Undersung | John Malcolm Brinnin: “As Well-Known as I Deserve to Be” — Julie Larios
Brinnin published five books of poetry between 1942 and 1956 but was not embraced by a large audience. It's true that Brinnin's meanings are not easily grasped on first reading. Norman Rosten, who published the Communist review The New Masses, complimented Brinnin by calling him a “poet's poet” (that kiss of death in terms of popularity) but explained his decision not to publish Brinnin's work in the magazine by saying, “You, being a fastidious worker of images and rhythms, are not too easy to grasp. A compliment, really. But the revolution must go on – even with lousy poetry.”
Imagine this scene in Florida’s Key West: the sun beats down on a white sand beach, a hot breeze blows the palm fronds, and six middle-aged men sit around a table playing anagrams. They rearrange the letters of words to make new words; they argue about the rules; they yell a lot. If it sounds to you like these men are Morty Seinfeld and Frank Costanza and their friends, I agree. But the group consists of composer Leonard Bernstein, journalist John Hersey, and poets John Ciardi, Richard Wilbur, James Merrill, and John Malcolm Brinnin.

A Favorite Pastime Among the Literati of Key West

Three or four times a week, depending on how many of them were in town, these men played anagrams and poker together. Ciardi was the most aggressive of the group and, according to his biographer, expected to win every game. Bernstein, according to the same account, insisted on his own rules. They were all successful and well-known artists – all, that is, but John Malcolm Brinnin, who saw a good deal of John Malcolm Brinnin in his later years. John Malcolm Brinnin was a poet. John was known to us, his friends, for the high drama of his eye glasses, massive horn affairs that were as much a product of his wit as his poetry.
and conscious choice as his courtesy, his conversat
anagrams. A lot of poetic spirit went into his self-present

Of the several poets presented in the *Undersung* series here at Numero Cinq, there is not another one among them who could had his or her poetic reputation subsumed by self-presentation, and I think Rose chose the words of her reminiscence carefully to imply both affection for Brinnin and criticism of him: his elegance and his contribution to the party atmosphere well one always looked forward to his getup as part of the fun of a party…”) but chastises him for his “conscious choice of style over substance. To subordinate your talent to self-presentation (though some people might call self-presentation an art in itself) is a puzzle. What Rose seems to be saying is that Brinnin was – like a good formal poem – elegantly composed, but also – like a bad poem – overfabricated.

Well, we don’t have to judge poets by their self-regard, nor by how well they dress. We can choose to judge them by the poems they wrote. Brinnin’s work more than measures up. It’s true that the poems in his first book (*The Garden is Political*, 1942) were called “mannered” by one critic who was, most likely, eager for the diction of poetry to be looser and more modern. It’s true, also, that Brinnin’s work does not sound loose; his language is denser, more opaque than the broken lines of prose that became more and more popular as the 20th-century progressed. Not many authors survive the curse of being called old-fashioned. But whatever the reason for the mannerisms some critics accused him of, Brinnin’s poetry pleases me in the same way Shakespearean monologues and sonnets please me: the product of someone with large things to say, someone using his or her intelligence to put pressure on the English language to be simultaneously truthful and beautiful.

**La Creazione degli Animali**

Here that old humpback Tintoretto tells
Of six day’s labor out of Genesis:
Swift from the bowstring of two little trees
Come swans, astonished basilisks and whales,
Amazed flamingos, moles and dragonflies,
to make their lifelong helpless marriages.
Time is a place at last; dumb wonder wells
From the cracked ribs of heaven’s gate and hell’s.
The patriarch in that vicinity
Of bottle seas and eggshell esplanades
Mutters his thunder like a cloud. And yet,
much smaller issues line the palm of God’s
charged hand: a dog laps water, a rabbit sits
grazing at the footprint of divinity.

From the largest moments of that poem (Heaven, Hell, Time, divinity) to the smallest (a dog lapping water, a rabbit at the feet of God) Brinnin offers up the “dumb wonder” a person feels in the face of such an ambiguous world, and in the presence of work produced by a master artist. The poem follows some of the rules of a sonnet – fourteen lines, with a slight turn or refocus after the eighth line. But Brinnin is no stranger to adapting the rules to his own purpose – the rhymes assert themselves clearly but without establishing a conventional pattern (ABCA/DEAA/FGHG/HF.) The couplet which usually closes a conventional Elizabethan sonnet is buried mid-poem (“Time is a place at last; dumb wonder wells / From the cracked ribs of heaven’s gate and hell’s.”) The full rhyme of “vicinity” and “divinity” still chimes loudly despite being separated by four other rhymed lines – not
Brinnin published five books of poetry between 1942 and his work was not embraced by a large audience. It's true that Brinnin's meanings are not easily grasped on first reading. Norman Rosten, who published the Communist review *The New Masses*, complimented Brinnin by calling him a “poet's poet” (that kiss of death in terms of popularity) but explained his decision not to publish Brinnin’s work in the magazine by saying, “You, being a fastidious worker of images and rhythms, are not too easy to grasp. A compliment, really. But the revolution must go on – even with lousy poetry.” Rosten “the question of ‘popular’ understanding is very important to a revolutionary magazine.”

So Brinnin was not a poet of the people; his poems are dense and must be worked out slowly. I suspect hearing them would untangle them more quickly than reading them. In fact, when I read Brinnin, I often imagine someone reading to me – someone like Ian McKellen or John Gielgud. Again Shakespearean elegance. Being read aloud, the complexity might settle down, while the musicality of them would sentences are long, which ups the level of difficulty; the verbs hide within the verbiage, so their narrative thrust – that — is not immediately discernible. Brinnin’s words will never make their way onto a revolutionary’s placard, and clarity is not the
A winkless river of the cloistered sort
Falls in its dark habit massively
Through fields where single cattle troll their bell
With long show of indifference, and through
The fetes champêtres of trees so grimly bent
They might be gallows-girls betrayed by time
That held them once as gently as Watteau.

Electric in its falling, passing fair
Through towns touched up with gilt and whitew
Chooses oddments of discard, songs and feathe
And the stuff of life that must keep secrets
Everlastingly: the red and ratlike curios
Of passion, knives and silks and embryos
All sailing somewhere for a little while.

The midnight drunkard pausing on the bridge
Is dumbstruck with a story in his eye
Shuttling like his memories, and must
Outface five tottering steeples to admit
That what he sees pass under him is not
Mere moonlit oil and pods of floating seed,
But altogether an astonishing swan.

The river, I mean, for all is riverine,
Goes slowly inward, as one would say of time,
So it goes, and thus proceed to gather in
The dishes of a picnic, or the bones
Of someone lost contesting with the nations,
Glad in the wisdom of his pity to serve
Though the river’s knowledge, whelming, overv

This isn’t subject/predicate/object territory; a sadis
English teacher could make her students suffer by requiring them to diagram the sentences of it. Each seven-line stanza is a single sentence, nouns often sit quite a way from the verbs they depend on, and lush dependent clauses make readers push to figure out exactly where the sentence goes. The effect of this poem is similar to a cubist painting; like Duchamp’s “Nude Descending a Staircase,” we see the movement before we quite understand the figure; we grasp the gestalt before we deconstruct the individual lines. From “fetes champetres” on, we know we’re in for some work. Questions pile up: In what way was the artist Watteau gentle? What does it mean to say that a river goes “slowly inward”? What does the river represent – to me, to other readers, to Brinnin himself? Who exactly, or inexactly, is “lost contesting with the nations”?

Answering or not answering these questions is a matter of personal preference; I’m comfortable being “riverine” and flowing past some of the difficulty, then following up later with a little research. Without much trouble I find images of Watteau’s paintings and realize that many of his people face away from us, just as “the stuff of life that must keep secrets.” I can ponder that for awhile, and isn’t pondering part of the pleasure of poetry? I read the best of Brinnin’s poems again and again, and I understand them better each time; I find new beauties each time. I’ve read the following poem several times and still have questions; to my mind, that’s a plus.

Rowing in Lincoln Park

You are, in 1925, my father;
Straw-hatted, prim, I am your only son;
Through zebra-light fanwise on the lagoon
Our rented boat slides on the lucent clam.

And we are wistful, having come to this
First tableau of ourselves: your eyes that look
Astonished on my nine bravado years,
My conscious heart that hears the oarlocks click
And swells with facts particular to you—
How France is pink, how noon is shadowless,
How bad unruly angels tumbled from
That ivory eminence, and how they burned.

And you are vaguely undermined and plan
Surprise of pennies, some directed gesture,
Being proud and inarticulate, your mind
Dramatic and unpoised, surprised with love.

In silences hermetical as this
The lean ancestral hand returns, the voice
Of unfulfillment with its bladelike touch
Warning our scattered breath to be resolved.

And sons and fathers in their mutual eyes,
Exchange (a moment huge and volatile)
the glance of paralytics, or the news
Of master-builders on the trespassed earth.

Now I am twenty-two and you are dead,
And late in Lincoln Park the rowers cross
Unfavored in their odysseys, the lake
Not dazzling nor wide, but dark and commonplace.

Brinnin was perhaps best known to his generation as "the man who brought Dylan Thomas to America." As head of the Young Men's Hebrew Association Poetry Center (now known as the 92nd Street Y), Brinnin founded a series of poetry readings that included some of the best known poets in America and Britain. He acted as Thomas's “agent” in America, scheduling readings and arranging for places Thomas could stay. During the Welsh poet’s last cross-country tour in America, Thomas fell ill; despite efforts to fulfill his public obligations, he ended up being taken to a hospital in New York City where he died a few days later; Brinnin’s strange lack of response to the emergency (he didn’t come down to New York from near
until several days later, after the poet had died) stirred up quite a bit of controversy, especially when Thomas’s doctors assigned the cause of death to pneumonia and Brinnin claimed it was alcohol poisoning. The postmortem showed no signs of alcohol being involved in condition, and doctors insisted it had not been an alcoholic coma that Thomas was in but a severe bronchial condition; nevertheless, Brinnin’s assertions played into the myth of the Poet as Self-Destructive Madman, a myth quite popular at the time (and, possibly, still popular now.)

Even more controversy was caused by Brinnin’s publication of the book *Dylan Thomas in America*, in which he continued to propagate his assertions about the poet’s death and to paint the poet—undeservedly—as a boozer and a womanizer, out of control, in a self-destructive spiral, and functioning without a strong sense of duty to his professional, collegial or marital relationships. Thomas’s family considered Brinnin *persona non grata* for failing to attend to the poet’s needs while in America and for spreading gossip about him. One reviewer of the biography had this to say about it: “A fascinating read, even if you are not interested in DT. On the surface, a story of wretched excess and inevitable self-destruction, but even in this one-sided account one senses an anxious, self-serving agenda. It was keenly interesting to later read the accounts of Thomas’ family who regard Brinnin as an exploitative hanger-on who added character assassination to his almost criminal failure to help the dying poet.”

Critics have considered the possibility that Brinnin’s indifference and inattention at that crucial time was due to Brinnin being in love with, but rejected by, Thomas. The fact that Brinnin kissed Thomas full on the occasion of one of Thomas’s departures from America might have contributed to that theory.

In spite of the controversy (or perhaps because of it), *Dylan Thomas in America* sold well, better than Brinnin’s poetry collections had. Brinnin resigned his position at the Poetry Center but continued to spend time with and write about other celebrities in the literary world whom he had met there. He published books about William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, and Truman Capote (among others) during the last years of his life.
who, according to Brinnin, abandoned his talent and took on "the role of mascot to cafe society.") Maybe Brinnin submerging in the world of other poets meant withdrawing from that world as a poet himself. As he once told an interviewer, "I think I'm as well known as I deserve to be.

In any case, he wrote less poetry after the controversy, publishing only one more collection twenty years later, and he focused on cultivating friendships, editing anthologies, and writing biographical pieces and accounts of travel on ocean liners (a passion of his – he crossed the Atlantic Ocean over sixty times.) In some way, his role is that of the leader of a private literary salon, making sure he was a star in that firmament. His book *Sextet* is full of gossipy anecdotes about celebrities, including some his own friends or the friend Eliot, according to Eliot’s roommate, John Howard, was it came to self-regard. Hayward told Brinnin “On the day *Time* came out with his face on the cover, [Eliot] walked for hours looking for wherever he might find it, shamelessly taking peeks at himself.”

Christopher Lehman, who reviewed *Sextet* for the New York Times, said, “…there’s something about these six easy pieces that faintly uneasy in the author’s company – something that slightly compromised by having to meet these people under Mr. Brinnin’s auspices.” And Brinnin could be vicious. In a review of one of William Meredith’s books of poetry, Brinnin kills three giants with one stone: “In poetic terms, Meredith takes us into a region recently charted by the knuckleboned asperities of Robert Lowell and by the vaudeville turns of conscience played out in the ‘Dream Songs’ of John Berryman.”

I’ve met enough poets and sat through enough lunches with them to know that their personalities are not always in sync with their poetry — affable and upbeat people can write pessimistic and mean-spirited poems; conversely, whiny and egotistical people can write poems that lift our spirits and fill us with wonder. For me, Brinnin the Gossip comes across at times witty, at other times narcissistic; Brinnin’s poetry, on the other hand, is humble and full of wonder. Without wonder (and its co-conspirator, curiosity) poetry cannot exist, and I agree with Brinnin...
own take on the subject: “Unfortunately, a sense of wonder cannot be instilled, installed, or otherwise attained. Rather it is something like a musical sense — if not quite a matter of absolute pitch, something in the genes as exempt from judgment as the incidence of brown eyes or blue.”

