rain doesn't
let up, I'm going to
have to rewrite the story
you've got in your head
about us and I don't
think you will like
the ending

DO I REALLY HAVE TO WRITE ABOUT WHAT SEEMS MOST SCARY?

Isn't it enough I've fought against
it with ballet classes every day,
often more than one? Do I have
to tell you about the letter
from a woman who says, "Now
in the gym the men stop looking"?
Do I have to joke, "Pull the plug if
I can't do ballet," laugh when a
friend says, "I didn't sleep with him
because I'd have to get undressed"?
Do I have to remember my mother
saying she'd rather be dead
than lose her teeth?
I think of the friend who
says she doesn't worry about what
poem she'll read but about what she
will wear. Another says she wants
plastic surgery but doesn't think
it's right for someone in the arts:
shouldn't she care about loftier things?
I think of another woman who will
be photographed only in certain
positions. Do I have to tell you what
I'm thinking about isn't death

Lyn Lifshin has published more than 120 books of poetry, including, most recently, *Barbaro: Beyond Brokenness* (Texas Review Press), *Desire* (World Parade Books), *Persephone* (Red Hen Press), *Another Woman Who Looks like Me* (Black Sparrow Press at David Godine), *The Licorice Daughter: My Year with Ruffian* (Texas Review Press), and *Before It's Light* (Black Sparrow Press).

Doris Lynch

FIRST SNOWFALL: TAOS

I want to package this day
inside a transparent envelope:

big, lopey snowflakes,
cottonwood bark dressed in rime

wind cascading down from *el monte sagrado*
as flurries mix with gilded aspen leaves.

Cold so biting and fierce that my friend,
met by chance on Montoya Street,

cocoons her miniature Dachshund protectively
inside her coat. "Too bitter for him. I sent my husband

home for the Volvo." We wait on the corner
of Kit Carson Rd. as clouds quilt earth

and one small dog seeks solace
inside a womb of down.

BIBLICAL FOG

Joe Lynch (1926-2008)

Two months after
your death, a swathe
of fog over the neighbor's
field reminds me
of Moses's hair.

Fiercely white, shimmering,
offering a direct line to God
whose thunderous voice
reminds me of your Irish tirades
that sent us kids scurrying

to our shared beds or the prickly
woods behind Center Square Green

where our unskipped stones
created rock graves on the silty
bottom of Neshaminy Creek.

Those days, I tried so hard to be good:
report card A's, rosary beads clacked
hard, Hoover wheeled out for every
Saltine crumb, heavy trashcans
hauled down to the curb.

Succeeded too well.
Too bad, both you
and I would
have preferred
a real renegade.

Someone who spurned
Moses's hair, preferring
to hack her way up
briar-clogged, gnat-whirled
Skunk Mountain.

Doris Lynch's work appears in *Bitter Oleander*, *Commonweal*, and *Tattoo Highway*. New work is forthcoming in *Adirondack Review* and *Xanadu*. Her chapbook, *Praising Invisible Birds*, appeared from Finishing Line Press in November 2008. The Indiana Arts Commission has awarded her three individual artist's grants: two for poetry and one for fiction. She works as a reference librarian.

Katie Manning

THE THIRD DAY

Here is the entrance to Chinatown
at last — two buses and a block of walking
from our Victorian bed and breakfast.
Why is everyone on this corner talking

in English? I'm slightly disappointed.
My new husband, Jon, tells me to pose beside
the gargoyle statue, so I stand with my fingers
pulling the corners of my already-slanted eyes.

Katie! Jon has a horrified
look on his face, but he manages
to click the picture of me
the moment I lower my hands.

Farther up the slanted street
in a kitchen supply store
we make our first frivolous purchase:
twenty pairs of plastic chopsticks and four

Chinese soup spoons. We'll use them
some day. Back on the street,
little ladies stand in doorways and push
dim sum. We give in. We eat.

Then we walk on with raised cameras
like the tourists in jokes. We each think
our new spouse is an enigma: like this window on the left,
full of clocks, with the sign *Golden Time Travel Inc.*

Katie Manning's poetry and book reviews have been published or are forthcoming in *Ancient Paths*, *Bare Root Review*, *Boxcar Poetry Review*, *New Letters*, *ONTHEBUS*, *Poet Lore*, *Relief*, *So to Speak*, *Trivia*, and *Word Riot*, among others, and she has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She and her husband recently moved from San Diego to Lafayette, Louisiana, where they're learning many new uses for the word *y'all*.

Laura Manuelidis

ALL COMES THROUGH

Just say hello!
New-humored time is on the rise
Blowing shirt on line
Beneath the foxglove bells
 it chimes

 as scurf of earth
Sweeps through the grass
 the meadow dandelions.

In patches, crows irregular
Exaggerate improbable rhymes
 and muskrats channel thick wet mounds
 to greet this spectacle
Chartreused.

The sloe-eyed sloth suns belly up
 while fox and deer hunt equal rest;
Close spider dangles down round chords
 to peer the ommatidia of ant

A narrative yet incomplete
 without those billowing city streets,
 the tug of river commerce brings
While rats out garbage also pause.

DISCOVERY

So we look forward to and backwards for
 that same feeding frenzy the bluefish make
Leaping through the body of the bay
 into the slivered scales of sky
Curving their backs at dawn in ecstasy
 (almost insensate upwards)
And as they descend into the deep, reversed
 for the other sublime: tormenting bite.

How many times have I told you, my heart, to go carefully
 here in the shallows when they come so near, deliriously hungry?
Even your toes are vulnerable as bait
 or the piece of swayed driftwood you hold.
'Though the water is clear, and you quiet your beat
 it becomes dark quickly just two steps away
Where wave lips engorge with blood.

You put your hand in once, and felt the blackness spread
 from that bite. Uncontrolled.
So it is impossible now not to return
 to the shore. To go deep again to touch its rising joy
No matter what the consequences

Laura Manuelidis is a physician/scientist who has investigated the shape of chromosomes and the causes of dementia. She has published poetry in various journals, including *The Nation*, *Connecticut Review*, *Oxford Poetry*, *Innisfree Poetry* and *Reflections* (Yale journal), has been nominated twice for a Pushcart prize, and has read in European and American universities and other venues. Her book of poems, *Out of Order*, is available online; additional links (and readings with music by P. Jordan) are at:
http://info.med.yale.edu/neurosci/faculty/manuelidis_poetry.html.

Bonnie Maurer

IN ROHALL'S DINER

after a painting by Red Rohall

Silver stools line up
along the counter
like chorus dancers
about to spin. Enter
Betty and Jules to
take them for a twirl
on seats red as sweet-
heart candy.

Jack the soda jerk,
swipes his towel at
their elbows propped, hands
hooked, smiles and takes his
pen, "What'll you have
America in 1941?
Skyscraper Sundae,
Adam and Eve on
a Raft, Pig Between
Two Sheets, "V" for victory
at all costs, innocence
fizzing in the glass?"

"Boogie Woogie Bugle
Boy" floods the juke.
The walls blaze yellow
as the hot summer
day. No one they know
has gone to war. Betty
has not yet delivered
their son while Jules learns
to drop bombs. Two straws
in a nickel Coke.
Jack waves so long.
Outside the diner
their Buick grins—all
its chrome teeth shining.

Bonnie Maurer earned an MFA in poetry from Indiana University. She is the author of four small-press chapbooks: *Reconfigured* (Finishing Line Press, 2009); *Ms. Lily Jane Babbitt Before the Ten O'clock Bus from Memphis Ran Over Her* (Raintree Press and Ink Press, 2nd edition); *Old 37: The Mason Cows* (Barnwood Press); and *Bloodletting: A Ritual Poem for Women's Voices* (Ink Press). She has poems forthcoming in *War Literature & the Arts*, and in an anthology: *And Know This Place: Poetry of Indiana*. Maurer has conducted creative writing/healing workshops for the homeless in recovery, for the HIV+/AIDS affected/infected population and for cancer patients at The Wellness Center. She grew up in Indianapolis where she continues to live and work as a poet for Young Audiences of Indiana, as a copy editor for the *Indianapolis Business Journal*, and as an Ai Chi (aquatic flowing energy) instructor.

Joan Mazza

JULY FORECAST

Cool summer morning without plans, no company
to clean for. Squirrels, front paws at their breast
and two titmice wait for breakfast on the deck.
A whole day stretches out, a meadow waiting
for me to lie down to read and write. I fill
the feeders with seed, replenish sugar water
for the hummingbirds, freshen birdbaths,
sprinkle basil and parsley. Easy summer,
no woolens or makeup. No bra. I wear soft
and sun-faded long shirts to let in the breeze.
Before July unfolds its warming blanket
on the day, I pick cucumbers, Swiss chard,
beans, last lettuce, first Roma tomatoes,
wash and sort for soup and salad, pull weeds
and water eggplant. In the simple life of summer,
my garden welcomes and gives, like the woods
in Sound Beach where my sister and I picked
buckets of raspberries and shrieked at dragons
landing on hair and arms. For days, my mother
boiled the jam and sealed the surface of jars
with paraffin, poured from a coffee can
on the open fire. No one helped her.
By afternoon, my minestrone soup simmers,
twelve containers to fill, label and date.
The day skates off on cloud wisps, sealed
with the wax of chores my mother taught.
The simple life is complicated, no time to read
or write until snow falls.

NEEDLECRAFTS

Used bookstore closing, I buy ten books
on fabric arts, fingers tingling to grasp
thread and yarn, needles and crochet hooks.
I yearn for the textures of fabrics—
silky, nubbed, soft or crinkly, sounds as they pass
over one another, tricks to make them drape
or lay flat. In thirty years, I've sewn nothing
more than hems on jeans, but the details
of smocking, gathered threads, and cut-out
work call to me. I drool in the aisles
of textile stores, love animal prints,
rickrack and ribbon, pinking sheers and pins.
In my twenties, I sewed all my clothes: A-line
dresses, polyester knit pantsuits, bell bottoms
and sheaths, hours embroidering blouses.
I stitched until the last minute, scraps
and patterns still on the floor as we rushed
out the door for Christmas dinner.
While Anthony drove, I hemmed the sleeves
of a wool jacket that matched my skirt.
I keep those books like scrapbooks.

