

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)

Welcome to *Innisfree 6*. In this issue, we continue our “Closer Look” series in which we showcase the writing of an exceptionally accomplished poet, this time the poetry of Eric Pankey. Eric’s eighth book, *The Pear as One Example: New and Selected Poems*, is due out from Ausable Press this spring. His first book, *For the New Year*, won the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets.

In addition to free verse, this issue features poems in a variety of forms, including two poems from Dan Masterson’s forthcoming fifth book, a book of ekphrastic poems, *That Which Is Seen*; Margaret A. Robinson’s crown of sonnets titled “Braided Marigolds”; Bruce Bennett’s rhymed fables from his full-length manuscript of such poems entitled *Ephemerae*; poems of rhymed

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couplets from Ben Berman; sonnets from Nancy Kenney Connolly, Roger Mitchell, and Patric Pepper; prose poems from Barbara Crooker and Jennifer Sullivan; and villanelles from Roberta Feins, Melanie Houle, and Frederick Lord.

We also add an Essays and Reviews section in which we post the weekly essays distributed by the Poetry Foundation, as well as others that come our way. You can access these pieces by clicking on the Essays and Reviews link in the green column of the poets' pages. (Adding a link to the front page is proving difficult.)

Finally, we now offer the opportunity for the readers of *Innisfree* to obtain this issue in two hard copy formats, a PDF download as before, and now, a printed volume of the current issue, at cost, at Lulu.com, thanks to the *Innisfree* poets who have agreed to make this possible. Just click on the appropriate links at the top of the Current Issue page.

I hope to make earlier issues available as well. To do so, the poets need to agree. If your work appeared in any of the previous five issues, please send an email to editor@innisfreepoetry.org (subject line: "Publication Rights") into which you've pasted the following statement of rights and stated your agreement with its application to your work:

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

Once I have all the agreements in hand for an issue, I'll proceed to prepare the text and make it available on Lulu.com. As issues are added, a notice will appear on this site.

The Editor
editor@innisfreepoetry.org

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Masthead

Editor, Greg McBride

The founding editor of *Innisfree*, Greg McBride's work appears in *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Connecticut Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *Hollins Critic*, *Poet Lore*, *Southeast Review*, *Southern Indiana Review*, and *Southern Poetry Review*. www.homepage.mac.com/gregmcbride.

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.”

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.)
2. Include your name, as you would like it to appear in the Journal, 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.

Assurances:

In 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:

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A CLOSER LOOK: Eric Pankey



photo by Clare Atkinson-Pankey

Eric Pankey is the author of seven books: *For the New Year*, which won the Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets, *Heartwood*, *Apocypha*, *The Late Romances*, *Cenotaph*, which won the Poetry Award from the Library of Virginia, *Oracle Figures*, and *Reliquaries*. A new book, *The Pear as One Example: New and Selected Poems*, is due out from Ausable Press in spring 2008. His work has been supported by fellowships from the Ingram Merrill Foundation, The National Endowment for the Arts, and The John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Eric Pankey was born in Kansas City, Missouri in 1959 and lived until he was eighteen in the Kansas City suburb of Raytown, where he attended the public schools, where he had the good fortune of excellent teachers who encouraged him in the written and visual arts. He enrolled in 1977 at the University of Missouri at Columbia, with the hopes of attending its famous journalism school, but found himself drawn to both the English and the Education departments and ended up with a degree in English Education 1981. While at the University of Missouri, the poets Marcia Southwick, Larry Levis, and Thomas McAfee taught him and suggested he apply to the Iowa Writers Workshop. At Iowa, between 1981 and 1983, he continued to work with Levis and Southwick, who were visiting professors, as well as with Donald Justice, Marvin Bell, Stanley Plumly, Henri Coulette, and Gerald Stern. While in graduate school he met his future wife, the poet Jennifer Atkinson. After completing the MFA, he and Atkinson married and their daughter, Clare, was born in 1986. For three years he taught high school in Marion, Iowa, and then was hired to run the MFA program at Washington University in St. Louis, where he taught

for nine years, until he and Atkinson were hired to teach at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia in 1996. Pankey is now Professor of English and holds the Heritage Chair in Writing at George Mason University.

A selection of poems by Eric Pankey:

READING IN BED

Chekhov writes of a man
who loved gooseberries so much
that little else mattered.
His devotion was simple,
complete, yet involved loss,
the way the lack of foliage
in the midst of winter
allows the mind to imagine
the abstraction of a line.
In the story, as now, a sudden rain
taps the window.
As we both sit up reading tonight,
the light from our individual lamps
sets us apart,
the room somehow larger
in the evening's diminishing clarity.
Months from now I will remember
everything I did not say tonight
—how it is possible to love,
how the air at the beginning
of any season smells the same,
the sky different
only in the number of birds
cutting the frail arc of blue . . .
Once I believed that in touching
there was a language that outlives loss.
But now, as you turn out your light,
I am glad I have said nothing
and have instead lived
in another's story for a short while.
I could say I am happy
but I know what I am feeling
is no more permanent
than the narrowness of a road
where it becomes a point on the horizon,
and if I walked down that road
the trees on either side

from *For the New Year* (Atheneum, 1984)

WALK WITH MY FATHER

A columbine's clear violet after noon rain.

The ditch of a creek we'd followed here,
muddy water stippled with shadow. It is 1966.
On the bank, a carp, or what was left of one,

covered with a glow of flies. Green, gold,
a momentary body of light
lifted as he turned the fish over with a stick.

The exposed flesh was flat, white,
raw as wound. Unearthly.
Or too much of the earth:

the dull texture of clay, the dust white of lime.

To satisfy me, he pushed it over the grassy bank.
The heat was visible on the rank air,
rising against a drift of daisies.

I followed the fish downstream until it caught on rocks
—pale jugged limestone, and the slow water
worked its gill. Opening, open, as if that would help.

from *For the New Year* (Atheneum, 1984)

DEBTOR OF HAPPINESS

Whatever empties the feeder
comes and goes without my knowing.
There is little satisfaction
in their names or the songs I've stopped
listening for. The birds that come
come in spite of me, are welcome
to rule the yard and its one tree,
to pick and scavenge the little
I've left them. I stood among them
once. The morning after Halloween
I broke open a frozen pumpkin
against the trunk of the maple
and chickadees and cardinals
and even a cedar waxwing

cleaned out the three jagged fragments
of their hard white seeds. Once I walked
along a river's marshy bank
pulling a canoe through the shallows
and all the sounds were water sounds:
the reeds swayed by wind, the wet call
of the killdeer, the heron's blue stealth.
Above the quick cut bank, sparrows
broke the air into flight like rain.

I believe the birds no longer
sing their one song of alliance.
If the hummingbird works its way
through the damp dust of evening,
if the black sweep of a crow's wing
or the jay's miserable crying
sends the other birds scattering
I am unaware. I feel the earth's
pull and cannot even look up
to see the nests in the winter limbs
or the hawk circle its hunger
above the rain-washed riverbeds.
Now in my dreams if I fly
flight is more like a falling.
I used to wake to their songs once.
I would listen and I would hear.
It was that simple. What I heard
wove a wreath in the air. I lived
beneath it like a happy man,
as if there were nothing, nothing but air.

from *Heartwood* (Atheneum, 1988)

OVERCOAT

The day my father came home, blood still wet
on his beige overcoat, the gash broken
open across his nose, raw and steaming
as he entered the house, it was Christmas Eve.

"I put the car in a ditch," was all he said
as he raised his hand to touch his wound, but didn't.
He was half-drunk and stood there like a child
needing help with the buttons on his coat.

I remember the water and soap, my hands
rubbed red as I worked the heavy fabric,
but the stain held fast, a splotch of brown
like mud outside where rain had worn away the snow.

Slumped on the couch, he talked himself through his sleep.
And as he slept, I drove from store to store
looking for the exact coat and when I bought it
I didn't have it wrapped. I even thought

of putting it on and stopping somewhere
to get dead drunk for the first time. I didn't.
He was half-drunk, which meant he'd wake easily
the next morning and remember enough

not to say a thing. He'd wake with crusted blood
along the ridge of his nose, with his coat
thrown over him as a cover and know
I'd given it to him and that it was not a gift.

from *Heartwood* (Atheneum, 1988)

IN MEMORY

If the world is created from the Word,
What can I hear amid the noise of that one
Assertion and all that rattles and diminishes

In its wake: the mockingbird's trill and grate,
The sluice and overlap where the creek narrows,
The dragonfly needling through the humid air?

And what will I hear when words are no more?
I cannot hear you now, ash-that-you-are,
My beloved, who in your passion and error,

In what was your life gave life to me,
My life from the life of your blunt body
That is no more. If I believe that Christ

Is risen, why can't I believe that we too
Will be risen, rejoined, and relieved
Of the world's tug and the body's ballast?

We are asked to testify, to bear
Witness to what we have seen and heard,
And yet our hope is in the veiled and silenced.

I take comfort in your silence,
In the absence of the voice that voiced your pain.
The body apart from the spirit is dead

But that does not mean the spirit is dead.

from *Apocrypha* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991)

ABSTRACTION

1.
The eyesore on the beach was torn down.
The charred half-rafter hanging over
The gutted, broken frame and rubble
Fell last, fell as it should have fallen,
Undercut by flames, unsupported,
First. In three swipes the crane's shovel drove
The house down and raised cold cinder smoke.
The seagulls, mewling their childlike cries,
Pulled themselves into lumbering flight,
Outward from the pilings and then back,
A haphazard, elliptical chart,
Outward from the pilings and then back.

2.
He wanted to know she wanted him.
He wanted her to want him, to know
She wanted him without his asking,
Without hinting or soliciting.
To be wanted was what he wanted.
The ruined formula of his want
Was that he wanted. How could he know
What influence, what small coercion
His expectation had on her want,
The purity of her missing want?
He believed it to be missing, although
In this somber farce, how could he know?

3.
This will be his home: the foundation,
The stairway, the framed-in walls open

For now on all sides. The rooms seem small,
The halls narrow, too narrow to pass
Through together. When the doors are hung,
Perhaps, when the drywall and clapboards
Are hammered into place, perhaps then
The space will not seem so closed. The plans
Denied limits: luminous white lines
Opened the field of blue they enclosed.
He prefers the abstract design to this:
A place to live, a room for each need.

from *Apocrypha* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991)

SCAFFOLDING

They spent a long time on the temporary structure,
Until the edifice, framed by cross planks and ladders,
Seemed a graph of idealized details: the corbel's bent
Disfigured figure, the flawed soldering on the stained glass,
The spade-like spear points and stone crosses. The scaffolding's
Grid, wobbly underfoot, stood sturdy enough to last
The disassembly. Each stone marked for the reconstruction.
Each ornament heavy with its function and excess.
A lintel next to a gutter, a statue's doomed niche
Sideways beside the cornerstone, seraphim and saints
In the quiet chaos before recongregation,
Set down for the time being in a jumble on tarps.

from *Apocrypha* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1991)

THE PILGRIMAGE OF MY FATHER'S GHOST

Halfway home, he comes to the field's edge:
Deadfall, goldenrod, a moulder of uncut hay,
A rose-thicket hedgerow skirting the verge,

And beyond it, a decline into a ditch
That part of the year fills as a creek,
The water slow, moving beneath a smirched

Surface of algae and islands of leaf rot,
And the rest of the year, this: a dry furrow,
A nest of roots beneath the shale outcrop,

The cutbank steep where the curve sharpens.
The crab apple on the other side shimmers
As frost catches dawn and the day opens.

Bent, buckled, a snarl of dead and green wood,
The tree, he knows, is the tree he planted
And left to the will of suckers and bindweed.

What he has forgotten is the way over,
And as he struggles through the tangled thorns,
The sun, still cold, consumes him like a fever.

from *The Late Romances* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)

APPROACHING ACCADEMIA: A NOCTURNE

It gets dark while they talk.
The vaporetto, almost empty,
Crosses the water. Revs, then balks,

Bangs against the landing stage.
As a rope creaks taut, she stops
Midsentence: the smudged vestiges

Of balconies, alcoves, and arches
And the running lights, drawn like oxgall,
Marble on the canal's inverted S.

He sees for once what she sees,
And seeing it, as through her eyes,
Knows her heart, or so he believes.

The loose, unraveled braids of the wake
And opaque green of the flat surface
Are rubbed up argentine as dusk

Deepens the canal. Domes and spires,
A string of white party lights,
A bridge's underside, and belltowers

All blur on the water's reaches,
Unfurl and glissade from berth to berth,
As the slack rope unknots and releases.

from *The Late Romances* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)

IN SIENA, PROSPERO RECONSIDERS THE MARRIAGE AT CANA

All sleight-of-hand trails the dross and clutter
Of the unseen, clumsily like an anchor,
Barely concealing its means as it deceives.

What else can be made of signs and wonders
But close readings and a display of awe?
What is left when the waited-upon is fulfilled?

After the standoff Jesus conjures a trick.
Should such an act be enacted knowing
The *next* and the *next* will be demanded?

Of course, he one-ups himself, causes a fuss,
And the story plunges headlong to finale.
And then encore. Above, in the Sieneese heat,

A pair of ravens patrol the parapet.
Washed linens flap on the clothesline.
A shadow bisects the curved blade of the Campo.

As if in confirmation of a miracle,
The twisted olive bears the wind's history,
A gnarl that hinders the brisk disorder,

Renders it as the unmoved here and now.
Skittish pigeons clatter up in the air.
Into shadow. Out of shadow. And then back down.

And no one, not even God, lifted a finger.

from *The Late Romances* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)

THE AUGURY OF PROSPERO

In the split-open breast of the lamb,
He fails to read the deity's will.
With his stick, he pokes at the carcass.

He nudges the wreckage of ribcage
Aside as if the Truth were concealed
In the sealed-off chambers of the heart,
In the intricacies of marrow

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Or the maze and switchbacks of the bowels.
He sees what he always sees: the past,

The unattended moments festered,
Bloated with all that was left unsaid,
Images haunting abstract spaces.

He stares at the cracked shoulder socket
And parses out its function and flaw.
By the time he glosses each sinew,

He has butchered the sacrificed beast
And makes a feast of his misreading.

from *The Late Romances* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1997)

SEE THAT MY GRAVE IS SWEEP CLEAN

Words are but an entrance, a door cut deep into cold clay.

I say, *A late sky flagged with jade; ice on the pear blossoms.*
I say, *A thrush of cinnabar in the lily's throat.*
Behind each assertion, each gambit, I could place a question mark.

Behind each question, a residue of longing, half-assuaged,
An argument of brine-edged light the moon, your stand-in,
doles out,
Grain by grain. Behind each question, a hook blackened with rust.

Begin with a clay bank, a chill wind's insufflation.
Begin with thumbflint, a fever, some sticks to fire the kiln.
Are words but an entrance? *Words are but an entrance.*

from *Cenotaph* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000)

HOW TO SUSTAIN THE VISIONARY MODE

Wherever possible, avoid predication: *the night sea, the dark river, this rain.*

As in a dream, where the door opens into a cedar grove, and the haze conjures a screen of sorts
onto which an ill-spliced film is projected, and the words, poorly dubbed, seem mere trinkets in a
magpie's nest, let each object be itself.

Objects a magpie might hoard.

:The blown dusk-smoke of flies above the sacrifice: The flames inlaid and lacquered: The horizon, a single graphite line on rice paper:

Revelation is and will remain the subject: "Behold, I come quickly: hold fast that which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

The moment present and full: thyme-sweetened honey, a New World of Gold, quick with what made it.

Let distractedness be an isthmus connecting the day to day, dazed with the fume of poppies.

Let the daydream, dimmed by slow rain, skip like a shuttle through the loom's scaffolding.

Let the rain rain all day on the slate, a province of rain, gray as the stone no longer quarried in these hills, gray as the pigeons tucked in the eaves:

The rain, the dark river, this night sea.

from *Cenotaph* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000)

THE ANNIVERSARY

1.

The constellation Virgo harbors a black hole at its center, but tonight I see the moon, ordained, a basilica of salt, mouthing its one secret like a saw-whet owl, and all that might be culled, collected, and classified beneath it, named as a disposition of objects, as a taxonomy, an order, a genus, or subject matter, is smeared with this salvaged and chalk-dry light, this fine-grained and corrosive distillate, this heirloom dust that gathers on the pearl button of the glove, its little satin noose.