The Giant Turtle Grants an Interview

How old are you, Old Silence?
I tell time that it is.
And are you full of wonder?
Ephemeral verities.
What most do you long for?
No end to my retreat.
Have you affections, loves?
I savor what I eat.
Do shellbacks talk to shells?
Sea is a single word.
Have you some end in mind?
No end, and no reward.
Does enterprise command you?
I manage a good freight.
Has any counsel touched you?
Your days – have they a pattern?
In the degree of night.
Has solitude a heart?
If a circle has a center.
Do creatures covet yours?
They knock, but seldom enter.
Have you not once perceived
The whole wide world is yours.
I have. Excuse me. I
Stay utterly indoors.

Choosing to put Brinnin’s work in front of the readers of
found myself wondering whether we need to admire an artist — the man himself or the woman herself — whose work we admire. The question was raised pointedly in the movie *Amadeus* — Mozart as a man is a giggling fool but as a composer is a genius, while Salieri the man is serious and committed to his art while the art he produces is mediocre. Some days I find myself thinking that if a poet is a son of a bitch, a bigot, a boozer, a racist, a loud-mouthed fool, a shameless self-promoter and/or a misogynist in real life, I’d rather not read his work. Other days, I couldn’t care less who the poet is — I just want to see if the necessary element of wonder is present in the poems; if it is, I can relish them and ignore everything else. My conclusion right now is this: John Malcolm Brinnin may, like Capote, have wasted his talent and become another mascot to café society, but he was wrong about himself — he is not as well-known as he deserves to be. I might not play anagrams or poker under a beach umbrella in Florida with someone like him — by many accounts backbiting, gossipy, and self-aggrandizing. But that has nothing to do with how much I enjoy and admire his poems.

"A Day at the Beach, 1984" – Key West Write

*From top left: James Merrill, Evan Rhodes, Edward Houe, Shel Silverstein, Bill Manville, Joseph Lash, Arnold S. Williams, Richard Wilbur, Jim Boatwright. From bottom left: Susan*
Julie Larios is the recipient of an Academy of American Poets Prize and a Pushcart Prize; her work has been published in journals such as The Threepenny Review, Ploughshares, The Atlantic, Ecotone and Field, and has been chosen twice for The Best American Poetry series.

Frost at Dawn: Poem — William Olsen
William Olsen is a dear friend and former colleague at Vermont College of Fine Arts, a publisher, editor and poet, a major force, diffident and yet such a presence. In this new poem, he pens what he calls “among other things, some sort of response to and loving argument with a favorite poem, Coleridge’s At Midnight.” The Coleridge poem situates itself as an address to the poet’s son, sleeping in his cradle. It’s night; it’s cold. Frost outside. Everyone is asleep except the poet. The world is so still the stillness seems to flutter with presence that disturbs meditation, the presence of the Stranger, which is a kind of Coleridgean encapsulation of a neo-Platonic deity behind or beneath the phenomena of existence. The poet bemoans his own childhood (much to complain of there) cooped up in the city grime and tells his son he’s lucky; he’ll grow “…lakes and shores / And mountain crags…” that are the “eternal language” of God.

Olsen’s poem plays with Coleridge’s poem starting with a brilliantly suspended first sentence that takes seven stanzas to come to an end as the poet takes us deeper and deeper beneath the surface of things, past regret and “funereal vacuities” (more than a hint of humor here) to something that, in the end, is not Coleridge’s Stranger nor his God, rather something the poet cannot name or even choose to name. Note the line “wherever it is leaves must
The leaf falls to earth and keeps falling and cups the frost, then decomposes beyond the deeps, to teach us how to be lost.

And the word “teach” here echoes the Coleridge poem that also is about teaching: God “Great universal Teacher!” But Olsen is much less credulous than Coleridge. He cannot say why things are nor who speaks through the delicate traceries of frost and the decomposing leaves that teach.

dg

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Far down below black, lowest regret, deeper than death, and deeper yet, down where my mother weeps to me to leave tomorrow’s sorrows be, far below sadness and tenderness, where more is less and less is less, below the sky or the sky-blue lake brimming over like the hull of a shipwreck, below where the crows crow and the cows sleep, below the bluestem and the apples the cows crap, below the prettiest sunset, below even the bluest white-bright-last-sunlight upon even bluer waves gleaming their overly-precious granite graves, below funereal vacuities, extravagant superfluities, far below the lovers’ quarrels,
or their story’s broody morals,
in its own good timely time, time has gone back
Time and time again, homeless time—

all the time in the world, homeless,
homeless space of universe,
all the time that time might pass
inside a shiny timeless hearse——

far down below idling hopes,
below the learned astronomer’s telescopes,
wherever it is leaves must fall
is neither my life nor my choice to call.

§

Upon a few gnarled stunted vines
fall’s first frost fairly shines,
mist rising up from fields while new minted frost
mummifies a shingle-sided house.

Here is a glittery homelessness
better acquainted with earth than with us.
All we are is less substantial,
all our fears, less substantial.

Dawn is ready and the heart is able.
Fear could not be less substantial.
I’ve had it with odes to dejection,
which is never more than the fear of rejection.

§

Here’s what frost isn’t—insubstantial,
querulous, of itself too full,
a mood of ferried buried
waves and the threadbare eroded
dunes we sightseers climb up and down to ruin.
Torment never spread itself this thin.
Incandescent, heartless, so like tin—
gull-gray gulls shriek atonal tunes.

The light of frost is the understudy of day,
this lake, once, as hard as rock:
icebergs—like ships, they broke
to floes which, farther down on their luck
drowned, to nothing—invisibly.
This frost is anything but free.
It looks like the moonlight got good and lost.
It got busted, sprung, and lost.

Frost has a cryological conscience:
the afterworld is cold chance.
Lunatical . . . white as a grin.
It shines unapproachably, like sunlight shines on tin,
whitening fields between cars and houses.
Plow-slashed furrows freeze
over smooth to its silver sky.
Forgive this intricate analysis
but it looks so stunned and incredulous.
It is spotty, like a roof of a vacant crystal palace,
Instantaneously tenuous,
it scribes the window glass.

§

It is so distinct from rain.
It shuns asphalt as too human.
The lustrous is
incipient in us.
Its deposition of glory
is inexplicably ordinary.
What a tenacious
underside of heaven it is—

it won’t be pushed around or salted or plowed like snow.
It won’t be tracked on and no weatherman will see it lift.
It is profligate thrift.
Its past is vaporous.

Beauty never spread itself so thin—
incandescent, the heartless night
turned inside out—
pasture field light.

§

The great lovers once frantic to touch
in darkness no dawn or frost can reach—
my mother gone in the blink of an eye,
my father going by and by,

all mothers, all sisters, all fathers, all sons,
all brothers and keepers, everyone’s
truest, best, lost influences,
nameless lovingkindnesses.

it is all and none of this.

§

It seems irretrievably early.
Time is awake, only barely,
infinitesimal hates,
infinitesimal fights.

Tight, fibrous and delicate,
around the fine white plow bared roots, 
it its extremely minute white 
threads appeared overnight.

It prompts us and then reproves us. 
Its intricate paralysis 
crystallizes . . . miraculous.
Preposterous. Analogous.

§

The leaf falls to earth and keeps 
falling and cups the frost, 
then decomposes beyond the deeps, 
to teach us how to be lost.

§

So night may be said to be over, 
over, and over at no real cost, 
each dawn the stars take cover. 
Stop fretting about the frost.

Frost clung to the shadow places 
and as always already was there 
before anyone could take a step. 
In the sky, stars stayed on

while you were asleep.

§

While you were asleep 
everyone was asleep; 
if we sleep, if we die, 
stars hang in the sky.
Between our houses
is its heartlessness,
but whatever grass
is, the frost blesses

whoever sees this,
whoever would mean
that frost be seen
not heard in this:

now fields steam and
its steam mists to sky.
Under us is only sand
and who can say why,

or whose voice this is.

William Olsen is author of five collections of poetry, including (Northwestern, 2011). He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the NEA and Breadloaf. He is co-editor of Planet on the Table: Writers on the Reading Life (Sarabande) and, most recently, Poetry in Michigan/Michigan in Poetry (New Issues). He teaches in the MFA program at Western Michigan University and edits New Issues Press. His home is in Kalamazoo.

Soundings: Poems & Photographs — Richard J
Poems and images intertwine in Richard Jackson’s “Soundings,” a series of nature photographs juxtaposed with the superb poems they inspired, the photographs themselves iconic, metaphorical and mysterious. The human and the natural intersect at the level of form when the poet spies a dilapidated chair in the forest, a cluster of roots resembling tank traps. A bee becomes a soul and a gap between facing cliffs looks like, well, a gap and the gap is violent, a pile of shell casings. Images and poems project a moral grid onto the cluttered world, they compose a judgement and a puzzle.

This is what Jonah had to learn, that it is all loneliness, all forgiveness, all gathering from the puzzling depths he carried within him.

Richard Jackson is a peripatetic poet and translator, an admired colleague at Vermont College of Fine Arts where we both teach, a good man to travel with and a profoundly engaged human being. He has published poems, translations and essays on NC before and it's a pleasure to have him back.

dg
SOUNDINGS

What we know deeply we know for such short time before it appears again, distant and foreign. Where do our words go once they are spoken? The whale sheaths itself and leaves behind a footprint of oil. The sea gathers the setting light of the sky. At some point, the sea becomes the sky. This is what Jonah had to learn, that it is all loneliness, all forgiveness, all gathering from the puzzling depths he carried within him. Above, a gull dives into a cloud. An invisible plane leaves a vapor trail the wind bends. There is a kind of truth we only see when we close our eyes.
BUTTERFLIES

All the energy collected by Radio Telescopes since they started is only equal to the energy of a butterfly landing on a flower. Which is to say how little we know about what is in our own solar system, or ourselves. In fact, Pluto’s orbit is so irregular we don’t know what it will appear next. Which is how, I suppose, you have landed here in this sentence and, like gravity, have begun to shift the focus. Maybe that’s why I think of Newton who, poisoned by Mercury from his alchemy experiments, couldn’t remember where he put his proofs for elliptical orbits. There’s no reality without its proof, Halley had argued years before the comet was named for him. The energy it takes to remember is the energy it takes to love, the saying goes, taking so little, as those butterflies know,
to flutter and fly off because there is no formula, and because love is stronger than the proofs we rememb...
told yet. Pascal was right, there is no center or circumference.
The bees are souls. The bees wander off. The story begins there.

TANK TRAPS
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 1992

Someone is watching from the window across the square. There are Nightbirds complaining as they maneuver And dive between the lights. We could drink the darkness. Those aren’t child’s jacks or crosses as they seemed Below us, a Roman city smirks about what we’ll never know. South of here the souls of the dead disguise themselves as Clouds to escape the militia. Each day is another trap.
Our words are blemishes on the truth. Every heart is crossed out.
The darkness provokes a few whispers. Everywhere we look
Something crosses our path. We can’t see the lovers
About to cross from the right. We can’t see the child
Crossing out what he’s just written. There are no halos
On the streetlights. These designs imprison us. The sky
leans down. If we aren’t careful we’ll cross out the world.

ROCK BIRDS, BISTI WILDERNESS, NM

No wonder the first people here believed we came from stone.
What these birds were waiting for was the day we would return.
The lizards wrap themselves in light. The wind whispers
into the ear of the sky. The shadows have a purpose we’ll never
decipher. Nevertheless, these birds invite us to speak to them.
At night these rocks will be iced with light. The question they would answer is why they left the air. They are no longer surprised by what we have tried to carve into history. Sometimes our words hold an idea for a few moments before the sand claims it. The mind shivers at this thought. Reality seems like a provocation. Nevertheless, these birds are silent to say whatever has been wearing us down, carving us into shapes we could never imagine, never refuse to believe.

Crows and Elephants watch over their dead and mourn. How strange to come back now to that sentence, weeks later. It’s almost time to leave. Every sound is louder now.
in the fog. My watch strains to go backwards. Shadows whisper where no shadows could be. An echo of the moon streams out of the last ruins of darkness. Yes, the two men in the boat about to become fog are real. So, too, the dreams that are lost among the fallen trees that scratch the shoreline. Last night, the stars on the water were trap doors. The crows with their charred wings are complaining to a hawk. It's time to pack up the sunsets the dawns and move on. There's our dog sniffing below this window who knows everything else we can't see.
Gravity happens to the lens. Words squint but
it doesn’t help. I want the mailman to deliver another story. Instead there are only the homeless men washing the windshield for a quarter. Why does love seem stuffed in the trunk? This is not a calculus problem. The bridge from here to there hasn’t been delivered. Empty bullet casings litter the scene. No one is ever a witness. The heart sags. My footprints forget me. I don’t think anything will ever be the same. This is the edge of the cliff and you can’t move, can’t jump. Everything is vertical. With binoculars you can see where you’ll be in an hour. Raindrops collect on the lens. A fine mist. It hides us. It drifts into clocks. Gravity presses your hands. Some hurts never get said. Some get smuggled.

has written introductions to books of poems by four different Slovene Poets for various presses, and a special Slovene issue of *Hunger Mountain* edited a special 50-page section of Poetry International (20 Matthews with an introductory essay. In 2000 he was awarded the Order of Freedom Medal for literary and humanitarian work in the President of Slovenia. He has received Guggenheim, NEA, NEH and Fulbright Fellowships, and five Pushcart Prizes. His new poetry collection, *Out of Place*, will be published by Ashland Poetry Press in 2014.