Joan Mazza has worked as a medical microbiologist, psychotherapist, certified sex therapist, writing coach, and seminar leader. She is the author of six books, including *Dreaming Your Real Self* (Penguin/Putnam 1998), and her work has appeared in *Potomac Review*, *Möbius*, *Permafrost*, *Slipstream*, *Timber Creek Review*, *Writer's Digest*, *The Fourth River*, *the minnesota review*, *Personal Journaling*, and *Playgirl*. Her chapbook, *Mom's Little Destruction Book*, was runner-up in the Permafrost Contest, and her poem, "When We Were Students" won the 1st Skyline Magazine Summer Poetry Contest, 2007, and was published in *A Hudson View Poetry Digest*, fall 2007. She now writes poetry full-time in rural central Virginia.
www.JoanMazza.com

Judith McCombs

DETAILS, JACKET

for Elisenda & Richard

The bedroom, winter light streaming in, white as the sheers on the windows.
The bed, four polished brown posts, foursquare to the winds, island of rest.
From upstate New York to 'Nam, California, Nepal, his lifeline led here.

The bedspread, petals or blazes of red, shapes drifting and held.
The pillows, side by side, head to head.

On the spread his jacket, grey padded leather, lies sideways and
half-folded over,
like a sleeper turned to the window, waiting.

Quietly, she lifts the jacket: *This is Richard's*.
It's what he was wearing, she says. His kids took the hat back to Nepal.
No one wanted his jacket. She opens the grey leather folds, still pliable,
to show the scissoring, too late, up the left chest and down the left arm.

It can be sewn, she says.

Judith McCombs' poems appear in *Calyx*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Poet Lore*, *Potomac Review* (Poetry Prize), *Prairie Schooner*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Sisters of the Earth*, and *Sow's Ear*; *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*; *Feminist Studies*, *Nimrod* (Neruda Award), *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, *River Styx*, and her fifth book, *The Habit of Fire: Poems Selected & New*. She received the Maryland State Arts Council's highest 2009 award in Poetry. She teaches writing workshops at the Writer's Center in Bethesda, MD, and arranges a poetry series at Kensington Row Bookshop.

Rachel McGahey

DAYLIGHT SAVINGS

We pinched an hour, and the clock is older now
at dusk. My neighbor has already called his dog.
The sidewalk cats slip in and out of sullen light.

A yellow brilliance squares the building lids
and sharpens far black foliage. Bright beads pierce
horizon treetops, dimming slowly, snuffed out

spot by spot. On gravel minced below my sill,
wine bottles bristle from a bin, and Spanish moss
collects like feral manes around their necks

while bicycles in fetters at the metal rack
jut angles, glinting, snarled in spidery ranks—
a few wheels gone, their stark frames mellowing

in sundown shadows. Resting here, with elbows
on the ledge, I hold our canceled time in mind
and store it, calmest since I gave you up.

ACCIDENTS

Oklahoma, 1939

My mother, four foot ten, would teach
a room of farmer sons and snotty
toddlers, thawed by one wood stove
and tethered by McGuffey's First
Eclectic Reader: *Răb. Ann. hăt.*
căţh. sēe. See Rab! See Ann! See!
Rab has the cat. Can Ann catch Rab?
She had a switch, and if they gave her
sass, believe me, she would use it.
She wouldn't take mistakes from anyone,

not even her own children. When I left
to marry John at seventeen—a leap
across the empty lentil fields
to Illinois—she sold my old piano.

Then she lived alone. She slipped
and cracked a hip, one winter, coming home,
and no one came to call until too late.

Chicago, 1999

Yes, I heard you call, and heard you
leave a message, twice, but couldn't
make it to the phone. I fell, I guess—
was sitting here on the bed, and must have just
fallen over. Fell right over, right
to the floor. I don't know how.
I must have been here all day long—
I don't remember. Not so young
now, John, that's all. You didn't
have to come from work, I'll really be all right.
Just stick it out, my mother used to say.
Tough hide, hard work, bean soup,
no salt. John. I can't move this side.

R6 TO PHILADELPHIA

The excess city clings
to the Schuylkill, heaping roofs
along the river's length,
casting spans across
as horizon skyscrapers grow.
On one side's rising shore, houses stack
up streets, staggered on the steep
incline. The towns chain tight—
Conshohocken, Miquon,

Manayunk. A train
comes tunneling out to ride the bank
by gaping factories and brick,
by broken doors, by leafy
scaffolding.

At Wissahickon platform,
in the harried pack, a man
trips up the boarding step
with a frayed suitcase, clawing
for a grip. He fills a seat. The people gaze
no place—at *Time*, a purse, a fingernail,
an oval pane, a SEPTA map,
a wallet. Dollars, cents,

receipts—he thumbs distractedly
for more, all pockets vacant.

She clips his ticket, shakes her head:
"It's not enough. We'll ask you to get off
at Allegheny," moving by
to other rows. The city blurs.
The train car clatters, jolts, but she
keeps ticketing, not even
reaching for a hold.

The level river runs
outside his window, brown
and low, no trouble on its changeless face.

Rachel McGahey is pursuing her MFA degree at the University of Florida.

Claire McGoff

THE ARTIST

Five years of week-ends our father works his art,
carves thumb-sized, jewel-shaped designs, hundreds,
in the pine beams that separate the loft
from the living space, dabs each with careful eye,
in robins-egg blue and tulip red.

For the walls above the fireplace and sunken tub,
he hand digs the granite pieces, placing each in relation
to the next, moves us when the snow trickles
and wild raspberries set on, from the city into a one-bedroom cabin,
so high you can see the western continental divide.

We unpack onto hand-sanded shelves angled against the A-frame walls.
Outside, the tar roof hidden among the Ponderosa pines,
whose branches bend and spring with the night wind surges—
those that rush our blood, keep my sister nestled to my back
in our new built-in bunk.

Little more than a closet-sized kitchen,
no neighbors, and eight hundred square feet soon grow
too small to hold our mother's misgivings,
the songbird clock too slow.
Suppers turn silent, bedtime voices grow louder

and louder through the beams into our room. A year November,
while he is away, we gather matching coats
and all we can fit in the trunk, head east down aspen-fringed roads
toward prairie and dormant winter wheat,
the scent of pine in what we take.

WHITE LICHEN MOTHS ON MESHOPPEN CREEK

They flutter in spotlights of sun beneath eastern hemlocks.
Their shadows tag ripples of water, daredevils,
nearly dip their dusted wings, and only ten feet downstream

winter's melt falls, has fallen for so long, so hard over the edge
onto the flat rock below, holes have formed, one perfect
for plunging our bodies and we do, over and over,

a little less startled by the cold each time. The water,
warmed ever so slightly by our play, streams back
into the pool, our eyes level with the slippery moss.

Above us, the small cloud of moths gathers
in this time we call September,
in clusters, four-leafed clovers, bleached, and small

as the sky divers in white at the air shows
we watched at the shore. From cocoon
to the first open wing of July, the white lichen moths

seem to know nothing of what they are not. I would catch
them with my eyes as they darted like a game or survival
in and out under ledges of bluestone along the bank,

four or five, way below the shade of hardwoods
that gives the conifers life. Alone, the last moth would vanish,
like a sleight of hand, in the measured closing of the day.

Claire McGoff lives in Silver Spring with her husband and six children. She has been a member of the Writer's Center for several years, participating in a number of workshops, including personal essay, memoir, and poetry.

Joe Mills

DRIVERS

Although we don't want to, we have to stop to change the baby, so we pull into a McDonalds, and afterwards we let her crawl around as we drink coffee, eat fries, and watch other people's children in the PlayPlace fight over Ronald's car. A girl who wears a t-shirt saying *Brat for Life* tries to drag *It IS all about me* off the seat while *Spoiled Rotten Princess* waits for a chance to swoop in. Before our child arrived, we took turns in France driving a car as tiny as a toy past indecipherable signs, but now I understand at least the one at every roundabout which insists: *Vous n'avez pas priorité*. It doesn't matter what direction you're coming from, how smart, rich, old, or beautiful you are. Whenever you approach an intersection, you must yield in the presence of others.

ACCIDENTS

It was an accident, my daughter says to explain yet another spill or why her younger brother's crying upstairs. *It was an accident*, she yells so soon after the crash it seems all one sound. She carries the word like a shield, a get-out-jail free card, a safe base, protecting her from any punishment. After all, when accidents happen, no one's responsible. I try to explain when a glass falls after she put it on top of the stepstool on top of the chair on top of the couch, she can't call it an accident. But, even as we talk about how our actions may have unanticipated results, I recognize the appeal of her position, and I wonder how much of it we could adopt. Why not consider disappointing dinner parties, bad gifts, awkward kisses, as accidents? Every horoscope could read, "Today, you will be involved in an accident."

Headstones could have the inscription,
It was an accident, an explanation,
not of how we died, but how we lived,
the way our curiosity and desire resulted
in breakage, odd collisions, lives full
of consequences, mostly unintended.

A faculty member at the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, Joe Mills has published three volumes of poetry— *Somewhere During the Spin Cycle* and *Angels, Thieves, and Winemakers* and *Love and Other Collisions*, just out in April 2010—as well as numerous works of fiction, non-fiction and criticism.

Jean Nordhaus

BREAD OF HEAVEN

Therese Grob, Schubert's first love, treasured the songs he gave her but prudently married a prosperous baker.

Time/Life: Schubert and his Music

O, the buns, the buns, his fragrant loaves and Leckerli,
strudels and Lebkuchen, little frosted sugar cakes
set out on the banquette like babies in a row.