2.

When I said, "But tonight I see the moon," I did not tell the whole truth, for I have not even looked outside, but have relied on the conventions of memory, and with a word or two the moon, like a body under siege, wears thin outside my window, the moon forages in the attic, the moon is hauled up like a broken whetstone from a well, for that is what I do with a word or two: avoid scrutiny, avoid measuring the lead weight of my own heart.

from *Cenotaph* (Alfred A. Knopf, 2000)

EPITAPH

Beyond the tracteries of the auroras,
The fires of tattered sea foam,
The ghost-terrain of submerged icebergs;
Beyond a cinder dome's black sands;
Beyond peninsula and archipelago,
Archipelago and far-flung islands,
You have made of exile a homeland,
Voyager, and of that chosen depth, a repose.

The eel shimmers and the dogfish darts,
A dance of crisscrosses and trespasses
Through distillate glints and nacreous silts,
And the sun, like fronds of royal palm
Wind-torn, tossed, lashes upon the wake,
But no lamplight mars or bleaches your realm,
A dark of sediment, spawn, slough, and lees,
Runoff, pitch-black, from the rivers of Psalms.

from *Oracle Figures* (Ausable Press, 2003)

PIAZZA S. SPIRITO NO. 9

I will always love this light: the brayed clarity of gypsum,
the cool kiln-glow of amber,
No longer liquid, not yet stone.

And the green shutter creaked by a breeze. And, across
the courtyard, the laundry pulleyed in,
Echoing a song of rhymes: *toll, coal, squall, straw, strewn . . .*

And the table set with a vase of lavender, the table level on
the shim of a closed matchbook.
And the sleep easy afterward, the heavy sleep of the body
unencumbered by dream or memory.

My body cradled in the luminous idleness of your own.

from *Oracle Figures* (Ausable Press, 2003)

THE BACK-STORY

The notebook—benedictions and burlesques, wishes and whatnot—
is full and closed.

The door, ajar, will slam shut when another door is opened.

So much

for the confessional mode.

I have three parallel scars that run across my lower back and no
notion of what caused them.

Uncertain of the when and the why, this is the point where, by
convention, I look out the window

As if the pine, poplar, holly, dogwood and the gravel-filled creek bed
below were, in fact, a refuge.

::

The night-fog was like lampblack on curved glass. I drove down into
the valley and was covered,

Then up again into tree-laden ghost-dark, the pitch and grainy green
of the forest.

My eyes closed for an instant. Two deer, stark in the headlights,
stood, gravity-freighted,

Then flew—apparitions, idolons, messengers—bright antler-tips
white gold.

My eyes opened

To the shimmy and jar of the shoulder's rumble strip as I plunged
back down into fog.

::

I finger each memory as if it were a prayer bead, but each crumbles as
salt to the touch.

I look at my hands and count a paper-cut, four calluses, a blood
blister.

So much for the epic mode.

All day I make offerings to the shades, wrest whatever clues they
cleave to.

All day I make offerings to the shades, steal what would be given
freely if I were a shade.

When I come home, my dog lifts her head—not to greet me—but
to confirm I am the one who left.

::

“I was driving late, and sure I was drunk,” George said, drunk and
animated, as he recalled the story,
“And there he was, huddled in the middle of the road and I couldn’t
stop and the car thudded
Over him. I killed him, no doubt about it, but the police said he had
been robbed, and beaten-up
And badly, and left there in the middle of the road for dead. I
finished him off.”

George took consolation
In the back-story, in all that was never in his hands to change for the
better or the worse.

from *Reliquaries* (Ausable Press, 2005)

THE THOUSAND THISTLE SEEDS

Ten years ago, I followed a lizard
Through a grassy, ruined amphitheater,
Quick as quicksilver,
But green, not silver.
The lizard darted,

Skimmed, froze,
Shinnied, insinuated like flame,
A pinpoint of pulse and flash.
The lizard knew
The Etruscan wall's cracks,

The downspouts,
The stone that blunts the plow,
The mortar's and stucco's flaws.
The lizard dwelt in a present
That extends, elongates, thins

Into a filament of consumed air.
I followed the lizard
From brick chink to olive grove,
Poppies to straw,
To sand and loam.

I knew, for a moment, the balance
Between the intimate and the infinite,
A word and what it reckons.
The sun on the hilltop
Flared upon the thousand thistle seeds,

The thousand virtues,
 The thousand minerals,
The thousandth of a second
 It takes the lizard to taste the moment
And change course.

from *The Yale Review*

BETWEEN WARS

A silver crown of flies turns above the mare's head.
Her ears twitch, each on its own, at the least touch of wind.
Fire burns us all, but some more slowly than others. Than the next.
The sky, reflected in a tire track's blank and stagnant water, is poker-faced.
If a thing can be thought it can be invented. Go ahead and say it:
The bodies in the mass grave look like bodies in a mass grave.
You are embarrassed for them: the entwined limbs, this one facedown
In the crotch of that one, that one's skirt hiked up to her armpits,
The haphazard, unseemly tumble of it all.
Like you, I am dismayed how the unthinkable is always thinkable.
Like you, I am in the midst of a long convalescence. You would like to redress them:
Comb the girl's hair. Cover the boy's gouged skull with a cap.
The mud and blood are interchangeable. Horseshit dries in the sun:
Grainy, sage-tinged oats, savory like a shovelful of turned earth.

from *The Iowa Review*

Franz Baskett

ZEN STREET

It is not much to stand on the corner
Across from the smell of the bakery
And know each one of the cracks
Underfoot like an unchanging friend.

Then I can see that the blonde
In the white French rabbit coat
Walking the piebald Afghan
Is no bigger a deal than she actually is.

Further along the street, the bartenders
Are just opening up with a practiced
And sour grace. A woman is shaking
A green rug from the second story.

A motorcycle explodes from the light,
Snapping my head around. The cycle
And the cyclist are pure.
A simple sentence. Noun and verb.

The light again turns red as I go up the hill
Past leather shop, bookstore, gelateria.
When I reach the top, it is not much
To stand with the sky around your ears
Like a blue helmet, like something
Very close to triumph.

Franz Baskett

A graduate of the University of Arkansas, Franz Baskett's poems have appeared in the *Southern Review*, *The New Orleans Review*, *Poem*, and *The Pacific Review* among others. He resides in Fayetteville, AR.

Kate Bernadette Benedict

CONTEMPT

It rises in the gorge, yes, it sticks in the craw
and you can't hawk it up, however much it chokes you.
So you live with it,
the gobbet that no enzyme will dissolve,
the sour reflux that no gargling refreshes.
You pencil on a pleasant morning smile,
you squirt a drop of luster in your eyes,
but how do you mask a tenacious nausea?
"What's wrong?" a girl asks, when she sees that smile;
"Are you sick?" asks another.
It's effrontery, that "concern"; they have appalled you.
Just as your boss appalls you: he is second-rate.
Just as the priest appalls you, with his sanctimony,
and the president, with his falsity, hogging the nightly news.

Every day, the gobbet grows larger.
You didn't think you were this elastic.
Perhaps it is having to be elastic that spawned it in the first place?
All that capitulating on the job,
the catapulting drudgeries,
all that bending to another's will?
Or is it a more general buckling—
to compromise, inequity, iniquity, disappointment?
Ach, it is all sourdough,
all gristle, gibbous gelcap lodging in the throat,
gross mass, gross manifestation,
sticking there, in your scuffed craw,
and you can't hawk it up however much you cough
and it clogs the gorge and it chokes you.

Kate Bernadette Benedict

Kate Bernadette Benedict lives in New York City where she edits the online journal *Umbrella*. Her poetry collection *Here from Away* (CustomWords 2003) was an Editor's Pick in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Bruce Bennett

REASSURANCE

A tiny bunny, trembling in its hutch,
missing its mother, absent who knows where,
lisped to itself: "Does anybody care?
I'm all alone. It may not matter much,

I guess, but oh! I hunger for a touch
of fur, the warmth and smell of Mama there
beside me, nuzzling, calming me. The air
is full of threats. I fear the Shadows' clutch!"

*The world's a menace when you're small and weak.
Say what you will, it's hard to fool the meek.*

A DIVINITY

The egret stalks on stick-like legs. He wishes
to keep his brisk appointments with the fishes
who frisk about beneath, oblivious of
the steel-willed, sharp-eyed god who prowls above.

*Enjoy yourself. You won't know when or why
a beak descends and plucks you to the sky.*

SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

A beta fish, in fighting trim,
challenged the glass reflecting him:
"I dare you! Come, invade my space.
By God, I'll put you in your place!"

*Aggression, bred in brain and bone,
compels some folks to live alone.*

TEMPERAMENT

A snapping turtle, angry as a slap,
lashed out. "I'm mad! The world is full of crap!"
"It is," his milder cousin, Mud, replied.
"But one can still be beautiful inside."

*We're what we are; it's Fate that made us so.
You sun yourself, or break somebody's toe.*

THE GRAPEVINE

A busy sparrow twittered to a friend
about a bit of gossip he had heard
which, though he couldn't believe it of the bird
and certainly had no wish to offend

Because, of course, the whole thing was absurd,
still, after all, who knew where it would end,
since once the news is out, you can depend
upon it, everybody has the word.

*Don't think, because a story isn't true,
the town won't know before it gets to you.*

OLD NEWS

"I've heard that song before," a she-bird twittered.
"It's stale. Old news. Last week. You gotta to try
some new thing on me, Baby." Then she fluttered
onto a separate branch. When by and by
he sang again, his song came out so altered
that it was less a love song than a cry.

*Whether or not it's cruel by intent,
disfavor will turn love songs to lament.*

CO-DEPENDENCY

A vine was angry with a tree
and fumed: "Look what you've done to me!

By dying you have spoiled our game.
I thought we shared a single aim

And clung together fast as friends.
Such selfishness is where it ends!"

*It's hard to feel the treatment just
when those we kill betray our trust.*

BIG MAMA

"You're pussy-whipped!" a tomcat jeered.
"Not me," another said.
"It's you who gets those claws," he sneered.
"I've seen your ears and head.

I've seen your nose, sliced like a beet
by one you call your mouse."
Just then a yowl alarmed the street
and terrified the house

They crouched in front of. "Gotta go,"
the second, cringing, purred.
"See ya," the first responded low,
as if to not be heard.

*It's easy for males to hold their ground
with boasts – if she is not around.*

DEDICATION

A beetle toiling over earth
to push its ball from here to there
was teased and taunted. "What's the worth"
cried other bugs, "of all that care

And effort when there's no reward?
Besides, you're lonely and you smell."

The beetle, calmly self-assured,
replied, "But don't I do it well?"

*What seemingly holds no attraction
can yield enormous satisfaction.*

ALAS, POOR YORICK!

The bull who roamed the fields, a prize,
now lies a bone beside the door
contended for by filthy flies.
The dog he chased sprawls on the floor,
full-fed, contented. Soon he'll rise,
and thump his tail, and beg for more.

*Preeminence, rampant at the full,
's illusory, just so much bull.*

Bruce Bennett is the author of seven books of poetry and more than twenty poetry chapbooks. His most recent chapbooks are *Coyote's Interlude With Little Miss Darling* (FootHills Publishing, 2006) and *Examined Life* (Scienter, 2006). These rhymed fables are part of a full-length, unpublished manuscript of such poems entitled *Ephemerae*. Bruce Bennett teaches literature and creative writing at Wells College, where he is Professor and Chair of English and Director of Creative Writing.

Ben Berman

LOVE

Our sages say: "And there is not a thing that has not its place." And so man too has his place. Then why do people sometimes feel so crowded?

—Martin Buber

Sunday afternoon

Whenever I end up at Curtin's Roadside
Tavern, praising the dulling buzz of light

beer and talking to some woman about
the day's cool jacket weather, how the clouds

seemed to threaten before they disappeared,
I begin thinking about all the weird

ways that I've almost died—the warm blood
that trickled down my thighs, the glass shards

on the ledge surely as sharp as the teeth
of the wild dogs circling beneath

me, as sharp as the focus on each step
when I grabbed the weak and bony grip

of a stumbling, drunken bus driver
and inched weightlessly across a river,

leaning on knees that hadn't locked so tight since
a scantily clad saddhu waved his tridents

in the air, then hurled a burning log
at my head—and I can feel my restless legs

burning and aching as they dangle
above the sticky floor, as my ankles bang

against the foot rail. And the more she leans
in close, the more I feel the space between

us, as though I've already crowded
too many stories into just one body.

PRIDE AND HUMILITY

Only when man reaches the highest rung, when he reaches his full stature, only then does he become truly humble in his own eyes, and knows what it is: "to bow before Thee."

—Martin Buber

*picking up a friend's daughter
from dance rehearsal*

Because work has a way of stretching me thin
I'd always thought of stretching as the ten

minute warm-up before I ran my laps—
push hard against a wall or collapse

into myself and attempt to touch
those faraway toes—I thought we stretched

to reach something, or, at most, to stave off
injury. But watching this woman lift

off the floor, spring into a fragile balance,
you'd think that stretching, itself, were the dance,

as she swivels and folds, streaming and flowing
from bend to arch to bow, her calf floating

effortlessly above the brass rail—
as though delicate were different from frail.

Ben Berman won the 2002 Erika Mumford Prize from the New England Poetry Club, has been a finalist in a few chapbook competitions and was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He has poems published in *Natural Bridge*, *The Cimarron Review*, *Cream City Review*, *Cutthroat Journal*, *The Connecticut Review*, *Inkwell*, and others. He currently teaches in Boston.

George Bishop

AFTERNOONS

(approaching sixty)

They come with a nap attached
now. A condition. They begin
by passing on lunch and agree
with nothing. They survive best
between promises.

They love catching a drop of rain
between two thoughts and pulling
off its wings, listening to dreams
rehearse and feeling themselves
vanish like a prayer.

The low ceiling of the bedroom
is made of flooring. They pace
the worn wood, pause at a cigarette burn—
then sit in a corner where the finish
remains glossy. I imagine a grandfather
clock there, my image deep in the grain.

HOSPITAL WINGS

(visiting a friend's grandmother)

Nearly hidden behind the bleached linen
she studies the dark figures of leaves
quivering on the Formica night stand.
Her dying had almost no life left—
her breathing shallow, quick
as if the mechanical bed were chasing her
around a cell of brittle bones. They said
her dreams were becoming longer, more
private.

This is the only room her face fits in now—
she's a spot in a spotless space.
Everything's measured except her hope
of being carried off this sterile shelf
by the dust only the sun seems to find.
It's what she waits for. Wants

Innisfree 6
March 2008

to pray for.
Not far away she gave birth,
I believe, when the only shadows
next to her were the hands of a clock,
when each branch in the window was a wand.
I'm sure when the leaves fell it was almost heavenly—
she must've come so close
to flying.

Born in Philadelphia, George Bishop was raised on the Jersey Shore and attended Rutgers University. He relocated to Florida in 1985. Recent poems have appeared in *The Comstock Review* and *White Pelican Review* and are forthcoming in *Boston Literary Magazine*.

Sheila Black

BARCELONA

So many ways to be ruined. In the stone squares around the Placa, discarded needles, a spray of blood, the words of the murdered poet. Green like the wild horses. A girl eats bread absently, crumbs falling from her long fingers. A wounded pigeon hops on one leg. The stones themselves are pitted, scarred here. When the revolution ends, men hold stones in their mouths to stop them from speaking. Never enough wine or bread no matter how often it is multiplied. In the church, the crooked child wishes to be something else. A length of smooth wood, a stick that would help someone walk or beat a man with a sound like wind. Cruelty sprouts in the slender weeds between the cobblestones. Anything better than to be always crushed this way. We, too, came here hungry. Brandy and coffee in the cheap cafes, so many cigarettes our throats ached in the mornings. What was dying between us briefly lovely—a respite from our seasons of slow bickering. In the cathedral, built like a child's dribbled sandcastle, the slashes of light in the darkness, saying there would be an after, saying we would get through this, and the stairway with its warm smell of piss and sour wine, where we climbed into the bleaching light, where we understood what it would be to be forgotten.