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**Reflection: Photograph & Poem — John Haney Amanda Jernigan**
Amanda Jernigan and her husband John Haney collaborate here on a gorgeous photograph and poem combination, the photograph providing the inspiration or focal point for the poem which is an irregular sonnet, a gorgeous thing, that builds its power through a series of contrasts, contradictions, and denials: delivered/abandoned, surreptitious/scandalously bright, dying/swans aren’t known to sing, never spoken/never taken back, (white — note: a word not used in the poem)/black. Read this way, you can see how achingly poignant each of the contrasts or denials is, sad, beautiful reversals. Even the poet reverses herself and seems to begin to disappear in that amazing double negative “we could hardly feign not having seen it,” or near dotted
the middle, the poem offers a dense run of literary references, other poems and books, swans, sirens, all concentrated in the moment when the glowing swan (see the photo; the swan has an aura) disappears under the dark bridge. Note also the rhymes leading to the end: Brewer/truer and sirens/silent and the gorgeous back/black that bookends the last line.

Amanda Jernigan earlier contributed five poems to Numéro Cin, her collection Groundwork which NPR picked as one of the top five poetry books of 2011.

dg

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Reflection

The swan slipped under the bridge — a palmed card, a dropped coin, a swaddled child, delivered or abandoned — a surreptitious movement, but scandalously bright, and we could hardly feign not having seen it. I thought about Macpherson’s swan, white habited; and Baudelaire’s, an exile from its lac natal; the snow-white somnatational swans of Outram’s ‘Ms Cassie by Tarnished Water’: dying swans sing sweetest, Brecht maintained. But Brewer tells us swans aren’t known to sing. The sirens, too, were silent, according to Kafka. Truer words were never spoken, never taken back. In your negative the swan is black.

—A
Amanda Jernigan is a poet, playwright, essayist, and editor. Her first book, *Groundwork: poems*, was published by Biblioasis in 2011; her second book, *the Daylight Hours*, is forthcoming from Cormorant, this spring. She is the editor of *The Essential Richard Outram* (Porcupine’s Quill, 2011), and is currently at work on a critical edition of Outram’s collected poems.

John Haney is a photographer, sculptor, and wood engraver. His work has been exhibited in public and private galleries in Canada and abroad. He is represented by the Christina Parker Gallery in St. John’s, Newfoundland, and by Emerson Gallery Berlin. He is currently at work on a series of black-and-white contact prints entitled *Common Prayer* (http://johnhaney.ca/), for exhibition at the Rooms Provincial Art Gallery in Newfoundland.

Amanda and John are sometime, amateur letterpress printers.
have collaborated annually on a hand-printed pamphlet or broadside, featuring one of Amanda’s poems and one of John’s photographs, issued under their imprint Daubers Press. ‘Reflection’/Weidendammer Bridge...

Amanda and John live in Hamilton, Ontario, with their young son Anson, and their loyal dog Ruby, of previous Numéro-Cinq fame (http://numerocinqmagazine.com/2011/01/21/five-poems-from-first-principals-by-amanda-jernigan/).

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Late: Video Poem — Elise Levine

I have known Elise Levine since 1994 when my co-editor Maggie Helwig and I included three of Elise’s stories in our annual anthology Coming Attractions (edited, by the way, by Mark Anthony Jarman who has appeared on these pages). Oh, she can write! She has a hip, dark, extravagant flair, an alienated edge, a way of making the bourgeois world look, oh, so dull.

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Author Photo by E
words, she makes you stand up straight and look at yourself. Her story starts: *It was midnight, Angel, and I'll never forget. We did it in the doorways up and down Church Street, my back against rotting wood or my hamstring hurting, crouched down on grey concrete, the club where I'd cruised you twisted down alleyways and across half-empty parking lots. And then a decade later, actually 2005, I put an Elise Levine story in *Best Canadian Stories* good that you are always curious about what she is doing NOW. And so just so you know, here is a video poem, an example of what she is doing and her questing mind is taking her. City street sounds, pigeon wings, hand-held video, the words coming in bursts or sound and image, the strange beautiful "no, about, no" turning your toward home.

dg

I’ve always been attracted to hybrid literary forms, little monsters like the prose poem, the lyric novel — the way they embody neologism and thus the desire to transform, transfer, mutate. The video poem offers another opportunity to ironize and complicate. Layering audio tracks, images and text amplifies the words, creates larger resonances.
Elise Levine is the author of the story collection *Driving Men Mad: Requests & Dedications*. Her work has also appeared in publications including *Joyland, Sententia, Hotel Amerika, Gargoyle, Coming Attractions Stories, The Journey Prize Anthology,* and *Prairie Schooner.* A graduate of the MFA in Creative Writing at Vermont College, she is currently an Assistant Professor in the MFA in Creative Writing Program and the Department of Literature at American University in Washington, DC.
These most recent poems from Nicole Markoti are raunchy little imp dances; they're a lover that won't stop punning, half love, half madness. It gives and then takes away, coy perhaps, but in charge. No Scheherazade poetics...
here you’ll see soon enough; there’s a painfully lovely dawning we’re the ones who dance here, and we dance for her.

Staying In

a boat skims the surface, plastic rudder aligns with the pond’s sundial, the and aiming. toys for US

who let the cat into the bag?

curtains drain the sun, your air conditioning follows Mars. I’ll bet it’s noont break-time in Copenhagen

worry from your lower back, down. a crisis of German emerges from the ar

do you fing-er, or do you fing-Ger? long-er, or long-Ger?

aqua naps help cut the string that pulls maps closed

but only by name tag

there’s been a pneumatic leakage, a quarantined seepage, lay people lay a intention is freakage

my angle, usually indigenous, remains bent at the elbow

thigh high, my big toe plays abacus in the cricket park, a bat per person

we’re all thumbs today, meaning my finGers are toe-like

close every ocular door with a deaf testimonial, and remind the lip-readin
kennels proliferate

ken you ken where I'm kent?

hurry and ketchup, the sundial’s ticking

**wrinkling the cut-offs**

Not only Echinacea Purple Cone, but dried Arugula and Potato Vines. A bee on the rough cement, thirty-seven moths sneeze irregularly, and succulents refuse to believe in westward shade.

Calandis blows on her Peruvian flute, covering the middle tubes with her mouth, and Shao-Chiu wears his spider-man mask. It's too big, so his nose hole sits on his forehead between the insect-blue eyes. She climbed the windows, he lurched from the television. Pleats in their shirts mean ironing might be closer than you think. A popsicle during the heat wave simply:

Motor vehicles insist that twelve times twelve equals, but does today count if it's past midnight?

I meant to look up IESB, but Firefly parodies took over.

A racket of scrambling, a drip of Shala-sweat, a wrist-bone releases, and fingers flutter to the tiles. I have counted up the list 49-million times and the answer always:

Sonnets breathe 14 yoga inhales. Each one a pause, pause in German. Rushing’s good. Ghosts slip up as often in the mortal world. Could you walk that way? Do you bury saws? Two screws in the lawnmower, one above the kitchen counter. Check.

Don't dismiss this information as poetry.

I’m still stopping.
at risk or at least?

sloping from the TransCanada:

a road crew to repair the prairie rain that slid the hill down

three riders on one wheelchair, chasing cross-traffic

a pedestrian bridge where kids leap up, just as the cars pass beneath

used spiderman webs, dangling from rescue trees

wading pool asthma

and three blackbirds, pecking at peanut shells beside the

could tomorrow pack in murderball and taxes, a porch sonata and
wedding speeches, emails to two Karls, and leg passports?

when didn’t hot-and-bothered last all night?

but how much ink on paper defines a thorough edit?

A Voice, then a Crow.

friends fly east, west, and north. I sit facing south, in the shade, late in the evening, on a flat piece of cement, dying for loopholes

and when tomorrow isn’t what the early-bird brings?

Count Down

Bamboo sheets and then the covers, in waves. Soft and caramel, but only if
dripping and a placebo. Misty. We’ve stroked the fibres of thick thickness, and tissue need, but not on weekdays. Whoever could have? A cardboard box, a railing, a cardboard pre-packaged breakfast extravaganza. And yes, just as raisins and three eggs and five pills and the dregs off loose tea. One mug. My shoulder, not the kneecaps, not seven of the toes, not the light switch it stained berber. Elevator doors, but only on the way down. Remind me to pulse on the 13th. Remind me to swallow. Did I ask?

Yes, swishing air, but not so’s y’d notice.

A metal handle, four car keys, and the wheel inside the wheel, ever-burnin scratched nose, and sixteen hair-flips but who says for show? The inside of but only twice by accident. Seventeen times on the radio, six on the compu

A sneeze that twirled inside niacin. But basically because Benjamin demanded at the precise corner of Pine and Windy. I’m not making this up. Too many knobs, or “press one for”s or keypads or take-out packets to list. I’ll list as learn. Learn from the fingertips, in. Yes, the bah dies. Bathe eyes.

A series of pages, not all poetry, but enough to justify the gutter restraints. up the upside, or the insect, or the smash-up. Windsor rain, on the downsi More books, in retail. More pens, in trade. More sleeves and file folders an doesn’t count and counter surfaces that do. A penultimum of half-price me

And finally: each other, but as explicitly as yummy digitals.

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“Thefts, Contortions, & Yogic Breathing: Nicole Markoti’s Trickster Poetics”

Nicole Markoti’s poetry is kinetic. In both of her collections, Other Alphabets (1998) and Bent at the Spine (2012), her aesth...
“and/or” pitfalls that Western traditional poetry and prose rely on. By disregarding formal line breaks and punctuation, her prosody conveys a more natural pause. This genre-crossing makes for a paratactic exploration that broaches complex questions concerning nationalism, feminism, and language.

She further complicates this exploration through her inclusion of overheard conversations. These dislocated voices often become her titles. They underscore her interest in multiple perspectives and reveal how her attentive eavesdropping comes from being preeminently concerned with metaphorical margins—margins which locate the cultural idiom through sound bites, double entendres, and puns that stack the poem with polyvocal suggestion. Markoti’s work exhibits a trickster quality in that she steals language and then returns it in altered forms. Her intertextual links rework language within the poem and provide a way of listening to the world.

As the selection below attests, her poetry grows out of the sentence. It is the “sentential piece,” in her words, that encourages “plasticity resistant to notions of purity in either prose or poetry.” Markoti’s use of the prose poem is her way of subverting the Western traditional poem, the poem that she deems a patriarchal device that doesn’t provide ample space for marginal voices. “I’m always stopping,” she remarks as though her thoughts cannot be completed because the medium does not encourage it or because she is hesitant in her own abilities to speak through the tradition. She reinforces this difficulty, in the selection here, in a variety of ways. In two of the poems, for example, she evokes “shala,” as “the hot yoga shala” and “Shala-sweat.” As it’s unclear if she is referring to the war goddess Shala, or the Sanskriti word for yoga studio, she emphasizes the arbitrariness of language. Both meanings, however, may be anchors—avatar and shelter—Markoti’s assertion that subversions of language demand closer attention.

“Too many buttons, or knobs,” she reminds us in another place, “‘or press one for’s or keypads or take-out packets to list. I’ll list as I learn.” And here the word play on “list” suggests lists of problems in a techno-centric world that no longer provides person-to-person encounters. “List” also alludes to listening, enclosing an area for battle, desiring,
accepting a challenge, stitching something together, and, arr
to leaning to one side or losing equilibrium. All of these
complexity and suggest that there are no absolutes.

Because Markoti’s world is without absolutes, she of
uncertainty. Even ephemeral elements play an importa
ead explorations. As she observes in “wrinkling the cut-offs,” “G
often in the mortal world.” Through this statement, sh
generates the question: “Could you walk that way?” The que:
and conflates. It is unclear if it responds to the statement, me:
act as ghosts when we make mistakes? Or is her question
thought, a tangent triggered by something physical in
something that interrupts the previous thought? This is one
her language in motion.

The physical body is also essential to her re-workings o
movement. It is often a field for converging discomforts, er
for her, “the prose poem is a poetic strategy embedded with
of narrative, and a feminist response to patriarchal langua

Even the title, Bent at the Spine, suggests physical contortion
well as splitting something, such as a book, in an irreparab
In,” from this selection, is a good example of how Markoti
personal and physical to global concerns through her styl
innovations. The sentence, of course, provides interconn
shifts between lenses. She writes, “worry from your lower

“Sonnets breathe 14 yoga inhales,” thus becoming a manif
language.

Her line breaks and tumbling thoughts are also physical impo
poem. They embody the reader, highlighting her inclus
incorporating colloquial language and found speech fragme
places, she beguiles the reader into a kind of subtext to the di
reading, however, the strangeness and ragged breathing pa
have been overlooked the first read, pushes through. S
selection, "Do you bury saws?” And before we have a cha
footing and an answer, she’s off on a strangely domestic adventure. Her checklist that sounds vaguely familiar: “Two screws in the lawn mower, one above the kitchen counter. Check. Don’t dismiss this information as poetry.”