And when he came to me, flushed from the heat
of his ovens, smelling of yeast and chocolate,
white as a miller with flour on his shoes,
when he wooed me with marzipan
and braided crullers, odors issuing
from his shop in waves of rapture, who

could resist? O, comfort me with Linzertorte.
I've had an easy life, bread and meat on the table
a roof above my head, a kind man who loves me . . .

but, O, I've grown fat, fat, and sometimes
when scents of morning *brötchen*
penetrate my sleep like tremolos of lost love,
I think of that earnest, bespectacled cherub,
his head haloed with unruly curls—
nothing inside but harmonies and dotted half-notes—

how truly I sang for him
like the little bird that whistles sweet, sweet, sweet
outside my window.

Jean Nordhaus' fourth volume of poetry, *Innocence*, won the Charles B. Wheeler Prize and was published by The Ohio State University Press in November 2006.

Scott Owens

RAISING SAWYER

The book of your life begins
with pink pages framed between
concentric lines of a quilt.
On each one I write
your first one hundred words,
kitty, babana, light bulb.

You fixate first on blankets,
then a bear you name Barry,
a cat called Purrey, lately
a drumstick you say has the power
to scare dinosaurs and monsters,
even purple ones, even mean
ones that try to stomp you.

You already have more friends
than I, at ease with words,
asking everyone's name,
inviting them to play with you.

When I walk too fast, you stop,
bend over, say you have to get
the breath back in your mouth.

At 3, you don't like the boys room
anymore, claim it's stinky
and boys' butts are different.

You talk about the way things were
when you were bigger, don't like
to play by yourself, pretend to be
the purple princess horse, yellow
mermaid, hero of the ocean,
ask me to be the Daddy.

You still make up nonsense words,
especially when cuddling,
an ur-language of love.
Sometimes you press into me
so hard it hurts, your nose
on my nose, face on my face,

as if there could never be
too little space between us.

THE DADDY POEM

The poem of my life has been
the transformation of just
one word, leaving behind
the slap and yell, sunken
teeth of argue and fight,
teaching the rule of numbers,
colors, left and right,
replacing fist with open
hand to carry, hold,
soothe, pouring tea
checking for monsters, eating
crusts of bread, skin
of apples, anything unwanted,
my only tools paper
and play, pen and wipe,
image and line, standing
still until the past
poems up inside me.

HOLDING THEM UP

*The chicken's claws will tear
a Rembrandt drawing if you put it down.*
— Robert Bly, "The Yellow Dot"

You can make sure they eat right,
exercise, rest. You can keep them
in the house during storms, move
away from fault lines and eroding
beaches, any place as suspect
as Kansas. You can warn them against
drugs, booze, sex, make sure
they're too busy to need distraction.
You can stroke away little pains,
sorrows, attacks on self-esteem.
You can visit the doctor regularly,
buy the best filters for your home,
drive carefully, always wear belts.
You can teach them not to run

with scissors or play with fire,
to stay away from strangers
and always look both ways.

But you can never foresee the hidden
tumor or shattered windshield.
You can't deny the will of God,
the short straw, luck of the draw.
And even as you hold them up,
you have to be careful you're not
holding them back as well.

Graduate of the UNCG MFA program, co-editor of Wild Goose Poetry Review, Chair of the Sam Ragan Poetry Prize for the Poetry Council of NC, and author of "Musings," a weekly poetry column in Outlook, Scott Owens' books include *The Fractured World* (2008) and *The Persistence of Faith* (1993). He is also author of two chapbooks, *Deceptively Like a Sound* (2008), and *The Book of Days* (2009), and over 400 poems published in various journals. He has been nominated for two Pushcart Prizes and a Best of the Net Prize this year. His poem, "On the Days I Am Not My Father," was featured on Garrison Keillor's NPR show The Writer's Almanac. Born in Greenwood, SC, he now lives in Hickory, NC, where he teaches and coordinates the Poetry Hickory reading series.

William Page

SKATING

In our basement the furnace burned
the anthracite I shoveled into a hopper,
its worm gear grinding like a train.
My hair was black as the lumps of coal
and curly as gulping blades of the shaft
that chewed the freezing night into dawn.
I used long iron claws to lift the clinkers
of iridescent gray and violet.
Into a bucket I'd drop them and carry
them to a waiting row beside the driveway.
In the basement I'd watch Father,
the band saw's voice screaming
at the mounds piling on the bench.
The first day I strapped on my skates,
I cinched their jaws into my soles.
There was a silver key my father tied
to a shoelace I wore about my neck.
When I stood up, wheels turned to wings,
and I flew to my knees, my temple
missing the workbench by inches.
Father took my arms to help me up.
The disappointed workbench said nothing.
The floor lay with its blank stare.
The furnace loomed, provider
of the fires of hell I'd heard the evangelist
scream about as he stoked our fears.
But a piece of coal cracked open and out
spurted a flame bluer than my father's eyes.

WITHOUT SPEAKING

In the night with a hidden bird singing in the great leafed oak
that holds its acorns without understanding a single note
of the spreading universe of green, the fallow fox rises
from restless sleep to trot along on its slim legs under a floating moon.
The coyote shrieks to its mate as the darkening clouds gather, waiting
for the storm's voice to tell it nothing it doesn't already know.

What is it that stirs uncurling on the black ocean's floor,
and what movement above in the stark heavens wavers other
than the wind that has no body or mind but moves like a human?
Much is hidden above and below, but here there are leaves
of grass, shrub, willow, and needles of pine that fall to ground
day after day and brown with time without speaking a word.

William Page's poetry has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The North American Review*, *Southwest Review*, *Nimrod*, *Wisconsin Review*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *The Literary Review*, *Mississippi Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *The Chariton Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *The Pedestal*, and in over a hundred and thirty other reviews, and in a number of anthologies. His third collection of poems, *Bodies Not Our Own*, received a Walter R. Smith Distinguished Book Award. He is Founding Editor of *The Pinch* and a retired professor of the Creative Writing Program at the University of Memphis.

Rhodora Penaranda

STARS UPON THE SALT PONDS

Diamonds in watery mounds —this patchwork
of ponds, salt-stacked, pearl-tipped hillocks, and carved
like a checkerboard. Nothing seems to churn,
flower flutter and insect hum muted
in the sticky ambergris air, wind sealing
our exchange: *Salt is between us.*

But ankle-deep in the bracken wash, the water-
beat of long-legged striders rattle the reeds
alive. The sniper cries of shorebirds startle
the whirligig beetles' dives. Boats return
in high-five bumps over on the quay, their nets
silver in the sun, air wet with the stink

of smelt and brine. This churning, scavenging,
burrowing down, or shooting out into the sky—
a society of animals converging
in orbit of these satellites of salts—
salt stars holding forth in a sea swirl of small lives.
For haven't we taken the sea with us,

flood and ebb across our worlds' transcending
phases, barnacles in blood, body's savor
and heat? Sometimes body, sometimes air, two
inconstant ions meet in a stand-down
of differences. In the heat-mist of noon,
a salt worker bends to pick up a brick

of salt, as once a Mahatma scooped a crust
on the beach to defy his lords. You think
you hear, in this floating chessboard of salt clouds,
a call—bids him, "*Hail, the Deliverer!*"

FOURTH OF JULY, A PUBLIC EXECUTION, MANILA, 1895

They peer from their hats, their parasols, jostle
on the streets, on housetops. Scramble on buckled
bamboo poles for a view. They chat on tiers
of fences packed shoulder to shoulder that feet
have nowhere to go, limbs nowhere to move,

arms to arms, head to head—every impulse
 passed from body to body, all differences
 become irrelevant. A watchful god
 over his watchful crowd, an assembly
 of believers bearing witness in the gritty
 dawn, awaiting to discharge itself of evil.
 Over the converging crowd crystals, through
 the regiment of drummers, the rhythm spreads
 of steps added to advancing steps, and priests

in their ascribed canonicals unfurl
 the Church banners embroidered in black and gold.
 And drawing unto their breath like bread, Christ's
 holy words—two natives—young men crouching
 in the corner of an open cart, grasping
 for once, for the last time their life in the full
 context of the physical, and beyond,
 and growing smaller with each measured step
 to the center, the same steps they once so proudly
 climbed. And the sun rose, the metal noose is fitted
 on the first, and the crank turned, breaking his
 vertebrae. The crowd held its freedom to breathe,
 as though allowing for the infinite
 dilution of the suddenness of death,

the violence of grief, until he broke
 this communion with a singular opposing
 gesture—the twitch of his naked feet. A priest
 raises his crucifix, a doctor waits
 in the gallows, the Chinaman's meat buns
 mingle with the steam of death in the air.
 Carriages roll in, children nibble
 their fresh-baked breads. From the still cowering
 eyes of the lone man in the cart, he cannot
 decide, even as a luminous expanse
 begins to enter him, or a moment
 is made clearer, intimate before him,
 whether the cry of "Hats off" from the crowd
 resembles for him the sorrowful lament

of the assembled choir of the blessed—
 or the salutary ribaldry of
 spectators prolonging their ritual play
 of terror on a mouse before it is devoured.

Rhodora Penaranda's poems have appeared in *Cutthroat: Journal of the Arts*, *Westerly Magazine*, *The Penwood Review*, and *Diverse Voices Quarterly* among others. Rhodora is presently at work on a libretto in collaboration with music composer Bayani Mendoza de Leon. She lives in the Hudson Valley in New York.

In Memoriam

Jacklyn Wayne Potter

October 19, 1943 – April 10, 2006



What I don't like about poems
is the voice, full of feathers and light
pretending to know
what it does not know.

(from "To The Neurosurgeon" by Jacklyn Potter)

For those of us who make our home here in the Washington, D.C., literary community, it is disorienting to realize, in this spring of 2010, that our beloved friend, Jacklyn Potter—poet, teacher, dynamo, nurturer of poets young and old, dramatic presence in our lives—died suddenly four years ago.