Sheila Black received her MFA in Poetry in 1998 from the University of Montana. Her poems have appeared in numerous print and on-line journals, including *Diode*, *Copper Nickel*, *LitPot Review*, *DMQ Review*, *Willow Springs*, *Poet Lore*, *Ellipsis*, *Blackbird*, *the Pedestal* and *Puerto Del Sol*. In 2000 she was the U.S. co-winner of the Frost-Pellicer Frontera Prize, given to one U.S. and one Mexican poet living along the U.S. Mexico Border. Her first book, *House of Bone*, was published by CustomWords Press in March 2007. A chapbook *How to be a Maquiladora* appeared from Main Street Rag in January 2007. A second book, *Love/Iraq* is forthcoming from CustomWords Press in late 2008. She is currently the Visiting Poet at New Mexico State University in Las Cruces, New Mexico.

Ronda Broatch

WHAT CALLS HER TO WATER

This morning the antler still sways
in the cold of the creek

I wade, tracking the habits of salmon.
Treading between bodies I find myself

jealous of the bones people keep:
bear claw, clavicle, fishbone, scapulae,

limbs lining sills and shelves, uncommon
icons, secrets carelessly dropped,

bits of soul unloosed: what reveals itself
when the house decays, when skin thins,

is borne away. What still lives
shifts direction, swims

across sandbar and rock pool,
into dark recesses, heart

crimson, flesh not yet greying
beneath leaves that dot

the water's surface. A flash of sky
between branches, sometimes November

sun the silver of scales.

VISITATION

Witness the way grass lies flat
beneath the feeder, a fleeting
supplication to the mass it bore.
The burden of frost

is nothing to heat's bristly bulk, bone-
crush of paw, shoulder and haunch.
Wrought iron post, once straight,
now apes the stranger's hunch, curves

in grace to kiss the rimed earth.
Birds flit from eave to limb, agitate
over suet strewn in the foray.
What need born

of hunger comes this late December?
What unfinished moon will tell
of her wonder? Search for signs
furrowed in woodflesh, depressions

etched in winter pasture, an acceptance
of what was, and is, and is to come.

Ronda Broatch is the author of *Shedding Our Skins*, (Finishing Line Press, 2008), and *Some Other Eden*, (2005). Nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Web, Ronda is the recipient of a 2007 Artist Trust GAP Grant. One of her poems appeared recently on *Verse Daily*.

Jeremy Byars

MY FATHER DEAD

His arm dangled over the edge of the couch,
the can of Natural Ice spilled on the knock-off
Asian rug he'd bought at the rent-to-own store.
His undershirt stained yellow from sweat, his belt
hung halfway off his grease-stained jeans, and sawdust
flaked his bristly hair and dense eyebrows.
I sopped up the beer with kitchen towels,
replaced his can with a new one from the fridge,
and scraped spaghetti off the skillet, careful
not to knock it up against the sink. He slept
through dinner, Monday Night Football—unmoved.
While I studied long division in the loveseat,
my math book slid from my lap and banged against
the coffee table—my father never stirred.
Worried, I poked at him, pulled on his ear.
Giggling, I stretched the corners of his mouth
in a mock smile, but he was lifeless as the oaks
felled to swell his company's stacks of lumber.
I shook him, saying, "Wake up, Daddy, wake up!"—
he didn't make a sound or move an inch.
I thought of calling 911—but didn't.

I imagined Nanny praying for my father
at the Pentecostal Church some Sunday morning,
could hear her lament her years apart from him
and pray her multifaceted God might turn
celestial cheek—spare her youngest child,
his troubled soul. I failed to consider what
my father's sudden death on the couch meant—
the dozen mandatory weekends
I spent with him, throwing Styrofoam footballs
at each other like neon javelins, driving
souped-up go-carts through the next-door-neighbors' yard,
carpet wrestling in swimming trunks and tanks.
I picked up my father's beer, hearing Nanny
condemn his vice of alcohol—which leads
to holes punched through storm doors and mothers' fears
their sons won't make it home. She'd predicted this
for decades, mourned his death before he died.
I couldn't stand for her to be right, for her
to know she was right. "Gimme that," I heard

my father say drowsily, restored to life.
Raising himself up off the couch and swigging
the hot beer, he staggered down the hall, collapsing
into the bathroom—the door slamming behind.
The rest of the night I lay awake in bed
dreaming what life was almost like without him.

BENTON COUNTY LANDFILL

From the bed of Grandpa's Dodge truck,
I hand Amy garbage bags filled
with clothes from 1975
or 6, Mom's bellbottom jeans
and Uncle Scotty's baby tees.
While Amy lobs the plastic bags
into the open dumpster below,
a sixty, maybe seventy year
old man walks over to us. He's dressed
in faded overalls, UT cap,
and paint-spattered boots. He says,
"You gettin' ridda' that ol' thing?"
and points at the table propped up
along the dumpster's edge—moments
away from one conclusive shove.
Amy looks at me and shrugs;
"Sure, it's yours," I say to him,
"A little dinged up, though." "Looks fine
t' me," he says. He lifts the small
fiberboard table—its top sporadic
patterns of drink rings; scuff marks
from boots and shoes; and nicks from knives,
forks, and falling objects. He lugs
it over to the office porch
and bangs it down beside a tall
back rocking chair. He brings a band
radio from inside, and drags
an orange extension cord behind.
The man sits down, fiddles the knob
until he finds a gospel station,
then sets the radio beside him
on the table and rocks himself, eyes closed,
to the rhythm of "Old Rugged Cross"—
disregarding the two of us
discarding old furniture, clothes,
and outdated electronics.

Jeremy Byars has recent or forthcoming publications in such journals as *Gihon River Review*, *Poetry Midwest*, *storySouth*, *Ariel*, *I-70 Review*, and *New Madrid*. The first ever graduate of the MFA program at Murray State University, Byars now works at a book company while completing his first poetry collection and an annotated bibliography of the Towneley plays.

Ann Cale

PHOTOGRAPHER

It's hard to say just where you took this photograph.
It could have been last winter on your farm in Massachusetts
or maybe farther north.
A man in the foreground carries a sheep.
Snow crumbles around him like bread.
He heads for a barn
or maybe just a light.
Behind him a dog, or a wolf, follows,
whether stalking or shepherding
or just holding on
I don't know.
And you, you would have been walking backwards in front of them,
falling away as they came on,
worried about your settings in the changing light.

After a long hiatus working as a journalist, Ann Cale is writing poetry again. In the 1980s her poems appeared in *USI: 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.

Roxana Cazan

SURGE

Sibiu, December 1989

His revolution wasn't soft-spoken, a smooth surface,
Crude and shy like a velvet Coup d'Etat,
Like some popping of balloons at de-coronation.

His was physical, those
Veins across temples whose pounding
He felt in the back of his throat;
The rush of blood spreading through
His fisted fingers like vermin
When the bolt of the rifle touched his cheek
Cold like a sweaty palm.
That winter, his breath got thicker.
He had felt it coming in the kitchen,
With everyone around the table.
He had felt that hunger strike coming
When the potatoes went bad, when they stopped
The hot water, and then the cold.

His revolution had been wanting
To rage like a lion fallen in the trap meant for tigers,
Like a firing infantry of workers,
Of street sweepers and deserters,
Wearing their vests, their rubber boots,
Holding pitchforks, dragging children by their hands
Or just gasping for mouthfuls of curses.

When he came home, he looked older,
His cheek looked older,
With a slight shadow of a rifle
Pointed towards his eye.

Roxana Cazan was born in Romania and studied English as a second language. She's an MFA fellow and a PhD teaching assistant at Indiana University, Bloomington. Her interests, in theory and writing, converge as she engages in the exploration of both. Roxana started writing poetry first in her native language, then in English. In her verse, Roxana explores her childhood recollections on the Romanian Revolution. In the United States, she published some of her poems in literary journals or zines, such as the *Madison Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *Warpland Journal*, *Giles Corey Press*, and *Sweaterbrain*.

Norma Chapman

DOWNTOWN WASHINGTON, D.C., 1972

Tuesdays and Thursdays, on my lunch hour, I sell
Militants for the Socialist Workers Party at 14th and F.
On Tuesday, a drunk man watches me for a while.
He moves closer, and he asks me to marry him.
I'm already married, but I think about it before I say no.

After work, I stand in front of the Holloway Cafeteria
across the street from the porno shop, waiting for my husband.
A man in a limo stops and crooks his finger. I'm 41 years old,
overweight, in a shapeless dress. He can't mean what I think.
I shake my head, and he moves on. I tell my husband
I may have been mistaken for a hooker. He doesn't hear me.

After dinner we go to party headquarters. My husband picks
up his Militants to sell on Saturday. I stay to enter debits
and credits in the party's books. The party is teaching me
to be a bookkeeper. Every member learns a useful trade.
When the revolution comes we need to be ready.

On Thursday, at my corner, a man sits on the steps behind me.
He says I'm Bear's girl, and we ride on his motorcycle
in Montgomery County with me hanging on to his belt straps.
I know I live in Arlington, but I see myself with Bear. I don't tell
my husband this. My husband sells his Militants in a tough
part of town. To fit in, he wears blue jeans, but he irons them.

Norma Chapman started writing poetry after turning sixty. Her poems have appeared in *Passager*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Iris*, *The Sow's Ear*, and *River Styx*. She received a 2003 Maryland State Arts Council Grant. Norma lives in Brunswick, a small town in Western Maryland.

Nancy Kenney Connolly

HIGH TIDE

And suddenly, as if the air is charmed,
a monarch rises from the undertow
of gravity to sail to Mexico
on whitecaps of warm air. You stare, disarmed
by orange, muted by a startling swarm
of syncopated wings, the to and fro
of flutter. Face to face with vertigo
could you reset your threshold of alarm
and, catapulted by a wind god's gale,
trespass light-hearted on the cosmic lawn?
Could you be orange too, a whimsy blown
to cumulus heights? The butterflies don't quail.
As they ignite the sky with sparks of dawn
will you dare singe your wings on the unknown?

Nancy Kenney Connolly's work appears in the *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Borderlands*, *Cider Press Review*, *Concho River Review*, *The Lyric*, *Mankato Poetry Review*, *Pembroke*, *Softblow*, *Sycamore Review*, *Wisconsin Review*, as well as in anthologies and her three books. Her manuscript, *I Take This World*, won the Main Street Rag Chapbook Contest and her poems took first place at the Austin International Poetry Festival and the Houston Poetry Fest.

Barbara Crooker

AT THE RENOIR LANDSCAPE EXHIBIT

Philadelphia, 2007

We sat at the café like Renoir's models, letting the sun daub us with licks of light, flicks of a sable brush. The way your fingertips had grazed my cheek last night, painted it peach and cream. Now we are looking at a painting of dahlias, a diagonal tumble of red, gold, white, but I am back in that garden in St. Germain-en-Laye, only now it's twilight that's brushing our arms violet and mauve. We're having dinner, and this is a luxe group, women in understated black sheaths, pearls on slender necks, expensive shawls flung carelessly over bare white arms. We're in a different life, an expense account, with a couple from headquarters for whom this is a matter of course. She checks her cell phone, rattles her fingernails impatiently between courses. Her husband urges me to try the foie gras, let its silky unctuousness melt on the crisp toast, sip the golden notes of the sweet aperitif that cuts through the richness, enhances the tone. The garden in twilight: enormous globe thistles, heavy mauve cabbage roses, the scents of exquisite perfumes. . . . And later, in our small hotel, you with your flurries of deft little brush strokes on the linen of my skin. . . . The rhythm, as we rowed our way towards shore, like the girls in the skiff in this painting in their bright summer dresses and jaunty hats. You dip your oar in the shimmering water again and again, until the canvas is streaked with brilliant slashes of red/yellow/orange, blue/dark blue/green, a wave collapsing on the rocky shore, then dissolving into itself in foam, vapor, light.

WORLDS END

We were sitting on the rocks, my husband and son,
down by the Loyalsock Creek, staying in a stone cabin

built by the CCC. Back at home, my mother cannot sleep—
her recliner's too small, the hospital bed's

too hard; like Goldilocks in the bears' cottage, nothing
is just right. Nothing will ever be just right again, as her body

fails and fails some more. Up on a ridge above the Loyalsock,
the foliage is at the peak of autumn's fire. Even the creek water

burns red, orange, yellow. The cell phone in my pocket
in case hospice calls thumps against my thigh.

It's one of those brilliant blue days you think should last forever,
the trees glowing redder, starry asters lining the rocky path.

Back in the cabin, pork and cranberries have been slowly cooking all day.
I boil up wild rice, add toasted pine nuts and golden raisins. At home,

my mother lifts a bowl, fills her nebulizer, inhaling the hot steam,
breathes again more easily for a little while. We throw more wood

in the black iron stove, whose hunger
is insatiable, whose belly can never be filled.

LA DENTELLE

So, we're in the middle of la belle France, at *la musée de la Dentelle*, the lace museum in Alençon, because I wanted to see the kind of lace I lied about when I wrote up my first wedding for the local newspaper. I didn't know *la dentelle d'Alençon* from *la dentelle de Bruges*, or my ass from a hole in the ground; there is no shade of green—lime, grass, chartreuse—green enough to describe me back then. Now, forty years later—can that be—I'm here with husband number two, the good one, the chemist, who never read a poem in his life until he met me, and who's only going to this museum because there's a promise of lunch at the end and he's hoping for something good, maybe with a few *frites* on the side. But he's a good sport and a scientist to boot, so he follows the documentary on lace making in all ten of its intricate stages, over, under, around and through the maquette, the parchment tracings, the transfers of design, the threads that go out in all directions, don't seem to make a pattern, but, in the end, under the discerning eye of the senior lacemaker, become a many-petalled rose that will bloom forever at the throat of a beautiful woman. He turns and looks at me and says, oh, now I get it, that's how you make a poem.

FAMILY ALBUM

The dead calla lily rose
like a cobra from the hood of its pot.
I wanted to break off the dried
stalk, but I was at my grandmother's,
and it wasn't my place. In her dining
room, the Chianti-colored walls bloomed
with photographs: birthdays, weddings,
first communions, with crosses made of dried
palms tucked behind each frame, and Jordan

almonds clustered in nylon netting in candy dishes
on the credenza. We were in our Sunday best, itchy
and starched. Nona brought in the ravioli, the sausage,
the chicken, the bowls of blood-red ragù.

No one in this snapshot is still living, swallowed by the darkness
that comes for us all, charmed like a snake from its basket
of coils. On this November afternoon, with a cold front
coming in, and the sun, a pale grapefruit in an orchard
of clouds, I close this black album, with all of its stories,
including the ones that haven't been written, including the ones
that nobody's told.

NOVEMBER

The light of autumn: you will not be spared
—Louise Glück

The burning bush has given up, slipped out of its scarlet
dress, stripped down to twig and limb, bare bones,
the architecture of itself. This is the heart of autumn,
after the fire's gone out. This is the year's dark dying,
when my mother began to slip from sight,
as imperceptibly as the moon shifts phases;
each day, a little less light. Frost's taken
all the flowers, the landscape, colorless,
shades of ash and beige, husks and seed
pods, what remains.

Barbara Crooker's work has appeared in magazines such as *Yankee*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Highlights for Children*, and *The Journal of American Medicine* (JAMA). She is the recipient of the 2006 Ekphrastic Poetry Award from Rosebud, the 2004 WB Yeats Society of New York Award, the 2003 Thomas Merton Poetry of the Sacred Award, three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships, and has been a twenty-six time nominee for the Pushcart Prize. *Radiance*, her first full-length book, won the 2005 Word Press First Book competition and was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; her new book, *Line Dance*, is just out from Word Press.

Michael C. Davis

THE END OF THE BRIDGE

For once, there is no traffic.

We cross Old Lee Highway
and proceed down
Lorcom Lane
past the Episcopal church,
the branch library,
the gay man's house
with the yard of ivy
my brother used to tend.

We make all the lights.

I see that your face is now
mine, and my sibling's.
But the hair
is yours, a dark
and curly cap that almost hides
your ears.

We don't need to say a thing.

The poplars over Spout Run
arch in full leaf,
pressing upward from the stones.
Your hand,
as middle aged as ever
firmly grips the blue plastic
of the wheel.

We roll

on well-greased hubs
down the roadway and turn on
to the river's edge. It's been
a long time since I've been
in a car with bench seats
and nylon upholstery.

Up the ramp,

the way is clear.
Georgetown's stone towers
signal the far bank
and I anticipate
the light at M,
the shift to cobbles,
the old trolley tracks
all of it suspended
momentarily
as the bridge drops away
and the car falls.