The essential nature of Markoti’s world is made up of these fleeting moments.

While this discursiveness is present in Minotaurs and Other Alphabets, the Spine is much more fractured and concerned with accommodating more voices. It is perhaps an ethical turn: by situating her own voice among many, she encourages autonomy and community. By fusing both her attention-deficit sentence and to the body, she captures the repressiveness she feels in having to lock down her thoughts. Marcoti isn’t interested in polite, normative poetics and she doesn’t meander on the neat path through traditional structure. Her sentences stand discursive beside each other in order to capture the rhythms of an uneasy urban vernacular. If we have normalized our isolations and shortened our attention spans to cater to dramatic transformations of movement and interaction, then poetry, for her, is panacea for jarring us out of this state of quickening. So that patch of Trans-Canada, that hot yoga studio or that hard rain is familiar to us but still strange. It’s Marcoti’s plasticity again, her resourceful poetics steeped in re-mapping the phenomenal and outcries of the body in order to prompt you: Look again. Take none of this at face value.

–Tammy Armstrong
Tammy Armstrong’s poetry has appeared in literary magazines and anthologies in Canada, US, Europe, UK, and Algeria. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, the Governor General’s Award, and short-listed twice for the CBC Literary Prize. She is currently a PhD candidate at the University of New Brunswick, working in Critical Animal Studies and North Atlantic Poetry.

A Fable: Poem — David Helwig
David Helwig here reminds us that poetry is a kind of divine tomfoolery, a playful messaging that oscillates between meaning everything and meaning nothing, that never means but momentarily and then the meaning shimmers away like a leaf blowing in the wind, catching here and there and moving on me calling it poetry. Actually what he said was more like he couldn’t figure out what it was so he called it poetry. On some level it enacts a messianic parody; it gives the year 2051 a mysterious significance; I like the stenographer drawn in a cart by a Newfoundland dog; I like the Four Lads and all the words beginning with Q; it lifts one’s heart.

David is an old friend and an amazingly prolific author of poems, translations, stories, novels and a memoir. In 2007 he won the Writers’ Trust Cohen Prize for distinguished lifetime achievement. In 2009 he was appointed to the Order of Canada. His book publication list is as long as your arm. He founded the annual Best Canadian Stories which he edited for years. Biblioasis is on the cusp of a collection of David’s magnificent translations of Chekhov stories, title story “About Love” originally on Numéro Cinq. See also his poems on NC here and here and here and here!
You’d see them by the shore on those greenest of green days, Himself in conversation with Quigley, adding newly minted sayings one of the fishers wading barefoot, steady in one place step gently up and down in search of the lump in the mud of the quahog, bending to lift each small edible bivalve o drop it in the floating container he dragged behind h towing his hard fate. Further out an oysterman probed a set of tongs. And beyond that yet the tiny image of pulling traps on the shimmer of water, silver under t clouds and on in a hint of forever to the line of horizon. I metallic flex and curl of birdsong, the tiny musicians hid reeds or the tall grass or the thick accumulation of succul

Himself would be bent a little forward, walking ten steps the other, intent, speaking his words, and Quigley him while he went on, the big Q, so he said, remembran of it, so later to scratch it all down and share it with the F years when the entirety of them westered into the secret and were known only by the initials, Q for Quigley, tho was for some Latin or foreign word, Q not for Quigley a was called that in the farmyards and on the highways, high lines of travel, while the Lads were known by their and L and I, MMLI adding up to 2051 in the ancient nu was prepared that in the year two thousand and fifty one Secret would be told, Himself achieving his place at last demand for Last Things, and Big Quigley had a whole bundle prophecies of the Third Coming and the Fourth, always more, like a couple, adulterous or even not, who have just at last caught the pace of it and climb the holy mountain at all hours.

At low tide the radioactive seals, flopping out of the mermaids, gather on a rock shoal not far from shore, g
and snarl. No one could remember the name of the arctic god
once reigned in the icy waters, and governed their lives.

Nearby, observing, silent, is a tall hard man with a shaven skull. He
never speaks. Then Mad Mary, in an opalescent shirt full of flesh,
shorts defining white thighs, strides out of a tent in the long
green ferns where she has passed the time with whomever, contrib-
uting to the fund, all her big mad teeth in a grin as she goes aboard
with its beds and galley and chemical toilet and with the shifting of
her bare long legs and heft of muscular arm places cardboard boxes,
sweeps up, and the holy scrolls in their rack, she sets to packing up
dehydrated veg and fresh water for the next voyage, a hip canted to
one side as she lugs the buckets.

Big Quigley watches her. Whatever his claims to holiness, he is not
to be trusted, of course, who would try to cheat the shell-fisher
of his catch, or anyone else of any manner of thing, better conceal him
for quarestio, a seeking or searching, Q for quies, rest, Q for complaint,
Q for quisquiliae, rubbish. And his ways served to augment confusions in
what was said of what was done, each of the Four Lads recording
what each believed he knew, late at night debating the matters and
sharing out their stories. His record, the spoken and claimed and
imagined basis of it all, would finally be vanished forever, so that
nothing was left but an image of an image, Mad Mary’s bright eyes and
heavy sunlit hair caught in the mirror of a puddle, where she glimpsed
herself with all her devils gone off over her shoulder in the water, come
up on her from behind. Himself must use the tools at hand, what is in
the world is in the world. She will read the Parmenides scroll to him
in the shade late some afternoon.

Now, the packing and preparation done, she comes out of the
bus with a wooden bowl in her hands, down to the water to fill, to
the firepit, where there is a faint trace of smoke winding up. Him-
self arrives to her and sits in the old upholstered seat taken out
of the bus each time they set up camp, and she takes
sandals and kneels, sun glittering on the waterdrops as he washes his feet, and as she bends toward him, he put his fingers through her thick hair with its metallic highlights.

They will march down a main street for the final parade, some of the willing natives gathered by the wayside, some watching on their eyeglass screens, and when she has washed his feet, Himself tells her a mystery while she combs out his hair and beard, making him handsome for the public presentation. Big Quigley studies it all. He is standing in the long green ferns, and down by the jetties, he sees two women climb from a rowboat and walk to a waiting air-bicycle, and he stares them so hard that they grow naked to his eyes, and in his way he possesses them both entirely.

The sunlight catches the thin smoke and the wisps thicken to clouds until the firepit is all whirling whiteness. Himself and Mad Mary vanish from sight, and the two of them gone, the Four Lads appear in their royal T-shirts each with his letter – TWO-ZERO-FIVE-ONE – as they sing out their stories in plainchant, then the unison dissolves into the chords of a march, and out of the vast smoke rolls the schoolbus, Mad Mary at the wheel, her bare arms exposing shifting tattoos, big hands gripping the wheel. Himself stands on the roof beating time, and all around it marches a phalanx of drum majorettes, in white satin skirts, tall boots, and red satin shirts.

Big Quigley, riding behind in a horse drawn carriage, has his hands, and he is scribbling in it as fast as he can, but so he turns on his eyeglass phone and begins to dictate into it. Behind him, in a cart drawn by a tremendous black Newfoundland dog, sits a stenographer receiving his dictation and putting it down. Behind the orange schoolbus, marching with their knees high, come male and female cheerleaders in silver bikinis, two of them holding a banner with the words EAT FRESH SEA FOOD. With the fingers of both hands Quigley forms the letter Q, and the cheerleaders wave to him and some of them make the same digital gesture. Each observer's portable device records their progress into the city.
Then the bus vanishes with its smoke and noise, the long
A van is parked in front of a snack bar, and a young man
wears a Boy Scout hat, holding a stick ending in a nail in
canvas bag in his left, and he strolls along the boulevard
chocolate bar wrappers and chip bags and popcorn boxes.

Picture Me Awake: Poems — Rigoberto González
Two Rigoberto González poems to die for. Nothing else to be said really. I got part way through the first poem and thought, This is the motherlode. Look at this stanza.

where there never was a father
there never was a child. if not
a birth, then not a love. if not
conception, then not a thought.
if not a wish or possibility, if not
a miracle, then not.
The poem is a meditation on the poet's knowledge that he will never have children even though there is in him the capacity to love a child, the paternal element, as it were. And this is the climactic moment of the poem as series of sentences that are simple parallel constructions, relentlessly repeating “if...if...if...if”/”not...not...not...not...” within which pattern he juxtaposes a set of paired nouns: father/child, birth/love, conception/thought (beautiful pun), wish/possibility and miracle/not where the final “not” breaks the rhythm of the parallels and by the magic of language becomes also a noun, a homonym of nought, nothing, zero. This is gorgeous writing. The effortless play of the poet's mind keeps the poem from descending into sentimentality. He holds his sorrow in a container of words and prolongs the emotion to a terribly bittersweet breaking point.

Rigoberto González is a friend and colleague at Vermont College of Fine Arts. It's a deep pleasure to publish his poems on NC.

—dg

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**Bodies of Little Dead Children**

*after a painting by Forrest Bess*

inside of me, i who will never be a father to any he is my son or she is my daughter or that’s my baby mirror glaring its crooked teeth back at me.

yet i must know something about parenting. at night my torso splits apart, a cradle for my heart to pound and tantrum to delirium.

dare I wish the little thing had
never been? dare I ignore it, let its cry shrink to a squeak that I can place over my tongue? this squirming pillbug, dare I ingest it?

         oh cashew in the sack, interrupted dream my barren sister had—the pitter-pat of baby feet vanishing like sweat on the tile turned steam. oh vacant nest. will she resent the way I squander my fertility? bless the tumbleweed that chases after rain all summer yet only flowers in a fire.

         what am I but an apple tree indifferent to the fruit that blisters and spoils, that clings to a dress like accessories that do not flatter.

         oh lover-thief, if you steal my seeds it doesn’t matter. you’re taking nothing personal away—i will not call the removal of my dead a loss.

         i will not name them, either.

where there never was a father there never was a child. if not a birth, then not a love. if not conception, then not a thought. if not a wish or possibility, if not a miracle, then not.
let my calvary be this:
to fade without a trace like all
that chromosome and protein
laid to waste across the sheets.
let my flesh go just as white
and just as cold without a soul.

let the ghosting haunt me.

Picture Me Awake: The Immortal Ramón Novarro

Razor me
a mustache;
shape my shrieks
into kisses me.

Young men collect
grains of sand that might turn

into pearls in their trunks.
I dream of such discoveries.

The beach bursts with light.
My housecoat splits

apart like an oyster.
I spill like sludge on the porch.

On my knees
a glow prayers me.
I soften anything
Papi, I too used to wear
such confident skin.

My nipple lifted like a finger
and silenced the room.

¡Atención!: a duet of blasts
in black on my skull and on

my crotch. You too sing
that naughty tune. I nuzzle

with my old horse nostrils.
My eye is not so dark anymore

but it can still expand
to take you in completely.

Say you see
the youth of me
beneath
the truth of me.

Ladies, who do you want me to be?
A Spanish caballero, a sheik?

Fantasies are no disgrace.
Press your hand to my chest,
it Hollywoods a heartbeat. Caress my mask, it slow-mos to a face.

I know this speed. I too lust for men. In my greed I can inhale like a whale

and swallow one whole. My final role--fish that bites two baits--is no pretend.

One winks. His brother leans in. *Come closer, love.* My whiskers twitch

when one tongues the other's lips. This plunge into a barbed-wire bed I can’t resist.

…………………
…………………

Picture me awake. Picture me angelic and alive. Beautiful me, intact, winged—undeathed—me.

I am not a tragedy. I am not the reel of film

that snaps and leaves blank the movie screen. I am not the afterimage bursting to a blood-blot

then just as quickly draining back into the puncture.
If I exit from the picture
I sky like a god. My teeth

a dazzling marquee.
Say my name. I glitter

in my gown of stars.
Don’t walk away,

José Ramón, or I’ll be
the comet that careens

around your neck.
You will be the welt

blistering with tears
and muffled scream.

Bésame, lindo–
I will breathe in you

an immortality.
Ay, José Ramón,

quédete bonito, maricón,
or you will die without me.

—Rigoberto González

Rigoberto González is the author of ten books of poetry and prose, of Camino del Sol: Fifteen Years of Latina and Latino Writing. He is a Guggenheim and NEA fellowships, winner of the American Book Award, Poetry Center Book Award, and The Shelley Memorial Award of The Poetry Society of America, and a grant from the New York Foundation for the Arts, contributing editor for Poets & Writers Magazine, on the executive board of...
directors of the National Book Critics Circle, and is associate professor of English at Rutgers-Newark, the State University of New Jersey and a member of the MFA in Writing faculty at Vermont College of Fine Arts.

**Numéro Cinq Author Sharon McCartney Selected for Best Canadian Poetry 2012**

Numéro Cinq is delighted to announce that Sharon McCartney’s poem “Katahdin,” published in NC last July, has been selected for the 2012 edition of the annual *The Best of Canadian Poetry in English*. The guest editor f.
Carmine Starnino. The continuing advisory editor for the whole series is Peacock.