Jacklyn was well known in Washington as, among many other things, the director of the Miller Cabin Poetry Series held each week in June and July—at the cabin Joaquin Miller built for himself in 1883—in Rock Creek Park, from 1984 until her death. She feted the poets with appreciative and memorable introductions and a reception at her nearby home on Kennedy Street, NW, just off 16th Street. In her introduction to the anthology she edited with Dwaine Rieves and Gary Stein, *Cabin Fever: Poets at Joaquin Miller's Cabin, 1984-2001*, she described the scene:

Reading poetry under the stars, in the woods, has called for certain arrangements. Necessary gear includes water for the poets, insect repellent for all, a portable table for materials, and plenty of series flyers (designed by Janice Olson). For audience seating we created a small amphitheatre [after the series outgrew the cabin itself], with the essential help of audience muscle-power, lugging several large picnic tables and locating them in a rough semicircle next to the Cabin. They faced tall trees, Rock Creek and the poets. For reserved seats, audience members would need to bring their own folding chairs or picnic blankets.

She closed in typical fashion:

May the poetry in this anthology give you peace and pleasure. If you've been to Joaquin Miller's Cabin to hear the poets, may the memories return. Join the poets now, under the stars. It's the right place! It's the right time!

Toujours le mot,

Jacklyn W. Potter
Director

The poet Peter Klappert remembered the readings this way:

For more than a quarter century, poetry readings at the Miller Cabin have been a joyous way to spend a summer evening, capped by a celebration (read: party) at Jacklyn Potter's home. Jacklyn and her co-editors have captured—but not contained!—that eclectic energy in a lively gathering of poets. This is the kind of cabin fever that makes you want to stay home and read poems, the kind of fever that sends you down to Joaquin Miller's cabin to hear poetry take to the air.

I met Jacklyn around 1999 at an American University MFA alumni reading where, in my metaphorical book, she stole the show with her fish poems. My first impression was of an impossibly cute, little big woman—who, if on tiptoe, might have reached five feet—with an incongruously, and charmingly, husky voice. Jacklyn was all energy and commitment. Animated by a life force of gargantuan proportions, she knew her own mind, her opinions many and vigorously expressed. She was, at the same time, generous in her appreciation of others. I well remember conversations with her about this poet or that poem and her emphatic and melodious rejoinder to opinions she found congenial: "I agree!"

Jacklyn was an original, a star. She'd been brought up that way, as her father ferried her, when a small girl, from stage to auditorium to TV or radio studio, where she would sing into a lowered microphone, then accept the crowd's acclaim. Like Shirley Temple, at least for a time, she thought this was the way all little girls spent their days. A few of her poems arise from that experience:

STAR

You said *sing*, Daddy.
And I sang with melodies
lilting through my baby
shoelaces; down into my eyes
fell the starlight of yours.
And my proud heart filled
your repertoire.

Let's hear some songs,
you said, for Red Cross
war veterans and heroes and
the Chamber of Commerce. My braids
glistened and my hands
tossed kisses to hundreds of hands
clattering praise.

You said *sing*, Daddy,
and school days ended early
with a microphone
in my hand. My smile
and the bow in my hair
were on the air.

Perfect and best
I sang and heard
your banjo ring.

You said *sing*.
Read through these watermarks.
Your starlight falls from my eyes.
Can you hear this scratching on the page?

Daddy, I am singing.

AFTER THE CLOSING SHOW

In the lobby
people kept their distance
watching you with awe

Off stage you're even more
present but who wants you real

They didn't dare approach you
and left you standing
in impenetrable space

Now I see you
white and scarred
like the ghost of a hare

with your face so frightened
with your hands so naked
and raw

Some years ago, Jacklyn was diagnosed with an "inoperable" brain tumor. She battled the symptoms and the judgment that nothing could be done, found a skilled and willing surgeon, underwent three surgeries, lost of much of her sight, suffered a series of setbacks, but never stopped enlivening the many who loved her or living herself or writing, including a poem for her neurosurgeon:

TO THE NEUROSURGEON

for A.K. Ommaya

What I don't like about poems
is the voice, full of feathers and light
pretending to know
what it does not know.

My voice comes now
to your hand.
You tell me you know more
about me than I think.

Soon you'll touch
what I can't see. Silent,
it grows and hangs
beneath the lobes

at the inner crossroads
of my eyes. Have you seen
a blur of birds, thrilled
by their progress to the wire?

With startled landings
they seek a balanced air.
They bend and flap and turn their heads
until they can hold
still enough to see
still enough to fly.

PERMANENT VISION

for Marchant

This year, before the lightning
of the fly sparked the trees,

before the night train
crawled across these eyes

with its headlights
scattered through the heavens

and on earth, black leaves
filled our kaleidoscopic garden;

before the air turned into this ball of fire,
I remember you held this elbow
(birdsong riddled the sky)

and you steadied my waist
(I had already turned and broken
the soil for seed).

You cut the plastic name
from my wrist. And lifted me

oh softly
into the foaming water
to wash me clean.

More poems by Jacklyn Potter:

JOB DESCRIPTION

Work. Smooth
your amber hair
across your ear.

Work. Smooth
your painted nails
over IBM keys.

Smooth your eyes
over a man and his
work.

Disguise your flesh,
but not too well.

Smooth the nerves
of the man whose coat
you hang and let
your skin speak enough.

He calls then
for coffee, he dictates
your work.

His thighs unclench
on soft leather.

a smaller smile than yours.

He has a wife
who later smiles at him,
a smaller smile than yours.

A WOMAN'S CHOICE

The black coat. *It's the key to fashion.*
She wants it. The one with the collar
that won't quit, the mid-calf, pure wool
black coat—the limit, the essence,
half-price, the black coat. She wants it.

She tries it: the perfect coat.
She is particular, precise,
she is the woman in the black coat.
See her lie in iridescent foam!
Soft wool rides the waves.

But now she gives it
back to the rack.

As she watches the boats
that go for clams and scallops,
the wind slaps her,
the wind that wears kid gloves.
She has consumed
many heads of lettuce,
she has picked
at many bones of fish.

Each day she repeats
a thousand motions,
she gathers her heart and body
at last, home, at peace
with her solitary choosing.
The seagulls wing before her window screen.
She wears her skin alone to bed.

HOSTAGE

I remember my mother's hair rolled in rags
as she slipped from room to room
her right arm crooked before her.
Sometimes she carried a rattling
glass of iced tea and a feather duster.
Her face had already found
the habit of searching corners warily
for what she'd lost.

My home was World War II temporary quarters.
The first roads I traveled
were grit dull, tight and steamy, not
like the colored veins of the road map
beside me now in the passenger seat.
I will not be like her.

But I sleep in wadded, sweaty
sheets. My dog near me,
I let him fill the bed with burrs
and dog hair. In the morning,
the road fills with honeysuckle mist
curling through loblolly pines.

For my mother, a dream for herself
was forbidden. She did not find
this out. She ironed dresses
for my song-and-dance routine
as soldiers practiced maneuvers
out back in the Belvoir Woods.
She tied bows around my French braids
and taught me to say "sophisticated"
while the troops marched by
singing and shouting *Sound off!*

MR. OZ

The man she would marry
sat on a rock and smiled
at the sea in particular.

He told her he like her red shoes.
"Very nice shoes . . . a little bit wild . . ."
Then he shifted his view.

The breeze lifted strands
of his coal-dark hair
in an indulgent, lover-like way.

He looked down and touched the rock
he was sitting on
as if each crevice was his bride.

The waves rolled in.
"This is an empty rock," he said
and he smiled.

RETURN TO THE GALLERY

(to Mary Cassatt's "Child in the Straw Hat")

For seven years I wandered
through a planetary bower.
The straw brim of your hat
circling toward me
brought me home.

Here in the city of winter flowers
your breath, rich as pomegranate seeds,
hardens into pigment.

I cannot speak. You cannot see.
A blind man's cane strikes the years
in sidewalk cracks beside the avenue.

SALT BLOCK

Mother I speak in your shadow
I see your glare beneath a wet cobweb of lashes.
I watch your tears turn in the circles
of your swollen eyes.

I am arched,
my body, string and bow
launching good will your way.

You despair in it.
Good will rots your martyrdom.

I come to cut the chains you've made
and watch them crumble
at my least touch.

You remain locked in.
Mother, you make death
play overtime.

I call you, more than once,
mother, salt of the earth;
I know the brine of your kiss.
That shrug of lost hope toward me
pushes me away.

I am the good daughter,
giver of gifts, giver of every conceivable jewel:
rubies, emeralds, pearls of touches
silver smiles, rings of arms
endlessly slipping around you
holding you from yourself.

Mother, I speak in the shadow
of your tongue. With your silence of words
I spin an empty web.

Some day
I will put you carefully away
in the box and I will strike
Pandora's name
from its lid.

SO LONG

after Else Lasker-Schuler

You never come with the morning—
it's your time of day.
I sit with my pillow of stars.

Among the tea roses, there is no more
tea in their luscious cups.

I color your sky with my red pen's
heart, remembering your words.

There is a knocking at my door—
It is my own heart

among the fronds. The terrible glow
of roses burns out in the sky's grey.

You never come with the morning—
I do not hear your footstep.
Oh, those golden earrings.

TWO VIEWPOINTS "POST BALZAC" 1991, JUDITH SHEA

1

The coat was to greet
you, not hanging so much as standing
in the garden's stone vestibule.
It is impervious to sleet,
rain, morning dew. Balzac missing,
the regal coat stands for
immortality, or the illusion.

2

It's empty you say, a notched lapel,
collar up, braced for a modern cold century.
Time is crossed with a double X
at the sculpture's base. It's ready
for the dissonance of Gustav Mahler's
second symphony. The bronze, a chilly
structure, that can't outplay the Dictator's brass.

1

Ah! Under Rodin's hands, the monumental robe
hid Balzac's potbelly. Shea's coat
covers nothing, unsentimental as a tour
of Auschwitz. It's too large for Columbo.
But it stands, holding its own space.
It waits to hold the artist larger than time.