The river rises

to smash through the glass
and metal. Mother,
I have not seen you in 20 years.
Where are you taking us,
I ask the face that is now mine.

PERSIAN MINIATURE

Tamerlane sits on two rugs,
one only partially unrolled,
apart from his retinue.

His wine bearers are frozen
in gestures of offering.

Across a small creek
whose voice will mingle
with other melodies
musicians sit
and pluck harp,
tap tambourine.

Fire of battle
still smolders
in the exalted one's eyes.

An orange tree
behind him
offers untaken shade.

The great city of India
lies at his feet,
taken.
There is no parade.

A simple shift
covers his back.
Violets embroider
the grass
carpeting
the hillside.

The music
is not heard,
nor the voice
of the brook.
The field lies ready
for the scythe.

SIMPLE MEDITATION ON THE THIRTIETH PSALM

One day after I have chipped at the ice for years
you appear, one leg at a time. The thaw
draws back like the smile of a ghost
and you lie, surrounded by your goods—
your knitting, a letter, the last *New Yorker*.
Then your lids flutter and your eyes open,
denying the last visit your husband and son
made to the hospital to remove your rings
and leave you naked for the end.

So now the box that arrived 300 days later
filled with your ashes was just a joke!
Through it all you just slept, even as we dribbled
what remained of your bones
through our fingers and read a psalm:
“Shall the dust praise thee; shall it declare thy truth?”

Your face now beams as innocent
as the moon, slow with sleep
and the cold. I hold it in my hands to warm
the frozen cheeks. You ask are there grandchildren.
How is the house? What's for dinner?
I wrap you in a coat and help you down
the path, up the stairs. All the while you whisper
how it was cold, and so heavy. Unbearable.

You will find that everything has changed,
and nothing comes up to expectations.
The grandchildren will not recognize you.
The house has long since been bulldozed.
Dinner waits in some other oven but not ours.
And we nag. Why did you go and leave us?

We wished to have mourning
turned into gladness when we sat on cold stones
and let your life pass one last time through our fingers.
And all the while the birds sang
for love, or out of duty, how could we know?
The landscape was just a scrim of life
over the mineral world that will endure.

And here you are today, a wraith,
a wisp of smoke. One last time.
All hope against hope. A handful of ashes,
a face staring up from beneath the ice,
a hand reaching through fire that none survive.

Michael Davis is the author of *Upon Waking*, a chapbook published in 1999 by Mica Press. His work has appeared in *Lip Service*, *Poet Lore*, and the anthologies *Open Door*, *Cabin Fever*, and *Winners*. He has read his work extensively in the Washington, D.C., area and participates in the Arlington County Pick-a-Poet program, teaching poetry in county schools.

Sarah DeCorla-Souza

2001

I

This is the way it was before the day
that divided time like Jesus:
I was the axis and the world
the carousel

These are the things we had:
a vast swath of dandelions
an abundance of sun
the pall of complacency we slept beneath
which settled into the walls
shut out thoughts of the transcendent

These are the things we kept:
a red and white graduation tassel
dried rose petals in a glass bowl
a chunk of laughter caught
in a cupped hand

These are the things we left behind:
a letter to a television star
a treble clef from our favorite song
the golden hair I wished I had

This is what I remember:
a ripe tomato plucked
from my grandmother's garden

imaginary wars staged in the backyard
weapons of sticks
fortresses of pine needles

the metallic slam of a locker door

running down a dormitory hallway
after I heard the news

a kaleidoscoping tunnel

This is when I came of age:
I can tell you the day, the hour.

II

This is the way it is now:
a pillar of fire
a crumbled shell of leaf
autumns that smell of jet fuel

the ripping open at birth
the hatching of the chrysalis
the rainbow after the bomb

years that are heavy with tears and smoke
the strong men bent
fetching the broken pulley from the well

becoming Alice
in a slanted Wonderland

a trembling hand on my sleeping child's back
the rise and fall of her breath.

FIAT

The angel paused, and creation held its breath.
The stars pulsed like a pounding heart
and the oceans yawned a gasping cave
waiting for the virgin's response.

In the days and weeks that followed
she ground wheat on the stone and walked
the familiar dusty roads, the words
she had spoken still blooming on her lips—

Let it be done to me according to your word.

And then—

The sighing of the wind for centuries down mountains,
the autumn leaves turning yellow
from relief as the trees relax their boughs,
the long exhale of the ocean currents.

This is why

the seagulls still dip and call above the floodwaters,
why the battlefield grass shimmers, why the tides
still swell and re-swell,
and the wind sighs and re-sighs.

This is what

The wind whispers to the fallen beams
even as the Earth quakes, what
the cardinal calls, blood-red
against the fallen snow.

Sarah DeCorla-Souza's poetry has appeared in *JMWW*, *Conte*, *Visions International*, *Dappled Things*, and *Angel Face*. She lives in Alexandria, Virginia with her husband and daughter.

Roberta Feins

IN THE BRONX, ELDERLY RELATIVES

. . . were exotic plants in steamy Grand Concourse
apartments, where wild ailanthus shouldered
through iron fences in shoddy courtyards,
and the dignified Hispanic elevator man banged

the cage shut on halls eternally smelling
of pot roast. My great-aunt, apron over
stuffed curves, lined face fine as strudel,
fussed at her husband with the shakes,

once a hatter, always a fierce socialist.
Radiators hissed behind cabbage-green curtains,
under scrolled mahogany chairs with horse-hair
seats, backs shawled with crocheted doilies.

Talk of family, pension, rude danger
all around. Accents of Middle Europe
from people sixty years in America, telling
jokes about Marilyn Monroe's kosher

mother-in-law, about Einstein and was he
good for the Jews? If I had known
it would all be gone, that they would all
have moved from high-piled down mattresses

to beds of mahogany and concrete,
I would have written down what they said,
instead of sitting in the slippery armchair,
gobbling butter cookies, nose buried

in the Red Fairy Book, or staring
out the window at kids playing potsy,
dreaming of handsome princes and the deli
we'd visit soon, where I could fish

for sour pickles in a wooden barrel.
Delicate flesh of smoked whitefish wrapped
in its golden skin, the black and white
Yin and Yang of marinated herring.

MECHANICAL TOY

The hand lifts up, then, open-palmed, comes down.
The show begins: the child's wild kick and flail.
Turning the crank you make it all start round:

the father spanking when the toy is wound.
His child's mouth gapes its O in voiceless wail.
His hand lifts up, then, open-palmed, comes down.

His tin legs—columns—rooted in the ground;
the hand on metal cheeks ignores their braille.
Winding the crank you make their act start round.

The toddler in gray-suited lap face down
no doubt deserves his birth into this jail.
The hand hails sin, then open-palmed, comes down.

He turns his head and wails without a sound.
His father's righteousness will never fail.
Turning the crank you make it all start round,

and cannot stop the wheels from where they're bound.
You set in gear this stagnant, bitter tale,
where hand lifts up, then, open-palmed, comes down
when you wind the crank. You make the world go round.

Roberta Feins was born in New York and has also lived in North Carolina and (currently) Seattle. She works as a computer consultant. She received her MFA in poetry from New England College in 2007. Roberta edits the e-zine *Switched On Gutenberg* (www.switched-ongutenberg.org/).

Nan Fry

A BLESSING

May the Rooftree Angel perch on your house
May the Angel of the Odd inhabit its corners
May the Angel of Order and the Angel of Dust
resolve their differences
May the Angel Who Brings the Sea Wind blow through you
May the Angels of Anger, made wholly of fire,
burn with a clarifying flame
May the Angel of Solitude calm you
and the Angel of Tears cleanse you
May the Angel over Wild Fowl and Creeping Things
keep the mice from your bread drawer
and the rats from your cellar
May the Angel of Constellations bring you
clear skies and dark nights
May the Angel of Mysteries remind you
of all we don't know, and may Memuneh, a deputy angel,
dispenser of dreams, bless your sleep
May the Angel of April send you a postcard in February
May the Angels of Snow, of Showers, of the Sirocco
open you to the world's weather
May the Angel of Voyages bless yours
May the Angel of True Visions, Chief of Thunder,
join forces with the Revealing Angel
and may the Angel of Love and Invention
egg you on

FRISBEE

Moon Disk, Pluto Platter,
so light in the hand that even I,
never good at sports, could pluck
you out of air and skim you
over my new husband's head.
Sometimes we'd play through dusk
and into the dark, as fireflies rose
from the grass, until we could barely
see you hovering above us, a tiny
spacecraft leaving its orbit.

Still we made each other leap
and run, reaching for you,
flinging you on, a glowing
shuttle weaving bright
invisible threads
between us.

ONIONS

*The onion is round. So is a basketball, a grapefruit, a globe, the moon.
How does the onion's roundness differ from theirs?*
—Nancy Willard

The onion wears a papery sheath.
It is the moon gone to ground,
light enclosed in a brown paper bag,
not really round, but the shape
of the tears we weep when we take
a knife to its white skin.

"Onions," says the Joy
of Cooking, "are of easy culture.
They prefer moist, rich earth,
sun, and shallow planting."
It does not say they are the moon's
long-lost relatives who send up
green spears toward the sun.

The grapefruit, on the other hand,
is a little sun. We cut it in half
and pour on sun-colored honey.
The mixture of sweet and tart
waking our tongues, we rise
from the table feeling lighter.

"Onions are supposed to be the secret
of health," says the Joy of Cooking.
"But how can they keep that secret?"
In a cool, dark place they sleep
in their papery shells. Giant pearls,
they will be married to mushrooms.
Fire is the priest at this wedding.

Onions, sliced into rings,
do not bounce, do not sail
through the air and into a hoop
looped round with netting as the crowd
cheers and the sun is captured
for another year.

Onions live more quietly
though they may sizzle
in their bath of oil.

The onion is not painted blue
where oceans pulse
or green where continents sprawl.
The globes of my childhood
are all wrong now—the names
of countries changed, borders
redrawn, but where the soil
is moist and rich, onions
still flourish, tiny illumined
globes in the spinning dark.

Nan Fry is the author of two collections of poetry: *Relearning the Dark* (Washington Writers' Publishing House) and *Say What I Am Called* (Sibyl-Child), a chapbook of riddles she translated from the Anglo-Saxon. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines such as *Poet Lore*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, and *The Bark*; in the online publications *Beltway Poetry Quarterly* (washingtonart.com/beltway/fry.html) and the *Journal of Mythic Arts* (www.endicott-studio.com); and in anthologies such as *Poetry in Motion from Coast to Coast* (W.W. Norton), *The Faery Reel: Tales from the Twilight Realm* (Viking / Penguin); and *The Best of Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet* (Del Rey / Ballantine Books). She has received a work-in-progress grant and an Individual Artist's Award in poetry from the Maryland State Arts Council and an EDPRESS Award for excellence in educational journalism. She teaches at The Writer's Center in Bethesda, Maryland.

Martin Galvin

A LIFE OF AGEE, THE CAT

The cat who took Prozac had
as cats do have, a tizzy fit
at being discussed before breakfast.
She had pretty much decided anyway
to leave the house for good, take
To the road in the grand old way
And prove herself in the little towns
That had never met a cat who took Prozac
And could have been convinced
Of something wonderful about her act

But then the only human bean she loved
Without regret came down with a fever
Or, rather, went up with a fever, and had
Deliriums—or is it deliria—that lasted
In cat days many months so she couldn't go
And then when she could she wouldn't
For fear the only non-cat man she loved
Would fall into depression from the loss.

So she settled in to the domestic life,
Depressed, as only contented cats can be,
And she scatter-brained about the house
Once a day on the stroke of six
Chasing her tail in the manner of dogs
Who she thought quite frankly were barking fools.
She fed her master, who she deemed her mate,
A Prozac a day, dropping it into the glass of gin
He drank as tonic before his evening meal.

She smiled, the cat who took Prozac, at
her medical art, how it rounded out
The path she had chosen, the ways of her world.
Then she popped her Prozac and grinned out loud.

PREMONITIONS OF A SEWER BOY

They lowered me headfirst into the sewer
Since I weighed less than the galoots
Who held me by the ankles. The soul I had
Those days was in my throat, trying to get out
But I wouldn't let it, anymore than I'd let
The smell get inside my heart, the way
That sally o'malley's did. I was there
After all to get a tennis ball, the only one we had
That had rolled its determined way along the gutter
And into the sewer as if that fetid hole were its heaven
On earth. And mine. Sure, I said, pretending I didn't care
One hoot if they took me up and lowered me down
Sure and if you drop me, dreadful things will happen
To your good names as the tough guys of the neighborhood.

The score was 26 to 5, but we didn't think of calling the game
because of utter rout or gutter loss. It had to be played until our time
For childhood was up and we were meant to go inside our houses,
Recite our schoolwork, scrub our hands and sit
To whatever food the mice and bigger brothers
Hadn't eaten. And that swallowing sewer
was the thing that stood between our stick-ball game,
Smacking hard line drives out of imaginary ballparks
And our late afternoon continuing into later.

The walls on the way down were dressed in slime-green
And wetted down with thousand leggers and what
Was worse, things that didn't have a name, but
Anyway, had tongues that slinked along the mold
And moss then shot out at any boy just passing through
On the simple errand of going down to get a beat-up ball.
The lesson of corporal punishment rode down with me and Dante,
A corporal punishment that was almost the only thing
I remembered about the religion our mother loved.

As I went down, I wondered if my parents would miss me.
Who would take the ashes out of the furnace Tuesday nights?
I was sorry that I had never really learned to hate the cat
As much as the cat deserved, that I didn't give my brother
Knuckles for his birthday, that my socks had holes in them.
Random thoughts. The kind boys have walking along
Or going down a sewer headfirst. To kill some time
As I went, I ran the nine x tables twice then spelled
Out loud the hardest words I knew. Transubstantiation,

Mediocre, illicit. Not so hard when you're older,
Any of them, but I was ten and heading down to hell.

The ball came grudgingly away from its grave,
Frosted with the coldest gloop I'd ever touched.
I stuck it in my pocket, just in case, and threw down
Into the dire the rosary I'd never need again, having done
My penance and my repetitions for all the life I'd led,
And gave the signal for the mugs to haul me up
To walk among men and boys, a blooded saint,
Free from the guilt and fears that taunt the best
Of them, my chin daring the clouds to burst.
Later, I was eleven, then twelve. Nothing much
To worry at but pimples, algebra, and girls.

THE WAYS OF MEMORY

In Montclair, California

Just when I think I have forgotten,
I will recall the cloy of the eucalyptus,
bring back to my ears the roar and whine
of the chain saw that meant business
biting through the legs of the dense stand
and forgive, for our own good, such slaughter.

The nerve behind my knees tells me how the tree falls,
Finding its slow way between the arms
Of its others, its seed-kin, children and cousins,
to meet what's permanent of gravity,
a fall that needs more than one letting go
to finish up. That fall I will remember

all the way down to San Diego
should my roots hold fast.

THE GREAT SILVER HORSE

You know me well enough to know some things
I would only do under foot-sore provocations.
To boot: a sale-slick country boy, the happiest face
I have ever seen off a Wal-Mart mannequin,
Who happens to have the cream puff just waiting?

at the Used Car Emporium on State Route 26
up to Millsboro next to the Move in Next Week
Mobile Home place and just south of a single-steeple
church that had been converted into an antiques shop
that calls itself God's Way and has not yet been
audited by the IRS but will be, by all the saints.
He has been waiting all day for a good taste that he
can pretty well tell is mine and he has been right here
for thirty two years and never missed a turkey dinner
and how was the family these days and the corn do I think
It will set up good and let's just take her down the road.

Now you can reckon the rest of it. We did by darn and weren't it
just good to have the road to ourselves with those summer fat frogs
gone back to their own HeeHaw bogs to croak and he could let me
have this creampuff at cost because he had to move it off the lot
right fast to show his boss he knew his job and weren't it
lucky we had jobs at all what with those foreign fellas moving in
who would work for nothing most of them and did not buy a thing
to help the locals put the bird on the table neither.

I knew I was back in the righteous world of Mickey Mouse,
Is A-O.K. and Normal Rockinghorse
pastelling the 48 Contiguous all over Saturday Evening
while Roy Rogers sidled up to the Lone Ranger, said
he had a bridge to sell and did his faithful Tonto
have a river needed crossing anywheres about?
And this horseless carriage he had to move were Silver
sure enough so I bought that sucker, brought it home, smiling
like gingerbread all the way. Sat her out front for my used-to-be-
new neighbors to see her for what she was. And rocked. And spat.