Congratulations all around but especially to Sharon. NC readers are advised that this is one of those occasions when it is appropriate to raise a glass of Talisker or two or three.

dg

Of Flowers & Of Fire: Poems — Emily Pulfer-Terino

I met Emily Pulfer-Terino on the jet to Chicago for the AWP Conference last year. A comical, sleepy morning meeting made somewhat impossible by my grumpy desire not to talk to ANYONE. Later, at the conference, we re-meet...
and it came out that she is a poet. Actually, a lovely poet who teaches at a private school in Massachusetts and has to do amusing things like chaperone dances. Emily Pulfer-Terino can build a beautiful line. Watch the verbs and verbals. Everything is moving, shifting, pelting, fraying in these poems.

\[
\text{this heaving air, the sound of air inborn as effort. And what washes up, limp, inside-out, jellyfish, empty skate, cartilage fraying.}
\]

Meditate upon the gorgeous concision of these lines. Think about the powerful rhetoric of lists and series and the dense concreteness of the words. Watch the way the grammar and drama of the sentences surges beyond the line to the next and the next.

dg

\[\text{———–}\]

The Vineyard

November wind persuades the dunes
You’ve brought me to. Dunes thin and swell.
Near, gray trees strain. Your friends build houses and couple here;

I prefer mountains. But your heart pelts against your ribs. You trudge at wind and turn, grinning over your shoulder at me. Constant here,

\[
\text{this heaving air, the sound of air inborn as effort. And what washes up, limp, inside-out, jellyfish, empty skate, cartilage fraying. And there’s your dog,}
\]

who into the pluming water follows tossed planks,
again pleased and flapping, again, salted by seaspume. Even in this constant reshaping of ground by wind, of wave by wind, with these cold shocks of beachwinter numbing the skin, how isolate each breathing thing must be. Scents of wet wood, aged fish wed these drowsy ions. I hate it here. The way you clasp against this afternoon into me, our two breaths chalking one, your face a mortifying pink.

Tinctures

Yarrow, she says, wading through the weeds beside the mountain road, will purify the blood.

Gathering plants to make tinctures and balms, serious and thinner now, my friend is learning how to heal. Red clover lowers fever, quiets frantic nerves. Stinging nettle soothes the skin, the pain of aging joints. Saint John's wart, common yellow flower, homely as a pillowcase, soothes the pain of life itself. Well, pain has made a pagan of my friend. At twenty-two, she has already learned to celebrate death: friends, her father. Alone in her sugar shack home up here, grown sinewy and stern, she studies the natural world as if the names of living things, repeated, were a spell to undo...
She gives me what she gathers—hawthorn blossom, elder, comfrey—to seal in jars with stones and alcohol. We’re pulled here forever. The sun, once heavy gold with heat, is growing tired over us, pale white light of evening setting in. Soon, she’ll stop and we’ll start to enjoy what we always do together: at her place, sepia sounds of guitar steeping from the record player, outside, lake water steadying slowly under lowered sun. And we enjoy the wine she makes: dandelion, lemon mint. Tasting of flowers and of fire. Strong wine, and good, it puts us under fast.

— Emily Pulfer-Terino

Emily Pulfer-Terino grew up in Western Massachusetts, where she lives and teaches English at Miss Hall’s School, a boarding school for girls. She holds a BA from Sarah Lawrence College and an MFA in Creative Writing from Syracuse University. More of her work is published or forthcoming in Hunger Mountain, Stone Canoe, The Louisville Review, The Alembic, Oberon, and other journals and anthologies.

Happiness: A Poem — Mark Lavorato
Here’s a poem by Mark Lavorato, not about Nature so much about the surprising thereness of our mysterious collisions with the sudden glimpse into the eyes of a startled animal, the eyes looking into your eyes. Unforgettable are lines like

and with two bounds of flaming grace

it slipped through a slot in the long grass
the candle flame of its tail doused
into a thin wick of shadow

I read herein faint echoes of D. H. Lawrence and also reminders of an American poet, Robert Wrigley, whose nature poems I admire greatly. Mark Lavorato is a Montreal writer (poems, novels, also he takes photographs and composes music). This poem is from his new book Wayworn Wooden imminently with Porcupine’s Quill.

dg
Happiness

A true story: Found a fox once
bright coil rusting in the spring grass

looked like it’d died in its sleep
its nose drowned in the fur of its tail

so I crouched down to touch
the still-glowing embers of its pelt

when, with a wild and frozen start, it woke up
I will never forget the electric green
of its eyes fixed to mine, and the rushing sense that I was looking into something I’d been scanning for miles or years or fathoms and had found at precisely the moment I wasn’t prepared to, butterfly net in the closet.

My need to swallow splintered the exchange and with two bounds of flaming grace it slipped through a slot in the long grass the candle flame of its tail doused into a thin wick of shadow.

Must have stayed there an hour wondering if he’d come back.

Mark Lavorato is the author of three novels, Veracity (2007), Believing Cedric (2011), and Burning-In (forthcoming). His first collection of poetry, Wayworn Wooden Floors, is published by the Porcupine’s Quill (2012). Mark lives in Montreal, where he also does work as a photographer and composer.
I first heard Jordan Smith read poetry at the Iowa Writers Workshop (or thereabouts) when we were both students in the MFA program. He was one of the poetry stars, at that time writing a series of poems on historical themes — yes, they were that striking, I still remember them (when I don’t remember much else). He went on to teach at Union College in Schenectady, win fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Ingram Merrill Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts, and publish six books of poetry including *Loving the Old Hymns* (Princeton University Press) and *Lucky Seven* (University Press). His newest book, just out, is *The Light in the Film* (Tampa Press). It’s an immense pleasure to publish on these pages five new poems by Jordan Smith — beautiful dense poems that jam words and quotations together, halt and reverse the vectors of meaning, and exude a light autumnal air of loss and fatality wrapped now and then in a sly bit of humor.

……*The cemetery deed from the Twenties*
Was filed neatly with my father’s will, signed
By his father’s father. I go to prepare a place,
The pastor read. Her black coat swirled. Dirt
In a wedge on my thumb. No frost on the flowers yet,
The caretaker said, though it’s so late. I shook
His hand. Come back, he said, now that you’ve been.

The photo of Jordan and Malie Smith above was taken by Evan Smith.

dg

A Poster of Steve Earle in Lerwick
— for Hugh Jenkins

In a grocery store window. The rain drives straight down
The glass, and no one’s on the glazed stone streets. I buy
A couple of sweaters I couldn’t get anywhere else,
And a meal I could, and in the Shetland Times Bookstore
A Penguin edition of a saga about the earls of places like this.
It was brutal for years, the croft families scraping potatoes
Or barley from a little storm-raked soil, the men gone for months
In the sixareens for the offshore fishing, then salting
The catch to pay the laird his tax on a house that wasn’t theirs
In perpetuity and by divine right a bailiff enforced, so of course
It’s beautiful, this place people fled so as not to wreck themselves
In labor, and to sing of it you’d need a voice that calls
Us home, all of us, and not like sheep at shearing time, and not
To dwell on a cliff edge that was a mountain once, an earth
That was an earth, before history’s mantra of theft took another
Turn, and left us well enough alone, a tuft of wool on a stone fence.
Reading Another Swedish Mystery

One can still go slowly on skis in the winter sun...

— Tomas Transtromer, After a Death

We can go on skis. The body is always a little further
Than the snow, wandering a little further than sight. The snow
Is a cliff’s edge, the sound of skis a stalking. The detective
Drives a fine car, a necessary car though the suburbs,
Through the security of the state. He knows what we were promised,
How little we understand, how we undervalue it. He knows
Too little, too little for now. And somewhere, don’t ask yet,
The killer watches a dvd, or perhaps records one, a kind
Of documentarian. Is it cause or effect; is it ritual or enactment?
A grouse drums. The detective drums on his steering wheel.
In the intervals, consciousness seeks its level. Plumb and centered
The man with the knife clicks Record.

Mr. Berryman in Ireland

The pictures in that Time-Life photo shoot,
Serious, kindly listening in the pub, the wild
Love of it, gestures rendering reason moot,
Embraces, his daughter helped through the stile
In the sheep fence and over wood and stone,
Such self-approving joy. For which, atone,

Atone. In the ruined chapel on Inish More
I built a little cairn upon the altar
As others had, as if I’d no more quarrels
With god or stone or self, as if I’d faltered
Happily into repentance, caught in the cant
Of going in fear of getting what I want.
The worst, he said, is the best gift.
On the Galway train, I want this calm of post-
Post-confessional, post-sabbatical thrift
Of heart, a solitary pint, a toast
To no one much. He interrupts. His songs,
Unquiet, grave brief lives. Art’s long.

On the Suicides at the NY/Canada Border

Yes, they step in the same river twice.
They present their bad passports, their reasons, their distracted e-
No, they will not be staying long, they tell the customs agents.
There are a thousand islands where they might reconsider,
Some with ruined castles, some with cabins that might have cram
They stumble at the questions about age and destination. They sw
Too easily to our anger and our pity; they profess to honor
The deserters from the unjust war. They’ve had enough of fighting
They imagine a city of bistros, accordions, tables on the sidewalks
But it is under snow. They are safe. No tourist will mistake them fo
In the bar, the old violinist plays a song that’s not sad enough,
And they share his panic as the notes fall off pitch. His fingers are :
They share his suffering. They forgive his dissonance.
They forgive the fog, the geese that pass so loudly overhead.
They are in a position to forgive all imperfection, all transience, to
Burdened with our snapshots and souvenirs, who will not join the
Not yet, at the café of good intentions and unmeant consequence:
Where they have fallen—is it sleep?—into and despite of our sorrow.

The Burial of the Dead
The caretaker said there were five places left
In the family plot. My wife and I traded glances:
That’s one problem solved for our heirs and assignees.
A few minutes later I was kneeling, dirt caught
On my jacket sleeve and watchband as I placed
The urns, my mother’s, my father’s, in one grave.
It was windy now; October. The pastor read
Her *sure and certain*. What more could there be?
What solemn music? In high school band I played
William Byrd’s *The Burial of the Dead*. Sonorous,
And sad, and simple and tricky to make it so, not
Just the usual baroque complications. The drive
From the interstate was all uphill on smaller
And smaller roads. My youngest son put a flower
On the grave; no one told him to. He knew.
*The strife is o’er, the battle won*. On every side,
Millers, Launts, Chamberlains, St. Johns. Kin.
No one told me to feel at home or offered a hand.
Not yet. The cemetery deed from the Twenties
Was filed neatly with my father’s will, signed
By his father’s father. *I go to prepare a place*,
The pastor read. Her black coat swirled. Dirt
In a wedge on my thumb. *No frost on the flowers yet*,
The caretaker said, *though it’s so late*. I shook
His hand. *Come back*, he said, *now that you’ve been.*

Jordan Smith’s sixth full-length collection, *The Light in the Film*
appeared from the University of Tampa Press. His story, “A Morn”
the forthcoming issue of *Big Fiction*. He lives in eastern New York,
Union College.
Marilyn McCabe herein presents trenchant meditations on the heart-rending duality (good and evil) of the human soul (think: Proust/Idi Amin). Marilyn is an old friend, a poet, translator, singer, and cross-country skier from Saratoga Springs. She is pretty much a regular contributor to these pages. See especially her translations of Rilke, Éluard, Silvestre, and Apollinaire put to music—sung in this instance by the uber-talented Ms. McCabe). These poems come from Marilyn’s brand new book *Perpetual Motion* with The Word Works (2012).

dg
Found

There’s a baby
in the crisped litter
of a roadside wood today, made pale
and lovely by an October snow.
Then even the skin is brittle.

It’s never the big thing
but the fine and permeative that destroys
often beautifully. How are we a thing that hates and is so hard to hate?

There’s a boy
tucks a note into the pocket
of a coat he’s sending a stranger, saying
“Have a good winter. Please write back.”

A branch breaks, a lamp flickers,
the dog digs at a flash of something paler than snow. A boy uncrinkles a note. What happens next?

Lost

In the zoo’s amphibious tanks’ blueglow curved
half hidden things dark dim dark dim

Kierkegaard said that we are two selves divided, one divine, one sullied by its reflection in the group;

I look up no one I recognize I am
eight years old and my group has disappeared
to try to see the self in others is despair, but despair is the beginning of the shadowed path toward God.

Run to the open doors run through the bucking storm where’s my group I cry no one no self to find myself

And who are we without each other, sweat smelling, shuffling,
God so far away and flickering?
Wasp Nest
after Vallejo

Professor of nesting, teach us to adhere,
to mongrel, to creep in purpose, to suspend
with aplomb and be the center of desirous flying,
the center of love.

Rector of eaves, teach us to look down backwards
at the angry citizens always wanting entry, to refuse
the attentions of sky by hiding well
and shouldering the cloak of architecture.

Technician of wonder, teach us to travel by mud,
to house in humility, hum
without sound. We make you from our bodies
but you are more than we will ever be.
You build us to build you to build us to build you
in buildings you may outlast.

Professor of such little beauty.
Rector of refusal.
Technician of this short time.