THE GIFT

He arrived at evening with pink gladioli.
Stems clustered in his hand,
the stalks curved upward
a bright cobra spreading
through his atmosphere.

She brought the bouquet
to her lips in its fullness,
then touched his wrist. At her window
a long blade of oak
tapped its way to barrenness.
At dawn, new petals

thin as tissue paper
raise their blossoms.
From a porcelain vase
they strike the air.

THE OLD BORDERS

Mouth near another mouth
In a miscellaneous universe;

Of all the spark plugs, wing nuts, star bolts!
One mouth closing in upon another,

Not merely for one tongue
To touch another here are

Two mouths in vast territory
Each moving toward a closed space opening,

As hungry as a prayer for the dying,
Mouths with ears filtering soft-spoken demands,

Trying not to hear parting
Sighs, tentative farewells, endings,

Broken vows, violated treaties, bombed truces,
The huge despair of nations
One rosy lip against another
A whisper for defense.

Jacklyn Potter's poetry and translations appeared in *The Hollins Critic*, *The MacGuffin*, *Poets On*, *Plainsong*, *Poet Lore*, *The Washington Review*, *Stone Country*, and *Jazz a Go-Go* (Warsaw, Poland). Her work was anthologized in *Weavings 2000*, *Maryland Millennial Anthology*; *Hungry as We Are: An Anthology of Washington Area Poets* (Washington Writers' Publishing House); *Quiet Music: A Plainsong Reader's Anthology*; *If I Had My Life to Live Over, I'd Pick More Daisies*, *If I Had a Hammer: Women's Work in Poetry, Fiction and Photographs* (Papier-Mache Press); the *WPFW-FM Anthology* (Bunny and Crocodile Press); and in *The Stones Remember*, *Native Israeli Poetry* (The Word Works). She was lead editor of *Cabin Fever: Poets at Joaquin Miller's Cabin, 1984-2001* (The Word Works, 2003). In 1994, *Delos*, a journal of translations, featured her interview with Richard Harteis and William Meredith. In 1994-95, *District Lines* included her Spanish translations in a children's literary poster series on Washington Metro

buses. Journey Proud: *Southern Women's Writings* (Carolina Wren Press) included her chapter about living on the Virginia Eastern Shore. For 22 years, she directed the Joaquin Miller Cabin Poetry Series, readings under the stars in Rock Creek Park. She received several fellowships from the D.C. Commission on the Arts. As a child, she performed as a singer on radio, television, and stage.

Oliver Rice

EXCEPTING TIME AND SPACE

In the park behind the library
it is a pleasant afternoon.
Winona and her new friend Harmon,
a junior, on the debate team,
have taken a bench out of the sun.

Each has a pad and pencil.
They are drafting a postulation.
A proclamation. A manifesto.

It is true, they have concurred so far,
true that other premises may be true,
but it is tenable that all things,
all events or circumstances,
existing or conceivable,
excepting time and space,
issue from the primal matter;

tenable, as well, that each of the elements
is invested with traits that are invariable
and with a purpose and a will that are unrelenting,
including potentials for interaction with other elements;

and tenable, therefore, that the periodic table
is profoundly, absolutely amoral.

They gaze, now, upon the habitat,
awaiting implication.

APPARATUS

It is a thing of mysteries.

A thing of accretion.

Of signs and schematics,
lists and categories.

Of wedges and levers,
chisels and measures and cogs.

*

One day in 1933
Paul Klee returned to Bern,
bearing the proposition that his truth
lay hidden at the bottom of things.
Or in a dream.

One day in that year
John Cheever woke at Yaddo,
feeling at the bottom of something.

*

This must not be absurd.

Oliver Rice's poems have appeared widely in journals and anthologies in the United States, as well as Canada, Argentina, England, The Netherlands, Austria, Turkey, and India. His book of Poems, *On Consenting to be a Man*, is offered by Cyberwit, a diversified publishing house in the cultural capital Allahabad, India, and is available on Amazon. He was recently featured in *Best of the Literary Journals*. Go to escene.webdelsol.com.

Elisavietta Ritchie

ENOUGH WORDS IN THE AIR

You up and died, damn it, when we were in full
swing, floated aloft in our communiqués
through the stratosphere every day —

No need to *speak*, we could *hear* the tones
of each other's ephemeral words
on the invisible page.

Like kites, we wafted over our other selves, bound
to still other selves on the earth, worlds
that kept reeling us back.

How to exit in style? Death was near, you knew.
No illusions of permanence then, enough
of our words in ink and in print.

We ghost-spoke till the end, a fortnight beyond
the joke the day you discovered somebody had
already filled in the hospital blank: *deceased*.

Was it fitting they burned you?
You spewed your gray and white flakes
like shreds of ripped drafts into the wind.

They stuffed your leftover cinders into a jar,
sealed this in a vault with a solid brass plaque.
As if you could not escape into me.

DARK CHOCOLATE

How one bite
 of chocolate
 leads to the next . . .

That should be rather
the final couplet
of a list of adventures

from the first awkward graze
in the movie-house dark

or a borrowed car
or dim grove
(slapping mosquitoes)

to the full bit in a motel
cheap by the hour
(where Housekeeping forgot
the sliver of soap
in its give-away wrapper)

or the Waldorf-Astoria
(how could you pass up
those mint chocolates
on the pillows)

wherever, whenever, however, why
are no longer germane

but again
 one bite of chocolate . . .

Elisavietta Ritchie's 15 books include *Real Toads*; *Awaiting Permission to Land*; *Spirit of the Walrus*; *Arc of the Storm*; *Elegy for the Other Woman*; *Tightening The Circle Over Eel Country*; *Raking The Snow*; *In Haste I Write You This Note*; *Flying Time*. A new collection will be out from Cherry Grove Collections in 2011. Editor, *The Dolphin's Arc: Endangered Creatures of the Sea*, and others; her work is widely published, translated, and anthologized. Ex-president for poetry, then fiction, Washington Writers' Publishing House.

A.L. Rodenberg

9:10 TO GLASGOW

Perched like daggers
thrown at a wall,
precarious, brittle
with a beauty
that breaks,
Scottish birds fly
on black wings
honed and polished
to an inorganic
shine, sharp
silhouettes pinned
to a grey sky.

FLOOR CRAFT

Charming is in the library,
fingering the artifacts of our first dance,
the remains of the night

I sawed my toes off one by one
for a shoe that did not fit.
He'll be down soon enough;

I think tonight it will be phalanges
run one by one through the fine hairs
at the nape of my neck.

Or just as likely, his left capitates
will break the skin of the cheekbone
he once versed by sonnet and song.

I have learned the use of each bone,
even after tendons powder and fall away.
I have learned to dance crippled,

to turn my unbalanced box-step photogenic.
While I have the time,
I inscribe figure-eights in my red dress.

I waltz Miles Davis across acres
of concrete ballroom.
The mop keeps perfect frame.

THE REPTILE

There is an alligator in my eye.
You are at your most honest at
my breast. I am at my coldest.
I love the third.

There is an alligator in my eye.
It flinches, considers you with ice
in its veins, waits with razors
in its teeth. You stand behind
me so you can't see it and it
can't see you. But you know.
I know. We all know.

You are at your most honest
at my breast. I tell my best lies
there: if this is a transaction
I can live with it. If this is good
bye, I will miss you. Really.

I will not say what is true.
I love the third, the phantom
the ghost that haunts my bed.

LYRA

When the windows shattered,
I did not mind. After the dust and the sulfur,
I could finally breathe again.

When the electricity was extinguished,
I was relieved. I went to the roof and found
my namesake constellation.

When the bomb took down my wall,
I wept in gratitude: it made a door
where there had been none.

The newspapers named the dead.
There, in print, they promised:
it would all be done tomorrow.

When the enemy took my son,
I went into the street and found another,
a better son with a mouth as wide

and empty as a baby bird's.
And when the bombs silenced
and the screaming stopped,

I broke apart like a dropped vessel:
I had waited too long
to be counted among the survivors.

A.L.Rodenberg is a writer working in both poetry and fiction. She graduated with a MA in Creative Writing from the University of Lancaster. Ms. Rodenberg was first published 2006 with “Apocrypha,” a poem published in *Smiths Knoll*, and will be included in an upcoming collaboration of poetry and art at the Tate Museum in London. Her most recent adventures in prose include completing National Novel Writing Month and a digital fiction work-in-progress located at <http://sites.google.com/site/shorehwy/apartment>. Ms. Rodenberg lives in a suburb of Washington, D.C.

Marybeth Rua-Larsen

FROST

They gave her Valium to slow his leaving
and like September's timid frost, they said
it was to ease the tight strings of her grieving—

not bear her loss or stop her from day-dreaming
he'd come around, prepare her tulip bed.
They gave her Valium to slow his leaving

and she considered it, to calm her breathing
while she buried bulbs, all they'd left unsaid
would ease the tight strings of her grieving

until the thought occurred, it would be pleasing
to eat the sugar corn he'd hoarded. Instead,
they gave her Valium to slow his leaving

and she smiled, purged his garlic while conceiving
ways to build her long-denied garden shed
and ease the tight strings of her grieving.

She eyed his kale, won't emulate his cheating
sweetness by denying frost. Yes . . . he's dead.
They gave her Valium to slow his leaving,
but she had eased the tight strings of her grieving.

SWEPT

The obligatory conversation twice
a week: *the kids are fine, their grades are good,*
the plumber's here, but she misunderstood
because her hearing aid was off. You slice
through crumbs and sweep, in your bare feet, then run
them out the kitchen door: Two birds, one stone;
you'll finish *something* while you're on the phone—
something mindless, something needing done.

The arguments were old, like grapes they'd rolled
beneath the stove and out of reach. You stepped
around the sticky spots. You softly beat
the rugs. You missed the cheddar, gray with mold,

and almost dropped the telephone. You swept,
she died. Now you wear slippers on your feet.

A BRIEF NEW ENGLAND HISTORY OF DESKS AND VIEWS

When her father, Bronson, built Louisa May
a desk between two windows in her room,
she faced the wall to write, then blazed away
to force those hot-house Marches into bloom.