Martin Galvin's work has won numerous awards, including First Prize for "Hilda and Me and Hazel" in *Poet Lore's* narrative poetry contest in 1992, First Prize in *Potomac Review's* Best Poem Competition in 1999 for "Freight Yard at Night," and First Prize from *Sow's Ear Poetry Journal* for "Cream" in a 2007 national competition. He was awarded a writer's residency at Yaddo for August of 2007. He will have poems early in 2008 in *The New Republic* and in *Sub-Tropics*, as well as in *Innisfree*. In addition to his 2007 chapbook *Circling Out* and his book *Wild Card*, he has two other chapbooks: *Making Beds* (Sedwick Books) and *Appetites* (Bogg Publications).

Vanessa Gebbie

TO NOT BE WATER

I would not be water more than I am.

You, a mathematician, say
I am little more than tides,

I respond to the moon. Ebb and flow
As blood replaces blood, and cell, cell.
Nothing but a small ocean.

I would not be water more than that.
Not salve to drought,
Holding monsters of the deep,

Not be cloud, or rain,
Not sit stagnant and green
Where cattle tongue and tread,

Or be the stillness of a lake,
Lilies growing over my darkest parts.

Except I might be your mirror

And, were I to be water more
You would lift me up, needing,
And I would be swallowed whole.

A writer, creative writing teacher and editor, Vanessa Gebbie lives in East Sussex, UK. Her short fiction has been widely published and has won many awards including prizes at both Fish and Bridport 2007. Her debut collection of short fiction *Words From A Glass Bubble* is forthcoming from Salt Publishing, Cambridge UK. "To Not Be Water" was her first extremely tentative poetry submission. www.vanessagebbie.com.

Brian Gilmore

diamonds are forever
(for wilmer isome gilmore)

we will live twice.
both times w/
sean connery rolling
balls of thunder
and saying his name coolly:

bond.
james bond.

and these are the days of
two movies for \$1.50
and they don't clear the
theatre after the show.
and our father is here with
us and has brought us
and this is a movie house
in our neighborhood
and sean connery always
gets the girl and always
wins his fights
and wears nice clothes
unlike me

all i do is
go to the corner and back
or down the alley for a post
pattern where my big brother
throws me the bomb and for
a moment i am charley taylor.
and the place my family always
summers is wildwood, new jersey
or atlantic city (before the casinos)
it is the greatest thing when
we are there too
it feels like we will
all live twice
our family together on
the boardwalk or in that
hot burning sand
or swimming in that salt

water along the jersey shore
and let's not forget salt water
taffy because nothing is better
in the summertime than
salt water taffy at the jersey
shore except maybe
sean connery
on some raft
with some long-legged goddess

and i still
watch those bond
movies these days
though none of the
new bonds are as
good or as cool as
sean connery.
and the movies really
aren't the same either
because the movie house
is not in my neighborhood
they clear the theatre after
each show
but most of all,
my father is not around anymore
to take me to the show.

the godfather

(for adanya, 18 months)

that scene from the godfather which i have watched over and
over: the don has passed chasing his grandson through the vegetable
garden. the traitor has been revealed at the funeral: sad eyed abe vigoda.
abe vigoda asks the lawyer tom hayden to get him out for old times sake
because it was "just business." "can't do it sally," is all that is said. though
abe is almost saved because of his face, that wonderfully precious, charitable
face which could make a father cry because like tom i too am a lawyer and this is
what i see each night looking into my daughter's 18-month old eyes: abe vigoda.
sad-eyed, looking to be saved from the sandman.

now she is working on me and giving it her best shot with those despondent
but hopeful abe vigoda eyes. my daughter has to sleep in her crib for trying to
cut a secret deal with one of the other five new york families. she wants me to
get her out for old times sake and she knows i am not strong and loyal like the
lawyer tom hayden. i look into her eyes and replay that scene again. i see abe being

led away to “sleep with the fishes.” francis ford coppola is lucky he didn’t cast this 18-month old for his film. who would have believed that an infant black girl would one day run the mob?

Brian Gilmore, a native Washingtonian, is a public interest lawyer, poet, writer, and columnist with the Progressive Media Project. He is the author of two collections of poetry, *elvis presley is alive and well and living in harlem* (Third World Press, 1993) and *Jungle Nights and Soda Fountain Rags: Poem for Duke Ellington* (Karibu Books, 2000). His poetry, essays, and reviews appear in such journals and anthologies as *Voices of Dissent*, *In Search of Color Everywhere*, *Bum Rush the Page*, *Step Into a World*, *Catch a Fire*, *Icarus*, *The Red Brick Review*, *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *The Progressive Populist*, *Soulfires*, and *Callaloo*.

Howard Good

AT KELLY'S SHAMROCK TAVERN

In the part of town where the porches sag
and evening starts out as an ache,

where the thuggish wind off the dark river
pistol whips the last few pedestrians

and a sweaty woman up in a rented room
moves her broad hips like a jackhammer,

where God has the kind of face he deserves,
the square, brutal forehead of a dirty cop,

I lean on the bar and order a shot and a beer,
and with a cigarette in my fist and the dead

smokestacks of ancient industries to my back,
wait for my luck, or at least the day, to change.

Howie Good, a journalism professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz, is the author of three poetry chapbooks, *Death of the Frog Prince* (2004) and *Heartland* (2007), both from FootHills Publishing, and *Strangers & Angels* (2007) from Scintillating Publications. He was recently nominated for the second time for a Pushcart Prize.

John Grey

ROD EXPLAINS MARRIAGE

Marriage becomes
this domesticated destruction.
I feel like a zoo creature,
hear the voices,
"Look, a full grown male."
I am violent toward
my food dish,
and the leather back chair
I dump my bones in
to watch t.v.
Marriage becomes
love translated into
another language,
like German
with all those hard consonants,
Some parts are stored
in safety glass.
Others are used illicitly
by strangers.
Marriage is the discovery
that vacuuming requires no romance,
that a garden is a kiss
five years down the road.
You stay together
the way objective
can live with subjective.
You stay together because
you can't live alone.
You've reached the age of fifty-five
and none of your loneliness
survived the journey.

John Grey is an Australian-born poet, playwright, musician. His latest book is *What Else Is There* from Main Street Rag. His work has appeared recently in *The English Journal*, *The Pedestal*, *Pearl* and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Brenda Mann Hammack

ALPHABET OF TREES

*A dreadful twang came from the springs;
The bed unfolded great black wings.*

—Edward Gorey

As Victorine's voice falters into cough-laced sleep,
bottle flies like bits of noctilucence clink amid aspens'
crooks and buds (precocious in late winter). By dawn, a
dream-thick fugue (or sluggishness) suffuses all in
ember light. What leaves remain congeal in resin as
fossil fairies might.

If prehistoric owl or fruit bat
glazed and petrified in alders' grottoed sides, if sylphides
hovered lifelessly, but weren't extinct despite their rigor,
if mahogany re-leafed, the very bed might splinter,
jerk, then heave beneath the flowered weight of curtain.
Knobs and headboard, twisting, might sprout horn buds,
luminiferous excrescences.

The child might not wake.
Manx cat might traipse down hallways lined with books
no cases could ever keep as whorls raised patterns that
oozed and steeped to nut-brown vortexes. Prehensile
pupae might, like Victorine, seek handhold, reach.
Quiescently reckoning, they might do lots of things.

Reality does not require belief. Neither does imagination.

Supposing all those trees, transfixed as leafless beings,
turned into something grander than piano, clock, or
undressed odalisque, even Ingres must admit, no
Venetian could be more grotesque: limbs wresting to
wing-bones, flexed.

If bed, suddenly, ascended into
Xanadu (or exosphere), would Victorine, unwaking, hear
yearling pterodactyl's cry as twanging? Would syrinx,
zealously indulged, remind those leaves of quaking?

Innisfree 6
March 2008

Brenda Mann Hammack teaches creative writing, children's literature, and Victorian literature at Fayetteville State University. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in a variety of journals, including *Mudlark*, *Word Riot*, *Heliotrope*, *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, *Arsenic Lobster*, and *The Hurricane Review*.

Colleen S. Harris

THE COURTESAN

Men stroked my skin for salvation,
pressed their thumbs deep to impress my flesh
and sent me trembling into the arms of my night-ghasts
when their fantasies were done.

Men spoke of my magicks hoarsely
in the torn fabric of dark. Men left me bruised,
mute and nude with no covering but my mussed hair
to face the harsh judge of dawn.

Men wrapped their tongues around
the syllables of my name, they ate the delicacies
I prepared, and left me a stranger,
surrounded by the cold luxuries their coin provided.

Men came to me. The old. The young.
Even the crippled came, to feel un-lame and whole.
They plumbed the depths of my flesh to find
themselves, and returned to their wives no wiser.

Men's weaknesses. My body. Gold. On these
shifting sands have I built my lonesome empire.
It will outlast Caesar's so long as men try to find
their salvation in a soft body not their own.

Colleen S. Harris is an assistant professor and librarian at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, where they don't mind her tattoo habit and poetry addiction, and is currently working on her MFA in creative writing at Spalding University. Her poetry has appeared in *Creekwalker*, *Survivor's Review*, *Poetry Midwest*, *Ruminate*, and *kaleidowhirl*.

Joy Helsing

return

here I am
by myself
at the same romantic inn
where we once stayed

I walk the rose-bordered path
dine at the same table
gaze at flames
in the same stone fireplace
watch the sun sink
into the same cold sea

lie in the very bed
we once shared
no more alone
now
than I was then

Joy Harold Helsing lives in the Sierra Nevada foothills of Northern California. She is an ex-salesclerk, ex-secretary, ex-textbook editor, ex-psychologist, ex-college instructor, ex-New Englander, and ex-San Franciscan. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals and she has published three chapbooks and one book, *Confessions of the Hare* (PWJ Publishing).

Nellie Hill

THE HUNT

We comb the grasses,
those long summer grasses
long after summer has passed.
We stride over the fields
and along the riverbeds,
past the hickory trees
with their dried hickory smell,
and the low-growing yellow oaks
with their oakey leaves still fluttering.
Our boots and our gloves release
a leathery fullness, a leathery animal smell,
in the stilled days of late autumn, the stillness
of early winter. We pass the remaining birds
with their miserable bird cheeps,
exactly the crackling sound of the thin ice
that covers the grasses before sunrise.

And we take home this feeling
of the wildness between seasons
as if we've forgotten where we came from.
We walk into the sleepiness that comes with cold
and the quiet before and after.

THE VIEW IN WINTER

The first time I see the summer house in snow
it's smothered, not breathing,
and inside the floor glares in the cold
and there's nothing in the cupboards,
not even rum or Scotch,
nothing to bring blood to the hands.

A musk smell hangs like a curtain
between then and before, then and now.
How can I move my numbed feet
from frozen memory and go
down the hill to the lake, rigid
in its winter sleep where I want to walk

the surface of this world
because the ice and the blanketing snow
have nothing to stop me,
nothing to call me back
the way in those summers
the dark water called, fragrant,
musical within the summer winds.

What do I want with this ramshackle house
back of the little road I know so well?
Whether in summer's damp arms
or winter's heavy coat, why have I returned
among spiders and squirrel nests and the bold mice
who've taken the house for themselves
but to remember life at its source,
where one begins to store
the days for the long view back.

Nellie Hill's work has appeared in various journals including *Poetry East*, *American Poetry Review* (with an introduction of her by Denise Levertov), *The Harvard Magazine*, *Commonweal*, *The Alaska Quarterly Review*, and *The Snowy Egret*, as well as in three chapbooks. For several years she taught creative writing in the Joint Medical and Humanities Program at UC Berkeley and now has a private acupressure practice in Berkeley.

Melanie Houle

INHERITANCE

All I can know of you rests in my hand,
An emblem of uncertain legacy,
As cryptic as a footprint in the sand.

I have no explanation to demand,
Since no one still alive can answer me.
All I can know of you rests in my hand.

An eighteen-carat rose-gold wedding band
Is all that's left to tell your history,
As cryptic as a footprint in the sand.

Were you a farmer's wife, wed to the land,
A shopkeeper, a lover of the sea?
All I can know of you rests in my hand.

A worn inscription in a foreign hand
Encodes a message meaningless to me,
As cryptic as a footprint in the sand.

Our link, forged in the generations spanned,
is cast in gold that seals its secrecy.
All I can know of you rests in my hand,
As cryptic as a footprint in the sand.

Melanie Houle is a physician and former jeweler. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee and *The Raintown Review's* first featured poet. Her poetry also appears in *The Lyric*, *California Quarterly*, *The Aurorean*, *Mobius*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *The HyperTexts*, *ShatterColors*, *Contemporary Rhyme*, *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and others.

Michael Hutchison

DIFFICULTIES OF SPEECH

How are the words
So carefully hidden
Concealed like lovers' letters
From this silence
They would break

Who are we
To need them
And who is to say
They are wrong

Think of the words as fingers
Gently calling to another hand
Fumbling with latchkeys
Hesitant
And trembling
In the doorway

Michael Hutchison studied the art of the essay as a graduate student at the University of Iowa, but prefers poetic expression as his most authentic voice.

Jason Irwin

YOURS

for Scott

It's the middle of night.
You wake for a glass of water,
or maybe whiskey
to calm your nerves, after
a hard week of work.
There's a knock at the back door.
Not loud, but steady.
You don't open it, or even look
through the curtains, afraid
it might be your best friend from high school,
the one who died on that stretch
of country road beyond town,
where you learned
the ways of men.

Maybe it's a group of refugees
from some faraway land you could never
locate on a map.
Maybe they're surrounding your house,
looking in all the windows, searching
for their happy ending.
Maybe they look like those old newsreels
of immigrants crowded in boats
like rats, with that look in their eyes:
sullen, yet astonished after weeks at sea.

It's the middle of night.
You wake for water, an antacid tablet,
or simply to look at your books.
You stand proud—marveling at your collection
of Latin American Surrealists, your tomes
on economics, religion and how
things should be—the way your mother stood
after polishing the silverware.
Maybe you just feel the need to see it all
in its place, knowing it's yours.

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Jason Irwin's first book of poems, *Watering the Dead*, won the 2006/2007 Transcontinental Poetry Award and will come out from Pavement Saw Press this spring. His work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *Confrontation*, *The Sycamore Review*, *Blue Collar Review*, *Miller's Pond*, *Pearl*, and elsewhere.

Lisa Kosow

EDWARD HOPPER, 7:00 AM

There's no breaking this stillness.
It has something solid about it,
in the railway station and the café
where a solitary figure stares off,
never toward the future, always
the past. Or it's the early hour
when shadows fall at the precise angle
that captures a place
at its most melancholy.
There's no revolution going on
here, no surreal lion's head
floating in a blinding blue sky
or cracked eggs in the rust red desert,
no cubist deconstruction
of human bodies twisting
in a fragmented dance of bone and flesh.
No paint is ever splattered on the floor.
There's no music to it, and no movement.
Just a small town shop window
pristine white at 7:00 AM
before industry and passion have awakened,
sad yet reassuring. You felt
the way I did this morning.

Lisa Kosow has had poems published in journals including *Gargoyle*, *The Connecticut River Review*, *Wordwrights*, *Potpourri*, *The Plastic Tower*, *Perceptions*, and the first issue of *Innisfree*. Another poem appeared in the anthology, *Cabin Fever*, published by WordWorks. In 1995 her chapbook, *Dawn is Moving*, was published by the Argonne Hotel Press in Washington, D.C. She has a BA from Washington College in Chestertown, MD, and an MLS from the University of Maryland. She works as a librarian at the Department of Justice and lives in Takoma Park, MD.

Frederick Lord

SEARCHING FOR LOWELL'S GRAVE

See how a moon-colored sun
squints from a scratched slate sky.
Hear how the gray grass crunches
beneath us like cheap plastic toys.

Brusque winds rouge your cheek,
fair lover, in this New Hampshire
mid-November. Are they roses
for the grave of Robert

Traill Spence Lowell, Junior,
who loved the ones who abused him
and abused the ones who loved him
and lied the truth about both?

Despite my leaning away from you
this time of year, whenever you bend
to read some tenderness long worn
to a whisper, I am diminished.