—Marilyn McCabe

Marilyn McCabe’s book of poetry *Perpetual Motion* was chosen by judge Gray Jacobik to be published as part of the Hilary Tham Capital Collection by The Word Works in 2012, and her chapbook *Rugged Means of Grace* was published by Finishing Line Press, 2011. She is a regular contributor of poetry book reviews for Connotation Press, and her poetry has appeared in print and
magazines as *Nimrod, Painted Bride Quarterly, Numéro Cinq, and the Review.*

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**The Untitled (91): Poem — Garry Thomas Morse**

1 Response


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The world is a poem, repetition rules, influence is rhyme. In his s
to his poem Garry Thomas Morse refers to an essay by [1] interviewed Blaser, one of my first radio shows, when I hosted [7] WAMC in Albany, NY, in the mid-90s, just after his amazing collection Forest came out. Blaser was originally from Idaho, but his poetry, the San Francisco Renaissance epitomized by Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan, he was also part of a general and often under-acknowledged surge of American writers and artists heading to Canada in the 60s, for political reasons and other. Blaser moved to Vancouver in 1966 where he became an immensely influential figure in Canadian poetry. Black Mountain poetry, the San Francisco Renaissance, conceptual poetry, surrealism, and even the sound poetry have had an amazing second (or third or whatever) incarnation in Canada. Fred Wah, the current Canadian Poet Laureate, is an heir to the movement there in Vancouver, on the scene, when Charles Olson made his famous 1963 visit and read from the Maximus Poems.

Garry Thomas Morse typifies an emergent generation of Canadian tradition. He’s exciting to read, fun to look at on the page (my son Jonah, 17, discovered a print out of this poem on my desk and charged in saying, “Who wrote this? This is great. He’s got the FONTS talking to each other! Look at this ‘scalar darkness’ line.”). We have here a work that is intimate yet aware of itself as typed words on the page, yet exploding into myth. Wonderful to have it, and to have a chance to limn its context.

dg

**Garry Thomas Morse: In his Own Words**

My lifelong long poem The Untitled (thus far) approaches personal biotext in terms of compositional method, transcending (or transmuting) quotidian aspects of life into refractions of poetic form in which the continuous lyric is subject to disjunctive fragmentation, for example, in more than one case into operatic fragments. I think it is fair to agree with what has been said, that my poetry has a “tendency toward epic” and is very much informed by the work of Rainer Maria Rilke, Ezra Pound, Louis Zukofsky, and Robin Blaser, to name but a few composers. I am also greatly influenced by the compositional structures and ideas of Mozart, Haydn, and
Stravinsky, and Mahler, hopefully the reader will on some level perceive them.

Poet Sharon Thesen recently sent me a quote from Robin Blaser's essay on Charles Olson in *The Fire* that made her think of *Untitled*, and this caused me to reflect upon the relationship between the individual and rerum natura:

“What I have noticed in the poetry and poetics of the most important poets is that they are arguing, weaving, and composing a cosmology and an epistemology. There is no epistemological cut-off in our deepest natures, nor in our engagement with life. Nor is the ambition of what is known short on its desire for cosmos. It is this structuring, large and deep in the nature of things, that still thrills us in Hesiod's struggle for the sense of it….Repeatedly in the history of poetry we find ourselves returning to epic structures….I suggest that great poetry is always after the world—it is a spiritual chase—and that it has never been, in the old, outworn sense, simply subjective or personal.”

*The Untitled (91)* is something of a parody of much poetic and conceptual praxis, where the “concept” of a city “narrative” breaks down into interweavings of Artaud and Adorno, who as Leonard Bernstein has pointed out, “didn’t get the joke” where Stravinsky was concerned and thought him a demon. I’d say my lyrical demonry bears comparison with Stravinsky’s methodologies, stacking linguistic constructions like so many tritones on top of one another in order to try and resuscitate the lyric mode. And it’s kinda messy.

To paraphrase the lovely and witty dramaturge Lucia Frangione, perhaps this is the only way to tell the pie you’ve made is homemade and not store bought, ie. tidy, angular, and geometric, pretentious or inedible. Real food is thrown together.

I suppose Gustave Mahler’s heart is giving out somewhere in the poem, and so is my Anglo-Jewish grandmother’s in the hospital. By assuming these fragmentary associations, this jumble of repetitive images may...
live on, in dare I say, the real world.

The Untitled (91)

The city stirs
with small cracklings, riotous laughter
The city
brandishes
high & shiny
surface elements \{ sea, fog, mountains
scrolling by. The city
is sharp & jagged & juts out of nati
water the water slaps against. In Genet's novel about Br
the city
is like an uncompromising prick prodding through fog
or at night, poking through cloak, as Catullus points out
The city is
full of cold hands
There are no more flames, no more fire
Put the light out, there is a siren wailing
At least the leaves are not ablaze

This has been built brick by brick—also with long slats of wood
and certainly one day someone will decide to live inside of this fixer upper
Not so far away the welcome balloons are steadily deflating
& this is a result of inflation
Desire for the model life, rows of boxes full of living doll
cannot be creepy. There are no bed bugs, just features. Wet hole
in the trade to be filled in are called skylights. Sheer transparenc
t
window after window, boxes full of clothes
made by living dolls, worn by industry dolls
in windows where living dolls open peepers
miming desire with pursed dollfish mouths

Beauty unsure of itself, reckoned by Keats to mean something,
light through blind at an angle, a hint of music in the backgrou
that is what persists. This is a long time for the hands to hold
figments of water & he promised it was a joy forever, a joy
What promises? A joy, forever, a joy forever. There are limits to the city. Even the bridge has to be tuned like a lyre to last. The flaming bridge is a bloody lyre

(pay no mind, listen to these rhythms
to this lapping of waves, to
sudden cries of elusive little birds
to what is within you, *love*)

A city. A woman compared to suspended caryatids. Sleeping around corner, slightly terrified. She is stirring. Not made of stone. The city is a place where we tend to scare ourselves

a place where we imagine things

How long have we been here

Who can say what is what

I have no notion. This took place. I was asleep in the room where you arrived & when I awoke there were scales over my eyes

Funny, I was also asleep. It was a sea darkness out of which glowed special counterpoint

Triads

Triads of letters, notes

Sounds you form are not forming sense

Tuning forks have enjoyed their fill

We may remain here. Give over waiting for light that seldom shows close the light close the light

stepwise approaches
This is imagination, playing things you hear these days. you fear these days, the thin

That other time, jotting down just above doggerel upon the page was claustrophobic

In sleep, you got in touch with this was more than mere

& this was very near to narr

I want casual, friendly, frightful
(kissing her).

How gravely you kiss me

I feel the trill of a violin

I feel the talk of bassoons

Please shut up, please

I crave artifacts from before broken in all the right places

Who can say what is what

He had expected a wallowing of pleasure — almost the glorious pleasure he had allowed himself for many months. But to wallow in your own phrases, to baste the savour of your own shrewd pawkinesses, to feel your anced and yet sober — that is a pleasure beyond most, pensive one at that, he had had it from mere "articles".
or birthday
card from
Kafka
museum
mysterious faces that pass
through city
haunts
a type of
handshaking
the return of
quasi-humanitas
or tenderness)
in a gloomy
room
of dripping
fonts
condensation of meaning
within the structure itself—
this. The "meaning" of
determined solely by its
went so far as to define
time of musical
in music called
this theory, because
extended to relate to the
reverse: the totality assumes
upon the individual detail. Such
moments beyond themselves—
completely within the space
as the meaning of
its aesthetic meaning to be
no more than this—in other
technical analysis reveals
is constituent for twelve-
not only its criticism of twelve-
the totally constructed work of
"integrated" work) falls into
of incipient meaninglessness
work is discarded. This

a process conditioned by
tone technique—corres-
music, even in free atom
inner relationships. Scl
theory of composition a
relationships, and every
meaningful may lay cl
as a matter of detail it of
totality. The same is true
within itself a definite o
extension of the aesthet
they at the same time re
of the work of art—is in the
work of art. It is un
more than a phenomenon
words, totality of the pl
emergent moment of me
tone technique, it forma
tone technique, based on art (that is to say, the con
conflict with its own id
immanent hermetic qua
hermetic quality is bas
precisely that integration elimination of this integration protest. In these technological unmistakably perceptible atonality with the

determines meaning. All music is transformed in configurations an elem proclaimed in the era of the force of an explosion

Loosely based on attaining ‘mindfulness’

I am out like a light

in artificial heart-beat awfully sluggish wavers in the Other 9th

grand Wagnerisms with a funny walk humming klezmer

with all that restless intensity

Either we will be able to revert through theatre by present-day means to the higher idea of poetry underlying the Myths told by the great tragedians of ancient times, with theatre able once more to sustain a religious concept, that is to say without any meditation or useless contemplation without diffuse dreams, to become conscious and also be in command of certain predominant powers, certain ideas governing everything; since ideas when they are effective, generate their own energy

rediscover within us that energy

which in the last analysis creates order and increases the value of life or else we might as well abdicate
If the nerves, that is to say a certain physiological sensitiv
spectator's personal interpretation, the Theatre of Cruelty, to return to all the tried and tested magic means of affectin
These means, consisting of differing intensities of colour, if sound, using vibrations and tremors, musical, rhythmic rep or the repetition of spoken phrases, bringing tonality or a great diffusion of light into play, can only achieve their full effect in discords

how to put down these hibernative strains carrying the tune of I am so tired

in a sturdy bucket beside the bed

He was one of those types who makes a dreadful scene right at the end and absolutely refuses to die. And so Behrens simply dressed him down:

‘Would you please not make such a fuss,’ he said,

and the patient quieted down at once and died quite peaceably

you know

if we cou here for a while listening to the
Garry Thomas Morse has had two books of poetry published by LINEbooks, *Transversals for Orpheus* (2006) and *Streams* (2007), one collection of fiction, *Death in Vancouver* (2009), published by Talonbooks, and two books of poetry published by Talonbooks, *After Jack* (2010) and *Discovery Passages* for the Governor-General’s Award for Poetry and finalist for the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize. Morse is recipient of the 2008 City of Vancouver Mayor’s Arts Award for Emerging Artist and has twice been selected as runner-up for the Robert Kroetsch Award for Innovative Poetry.

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**Readiness Practice: A Poem by Kate Fetherston**

1 Response

READINESS PRACTICE

Fighter jets loop fat chalk marks on a turquoise sky while I’m daydreaming out my third grade classroom window. The air raid siren blasts and Mrs. Fisher hollers, “Kids, get under your desks, arms over your heads!” I crouch beneath my pink metal bomb shelter, eyes squeezed shut, waiting for the end. This
is what the last minute will be like,
I narrate to myself, The bomb
drops just like that, an enormoid
ball of flame bigger than the sun, but

it’s like reading The Weekly Reader out
loud and my mind drifts. Through

the classroom’s open door insects
pop and click. Weeds reeking

in desert sun: stinkweed, goat heads,
and alfalfa by the tether balls where

I practice praying to see if
it works. Please, make Dean Posey

love me. But he turns his buck-toothed
smile toward that nasty Cindy Mercer

and a sonic boom shakes the swings when
he asks her to play kickball. I punch

the deflated yellow ball against
its whining pole, hard, and I picture

the shrunken ball sucked away and
swallowed by a relentless

heaven. The fragile thread attaching
me to gravity

snaps and I whoosh into space,
whirl farther and farther above

this little earth, crash into John Glenn
and the Cosmonauts. Cracking open
one eye, I peek at my desk’s moonscape
underbelly of gum wads and dried
snot, wondering if the sky has
a ceiling like my bedroom at home
with its glow-in-the-dark stars, and maybe
you smash into it when you die, but what’s
after that? Now, Mrs. Fisher’s voice
slams me awake, “Children, readiness
practice is over. Your arithmetic
test is next.” And, climbing back
into my seat, I smell eraser
dust. Cindy Mercer’s eating paste
again; Dean Posey throws up
his baloney sandwich, and everything’s
back to normal.

Kate Fetherston’s first book of poems, *Until Nothing More Can I* from Antrim House later this spring. Her poetry and essays have appeared in numerous journals, including *North American Review, Hunger Mountain, Nimrod,* and *Third Coast.* She co-edited *Manthology: Poem Experience,* (University of Iowa) and *Open Book: Essays from the Postgraduate Writers’ Conference,* (Cambridge Scholars Press). *Kate holds Vermont College and was a finalist for the Pablo Neruda Prize in She’s received Pushcart nominations from 2002 to 2011. Kate is a*
in private practice in Montpelier, Vermont.

Sketches of an Orange: A Prose Poem — R. W. G
Nights caught in small cold moments of crystallized fire. Winds about temporary shelter, the unmittened hands of friends, and accident Strung lights across the darkness. This is how we find our way.
He and I walk in the dark woods. We call out and point at the constellations. We each know only four. A short game. But it makes sense of the darkness, our breaths rising, converging, in the air above us, our gloved hands reaching, like children too small to grab the lowest branch. Round the corner, dip in the tree line, sudden fire of the moon rising, hanging burnt orange.

He tells me how his mother brought oranges home box by box from the grocery store, each orange in its small green paper nest. Satsuma, Clementine, Tangerine, Owari, Tangor. Each sounding like a country he might someday visit. Early morning, his mother at the kitchen counter peeling his father’s oranges for his lunch, so he could eat them later without the citric acid from the peels stripping the machine grease from his hands. How she saved him from black oranges. Love in the small lunch-box gestures.

I tell him how in my town I knew a boy who worked at the grocery store who had been bitten by a tarantula that had been accidentally packed or stowed away in a case of bananas. I still think about that tarantula so far from the warm, so far from home. Did he get to see snow? After that, I opened each box of oranges my mother brought home carefully, wondering what exotic things might come along with them. What stows away, escapes, what bites you and your greedy hands.