And Hawthorne, who would rather stand than sit,
designed a tower room at Wayside. Enthused
but bothered by its bleakness, he couldn't commit
to work; the standing desk was seldom used.

Then Emily: she couldn't have kept a lamp
and both her elbows on her desk and write.
When funerals passed in view, she would decamp
and seal her hymns in drawers, buried from sight.

A stream of tractor-trailers screens my view.
The ironing-board-as-desk makes its debut.

Marybeth Rua-Larsen lives, teaches and writes on the South Coast of Massachusetts. Her poems have appeared in *Measure*, *The Raintown Review*, *The Barefoot Muse* and *Two Review*, among others.

Tania Runyan

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Amish schoolhouse shooting, Nickel Mines, PA

I didn't trust their forgiveness.

Before the blood cooled on the schoolhouse floor
they held the killer's widow in their arms,

raised money for his children,
lined his grave site with a row of patient horses.

Somewhere in town there had to be a father
splitting a trunk and imagining the crush

of the murderer's skull. There had to be a mother
hurling a Bible at the wall that received her prayers.

Or is it just the flash and noise of my own life
that primes me for anger? Does scrolling

through playlists in traffic fill the spaces
in my mind reserved for grace?

Forgiveness requires imagination.
Eye for an eye is efficient.

For the man brought chains.
He brought wires, eyehooks and boards.

He brought a bag of candles and lubricant
and secured little girls with plastic ties.

Two sisters begged to be shot first
to spare the others.

He shot them first. Then the rest.
One child with twenty-four bullets.

Perhaps they know something I don't,
something to do with the morning rising

over an open field. The fathers receive
the meadowlark, the swallowtail,

the good corn rising into the fog.
The mothers ride their carriages into town,

accepting the rumbles of the stony road,
tripping into the rough hands of God.

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN

Blessed are you, woman,
doubled over in the bathroom stall
awaiting your miscarried child.

Blessed are you, weeping
constellations of all-night vigils
on the shot-up university campus.

Blessed are you, soldier,
rubbing the phantom
of your amputated leg,

and you, small boy, huddled
in the closet with a handprint
on your face—bless you.

Bless the vice in your stomach,
your throat stripped raw from crying,
the shoes you fling across the room.

Bless the rain you curse for falling
so easily outside your window, the chair
you collapse in after a night of pacing the halls.

Bless the food you cannot eat,
the hair you cannot wash,
the God you cannot pray to.

Bless you who want to forget
it ever happened but feel the grave
rising to asphyxiate your heart.

Bless you who want to dive
into the grave and feel nothing
but the simple weight of the earth.

Blessed are you who damn
these words, who send them to hell
with your sorrows.

Blessed, yes, even you.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

She is all we learn to forget,
this woman approaching
the edge of the health club pool.

She wears her hair
like laundry lint. Faded Lycra
toucans and orchids

sag beneath her nipples.
I imagine her going home
to dump a can of Campbell's

in a casserole while her husband
barks orders from the football chair.
She moves through the house

without consequence,
straightening an old lighthouse
cross stitch in the hallway,

rifling through coupons
for half-price dinners
and oil changes. But this morning,

she is here. Her eyes take in
the narrow lane of water
as if it were the river

of an ancient civilization
and she plans to wrap her arms
and legs around time itself.

She twists at the waist,
stretches her mottled fingers
to the rising dough of her feet.

She catches my stare
for a moment, arches her brows
and dives,
 gliding and breathing,
 gliding and breathing.

SARAH CONSIDERS THE STARS

He took [Abraham] outside and said, 'Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.—Genesis 15:5

After Abraham fell asleep,
she pulled her cloak

around her shoulders
and walked out to stare

at the night. Stars collected
in the crevices of mountains.

They spilled into the oak groves
and clung to the branches.

And when she spread her hands
to the sky, they rested in the sags

of flesh between her fingers.
The world is dripping with stars,

she thought, and still not one
belongs to me. She considered

hating them. She considered
wishing a heavenly storm

to drown them. But she only
murmured, I am through

and walked off, holding
a sudden sharpness in her side,

as if a star had dislodged
there, and turning and scraping

and shining its path, settled
into the bare sky of her body.

Tania Runyan's poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *Indiana Review*, *The Christian Century*, *Willow Springs*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *A Fine Frenzy: Poets Respond to Shakespeare*. Her chapbook, *Delicious Air*, was awarded the 2007 Book of the Year Citation by the Conference on Christianity and Literature. Her first full-length collection of poetry will be published by WordFarm in 2011. When not writing, Tania spends her days tutoring high school students, playing various instruments, and chasing three kids around the house. Find Tania online at www.TaniaRunyan.com.

David Salner

1968: THE DIGGERS PLACE

San Francisco, the summer of love,
and I wander the streets, searching for some,
and a place to crash. The wind off the bay
has been beating me all afternoon, all night,

a chilly fog. I enter a soup kitchen,
order beans. People younger than me
troop past, smelling of musk and dope,
talking about the towns they left last week,

Milwaukee or Baltimore, and the good vibes
here, always the good vibes here, while I
shiver despite the air full of steam and grease—
and the shoulders of a big guy with tattoos

and shoulder-length hair, who squeezes in next to me.
"You ought to try the Diggers Place," he says,
"If you need a place to crash." So I go
to the three-story house, where they tell me,

"Sleep anywhere you can find, except
the couple's room." The hallways are dark
and packed with people who don't wake up
even when stepped on. I fall through a door

and I'm in the couple's room. A few feet away,
under a pink light bulb, a woman's back
arches—the walls seem to grind and convulse.
They ought to lock the couple's door, I think.

I give up on sleep, find a playground outside,
and sit on a Jungle Jim. The dew on the steel
soaks through my jeans. I light my last smoke,
sniff the bouquet of tars on my index finger,

watch the tile roofs darken as dawn
transfixes each gable in a coral light,
a jumbled perspective. Where will it end?
Where will I sleep tonight? The future drops off

into mystical space; I vanish,
can't see the decision I'm going to make,
or the years of hard work I'll gladly put in
in towns like Hibbing, Guadalupe, Nitro.

More recently, my daughter holds up
a stringer of blue fish and grins for me
and the camera, while the head boat
rocks underfoot, spray cold on my face.

But during the summer of love, I didn't
know where I'd find my next smoke, let alone
a future like this—and how easy it was
to arrive here. I had survived my past.

ON A PHOTO OF BABE AND LOU

It has that 1930s look,
and they look like men of that time—
no more famous than I am.

Except for the baseball jerseys,
they could be two harvest hands
who wandered into a tavern

after tossing square bales in the sun.
The shade and the overhead fan
are good things to these men—

elbows resting on the bar, chaff
in their eyes, chaff in their hair.
"I might follow the harvest south

to Texas or California," Lou says.
The two men shake their heads
and exchange oblique grins.

"Hell of a life," Babe adds,
crows feet showing through his tan.
Lou places a dime on the bar.

One more beer for Babe and Lou
and then they're gone.

MY FIRST SLAUGHTERING

Early winter—I'd gotten the day off school
to go to Dean Bentzel's farm
for my first slaughtering. It would be
educational, said Mr. Hamm, my fifth grade teacher.

I got up early—sniffed the low-hanging clouds.
"Warm for winter," I thought, and shook my head,
"no," as Mom held my bulky coat up. Then we drove
in the green station wagon, passing fields

that were x-s to me—ex-corn, ex-wheat,
tilled stubble, all gray and brown. They were
too rough for hard-hit grounders—and if
you ran deep for a pass, a pheasant squawked up.

She dropped me off as the winter sun
parched the last of the mist, chilling everything
in its blue-bright spell. No one warned me
there'd be so much standing around, or I would've

dressed warmer. But there were important things
to watch for—like Dean's dad and Mr. Zumbaugh,
arranging the chains on a giant brace,
which looked like it should've been on a playground,

holding up swings. They pushed it, on wheels,
to the barn and hooked tackle and chains
to the apex, high in the frozen air. Meanwhile,
Mrs. Bentzel worked in the kitchen,

with women from nearby farms. They were
where I wanted to be, where the air smelled of bread.
I was freezing outside with the men—
who loaded and sharpened—when the women

burst from the kitchen and marched to the barn—
each bearing a tub of steel, heated
and wrapped in a towel. A curtain of steam
rose in front of the steer—and I heard

a clink as they placed the tubs
on the frozen ground, then a crack!—
as if those farm-women had broken
the earth wide open. The steer slipped,

like he was on ice. Dean's father
let out the rope on his neck, and Mr. Zumbaugh
lowered the gun. It was over—I'd seen
the stunned look on the face—and how small

the red hole was. I asked Dean if we could
get warm, but he pointed at his father,
who hoisted the steer by the feet
from the quivering chain, strung like a harp

in the frozen air, and Mr. Zumbaugh
sliced the neck and jumped back
as the steer came to life for a sickening moment
and a stream of red poured out and steamed

in the cold, while the men danced with their tools,
and I slid to the ground and got sick,
which no one noticed, because of how hard
they all worked — except Dean,

who led me into the barn. "Some kids
throw up the first time. You can rest here—
I need to go back—we've got two more
Holsteins to do." I shook my head, "no,

I'm okay," wiped my mouth on some straw,
and we found a corner to pee in (which Mr. Bentzel
told us never to do in the barn) and went back.
The afternoon passed as the men

shot and sawed, the women carried off tubs,
and fluid of different colors ran out. About four,
Mrs. Bentzel called us for apple pie. "It takes
some getting used to," she said. Our eyes met.

"We'll have an old guernsey next month—
tell Mr. Hamm, if you want the day off."

David Salner worked as an iron ore miner, steelworker, and machinist for 25 years. His fourth collection of poetry, *John Henry's Partner Speaks*, appeared last spring. His work appears in recent or forthcoming issues of *The Iowa Review*, *Isotope*, and *Southern Humanities Review*. His first published short fiction was nominated for this year's Pushcart Prize. He has been awarded

grants from the Maryland State Arts Council and the Puffin Foundation and is currently working on a novel about the lives of hard-rock miners in the Old West.