What the dead caution never changes,
though frost may have heaved
their chests like Lowell's sea.
How soon before we wear our names?

And can we still call death a brief
passage through cold shadow,
or is that antique comforter
shredded beyond all mending?

Now the flint sky on stone cloud
strikes stray sparks of snow.
Time to give up and go home
and with glad hands build love's slow fire.

VILLANELLE, FROM A LINE BY UPDIKE

“God made the world, Aquinas says, at play,”
and what we make we love as our own name.
But then that gifted child was called away,

from the beach where our world sandcastle lay,
by other children, for a different game.
God made the world, Aquinas says, at play,

with what odd stuff was handy on that day,
delight in the doing God’s only aim.
But then that gifted child was called away,

to let the sea dissolve our lump of clay
with each caress, as if it would reclaim
the world God made, Aquinas says, at play.

Though some may wonder if our maker may
never have meant us for what we became
after that gifted child was called away,

who cares what novelist-theologians say?
Love by accident is love just the same.
God made the world, Aquinas says, at play,
but then that gifted child was called away.

Frederick (Rick) is the Assistant Dean of Liberal Arts at Southern New Hampshire University, where he also teaches English and serves as poetry editor for *Amoskeag*, SNHU’s literary magazine. A finalist in 2007’s Dogwood Poetry Prize and honorable mention in the Juked Poetry Prize, Lord has recently appeared in *Blueline*, *Switched-on Gutenberg*, *kaleidowhirl*, *Main Channel Voices*, *caesura*, *Bent Pin Quarterly*, *Relief*, and *Bayou*. He and his wife Heather, a painter, live in Bow, N.H.

Dan Masterson

From the manuscript of his forthcoming book, *That Which Is Seen*, a book of ekphrastic poems—



BULLY BOSS & CANDLE BOY

based on Giuseppe Arcimboldo's "Summer"

Anybody can become angry, that is easy; but to be angry with the right person, and to the right degree, and at the right time, and for the right purpose, and in the right way, that is not within everybody's power, that is not easy. —Aristotle

He sits at a glaring light-tube,
Candling eggs in the A&P cellar.
Overhead, Tex drawls his way
Through another sale, tossing
Corn husks & carrot tops onto
The floor inside his circular
Produce counter where they mix
With the daily slosh of rotting
Grapes, bananas, lettuce, oranges,

Avocado, cauliflower, cucumber,
Squash, broccoli, & mango, & melon
& mushrooms, the trash cans plum
Empty as always. Soon, Tex will

Prop the trap door open & yell
His Bombs Away greeting to the
Candle Boy, & rake it all down
The stairs at quitting time, his
Necktie dangling just beneath

His toothless grin, his cackle
Fading away as he hangs his apron
Up for the day. But not this time,
For Candle Boy has propped a ladder
Behind the staircase, & waits as
The lid creaks wide open, & the
Basement sky is filled with garbage
& that familiar cackle, & then,
On cue, Tex's tie flops into view.

One two-handed yank & Tex goes
Airborne, headed south, tumbling
Like a month-old sack of potatoes,
In danger of breaking his neck &
Other things, but Candle Boy
Will never know, for he's long
Gone, already out the alley door,
In need of another after-school
Job, but that's some other day.



THE VIGIL OF JUDAS ISCARIOT
(on considering Salvador Dali's "Crucifixion or Corpus Hiperbolicus")

*The dogwood is ready.
Its braided hemp hangs
knotted in a noose
dilating for my soul.*

*The tremors of your face
unfold on the backs of
my shut eyes. Your scared
suicide will cause my own*

*To be recorded forever
as the vile sacrament
of despair, the very solace
of this shattered viaticum.*

I smell lantern oil hissing above the pledge
Of public torture, see the sack cover your head,
Hear fists carry you beyond fear into giddiness.
Sweat runs your blood as you stumble toward
Antonia. At the tower, bone-chip flagrums shred
Skin from your back & buttocks, looping to rip
Haphazard chunks from your chest. The crowd
Chants for more. Naked and nauseous, still tied
To the pillar, you shiver in silence. They allow
You to rest, measuring your strength. You awaken
In a halo of thorns being driven into your skull
With a broken branch. A glancing blow breaks
Your nose; others split your lips & brow & cheeks.

Wearing your own robes again, you balance the
Patibulum on your shoulder, as they push you
Toward Golgotha. The throngs become less
Raucous, waiting for spikes to free your tongue.
Your robes are peeled away: all healing wounds
Open for their final bleeding; gravel cakes your

Back as men of your father's trade stretch your
Arms full length. They pierce your left wrist,
Right, & two hammers begin to clatter above iron
In search of wood. Both thumbs dance against
Your palms: visual proof of severed nerves. You
Rise half-crucified, soldiers advancing for the lift.
In one deft movement, you are set atop the stipe &

Fixed fast. Your mouth opens, saliva flows, you no
Longer swallow, muscles tighten, fingers draw in,
Toes curl under, stomach cramps begin. The chest
Puffs, the face purples, the eyes roll. Time & again,
You stand against the spike, trying to fill your lungs
With God-forsaken air. The flies arrive to lay their
Eggs among your mutilations. Blood flows from
Your side & takes on water: the final stage of life, but
It is clear you will live on through the birth of flies
To witness exquisite atrocities performed in the holy
Name of the Father & of the Son & of the Holy Spirit,
As it was In the beginning, is now & ever shall be.
Amen.

Dan Masterson is the author of four collections of poetry: *On Earth As It Is* (The University of Illinois Press, 1978), *Those Who Trespass* (The University of Arkansas Press, 1985), *World Without End* (The University of Arkansas Press, 1991), and *All Things, Seen and Unseen, New and Selected* (The University of Arkansas Press, 1997). These poems are from his forthcoming fifth book, *That Which Is Seen*. He was elected to membership in Pen International in 1986. He has received two Pushcart Prizes, the Bullis, Borestone, and Fels awards, and is an AWP Award Series honoree, as well as the founding editor of the *Enskymment Poetry Anthology* (www.enskymment.org). The complete texts of his first two books are in the permanent collection of The Contemporary American Poetry Archives. His work has also been anthologized in *The Random House Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry*; *Holt Language Arts*; *Poets Against the War*; *Caught in the Net*; and *Perfect in Their Art*. His work has appeared in many journals, including *Poetry*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Esquire*, *Shenandoah*, *The New Yorker*, *Esquire*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Artful Dodge*, *Ekphrasis*, *Poems Niederngasse*, *Chautauqua Literary Journal*, *London Magazine*, and *Innisfree*, as well as *The Ontario*, *Sewanee*, *Paris*, *Southern*, *Hudson*, *Yale*, *Gettysburg*, *Massachusetts*, *New Orleans*, and *Georgia Reviews*. Professor Masterson has directed the Poetry program at SUNY/Rockland for 44 years. In 2006, Syracuse University's Bird Library assumed stewardship of The Dan Masterson Papers for its Special Collections Research Center.

William McCue

VIETNAM BATTLEFIELD

A blood maroon canopy of clouds
Looms over smoldering charcoal fields
Where skeletal remains
Lie entangled on the ground

Bleach white bones
Are scattered in the jungle foliage
Fragments of incinerated soldiers
A corporal from Wyoming and his M16 rifle
A rice farmer's bayonet and bamboo cover

Former football stars, teachers, mercenaries
All too dangerously close to the incoming fire
And stripped of identity and nation

Dog tags and steel pot helmets
A Special Forces Bonnie hat

A voice in the crackling static
Sent an order over the airwaves
Received and confirmed inside the cockpit

A button is pressed and
Uniforms, grenade launcher and flesh
Are melted by orange and jagged
Diagonal lightning strikes spewed by
olive drab metallic birds of prey
Onto the battlefield
And inside the flash point, the dance ends
Freezing the embrace
Of hand to hand combat.

A gasoline smell rises and
Mixes with vapor trails
Leaving only the sound of crackling embers
And the smell of jungle foliage burning
Like funeral pyre kindling.

All that remains is shimmering heat
and the buzz of a chopper
Circling like carrion

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Commanding officer on board
Reports on the aftermath
He calls off the med evac squad
No survivors to report in the wake.

William McCue is a lifelong New Yorker who lives in Park Slope, Brooklyn, NY. By day he is a senior account supervisor at Dukas Public Relations in New York City. By night he is the lead singer in the psychedelic rock cover band The Marvin Barnes Time Machine. He's also been known to pour a tasty pint of Guinness when bartending at The Gate bar in Park Slope.

Claire McGoff

BERCEUSE

His mother's foot lifted off the pedal,
and down again. In 3/4 time, she cradled
the notes that swelled, tender,
from the low crafted ceiling above the boy.
His eyes followed the lullaby's *legatos*

as they ran along twisted patterns in the rug
that cushioned his small frame.
He stared up into dark rafters, hollows
that housed the hammers and felt.
He peered out into the other world. A sun beam

traveled across the floor and up
the dark legs of the hutch. He watched
the patent leather of her shoe
push the soft pedal down, lift off,
and off. With her right hand, she reached

for the final measure, her little finger
holding the *fermata*. What he wanted always
was just one more repeat
with a lasting *ritardando* as he drifted
beneath his mother's music box.

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.

John Milbury-Steen

MAKING A BIG DEAL OF IT

Prufrock thought that he was missing something
and made the yearning into one great drama,
a galaxy of many a shiny crumb
filling up our telescopes to sing
the music of the spheres of something wrong.
Prufrock was stalled, but how he played his theme!

He ran an orchestra on what he lacked!
Imagine! To say that every day I walked
in public with a fat ripe peach about
Brighton beach, weighing gain and hurt,
making it a thing of such import,
the question being should I eat or not,

Dantean ghosts converged for the debate
and angels hung on learning if I ate!

John Milbury-Steen's work has appeared in or is forthcoming from *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Blue Unicorn*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Chimaera*, *Dark Horse*, *Kayak*, *Hellas*, *The Listening Eye*, *The Deronda Review (Neovictorian/Cochlea)*, *The Piedmont Literary Review*, *Scholia Satyrica*, *Shenandoah*, *Shattercolors*, and *Shit Creek Review*. He served in the Peace Corps in Liberia, West Africa; earned a Master's in Creative Writing with Ruth Stone at Indiana University; worked as an artificial intelligence programmer in Computer Based Education at the University of Delaware; and currently teaches English as a Second Language at Temple University.

Anna Mills

MONO LAKE

I've gone for a swim. Shrimp drift like shreds of egg white, mating.
A fly larva tastes buttery, food of the Paiutes.
The shrimp and larvae eat algae, which eat arsenic-breathing bacteria;
life is simple. Nothing else survives in the water,
which comes from the Sierra, my mountains.
The snow melts; the streams lick minerals and carry them to the desert.
A ring of hills cups the broth;
the surface cups light.
In the lake and beside it, lava has welled up and erupted,
built black islands and sand-dune craters, and will again.
Here, a bather floats without trying, caught between skies.
Cuts sting, eyes blaze.
Arms and legs drift from the trunk of the body.
The body holds space;
space enters in.

Anna Mills' poems and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in *Salmagundi*, *Cimarron Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Lunaroisity*, *Isotope*, and the anthology *Fresh Water: Women Writing on the Great Lakes*. She teaches English at City College of San Francisco and earned her MFA in nonfiction from Bennington College. She also maintains a blog of book reviews, "Anna Mills on Nature Writing" at <http://onnaturewriting.blogspot.com/>.

Roger Mitchell

OLD WOMAN WITH DOG IN FIELD

Wearing a white tennis visor
and blue cottony windbreaker,
telling Ralph, Down, silly.
Be down, and (to herself) not so damnably
up in the face of every odd bird
out for a quick check on the world.
Over-friendly, she says, pulling a full
set of ivory teeth out of her smile.
What's it like in your life?
Asked by looking off at the bluff
and muttering something about winter.
Yes, I say, looks like a hill of weather
headed this way. Ralph has pinned some
beetle to the ground, continues winsome.

THE CLICK

I do not know what I think this morning,
except that I do not know what I think.

Can civilization rest on so slight
a thing? If such uncertainty can be called

a thing, to begin with? What is a thing?
Is it certain? Do its molecules rest,

ever? Or do they, like the rest of us,
like thought or feeling, like the galaxies,

whirl implacably through their universes,
their separate, overlapping, half-realized

universes, not looking, not seeking,
not tending toward anything, just whirling?

What is thought in such a place? What is place,
for that matter? How far out do I go?

I lock my door at night, but not against
the thief. The thief will have his way with me

no matter what I do. I lock my door
because the click makes the world stand still,

almost. Because the click is a goodly,
snap-like sound, betokening sureness,

because the inside and the outside meet
thereat, because it is a thing to do

when there seems little else to do, because
it is a sound I make, a twig-like song,

like the click the beak of the brown creeper
makes pecking the bark upwards up the tree.

EARLY SPRING

Rain falling on snow.
You at the back window.
Out there a sputter of dead sticks,
contusion of dark statics.
Here, a smooth place on the floor
marking a scrutable torpor.
Three doves and a junco sit
on the fence rail. Opening gambit
to spring. Wind pours from the south,
tearing the lip of the bud mouth.
And now, time's slow seed
bursts. Yours is the dirt it wanted.
And the yard. Yours is the one it chose to spill
into, love like a tendril.

Roger Mitchell's most recent book, *Half/Mask*, was published in 2007 by The University of Akron Press in 2007. His previous book, *Delicate Bait*, won the Akron Prize in Poetry. New poems have appeared recently in *Poetry* and *The Paris Review*. A volume of new and selected poems will come out this year from Ausable Press.

Barbara J. Orton

AFTER TRYING TO DIE

Amazing what you can get away with:
debts forgiven, friends who still call,
parents who visit you in the hospital
though they remember what you did.
Love is tenacious as a weed:
I've tried to root it out, wanting my death
to leave me, if not unremembered,
at least unmourned; but it's hard to kill.
Now that I want to live,
I suppose I'm grateful for it, though
it's hard to bear so much forgiveness,
as if each day I had to kneel and give
thanks, not to the God that left me, but to
each old friend's weary, unforgetful face.

CHARYBDIS

a mouth that makes whirlpools a mouth
that eats narwhals a mouth that no longer
kisses speaks or cries a mouth of hunger
a mouth that never pauses to take breath
a mouth that sucks in whole sailing ships
and swirls them like raw wine a mouth that tastes
the salt of bodies the sharp points of masts
and spits out shattered hulls like olive pits
a mouth that never tallies what was lost
a mouth lipless tongueless a mouth that was
devourer of cattle a mouth hurled
deep into the sea a mouth so vast
we cannot pity it a mouth that says
Shhhhh shhhhh loud enough to drown the world

Barbara J. Orton's work appears widely in such journals as *Ploughshares*, *Pleiades*, *The Laurel Review*, *Sou'wester*, and *The Yale Review*, as well as in four anthologies (*The New Young American Poets*, *New Voices*, *Under the Rock Umbrella*, and volume 7 of *In Our Own Words: A Generation Defining Itself*). Her chapbook can be accessed online at *The Literary Review* (theliteraryreview.org/Featured_P&W/Barbara_Orton/). She received her MFA in writing from Washington University in St. Louis and is pursuing a PhD in English at Tufts University.

Richard Peabody

NOTHING LIKE A COUNTRY BASSIST

Being a country bass player
must be the dullest
job in the world.

Just watch their hands.

Thump, thump
thump, thump
thump thump thump.

They spend their lives
lost in the glow of divas
or Nashville guitar wizards.

They get replaced by
rhythm machines and
keyboard tracks.

They're always the youngest
guy in the band

or the oldest.

What would happen if
you put 3-4 of them on stage

at the same time?

Who would be left to sweep up
and switch off the lights?

Richard Peabody, a prolific poet, fiction writer and editor, is an experienced teacher and important activist in the Washington, D.C., community of letters. He is editor of *Gargoyle Magazine* (founded in 1976), and has published a novella, two books of short stories, six books of poems, plus an e-book, and edited (or co-edited) sixteen anthologies including *Mondo Barbie*, *Mondo Elvis*, *Conversations with Gore Vidal*, *A Different Beat: Writings by Women of the Beat Generation*, and *Kiss the Sky: Fiction and Poetry Starring Jimi Hendrix*. Peabody teaches fiction writing for the Johns Hopkins Advanced Studies Program. You can find out more about him at www.gargoylemagazine.com or www.wikipedia.org.