I tell him, too, of that Christmas when my mother told my brother and I how the oranges had vitamin C, which would make us grow up big and strong. How when she was out shoveling snow off the steps, we took turns eating an orange and then lifting the end of the couch. She was right, we decided with each lift. Soon we would lift the trailer. Soon we would tear it from its blocks and roll it to another town, one with more oranges. And we would be gods. Orange gods. But how instead we spent the next day fighting for the toilet.

A conversation beneath this conversation glowers between us. The erratic space between our hands as we walk. How, later, on the wide bare bed, he will explain that an orange is a question of distance: from tree to hand that picks it, from hand to box, from box to home, to hand, to mouth, to tongue. Says we are all reaching for the branch. Even oranges.

I explain how oranges, mandarins, offer themselves up, shuck peels, let segments
fall away from one another, like a too eager lover naked at the foot of a bed waiting. They are always waiting.

And other aches of time. Time between each segment placed on a tongue. Span of time before bodies can no longer keep one another warm so the duvet has to be retrieved from the hardwood floor.

For now, though, we walk deeper into the woods, the soldier, bare trees reaching for the stars. But once you’ve seen an orange, you can’t help but see oranges everywhere. In the darkness, each star caught in the wide blackness might be an orange gloaming there instead of a planet. Celestial bodies, the hurtling rotations and orbits of great oranges, galaxies just spilled boxes out of reach.

I want to quote Neruda. Something about his lover’s “orange laughter.” But I can’t remember how it goes. So we walk on, a waltz of bumping shoulders, the quiet hum of the star flung, mandarin sky.

— R. W. Gray

R. W. Gray is a writer with commitment issues when it comes to form. He has published his poetry and prose in numerous journals and in the anthologies *Seminal, And Baby Makes More, Queering the Way*, and *Quickies* 1 and 2. His first collection of short stories, *Crisp*, was published by NeWest Press (2010). Ten of his short scripts have been produced and the most recent, “alice & huck,” won awards at festivals in New Orleans, Beverley Hills, and Honolulu. He currently is a professor of film and screenwriting at University of New Brunswick. He is also senior editor at the helm of Numero Cinq’s NC at the Movies.
Mary Ruefle is a vastly brilliant poet who seems mainly to function at the level of the oracular. She is an old friend and colleague at Vermont College of Fine Arts, which makes me one of the lucky ones. You watch Mary read one of her lectures and think, Oh, right! That's what I am supposed to be doing with my life. Art! Poetry! Books! Her restless intelligence and passion for text has led her from poetry to erasure books to these little assemblage poems, texts snipped from old books combined with antique postcards picked up at the secondhand bookstores she haunts. These are very strange objects, doubly inspired by absence (or nostalgia), words that once meant something else in a different context and images of forgotten places and people, and by irony: Detritus & irony. She mailed me a large stack of these; I offer here the best.
you go into the
often. because it is far aw
THE SINGING INSECTS OF JAPAN

130 feelings worth strangely added fact rather
Why increase the difficulties encountered

The memory of the older woman had nothing to
Among the Musk Ox People (2002); Apparition Hill (2001); Post Meridian (2000); Cold Pluto (1996); The Adamant (1989), winner of the 1988 Iowa Poetry Prize; Life Without Speaking (1987); and Memling's Veil (1986). Also a book of prose, The Most of It (2008), and a comic book, Go to Bed (Pilot Books/Orange Table Comics, 2007). A collection of lectures, Madness, Rack and Honey – all of which were given at VCFA over the years – will be published by Wave in the fall of 2012. She has won many awards including an NEA, a Whiting Award, a Guggenheim, and an Award in Literature from The American Academy of Arts and Letters. She also makes one-of-a-kind erasure books, which have been exhibited in museums and galleries. Mary lives in southern Vermont.

This Poem, Part II, by Adeena Karasick

1 Response

Adeena Karasick is a one-woman semantic explosion. She writes verbal play and experiment and RIOT out of Gertrude Stein and others (spoken word, rap, Black Mountain). And how can you NOT like a poem that admits its own “unraveling” and bills itself as an “asterisk taker” and contains lines like “oh, just lick its/ ideological infrastructure” and dances between contemporary cultural filigree and theoretical/philosophical references (“ontic gap”)? See below, a video of Adeena reading from the beginning of the poem. The images scattered through the poem were made in collaboration with Blaine Speigel. The whole poem, called “This Poem,” will be published this fall by the great and storied Vancouver publisher Talonbooks.

Adeena Karasick is an internationally acclaimed and award winning poet, media-artist and author of seven books of poetry and poetic theory: Amuse Bouche: Tasty Treats for the Mouth (Talonbooks 2009), The House That Hijack Built (Talonbooks, 2004), The Arugula Fugues (Zasterle Press, 2001), Dyssemia Sleaze (Talonbooks, Spring 2000), Genrecide (Talonbooks, 1996), (Talonbooks, 1994), and The Empress Has No Closure (Talonbooks, 1992), as well as 4 videopoems regularly showcased at International Film Festivals. All her work is marked with an urban, Jewish, feminist aesthetic that continually challenges linguistic habits and normative modes of meaning production. Engaged with the art of combination and turbulence of thought, it is a testament to the regenerative power of language and its infinite possibilities for pushing meaning to the limits of its semantic boundaries.
Her writing has been described as “electricity in language” (Nicole Brossard), “plural, cascading, exuberant in its cross-fertilization of punning theatre and theory” (Charles Bernstein) “a tour de force doublespeak” (Globe and Mail) and “opens up the possibilities of reading” (Vancouver Courier). She is Professor of Global Literature at St. John’s University in New York.

Composed in the style of Facebook updates or extended tweets, This Poem is an ironic investigation of contemporary culture and the technmediatic saturated world we’re enmeshed in. Mashing up the lexicons of Gertrude Stein, Louis Zukofsky, Shakespeare, Walt Whitman, the contemporary financial meltdown, semiotic theory, Lady Gaga, J
Derrida and Flickr streams, “This Poem” a self-reflexive romp through the shards, fragments of post-consumerist culture. Both celebrating and poking fun at contradictory threads, webbed networks of information and desire, a language of the ‘ordinary’, it opens itself with rawness and immediacy to the otherness of daily carnage.

A deeply satiric archive of fragments, updates, aggregates, treatise, advice, precepts, echoes, questions, erupting in a voluminous luminous text of concomitance, divergence, dis/integration and desire.

A serial poem that textually proceeds in the tradition of such poets as George Oppen, bpNichol, Robert Duncan, Jack Spicer committed to the shape of a life lived with the lyric irony of textuality; taking on the search for definition punctuated with strong incursions of eros, pleasure, terror and social networking. —AK

dg

This Poem
By Adeena Karasick

Part II

And in the rapturous apertures of perspicacity (purse capacity),
of its bootstrap boobietrap of ear-tickling hyper-inflated speculative frenzy
This Poem just wants a “happy ending”

like a ring-a-ting swinger
foursquare tech ticker, fecund licker

elbowing its way through a persnickety
kwik-pic sticky dctic,

and wants to lick you immeasurably,
your vesicles and crevasses, lick the lips of your
pixilated proxy, paroxysms of purring tragedy

wants you to smack it
up against its inky-vexed lexis,
mixological excess, slide down
its rumpy pumpy amped-up optates,
jacked clad cock of the walk ecto-flecked vectors
Denise Evans Durkin writes poems that glow with a gentle melancholy (all memory is tinged with melancholy) unexpectedly laced with joy and wonder. They are wonderful to read, not just for their warm humanity, but for their loving attention to detail, details that seem to accrete spirit and luminescence as the poems develop.

She was raised in Brooklyn and lives in Putnam County, New York, with her husband. She wishes me to note that the poem “Letter to My Sister from Bellevue’s Prison Ward” includes a line from Gil Scott Heron’s “Dirty Low-D” her first published poems.

dg

Impedance
The girl downstairs waits mostly. Sitting on her luggage by the cattails, side of the road. Embroidered each star on the velvet pillow of sky — they glitter through the pin-pricks.

She waits, lonesome as the notions in her felted sewing box—mismatched buttons, thimbles and threads in bright remembered colors — bobbins and hat pins — good things going away.

She’s there in the spaces where the dime store and the pay phones used to be. The cart that sold ice-cream and hot waffles. Relics.

Seeping cold. Click, drag, stop — over imperfect stones. Her gradual world — ohms build between receiver and vintage turntable on the dresser in the bedroom she has not visited in thirty years. Glass & leaves falling. Dust falling down in the hush —

Letter to My Sister from Bellevue’s Prison Ward

Traveling up from blue-black dreaming those first pin-pricks of pale blue light give such sudden joy.

Once at a farm I saw eggs that color blue; the class learned about farms, about far-off things and places where people know their food, know their land and don’t live like we do.

Do you remember when we used to sing it? *Said I wonder, wonder, wonder, wonder who put those ideas in you.* You closed your eyes when you sang back up; we got it right.
Mornings are my best time — even the doctors agree — when I wake full of hope, and my hope is the color of morning, and my eyes the color of the sea and I know all that the seas know.

A thrum of bees where my heart should be when my eyes flutter open mother your face dissolving in the water swirling in the sil were you here in your white nurses’ shoes? I thought I saw you in your white dress adjusting the tubes that feed me, that disper the medicines, checking my bandages, and my restraints I thou; I felt all the little red lights on the living machines silver mechanical fireflies that blink and glow redder through the gauze of my forgetting pieces of what I thought was my life and I can no longer remember how I got here — I watch your white shoes walk away squeaking on the tiled floor.

Don’t think I don’t know nothing but the sea stays around long enough to get old — and all I do in here is imagine this gossamer daylight everyday — all just going by —

Come September

This morning the darkness is thicker — like spider’s webs spun especially for the heavy snow they know is coming. Crickets sing in the perpetual twilight of the field beyond my pa my small wilderness — where even now leaves are falling. The vine wound up around that oak; some of its leaves are already red. This is how I measure time: by leaves changing color, by feeling the dew clinging to grass, to wildflowers, waiting for the late summer sun.

The day you left draws nearer now. Noted on my calendar, of course, but I don’t need reminders. This is how you return to me: in the small twigs I pick up
for kindling, in the rain battering my old house,  
beating the glass skylight, letting me know everything  
is the way it’s supposed to be. I walk my solitude  
past the fading clapboard and the weeds, deer at dusk  
and whitecaps on the lake. These are what you left me.

Fall Notebook: Prayer & Dream

Inside a deep longing I dream alone by the sea.  
Wooden table laid ready with black beans, rice and cornbread.  
I imagine an indigo sky and wild horses.  

Here I dream closer to the weather, to the light, to any decision.  
Angel, how long is this bridge?

Over my heart on a lanyard of silver stars, my tiny imagined locket  
opens into a mansion where my necessary delights reside.  
These rooms full of one wish: for the sisters who  
look in on me when darkness falls, who brush sweet almond oil  
into my skin, my hair. Lord, my needs are small.

Mother returns in firelight, starshine, moonlight — her fingers  
touching the top of my head, reminder that everything is what it is  
Deep cobalt sky and then the moon laying on its cold blessing —

Soothsayer
spoken by my mother

Rootworker they call them in the Carolinas where I was married far from Georgia  
where I was born and raised — farther still from these misty Coney Island streets  
strewn with blown paper, dirt and sand.
Across the street from the Mount Zion Baptist Church where I sing in the choir, collect tithing baskets and light white votives at sunset, my sisters wait at the bus stop —

old women with knitting in their straw totes, they nod without looking for me like they know I'm in here —

and they do. They know rootworkers are never welcome in this church or any other —
unnecessary anyway with the devil in the first pew every Sunday loudly singing hymns he knows much better than my choir ladies in their cloches tipped down on one side threaded with beads like bits of sea glass keeping close together moving in tune as they file down into the pews, careful not to touch him whom they have always known.

Lord, I am your child, walking and talking right, gone to the river and baptized into the ease of your arms, my heavenly home.

Choir leader of my church under this indigo sky — vesper-quiet in here with this cross and these candles constant flame of love in my heart —

ruler of this elemental kitchen magic my sisters call me Soothsayer and I know what I know.

—Denise Evans Durkin
“Let’s start by making ourselves unfamiliar,” Laura Behr begins. She does, continuously through her poems that are filled with surprising twists, non sequiturs, surrealistically tinged phrases—anything to let us see the world and our relationships in it anew. Laura has been a private student of mine for a few years now, starting after we met at the Iowa Summer Writers’ Festival. To be honest, when she began I wasn’t enthusiastic about the work but she is a voracious reader and reviser, and she has become one of my favorite all time students. I look forward to every poem she sends and shake my head in wonder at the new ways she finds to see herself, all of us.
She’s the kind of original that makes us more original ourselves.