E.M. Schorb

CAPITULATION

Be near me now; Time's weakened me; be
near me now; let me have my way once more.
Forgive, forget; you must remember me

now in my need. Come in the door,
sit down, relax, and let us talk
of all the silence listened for

these many years. I walk
alone in here and putter
weakly. I'm white as chalk.

Perhaps, I mutter,
in truth, it's I,
who cannot utter

a cry,
may sigh

E.M. Schorb's work has appeared in *The American Scholar*, *The Formalist*, *The Dark Horse*, *The Southern Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Yale Review*, *The Chicago Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *Stand and Agenda* in England, among others. His collection of poems, *Time and Fevers* won the latest "Writer's Digest" Award for Self-Published Books in Poetry and received an Eric Hoffer Award for Excellence in Independent Publishing. Another collection, *Murderer's Day*, was awarded the Verna Emery Poetry Prize and published by Purdue University Press.

Lynda Self

CRAPE MYRTLES ON SPRING STREET

The mark of Southern summers whose heat swells
the hard green kernels, draws from them
their cones of color. The blooms themselves frivolous—
the tiny petals no more than ruffled bits of tissue
staining car hoods and sidewalks after summer rain.

It is July as I cross from Main onto Spring Street
where the trees once more have burst into a gaudy pink.
Memory somersaults to childhood. Summer not interim
but stasis—months seemingly passed on the front steps,
caught in an illusion of rescue. Days whose sole intensity
converged in blooms alive with girlish fancy. The twinge
now in my chest, the longing for redress for the child
I once was—always too hopeful, too willing to wait
on the front steps of a street where no traffic ever passed.

For three years now, the one we planted here has reneged,
withheld from us the favor of its flowers—their color just a memory,
a plastic ribbon tied to a limb. Altitude, perhaps. The winters
too cold, sabotaging the first bout of spring with onslaughts
of snow. Or phosphate, inadequate in this mountain soil.

This fall, when its leaves turn the colors of citrus fruit, I will
kneel at its base and scratch a girdle round its roots. There
I will blend bone meal with gritty dirt. Come June, I will wait
like the child on the front steps in expectation of its bloom.

SEPTEMBER MELANCHOLY

"Maybe it was just the usual September melancholy,
made unfamiliar by circumstances. . . ."
—John Banville, *The Book of Evidence*

I wait for those chill days highlighted by the sun's indifference,
wasting leaves mingled with pine straw,
the redolence of decay in soil upturned for planting—
not these rainsoaked days, grass rangy with neglect,
blooms of coneflowers and zinnas asag from heavy water.

I see myself suffused with autumn's grace.
Face flushed with exertion, each day granted purpose
by a calendar now adrift in time. Even idleness
somehow hallowed—the pleasure of late sleep enriched
by coffee on the deck and the cool air against my face.

Meanwhile, I sit inside, a book lying idle in my lap,
and listen to the rush of rain on the leaves. At times
I rise from the chair beside the window, force myself
to walk the dogs even though it's wet. Tomorrow perhaps
if the sun dries out the water on the deck, I will sit
outside and watch the last of the hummingbirds, the whirr
of their wings obscuring the lethargy of the day.

Retired after a career of teaching high school and college in Norfolk, Virginia, Lynda Self now resides in the mountains of Western North Carolina. Her poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The New England Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *The Threepenny Review*, and *Innisfree Poetry Journal*. Recent poems will appear in forthcoming issues of *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Confrontation*, and *North Carolina Literary Review*.

Janice D. Soderling

1954

Oh, Lenny of the slick ducktail and low-slung levis.
Crumpled cigs in the sleeve of your T-shirt.
Oh, Lenny of the red convertible and ice-blue eyes.
French kisser, unhooker of bras.
Where are you now?

And Peg of much bosom and home-permy hairdo.
Crumpled wet Kleenex in a weeping pocket.
Oh, Peg of high aspirations and tugged-up green skirt.
Queen attendant, slow at math and jokes,
Where are you now?

Oh, Lenny, famed for hook shots and wham-bamming dunks.
Cruiser of Main Street, begetter of children.
And Peg of strapless gown and plastic sandals fame.
Crinolines, cinch belt, loosened knees.
Where, oh, where, are you now?

Underground, both of them, deep underground
With separate heartbreak in separate graves.

NOT KNOWING

He said, looking up from the pillow, *We didn't know it would be like this*. I pulled the covers over his wasted shoulders. *Me here. You here. We didn't know*. I hesitated, evasive as our mother ever was. He stared at the ceiling and repeated, *We didn't know*.

**

Not knowing what was on the other side of the hill, we waited, prone in the tall grass. Not knowing if the bad guys had heard us coming, we waited and listened, exchanged silent signals. Not knowing how many they were, or how heavily armed, we sweated and gestured each other forward, belly-crawling up the sandy hill.

Our beanstick horses were tied to a sassafras down in the hollow. We each had a pistol loaded with a new roll of caps. We each had a cowboy hat. We each had a badge, but he was the deputy, because I was oldest.

At the top of the hill, we stood up and yelled, *Drop them guns, you good-fer-nothin' varmints. You're headed for the hoosegow.* One of the sidewinders tried to draw, but a quick bullet knocked the gun out of his hand. *Good shootin', pardner,* I told my trusty sidekick. He squinted his eyes like Roy Rogers, waved a hand at the cowardly outlaws, said, *Let's tie 'em up and git goin'.*

**

Not knowing what was around the river bend, he waded in water up to his knees. Not knowing if they had made noise or if there was anyone to hear it, he waved a silent signal to the men coming up behind him. Not knowing how many were hidden in front of them, or how heavily armed, they moved forward.

The day before, he'd picked up three replacements, one young grunt was from his hometown. Driving back along the jungle road, they talked. As the boy stepped out of the jeep, one foot already on the ground; something went in one side of the kid's head and out the other.

Now the other two waded behind him. They were nineteen, older than he was when he enlisted. It was their first mission. It was his third tour of duty in Vietnam.

He came home full of chemicals, but did not know it. Death gnawed slowly on his bullet-scarred body, taking first his locomotion, then his speech, finally, mercifully, his mind.

**

Not knowing, we unsaddled our beansticks and put them in the corral. Not knowing, we walked home across the outfields, laughing and walking tall, our shiny badges gleaming in the sunlight. Not knowing, we walked toward the future.

Janice D. Soderling is a former contributor to *Innisfree*. Her current and scheduled work appears in *The Pedestal*, *Blue Unicorn*, *New Verse News*, *Soundzine*, *Concise Delight*, *Literary Mama*, *Left Hand Waving*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *Unsplendid* (USA), *Anon*, *Lyric Poetry Magazine* (Scotland), *The Centrifugal Eye* (Canada) *Horizon Review*, *Borealis* (England), *The Flea*, *The Chimaera* (Australia), and the recently released *Best of Our Stories* anthology. Her poetry was nominated by the Australia-based *Shit Creek Review* in 2009 for *Dzanc Best of the Web*, *Sundance Best of the Net*, and *Pushcart*. She lives in a small Swedish village.

Jim Solomone

PRAYERS—WARD B

Friday nights, his mother
brings a priest to our room
to pray for his disordered soul,
citing scripture
that had long failed her,
the eloquent rhythm
of his medieval voice
soothes my roommate,
and for this time together,
he stops mewling—
dare I tell them that
the patient in the next room
evokes the same response
by rapping his head
against our wall

Jim Solomone's poem in this issue of *Innisfree* is from his unpublished collection titled *All this Living*. He has also written comedic fiction, one unpublished novel, *Gunning's Yaw*, and numerous short stories.

Jack Stewart

ST. ANTHONY OF THE CAVES

In a cave narrow enough
to rub shoulders with God,
St. Anthony contemplated
under the hillside at night,
imagining the grass nearly
reaching through to such little sound.
When others followed, he helped
them build their own loneliness
and taught them how to phrase
their praise of isolation. He blessed
the church they raised, but the words
for sainthood were nowhere in
the vocabulary of rain
or slow snow, and he did
not desire stained glass beyond
the afternoon light bleeding
through the autumn leaves.
And so he lived, and so he died,
and eventually the hillside
was emptied, the hollows of their faith
just ridged bumps in the earth.
I have never been there.
But some days the wind reads
to me a distant story
of devotion, the blind wind,
as it runs its fingertips
over the Braille of that grass.

Jack Stewart's work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Gettysburg Review*, *The American Literary Review*, *Nimrod*, *The Southern Humanities Review*, and other journals and anthologies, most recently in *Evansville Review* and *The Iowa Review*. From 1992 to 1995 he was a Brittain Fellow at The Georgia Institute of Technology. He lives in Fort Worth, Texas, with his wife and two daughters and teaches at Fort Worth Country Day.

John Surowiecki

**PLAYING MINIATURE GOLF WITH J.Z.
AFTER HELEN LEFT HIM FOR A MERCHANT MARINE
(A POEM IN EIGHTEEN HOLES)**

La joie venait tou jours après la piene.
—Apollinaire

And Helen answered: " ' ' ' ' ' "Love!" ' ' ' ' ' "
—John Barth

Prolegomena

It's July, 1965. I'm with J.Z., my neighbor and friend. We leave a crowded beach in New London, Connecticut, for a universe of faded indoor-outdoor carpeting and archetypes on a mostly nautical theme. Of course, J.Z. is the biggest archetype of all, the betrayed and abandoned lover. He doesn't stop bemoaning the loss of stringy-haired Helen, short-order cook, cashier and the face that launched a thousand chips. A few days later he'll learn she's in San Diego, betrayed and abandoned in turn and, worse, broke. Incidentally, this is a rundown and shabby miniature golf course, which is exactly why J.Z., his brother, S.Z. (just arrived in Vietnam), and I like it so much. Still, J.Z. and I don't linger. It's hot and there's no shade as we progress hole to hole in a journey that drops us off exactly where we began it.