Steven Pelcman

TOUCH THE WIND

Normandy, France

If death
Were to take hold
Here, among a patchwork
Of grassy fields
You would never know
For there is little difference
In the gentle beauty
Of such stillness.

It is a cushioned thick earth
Full of Gothic stone
And brown-white cows
Where white light
Fingers its way
Through hedgerows
And into the sea

Where the blue tide waters
At dusk
Still drag skull bones
And bullets to shore
Full of windswept shadows
That touch the wind
When a man passes.

Steven Pelcman is a writer of poetry and short stories who has spent the past few years completing a first novel titled "Riverbed." He has been published in a number of magazines, including *The Windsor Review*, *Paris/Atlantic*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Salzburg Poetry Review*, *Wings*, *Caffeine Magazine* and many others. He has spent the last ten years residing in Germany where he is a language communications trainer and has had the opportunity to continue his writing, travel the world, and enjoy the challenges cross cultural experiences provide.

Patric Pepper

MISUNDERSTANDING ON P STREET

The now of the mountain bike,
and the mountain bike itself, parked and chained,
like a metal stallion to a parking meter,
and the parking meter, too, as well as the chain,
and the female up-and-down of trendy city bottoms,
made so by clothes of the highest, lowest style,
coming into view and passing out of view,
and then the city dogs wagging, and sniffing each other,
and the lazy trees in their square plots of earth in the sidewalks,
and their lazy, drifting flying leaves above the evening's action,
and the cornrows of this baby's hair, and the hair itself,
and the cellophane-cell-phone-in-the-ear-elbow-pointed-strut,
and the cell phone itself stuck in the side of his head,
and the sweet, handsome men who kiss Hello!
and the serious women pecking their serious men Hello!
and the brothers who mysteriously grab the hands of the brothers Hello!
on Friday night at 6:55 P.M., and even Friday, too,
and the wonkish staffer shaking his leg up-and-down,
twirling his pasta at the outdoor table, savoring his white paper
all the way through, through his out-of-fashion thin-rimmed spectacles,
twirling and reading and finally sucking the long thin string to his gullet,
and the pasta too, what about the pasta, and the white paper
and the fork and the glasses and the table, what about the table—
now aren't these people, these animals and plants,
in fact these objects, and these actions,
they that breeze like candy wrappers into my line of sight,
aren't they only interested in love?

COMPANY PICNIC

Old Rita, a Q.C. Inspector, pressed
on with a plate of barbecue and slaw—
until Matthew from Marketing, bare-chested,
ambled back from basketball. In awe,

Rita exclaimed, "Who is that beautiful man!"
as if Matt's pecs and abs destroyed some plan
for finding fault, a plan without a now
of beauty nearly naked toe to brow.

Rita was union-tough, not one to trust.
“That’s Matt,” I said, “Isn’t he a beaut?
“Oh yeah!” she moaned, “That’s one lovely brute.”
And this was not a vestige of young lust,

but acute-eyed sweet greed, that day, for more
to possess Rita, up from the factory floor.

FLUFFITUDE

Uncle Bud was “The Old Man in the Mountain”
on late-night radio, Hendersonville,
North Carolina. Bud just loved Hawaiian
slide guitar, its “fluffitude” on still
nights when no one out there cared or listened—
almost—just the timekeeper at High
Point Furniture, third shift, and the few men
with him, maybe some drivers swallowing pie
down at the truck stop, and Cheryl manning the E.R.
all night.

When I was a new manager, and rattled,
I’d visit Uncle Bud. He’d ease me back
to the hi-fi room, where LP records,
hundreds amid the 1950’s gimcrack,
waited like boxcars full of cumulus clouds.
Bud would start to spin his sweet, ignored
songs from paradise—those drifting islands,
somewhere—as he explained and grinned and cared,
and I’d become so soothed, unmoved, so pleasantly bored.

Always we’d end up rocking on the porch,
iced tea, investment talk, when suddenly
Bud would become solemn, his blue eyes catch
the light, his dated body lean to tell me,
every time, how Hawaiian music
was “like those clouds there.” I was a young man,
and Uncle Bud was some old guy in a mountain,
and though he’d actually reach to touch my hand,
I was uncomfortable. Just didn’t understand.

Patric Pepper lives in Washington D.C. He published a chapbook in 2000, *Zoned Industrial*, and a full length collection in 2005, *Temporary Apprehensions*, which was a 2004 co-winner of the Washington Writers' Publishing House Poetry Prize. His work has most recently appeared in *Confrontation Magazine*, *The Distillery*, and *Minimus*.

Allan Peterson

FREQUENT FLYER

One does not tell the future it tells us
when it gets here
People call and though I say wrong number
they call back
Last night I saw trampled grass where a deer
or refrigerator slept
and with light through lace like moon through leaves
during an eclipse
the whole room rested many times on your shoulder
It was like sitting on my leg
then rising up and feeling the stars pass through
each blood cell
You turned and glittered minutely like a mirror ball
like a lens to pleasure
But I have awakened after working all night somewhere else
just to take aspirin for sore shoulders
and thought maybe someone lives here with my name
or the lines in my hands are maps
to my aching other life folded in a fist
since even the moon sometimes keeps its one eye closed
above the whole population

PRECIOUS LITTLE

Horse loyal as a dog,
a parrot that surprisingly flies to you.
Then the grey cat going by,
oblivious to dependence
or any appreciation
of the backup sky's ability to tell us
if we're having tragedy
or beauty,
whether bones dressed as Jody or Marilyn
have turned soft or sour,
whether this year the flickers
will escape the owl.
Something so small is often
beyond the scope of the question
which was originally
will the world acknowledge us at all.

Allan Peterson is the author of two books: *All the Lavish in Common* (2005 Juniper Prize) and *Anonymous Or* (Defined Providence Press Prize) and four chapbooks. Recent print and online appearances include *Bat City*, *Salamander*, *Iron Horse*, *Segue*, *Caesura*, *Laurel Review*, *The Pedestal*, *Runes*. He has work forthcoming in *Gettysburg Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Swink*, *Compass Rose*, Ted Kooser's *American Life in Poetry*. See his Poetry/Art featured at www.uwf.edu/panhandler.

Gretchen Primack

THE ABSENCE OF UNNECESSARY HURTING

This is the press of the earth. One star hanging
there, honking like a goose. The lake
a smudge of black juice, the hill a draped
pancake. Frogs singing, sharp
and gutty.

Night! Clean air, clear water, five
baby mink in a pile, snoring.
What overwhelm can be dug from sludge
below dock. On either side fruits slung
over branches, glued to their seeds.
I like so few people. Admire
fewer. Here in the slurry live the things
I consider; here in the hills. What do people
think of? What do they think of me
in my carings?

Ripples lunch on each other, heavenly
body lights flicker, too cool for moths.
I don't want to hurt things.
The fine brown eye of an animal,
the broad slick leaf of a wing.
I'd like to be gentle here.
I want to be worthy of you, lovely, tired
ground, bury my face in your broken bread.

ECCENTRIC

ek—out of
kentros—center

Dangling from the center's ledge.
Leaning on the center to nudge it over.
Stroking the center's back, weeping.
Staring cross-armed at the center.
Heaving a shroud over it.
Walking away until the center disappears.

Gretchen Primack's chapbook, *The Slow Creaking of Planets*, came out from Finishing Line Press in 2007. Her poems have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *FIELD*, *Best New Poets 2006*, and elsewhere. Her full-length manuscript, *Fiery Cake*, has been shortlisted for several prizes. She lives in New York's Hudson Valley and teaches at Bard College and at two prisons through the Bard Prison Initiative. Her website is www.gretchenprimack.com.

Oliver Rice

WE IN OUR SHIELDING AURAS ARRIVING WHERE WE HAD NOT QUITE INTENDED

*I'm checking on what's in the world.
What's left.*

—Susan Sontag

*The role of the educated intellect
is to remain critical of all popular
passions.*

—William James

Neuroscience has been quite busy.
The nuclear arsenals proliferate.

The streets comply with miscellaneous persons.

Technology is taking original sin
out to farther and farther stars.

Anthropology gropes along the back streets.
Time has neither conscience nor caution.
Asia is reawakening.

How idiomatic are the fallacies.

The tempo in the cerebrum, they say,
is eight to twelve electrical cycles a second,
brisk for our excursions into the actualities,
the ambiguities in which we are immersed,

we who incur fantasies of many cities,

who earnestly probe all emergent myths,
mottos of the golden ages,
disquietudes of the statues,

who are baffled by the night spirits,

who meanwhile must evade old idolatries

and the syndromes of our time,

the blue Aegean visible
through the olive trees and the pines,

the doorways gazing impassively
upon what is thought to be happening,

the ballerinas with infinite planes entranced.

Oliver Rice has received the Theodore Roethke Prize, twice been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. His poems have been published widely in the United States, as well as in Canada, England, Austria, Turkey, and India. His book, *On Consenting to Be a Man*, will be introduced next month by Cyberwit, a diversified publishing house in the cultural capital Allahabad, India, and will shortly be available on Amazon.

Margaret A. Robinson

BRAIDED MARIGOLDS

1.

The Dog Days bark. I rise from bed,
creak to the bathroom, haul on shorts. Claude's at
the kitchen table, front page spread flat.
He's concocted muesli. Coffee makes my head
a trifle clearer. Peanut butter, toasted bread,
five assorted pills. He says, Hot.
I glance at the thermometer out
the window. Yup. Humidity like lead.

Screen door. Snap. The watering pot's sclerotic,
its mouth chipped. Bare toes enjoy the drops
that spill. Past ferns, I top-up the bird bath,
say Hi to special pals (is this neurotic?),
a dozen fragile marigolds which flop
if I don't carry drinks along the path.

2.

If I don't carry drinks along the path,
there won't be flowers blooming in mid August.
I can't let seedlings die. To be honest,
a bloodline, something deep, says I have
to scatter seeds on moist spring dirt, rave
when they come up. Weed, transplant—the list
grows long—attach the sweet peas' twist,
tie twine for cypress vines. The garden laves

my dusty spirit. Sitting, butt on compost,
next to trowel and bucket, I feel complete.
A wren repeats You beast you!—what a flirt.
As I water, cool mist blows, the day's roast
is postponed, decaying leaves smell meaty.
The marigolds drink deep to grace the concert.

3.

The marigolds drink deep to grace the concert
scheduled in our home for 8/13, at three—
Cheryl (drums), nephew Toby (bass),
niece Zoe (vocals, banjo, and guitar). Bertrand
Russell on one wall, Frederick Douglass
facing, Pat (slide guitarist) underneath.
Seats, lights, a stage—snacks to feed
the audience—each room cleansed of dirt.

Friends and strangers climb our steps, best
seats get grabbed, old folks and kids
up front. My stomach will do flips—keen
dread, sharp joy—while I welcome guests
who grin at dobro, cymbals, uke. Amid
life's celebrations, a house concert's supreme.

4.

To celebrate a house concert's supreme—
almost. What I actually prefer
is Zoe kitchen singing, just to us, her
newest song, almost complete. Claude beams.
This quasi-daughter's tunes can dream
him into tender places. How did you learn
this stuff? her dad asks. Her mom stirs,
digs for a tissue, wipes her streaming

eyes. Note-soaked, I always have one wish—
that time would stop, hold us in its palm,
laughing, rapt. Hope stares down loss:
melodies about a broken crystal dish,
a red coat in dreary winter, love's balm
in plastic flowers by a roadside cross.

5.

In plastic flowers by a roadside cross
I see my parents' luck to lose no
child to war, disease, an icy road.
Dad taught us how to drive on snow, touch moss,
fry eggs, brown hash. Mom was boss
of our behavior. She wrote, painted, sewed
our clothes. Dad dances in my garden rows
of painted daisies, chives. I toss

compost on the pile because he did.
He grew the salad for my sister's wedding,
the roses for my own. Devotion—
that's what it's about, and care. The kids
will focus on the music, not the setting.
I'm the aunt with flowerbed emotion.

6.

I'm the aunt with flowerbed emotion,
excitement now at tiger lily burst,
delight at yesterday's tomato, the first.
A month ago I had a larkspur ocean
and rain-filled smoke bush puffs. Motion
when I shook them washed me. Some curse
invasive plants. I don't. Much worse
for me are slugs and deer. Bloody notions

fill my mind—arrows, bullets, venison
stewed with onion slices, fresh picked thyme.
The oil truck crushed my lavender. I barely
kept from punching—how could eyes be so blind?
Once I dreamed that I was purple vetch, a sign
that souls reside in phlox and such, or nearly.

7.

Though souls reside in phlox and such, or nearly,
this sonnet crown—phew!—kicked them
off my list today. Cough, ahem,
roots called. I forgot. Their tone was surly.
Dressed for work and rushed, I fairly
flew, raised beds to faucet, got my hem
wet, soiled my shoes. I craved my pen,
not seedlings, needy babies, crying daily

yet I want to grow both gifts, these lines
and heat-proof pungent stems as living art.
So. It's scribble, water, rewrite, deadhead,
keep old seeds alive in present time,
braid sonnets which seem marigolds at heart.
The Dog Days bark. I rise from bed.

Innisfree 6
March 2008

Margaret A. Robinson teaches at Widener University. Her poems have appeared recently in *Prairie Schooner*.

Janice D. Soderling

ON READING LORD TENNYSON'S ULYSSES

What a shock to come home and find wizened Penelope,
girl of his daydreams, now past the menopause
and begging off every night with a headache,
and all she can talk about is that damned tapestry
she's weaving for Laertes' shroud. Let's face it,
women age faster than men. I mean,
what can a conquering hero discuss with a woman who
has never left the house. Looking in the rear view mirror,
he finds even Circe preferable, despite her bad habit
of turning men into swine, and vice versa.
She knew a lot of kinky stuff, well, she was a sorceress,
wasn't she, and if Zeus gives you a talent you should use it,
anyway, she was okay
before the three boys wore her to a frazzle.
Man, all that squalling, night and day, it could really get
on a guy's nerves. Knowing what we know now, what he
shoulda done, he shoulda stayed with
Calypso who was always hot to go
(*cold lover, ardent lady*);
she had a few magic tricks up her sleeve too.
Even promised him immortality and eternal
youth if he would marry her. He wonders now
why he had those attacks of post-coital guilt
that sent him straight from her bed down to the seashore
for a crying jag—why?
Was it for his lust to rule Ithaca again, to thrust
his weight around, exert his royal prerogatives?
Forget it, Ithaca turned into a banana republic,
all the people do is gripe and complain;
all the real men sailed with him to Troy.
Was it for faithful Penelope, hunched over there
muttering and counting threads. I don't th-i-ink so!
Was it to be boss of his own household?
Telemachus, that little twerp, shows no respect,
sleeps till noon and plays computer games all day,
when he's not eating. He won't look for a job,
so let him take over the family business,
the army will make a warrior out of him.
That's how his old man started out in life.
And now?

What's Ulysses gonna do now?

'Tis not too late to seek a newer world. Push off.

Janice D. Soderling lives in Sweden. Her fiction was published by *Glimmer Train* (USA), *The Fiddlehead* (Canada) and *Acumen* (England) and is on-line at *42opus*, *Our Stories*, *Word Riot*. Her poetry is online at *Apple Valley Review*, *Autumn Sky Poetry*, *Babel Fruit*, *The Barefoot Muse*, *Beloit Poetry Journal (PDF)*, *The Chimaera*, *Lucid Rhythms*, *The Shit Creek Review*, *Umbrella*. Poems are forthcoming at *Other Poetry* (UK); *Blue Unicorn* (USA); *Right Hand Pointing* (online).

John Solensten

MONDRIAN AND THE TULIPS: NEW YORK, 1940

The old men on the benches
in Central Park are wise to him,
consider him quite mad.
"The Dutchman he's nuts on tulips!" they mutter
when he appears on the April walk,
stiff, upright in the cone of his gray coat.
He is habitu , alien, thief in this place.
His tall boots are polished black cylinders
posting in the startled grass.
Yes, and with what insouciant little polonaise
he steps into the beds of the tulips,
turning the nodding turbans of their blossoms
into the ebony gleam of the boots,
where, in rays palpable as tubes,
they abstract deeply,
blazing—oh, so briefly—with Divine fierce energy.
And then to his studio's planing walls
where brushless lines of red, yellow, blue
draw an asymmetrical equilibrium
of pure colors meeting at right angles.
That done, nature surprised again,
he sits in a cantilevered chair,
savoring his geometries,
drinking bad coffee
from the crooked shell of a paper cup.