1 Labyrinth

So much for love, so much for heartless Helen,
gone for good, leaving behind a cloudy mirror,
a roach clip, a dop kit filled with salves.
He met her when she worked the counter
at the Polish smokehouse; looped sausages

hung over her head like trophies.
Later, she found a job at Fish 'n Chips,
closing early to have sex with him
on the table where she had that morning
breaded the scrod and scallops.

By spring, there was no escaping her;
she charted imaginary honeymoons
from a mountain of atlases. By June,
he had lost the place where love began and reached
its end without seeing how he got there.

She wanted rings and dinners, tattoos on her pale arms:
a throbbing heart, a thorny rose, a golden apple.
She wanted young men to fight over her
along the line where the sea touches
the shadow of the walls of Troy.

2 *Wall (i)*

Let her go away in the ships
—*Iliad*, III, 159

The old men of Troy praise
her beauty and grace, the attention
she pays to those who speak to her,
the genuineness of her courtesy.
But the thing is: doom walks with her.
Let her go. Don't ask her to return.
She'll only give you grief.

3 *Wall (ii)*

O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,
Show me thy chink.
—*A Midsummer Night's Dream*

You can't go over this wall or around it:
you have to go through it: a chink
only slightly wider than it needs to be.
We try again and again, failing miserably.
Finally, J.Z. uses his club as a broom,
drags the ball to the hole
and rudely stuffs it through.

4 *Loop the Loop*

He has to stop using love as an excuse for not living,
for walking around with that stupid moony look.
He has to hit the ball with enough force to generate
the necessary centrifugal-centripetal energy; but each time
he barely taps it and each time it strikes the rusted
curlycue with a soft thunk and rolls back defeated.

5 *Mermaid*

She unmendeleevs you. In her room
she keeps vials, flasks, inks, potions,

something like an atom-smasher holding rollers.
 Her bed is an eddy of sheets, hissing from salt.
 The blue of sea kings shines through her skin.
 She is the adventuress in a sinking house,
 entertained by cheap rings and bags of pot.
 She asks for warmth against warmth
 generating new warmth and has nothing
 more to say except how warm the warmth is
 or how quiet the quiet is or how mighty
 the night wind is as it shreds the café flags.
 Sea urchins are the coins of her mistrust;
 gulls chart for her a geography of exits.

6 Turtle

It's self-contained and uses no poison;
 it's without guile or cunning
 and has only passive, defensive strength;
 it has to be convinced that it will prevail
 and when it does it continues
 on its way as if it didn't.

7 Scow Schooner

Its sails are in tatters and dyed black
 from mildew; the bowsprit hangs limply
 to one side, broken years ago
 by a sub riveter drunk on Cutty Sark;
 its kind once dredged for oysters
 and carried salt hay down the Thames.
 The ball travels up one gangplank,
 rattles around the wormy hull,
 then rolls down another; the ocean
 is a circle of cement painted blue
 with carets of turquoise: chips peel off
 and are carried away by sudden gusts.
 If the sea is a woman to a sailor no wonder
 women seem lovelier to them than they are.

8 Dinosaur

Its only flaw, really, is clumsiness: it's
 as if it had been designed for a less exacting world.
 How can it grasp with those little hands?
 how can it see with eyes tucked away into
 that yarrow head? how can it think

with the sun boiling its brains
and love boiling its blood?

9 Pirate

It must be enough to be thought of as a thief of hearts
or to have as your home every drop of liquid earth
and reduce existence to a few shades of blue;
and yet we can't see him as the son of Blood,
a scoundrel surrounding a set of dazzling teeth:
what she thinks he is can't be anything like what
he really is: a minimum-wage jamoke
with a collection of comics and a tattoo or two.
The salt air has bitten his face with unseen teeth,
his black wig has grayed, his ruffles are pitted,
his saber has long ago been shown to be the stick it is.

10 Whale

The ball enters the cathedral of its mouth,
rolls through its intestinal plumbing
and passes forty and odd vertebrae before
dropping undigested from one of three assholes.
J.Z. looks toward the graying Sound,
suddenly interested in the high-school girls
as they lick their ice-cream cones and yank
at their cracks, shivering in the same vitric sun
that real whales glance at when they die.

11 Elephant

Resplendent in pearls and rubies,
the rajah waves while the elephant offers
a sidelong glance as if to tell us that it could,
if it wanted to, toss this bearded chump
out of his box, better yet, open the earth
with its tusks and plunge him and all
the world's betrayers into its personal inferno;
but we hear no avenging trumpet and no
basso thud from those odd flat feet,
only the hum of a biplane overhead
pushing beer.

12 Windmill

It's a giant all right with teeth as brown
as anthropology and eyes as blue as a scallop's.
Its waffled arms never stop spinning, slapping
away J.Z.'s shots as if handing out punishment:
hadn't he mistaken vertigo for love, hadn't he
found beauty where there wasn't much to look at?
He hits the ball into the alley outside the reach
of the giant's arms and gets out while he can.

13 Schoolhouse

She'd been a chambermaid and a laundry girl,
a sous-chef in a paper hat slicing vidalias.
She poured the honey over Miss Bee's apple pies
and was trusted with money that wasn't hers.
She cleaned out toilets at the train station.
And she had honored J.Z. with her paper world:
the pink tongue of Togo, the snake of Vietnam,
the nugget of Surinam, the Congo blanched of blood
with a river so wide they couldn't, if they
were standing on one shore, see its other.

14 Lighthouse

He wonders if this bulbless lighthouse,
this squat tower of wormy slats,
could send a beam to his brother in Vietnam,
one beach and hot green sea to another,
a simple message—*We're alive, are you?*—
in the flicker of a new morning star just above
the line where the world begins or ends,
depending on your point of view.

15 Fountain [Broken]

Another day and we might have seen
lively rainbows, liquid parasols opening
and closing, vertical rivers returning
upon themselves, see-through snakes
or ostrich necks helixing. Instead,
we see green pennies, powdery
and, with regard to wishes, already spent.
Our coins thud and bounce and roll
in clipped circles and when their dance

is done, they bake in the heat,
unreflected, unrefracted, undervalued.

16 Rocket

There must be a planet where no one
is exceptional or unlucky or unloved,
where no one fears loneliness more than harm,
where no one knows what it is to gawk at
other worlds and wish there was a way
to get there in a bucket of blue aluminum.

17 Garden

It's a brick circle containing blue flag irises
dug up years ago from a nearby swamp;
they've long since taken over and are so tightly
packed no weed can find a place to set down roots.
The flowers are deep purple with a touch
of yellow: so elegant, some might think
too elegant, for a wild flower. We realize
it's not a circle at all but the shape of a heart.

18 Clown

After they roll into the cackling abyss,
the balls begin their zigzagging odyssey
past larva enclaves and worm resorts,
ending up in the peeling white shack
among putters and stacks of scorecards
and boxes of stubby eraserless pencils.
More irises announce our exit,
white birches offer us some shade.
We head for the boardwalk wall:
the tide is in; the Sound has grown fat
like a wrestler beyond his prime, lifting
waves and dropping them with a grunt.
The world smells like a cheeseburger.

Notes

Mermaid

the adventuress in a sinking house
From Proverbs 2

Scow Schooner

a sub riveter drunk on Cutty Sark

The course is not far from the U.S. submarine base.

Pirate

son of Blood

Captain Blood as played by Errol Flynn.

Whale

forty and odd vertebrae

From *Moby Dick*, CIII ("Measurement of the Whale's Skeleton")

that real whales glance at when they die

From *Moby Dick*, CVXI ("The Dying Whale"): "For that strange spectacle observable in all sperm whales dying—the turning sunwards of the head, and so expiring . . ."

John Surowiecki is the author of two books *The Hat City after Men Stopped Wearing Hats* (The Word Works, 2006 Washington Prize) and *Watching Cartoons before Attending a Funeral* (White Pine Press, 2003). A third collection, *Barney and Gienka* (CW Books) will be published in the spring. In addition, he has written five chapbooks, while his *Tapeworm Comics*, a narrative poem in comic book form, will be published by Ugly Duckling Presse very soon, any day now, in fact. In recent years, John has won the Poetry Foundation Pegasus Award in verse drama for his play *My Nose and Me: A TragedyLite or TragiDelight in 33 Scenes* and the Nimrod Pablo Neruda Prize. He also took the silver in the Sunken Garden National Competition. Recent publications include: *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The Alembic*, *Cider Press Review*, *Margie*, *Nimrod*, *New Zoo Poetry Review*, *Oyez Review*, *Poetry*, *Redivider* and *West Branch*. John was a featured reader at Cafe Muse in 2007 and at the Kensington Book Store in 2008.

Sharlie West

SUMMER NIGHT

On the deck, my husband lights
a red candle.
Fireflies dance beside the flame,
pricking the dark around us.
From each end of the garden,
cicadas hum
the hot, slick air.

I think of those who have loved me,
gone like summer berries
plumped from leaves;
their shadows
follow me into the house.
Now, beside the moon,
a vanishing star.

IN EARLY SPRING

a damp crust covers all things
a smell of emptiness
and cold flowers,
petals of white ash
that grow in the riverbed.
The river hides
in veils of dead leaves.
Spring hangs close by
waiting for a script.
I pen the shape of ferns,
the shape of moon and winds,
black roots that bend
to the rhythm of word,
prints of cycles
written in margins of leaves.
The river everywhere
spilling
over boundaries,
mournful, wild and deep.

Sharlie West was born and raised in Washington, D.C. She received her MA in English/Education from the George Washington University. Her work has appeared in numerous publications, including: *Pacific Coast Journal*, *California Quarterly*, *Passager*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Minimus*, *Wordwrights!*, *Bogg*, and *Nth Degree*. She is the author of five poetry chapbooks, a novel, and several short stories. Sharlie and her husband, Jim, live in Silver Spring, Maryland.