AN ILLUSTRATION FOR BAUDELAIRE'S *LES FLEURS DU MAL*

When she speaks to him
her words are soiled roses
walking on hind legs like dogs
in coy miniature.
The carpet in the room
is newly ancient
with the wheezing captured dampness
of eros and ennui.
The morning
is a long white sheet

of the kind pressed on a wooden table
in a physician's office.
It is sliding downward
with a slight hissing sound.
In the tolling of yellow light
from an obtuse lamp,
a pillow falls
from one corner of the divan.
She puts the slithered lily of her foot
upon it,
holds it there
as if pressing it
on the low mound of a small grave.

John Solensten has published four novels, more than 25 individual short stories and memoirs, and more than 80 poems, including one chapbook. His plays, including a Jewish Community Theater first prize and a Native American drama award, have been produced by theaters in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Duluth, and Oklahoma City.

Joseph Somoza

SHUDDER

First day since last
winter I've been
cold enough to wear a sweatshirt and a song
starts up, "one of these
mornings, honey,"
a train
whistling from below, "you're gonna
miss me,"
a start
from winter blowing in, the leaves
down, more blankets soon,
the gas heat on that every year
gives us asphyxiation fear and so we crack
the window nights and
huddle close,
"so long as we're together."

MY MOTHER AT 91

After the fire burns off
the smoke, the sticks
flame and warm, the day
comes into itself,
a dove
perched on a branch,
the cats sleeping
in the pyracantha thicket,
clothes drying on the line.
If we could see past
the human,
we'd see ourselves more
clearly as wood
glowing with a slow
combustion
that burns off
the rage and resentment
and leaves us
dry
and warm.

Joseph Somoza has lived in Las Cruces, New Mexico, for 35 years, where he used to teach at New Mexico State University. He lives with his wife, Jill, a painter. He has published several books of poetry over the years, most recently *Shock of White Hair* (Sin Fronteras Press, 2007).

Sandra Staas

WATER COLOUR BEFORE CREMATION

Glasgow, 1964

Frozen father beneath scars,
polished wood, clasped hands.

His paintings and books lie on
the mantel piece, pages fluttering
as Auntie Madge plays the piano,
her long slim fingers trembling,
her lips tight.

The clan gathers. Old friends arrive,
the men's bunnets in their hands,
even cousins twice removed
turn up at our house to say a last
farewell, to say they're awfy sorry and
how awful for him to die so young.

Yet street lights flicker on the walls
as lovers giggle by and Mrs. McFadden
hastens to buy a large meat pie,
whilst the tea pot simmers. The fog horns
from the ships on the Clyde bellow mournful
laments. Just another day.

"If you kiss him, it'll help you get over his
death." A gentle tug pulls me to the coffin.

He had never wanted affection, never even
offered it, so why start now?

"Gie us a smile, hen. Aye. Ye'll remember
this day for the rest of yer life. Make it a good
wan. Huv a wee nip of whiskey, if ye like."

I ignore the offer, trying hard not to scowl,
then take the water colour brush from
its container. I lean over my father to
caress his face with the soft bristles,
painting away the injustice, the anger.

Sandra Staas grew up in Glasgow, Scotland and graduated from Hamilton College of Education and, later, from the University of Maryland with the B.A. in Psychology, and from the University of Pittsburgh with an M.A. in Hispanic Literature. She has been published in various literary magazines, including *Innisfree*, *Pittsburgh Quarterly*, *LoyalHanna Review*, *New Hope International*, and two Sandburg-Livesay Award Anthologies.

Micah Stack

A PROJECT

Not much transfers from our previous lives;
recollection doesn't survive metempsychosis.
Élan vital, very well. But in whose world?

All I can access now is a faint reverb.

There is a file somewhere, though,
with sounds irretrievable in the present
tense, the tones we miss the first time around.

If I could hack into infinity,
make incisions in space. I would
learn to trust the axioms of the sea,
the hypertrophied sound of green.

The sky: a pink and blue photo,
blurred by excess motion. An amateur's
error, a small miracle. It leaves
a roseate stain on the cat, the chaise
longue, the weeds between the bricks.

When I break the code, I know how
the library will look: a row of gleaming
cabinets made of ether, filed in harmonic
order, anxious to flood me with all the
impromptu concerts I never heard.

Micah Stack received his Master's Degree in American Literature from the University of Southern Mississippi. His work has appeared in *Product*, *Radiant Turnstile*, and *Word Riot* and is forthcoming in *Paradigm*. He currently teaches English at The Isidore Newman School in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he lives.

Susan Stiles

CANVAS LENS

Make me into a movie. Come down my
elevator. Fall over my couch and stumble
onto the living room floor. Make yourself
a coffee. There's nothing to it. Breathe a
sigh of relief. Move your pawn forward.
I'm all out of rooks. No matter. Play on.

Take me to some country inn. Let the snow
fall. Lift the lid on the piano and hand me
my pipe. I'll sing for you. Pour me a scotch
and soda, that's right. Now move the inn
south. An island? OK. In a storm? Just so.
Come on in, the water's great.

Stand me by the edge of a sandy cliff.
Pretend that I will jump then locate my lover
in the misty distance. All is well. Let's cross
that bridge some other time. Preach me a
sermon while the desolate sun determines
its next move. Exit, stage left.

I am everywhere I have ever been. I stand,
waiting, in the lighted hall of an unmarked
school. I sleep high above a grassy pyramid.
I rummage lazily in the back of an abandoned
car. I tell tales in a makeshift cavern on a
midsummer's night. I lock and unlock the
cellar door. I interrupt a lonely twosome.

I am called to attention in a triangular well.
The landscape condenses the ground under
my feet. I am rescued by a wandering Saint
Bernard. I crouch, fearful, in the spires of an
unfinished church. My legs tighten with the
onset of end-stage vertigo.

I am smoking on a rooftop in Antigua.
This is my world now. The talk relapses
by turns: death and recent earthquakes.
I recall a cemetery, in a teenage embrace.

Innisfree 6
March 2008

These trees appear rootless, by comparison.
A narrow fog floats in, then hurries past.

These people make me nervous. I will
cross the lake instead, circle the broken
volcano and lie in wait for the cardboard
artist with whom I danced last night, she
of the long and straight and immovable,
blond hair.

Susan Stiles is a Manager of User-Centered Design for an IT consulting firm in the Washington, D.C. area. Her poems have appeared in *Dalhousie Review* and *Red River Review*.

Jennifer Sullivan

HALF-LIGHT

I very much like to think that illness sometimes heals us.
We grieve like fallen leaves,
sap covered, soaking in the half-light of dawn.
Dirt lines the corners of our mouths.

We grieve like fallen leaves,
scattered slivers of illuminated disorder.
Dirt lines the corners of our mouths.
Refuge lingers close like summer rain.

Scattered slivers of illuminated disorder,
reborn like yellow dahlias.
Refuge lingers close like summer rain.
We must learn how to move on.

Reborn like yellow dahlias,
sap covered, soaking in the half-light of dawn.
We must learn how to move on.
I very much like to think that illness sometimes heals us.

["I very much like to think that illness sometimes heals us" is excerpted from a letter
Vincent van Gogh wrote to his brother Theo on July 6, 1889.]

IN FRONT OF SUNFLOWERS AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY

A group of preschoolers spread across the floor. Their teacher hands them a square of black construction paper and two lumps of clay. Yellow and green. She says, Texture. Remember what I have said about texture. The children begin to snake pieces of green between their hands, the sound of tiny palms rubbing together. One child is not yet working. She stands up, leaves her materials on the ground, walks toward the painting. She reaches her hand toward it. She wants to touch it, fit tiny fingers in thick thumb slides. She stands there, hand saluted. When she returns to her spot, she drops to her knees, blobs the yellow clay on the paper, knuckles it to the page. She stretches pinches between her index finger and thumb, slides the petals to asymmetrical spots, looks up only to ask why she was not given any orange.

Jennifer Sullivan is a poet from Akron, Ohio. She has published poems in a variety of journals including *Nimrod*, *DIAGRAM*, *Main Street Rag*, *Timber Creek Review*, and *Ohio Writer*. Recently, she was a semi-finalist for the 2007 Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry and she was the first place winner for poetry in the Best of Ohio Writers Contest 2005. In spring of 2008 she will graduate from the NEOMFA program.

Colette Thomas

PUSHING UPWARD

Stubborn cold is at most a dull blade. What is small and quickening does what it must. Each spring I say to the magnolia buds not yet. After a frost I have seen them hanging all over town, blackish and leathery as sleeping bats. You may imagine covert forces aligned against you. Consider that the turret is empty—you'll have to find a better excuse. The redwood arrives at its present stance of perfect rectitude one willing cell at a time, inhaling fog and light in equal proportions. The cathedral rises arch by variegated arch, as if chiseled stone could root and flower. As if this were the very place eternity pushes through. From the vantage point of the lately frozen garden there is only one direction. Ask any seedling. Ask the brown-edged camellia. Kneeling on the horizontal crust you might choose to pray—or simply watch—as tiny spears hazard their first thrusts into the brightening and unforgiving fray.

INCREASE

Night slips behind the monuments, past the glow of ghost- light from the cherry blossoms. You've studied the old dynasties—when the mandate seeped away they moved the capital.

I listen to the news. Somebody needs to steady the bottom rung. Whatever you have done to one of these, the least of my brethren. We all know an honest heart when we see one, don't we? Who

will notify the chief in his bunker? Things have taken a turn for the worse, sir. Half empty, half full—when you think

it won't hold any more, keep pouring. When you think you can't descend another step, keep sinking. It's chilly.

Spring came early on a raw wind, old stumps spurting saplings, earth-smell infiltrating the fog. Here you are

at the edge of the tidal basin, staring across black water with its flotsam of shredded light, wondering, as you have before: How much longer? How much lower?

PEACE

Light and darkness, yes. Arrivals and departures.
The tongues of men and angels. The splinter of sin.

But sadness is continually startled, like a bittern lifting
from marsh grass with a low cry. A parrot's turquoise dart

against dark vines. Mute beauty of calligraphy
in a language we cannot read. The answers are everywhere.

Rumi dancing in a garden at the desert's edge.
John of the Cross kneeling in half-light, at dawn or dusk
(from here we can't tell which). A man in the moment

before his guests arrive, lighting lanterns, opening the wine.
A man listening to Debussy while, outside his window,
trees come to life in a quivering gauze of yellow-green.

A prayer rising from the end of a jetty in a red bay.
The singing mouth, the outstretched arms.
How wide it all is. How the tide floods in.

DURATION

In the short term, the hurricane churns up the coast.
It is pure air, but it spews roof-halves and corpses

of trees and has a name. In the short term, the darkness
on our side of the windshield pushes against the darkness

on the other side, the silence between us mounting
like a low pressure system out of the south. Each night
the delegation we call "I" journeys to a chaos

we remember partially or not at all. We dance
as mountains dance, with the undertow of time.
Two strands of air intertwining like the wakes

of butterflies. In the long term, the copper beech
spreads its ancient shade across seasons, across stone walls,
over snow and dappled undergrowth and the small blue flowers

that spark like stars among its roots in spring. We wake
each day and find by some miracle we are still here.

Colette Thomas has presented her poetry in Washington, DC, and elsewhere since the early 1980s, in settings including the Library of Congress, the Folger Shakespeare Library, and Harvard University. She is the recipient of several poetry awards from Harvard, where she studied with Seamus Heaney. Her poems have appeared in *Grand Street*, *Poet Lore*, *WordWrights*, and other magazines, and in anthologies of Washington-area poets. She also teaches Daoist meditation and is a long-time student of the I Ching.

Barbara M. White

GRACIE

You had to like dogs. Or at least not mind dogs.
Or be able at least to tolerate this particular dog.

Mainly you had to accept that at random moments,
Gracie would launch her soprano *ah-woooooo*,

aiming it high above the highest notes of your right
hand's Mozart or Bach. If she kept at it too long,

Harry might pick her up, ruffle her ears,
but Gracie alone decided on the time to stop.

On sporadic Saturdays, Harry taught me to think
in phrases, build them into a coherent sonata allegro

or weave them into a meditative fugue. I learned
to seek out repertoire whose reason for song

reached deep inside me, creating a pedal point
far below reason or the musings of my five senses.

Whenever Harry taught, Gracie stayed near.
It was Harry's piano tuner, a man alert to the tiniest

variation in pitch, who noticed that Gracie sang
always on either the tonic or the dominant —

the home key or the note that called
all others to return to the safety and repose

of home. Gracie, that wriggle of brown and
white and black, understood what was important.

In memory of Harry McClure

HER PRESENCE

*for the class of 1958,
Brandeis University*

The night Eleanor Roosevelt would speak
at Gen Ed S — it was our freshman year —
I had to go to the bathroom in the Student Union
before dinner. Afterwards I turned
the water on, heard the click
of a stall door opening. I added soap
to my wet hands, looked up to see beside
me at the sink — and full face in the mirror —
Mrs. Roosevelt.

For four years, I sang alto in the chorus
and attended every graduation,
every academic convocation.
Whenever Mrs. Roosevelt took part
in the procession, everybody stood
as she walked by. Her presence pushed us upright,
row by row by row.

Barbara M. White's poetry has appeared in *Lilith Magazine* and *Innisfree*. She has been a featured reader in the Takoma Park Library in Washington, DC, and the Takoma Park Poetry Series in nearby Maryland. She is a retired copy editor and has also worked as a Jewish educator, a free-lance writer, and (many years ago) a piano teacher.

Kathi Wolfe

BREAKING UP WITH MYSELF

It's not you,
it's me.
You're so special,
anyone
with Stephen Hawking's
brains,
Warren Buffett's dough,
who eats
cheeseburgers in paradise
with vegans,
would be lucky
to have you.
I could live
with the black bear
dancing with your muse
in your dreams,
but Mother Teresa
and Dr. Seuss
bowling for dollars
was over the top.
The hard-as-a-rock
ambition,
incessant praying
to the God
you did not believe in,
were only human.
But the name dropping,
the meta moments,
nearly did me in.
Still,
the jokes
only you understood,
the tingle of your skin,
the romance of your ego
and your id.
Bygones can't be bygones,
but could we still
be friends?

Kathi Wolfe is a poet and writer in Falls Church, VA. Her poetry has appeared in *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Beltway Poetry Quarterly*, *Potomac Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Not Just Air, Breath & Shadow* and other publications. She has appeared on the public radio show *The Poet and the Poem* and read in the Library of Congress Poetry at Noon Series. Wolfe has been awarded poetry residencies at Vermont Studio Center and a Puffin Foundation grant. She was awarded Honorable Mention in the 2007 *Passager Magazine* poetry contest and was a finalist in the 2007 Pudding House Press Chapbook competition. Her chapbook *Helen Takes the Stage: The Helen Keller Poems* is just out from Pudding House Press.

Ernie Wormwood

MARATHON

to an Athenian named Pheidippides

Poetry,
poetry marathon,
five hours of poems
from the 27 countries
of the European Union.
136 poems
the tragedies of centuries.
Runners bearing their poems
running and running
through the valleys of despair
over the mountains of hope
to the splendid city.

They are from the
Embassies in Washington—
Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria,
Cyprus, the Czech Republic,
Denmark, Estonia, Finland,
France, Germany, Greece,
Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia,
Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta,
the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal,
Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia,
Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom.

Breathless, running still
their papers curl as if on fire,
from the heat, the beat, the unabashedness.
Yes, poetry burns the tongue.

Poetry-in-motion in Washington, D.C.,
The poets in their first marathon,
crossing the finish line
together, all in a line.

Innisfree 6
March 2008

Later running to surgery, I remember.
Oh, ticking clock, if I must die,
let it be with my sisters and brothers of the word.

Ernie Wormwood lives in Leonardtown, Maryland. On May 5, 2007 she was the Moderator for the first European Poetry in Motion Reading held at the Goethe-Institut in Washington, D.C. This spring she will have work in the anthology *Poem Revised* from Marion Street Press and in *Poetic Voices Without Borders II* from Gival Press. She recently appeared on Grace Cavalieri's program for the Library of Congress, *The Poet and the Poem*, which can be heard at www.loc.gov/poetry/poetpoem.html.