Cave Diving With Einstein
Poems by Laura Behr

Reflections on Magritte’s Painting
The Therapist: You Are My Suitcase

Let’s start by making ourselves unfamiliar. Listening, to the puzzles of silence. Travelling as far as we can go. We'll form an Optimists Club. Rewriting ordinary things: a straw hat, reed cane, the red blanket. I can see every third page is missing, so you can wear the blanket first. Later, I’ll try it on for you and invite you into my lap. I want you to look into my bird cage. If you’d like I’ll turn and show you my dove-heart, and you can sit on the heart-ledge of my cage cooing, and keeping my dove-heart company. Sky and water open the illusion. Every particle of yellow sand, atoms of myself sitting resolutely on the beach, the darkness of a midnight-blue sky, my Sunday hat, meld with every particle of you collecting inside my portrait. Bring your Lindy Hop, and uncover me in the quiet music of waves. Breathing in the scent of sand pines. Stop and rest with me in these exotic blues of children’s books and imagination. We’ll lose our bearings, mixing up horizon-lines and dreams, falling open to each other, learning to love in solitude. We’ll need a pair of carrier pigeons, trained to carry messages.
written in invisible ink. Let’s wash away the old answers, letting the horizon form a new tracing-line decoding the cipher between us leading on to the future. Sit with me. The future of the thing, sees for us without a face, with its well-trained heart and finds itself in balance, if mystery lifts her veil. The weight of things, two birds: one free, the other caged by a lover’s cross, as primal navels open insides first to love all bird-cage hearts.

On the Banks of the Cedar River Finding a Rare Igneous Rock

All he wants. A soul’s weight. Washed up from a century’s flood. Not the rock he pressed into nameless hands long ago. The felt how of living. His words bent by gravity and time. Her name long forgotten. Smooth, black, almost volcanic. The world outside is not enough. Pressing his rock into her small hand at recess. He imagines her now. Her face, nameless. And every word exchanged transgresses memory. Working things through as the world wakes. At the mercy of one task. He wants to be a time traveler. The best day of his life could be in the future. Stripping down. Jump and crossing over. Freed by the river’s forward moving questions. The chaos seems insurmountable. Time moves truth into view. Where to go from here? A still quiet moment poses in dark woods. He wants to go back, capturing stars hanging above the silent pines. Falling back into night’s silver lining, as its spirited double-helix hums an incantation in star-speak counter measures. And even his affection for living can’t hold him safe enough to see his own ignorance. He wishes he had been smarter, moved faster. A regret. Still, the future is alive with a promise which marks the things he carries of her into infinity. Uncharted in shadows, he wants.
The world’s beauty, recovering eyes that wonder. Silent, in a moment that doubts the mystery. Its haunting stripped and smitten as words lose meaning slipping into ambivalence. A perfect set of magnets, and closeness enough to touch fingers and toes. That is all he wants. Eternity, reliving what has yet to be lived.

Owen Meany at the Alamo

A few stone buildings, a neatly trimmed lawn, a nice place to take a picture. A reason to take off a hat. None of it changes the ending. It’s happening now, expected signs and all the rest. A home for missionaries and Indians, a freak storm hits in shirt-sleeve weather. If you dare ask what will kill you. The ghosts will tell you. Or ask how you know what you don’t know. Be willing to do something. Act like a baby or a fallen star. Both roles have merit. When life isn’t so beautiful it’s hard to put into words. Faith isn’t pure or sure of itself or of you. It’s a word born and blurred, in veils and regret. It proves itself against the disorder. Blow it up, you can’t leave it undefended. How do you hold happiness? It’s the oddest things, the unexpected turn of a moment you don’t see coming but you see, and there are no survivors. Practice. Living with what is missing, an arm, a father, it’s a no win argument, chosen, human. Faith in faith means walking, not figuring it out. A hero is only a street light away.
Cave Diving with Einstein

Two minutes underwater and the last thing you see is the pale gray shadow of clouds falling down to uncover angels dancing within the electric blue glow. Eternity is blue, holy as the first touch of skin radiating light thru deep black waters. Within its light lies the weight of everything that we cannot say. And, waiting on the lap of gods for a second wind or a kiss, as ghosts walk, as rain falls clearing the air, we laugh. Dreaming of love’s savages warm and expecting summer rains. Suppose the earth above us is the illusion. Water rushes, siphoning silt thru a slit in the rocks. Grounded by live oaks and scrub jays the sandy path above is the netherworld. The Harrier hawk mid-flight and lost is a Firebird, his feather tips are your hands. Will you believe with me in implausible things? A turbulent storm-tossed sea. Electric blue spheres of light. Enwombing us, in the binding intensity of heat. Gravity healing and unruly, shifts its boundaries and leaning in forces jumps of spiritual force that spread out and over the tides to woo us away. Facing the whiteness of surf light, looking into the blue-sky water, I watch as the shadow borders of ordinary life disappear. Entering with you into dimly lit worlds, hidden below a glassy surface, I hold my breath. Listening for the strange music of a seashell over a roar of waves, the music tells stories of our very natures and of places beyond this, where things are truer than real. Waiting to see this murky dreamscape with the soul’s eye, we uncover in the quiet music of waves the taste of salt on tongues, the scent of ambergris and an ever growing feeling of buoyancy.
Sometimes, when we talk about things the light seems to go away from us, as lightening over the sea follows the wind. We almost always need more than we can ask for and so we don’t ask for anything. And though we can make anything out of light, darkness into tender night, we cannot make things un-happen. This is what makes all the rest so hard. Even as night is grave, waves erase. The way it used to be. The way you want it to be now.

This Land Who Could Know

Smelling of cigarettes, you ask me to turn my bones into a beaded necklace for Timordee bartering. *It’s not that easy.*

It wasn’t so much that I didn’t want to tell you what I felt that night, I didn’t know how to tell you. Splayed out like a broken cross, my chest rising and falling like fire coils inside a star or a wave of slaked breath crosses, *a catch of longing wanting more.* I was willing to be with you, asking nothing, taking what comes. Pretending with you, *this* can go on forever. There was only one star in the sky, the moon hidden by a navy haze.

I took that as permission, the moon’s illusion of what counts. I was older than I’d ever be, commanding the star to reverse. Giving myself away, learning the business of love, stuck in the past where anything worth knowing looms contented and even the future doesn’t know everything. *Where everything beautiful is a trick.* If you knew anything, you’d know how to run your hand
up my thigh, running your hand over my why not, until practiced eyes leave off unexpectantly and pass over truth. But it’s not that easy. Neither of us can say when it started or how long it took the wind to carve an arch thru the flagstone wall. I walked thru at the place where truth pleads for a way to betray or to put up with each other and the world. It felt like an invitation. I can’t remember the beginning. So ask a different question. I remember wavering and waiting for you in dangerous moments with empty hands. I remember trying all night to convince the light to mold itself into an apology. Wanting to hear, All is forgiven. Learning instead what goes unsaid never gives fair warning. Today, the lavender sky takes the light away with you, all tangled purple-heart. And I can see in the secret goings of stars the advantages of losing. The night looked into me to speak. My eyes stripped and final, a reason to love is destination enough. A lasting solo. What comes after? All that exists is love’s simple intent. More than anything precious a cooing then sleep.

—Laura Behr

Laura Behr lives in Montgomery, Alabama. She is a psychotherapist, a partner in a business consulting group advising business and its leaders on mental health and preventative wellness from a combined Neuroscience, CBT, and Psychoanalytic framework, and the mother of two girls. She has published in Café Review.
Here are three spoken word poems & recordings from a brand new collection by Toronto poet Liz Worth who is also the author of an unforgettably named nonfiction book *Treat Me Like Dirt: An Oral History of Punk Beyond*. The poems are personal/social commentaries, incantatory, and replete with surrealistic detours and juxtapositions and the three-syllable latinate nouns characteristic of the genre. The collection is called *Amphetamine Heart* by Guernica Editions. Liz Worth has also written three chapbooks, *Manifestations*, and *Arik's Dream*. She lives in Toronto. (Author photo by Don Pyle.)

dg

Amphetamine Heart: Poems & Readings — Liz Worth
On Cheetah’s Speed

we are taut and directionless,
networks of revolutions suspended
like fingertips to a temple,
poised and blurring into white spider legs,
their ends painted an intrusive shade of red.
At this angle everything looks better from the left,
even the accelerated aging of blondes.
Warts of perspiration radiate,
glossed by black lights and exit signs.
We are marked as wounded, fragile,
the stimulated strength beneath us, between us,
Sprezzatura with Two Rabbits: Poem — Alan Michael Parker

imperceptible.
Sprezzatura is a Renaissance term/style: nonchalant, natural, apparently careless though, in fact, the opposite—a pose in a sense, an attitude, a rhetorical stance.

Alan Michael Parker is a poet-novelist, that is, he began his career as a poet, published five volumes of poetry, an impressive and expanding opus. The last book *Elephants & Butterflies* is, as it should be, perhaps his best, curbane, knowing, acerbic, witty, quick, cutting and surprising. Parker has a way of talking about God and TV dreck in the same moment. He has made sprezzatura his own.

*Dear God who made me act*
*in whose gaze I am rerun*
*now I lay me down*

Alan is an old friend and colleague from dg’s stint as the McGee Professor of Writing at Davidson College in North Carolina. He had the good taste to marry a Canadian, the painter Felicia van Bork. He is a prolific poet and a novelist, a wry, energetic presence with a gift for teaching and satire.

dg

**Sprezzatura with Two Rabbits**

By Alan Michael Parker

Talking to the two rabbits in the herb garden, I could be Gerald Stern, the way he talks to everything, my god, and really Gerald Stern is always singing to everything, and everything is singing back.

I tell the rabbit on the left her name is Plato, and the rabbit on the right she’ll have to wait for a name because so many names are just a necessarily lesser quality of an original thing. I call both rabbits “she.”
I describe to the rabbits Gerald Stern’s childhood in Pittsburgh, his Greek roses and his Borscht Belt beauty and his poem about Auden; predictably, the rabbits don’t seem to care about my story, jittery and motionless in their agitation, while the stiller I have to stand to keep my audience, the more some muscle in my left arm starts to twitch like a bad rhyme, or like a captive princess kicking over the table in a fable when the witch wants rabbit stew.

But since I killed so many rabbits in a poem in 1996 with a shotgun—my best weapon then, before I learned to write about my family—I feel too guilty in advance to kill and skin and cook and eat a rabbit named Plato or her pal. Writing poems makes me hungry for what I can’t have, sometimes, which I think Plato probably knew about poetry, but I need to Google it. FGI, I tell myself all the time, Fucking Google It.

But now one of the rabbits is named Plato and the other’s Gerald Stern, a combo I’m surprised by, although I suspect that this poem suspected so all along, and named both rabbits “she” only as a ruse. Hop away, hop, hop, hop away free, you bunnies: go back to the greatness of the garden, your fur dusted with sage and thyme, your lives opening into a warren filled by the mind of God, with carrot tops, twenty-seven brothers and sisters, and endless sex; free of the human need to name, or our crude ambitions to see whatever light we hope to see, and hop up and down as we shout the light! the light! before we’re gobbled up by mystery.

—Alan Michael Parker
Charmed Objects: Poetry and Childhood | Essay
Nancy Eimers

Herewith a lovely, meditative essay on the conjunction of poetry and childhood from Nancy Eimers. The essay draws its inspiration from Proust and the art constructions of Joseph Cornell and draws to a close with Mary Ruefle's *Now-It*, an erasure book made from an antique children's book about Snow White. Nancy Eimers is an old friend and colleague at Vermont College of Fine Arts. In March NC published poems from her new collection, *Oz* January from Carnegie Mellon University Press. Her three previous collections are *A Grammar to Waking* (Carnegie Mellon, 2006), *No Moon* (Purdue University Press, 1997) and *Destroying Angel* (Wesleyan University Press, 1991). She has been the recipient of a *Nation* “Discovery” Award, two National Endowment for the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships and a Whiting Writer’s...
Charmed Objects: Poetry and Childhood
By Nancy Eimers

The genius of Cornell is that he sees and enables us with the eyes of childhood, before our vision got clouded by experience, when objects like a rubber ball or a pocket seemed charged with meaning, and a marble rolling across a wooden floor could be as portentous as a passing comet.

Ashbery
Joseph Cornell’s *Untitled (Soap Bubble Set)* is a brown box with metal handles on either side. Here is a list of its contents.

— blue cloth  
— blue thumbtacks  
— a map of the moon  
— three glass discs  
— light blue egg, in a cordial glass  
— doll’s head, painted blue and gold  
— three white wooden blocks
Really, they are ordinary things, in one world or another.

If you visit Untitled (Soap Bubble Set) in the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut, you must keep a distance. You will not be allowed to open the box and play with the bubble pipe. Not even if you bring a child.

Now, a look at the box. But not an image. Words are the medium here.

Oh roundnesses you can feel in the palm of the hand. The moon’s at the center, silvery blue, and dominates. Carte Geographique de la Lune. The doll’s head, cheeks scarred, has been smiling now for how many years? Also a silvery blue, the doll and the egg are bathed in the thought of the moon. The discs of glass are laid at the floor of the box; if you picked one up, the rim might cut your hand.

Every circle is synonym to a bubble: doll’s head, egg, bowl of the pipe, craters of the moon. One of the books Cornell loved was a series of lectures delivered in 1890 by a scientist, C. V. Boys, to an audience of children. You cannot pour water from a jug or tea from a tea-pot; do anything with a liquid of any kind, without setting in action the forces to which I am about to direct your attention.
I haven’t seen that soap-bubble box except in a book, but I’ve seen (Forgotten Game) in Chicago’s Art Institute. A pinball-like game with holes behind which there are pictures of birds cut out from old books. Inside the box there are ramps down which a ball is meant to slide. If you could open the little door at the top and insert a blue rubber ball, if the ball were to slide down the ramps and reach the bottom, a bell would ring. That it doesn’t ring is part of a terrible sweetness.

Forgotten game, blue-silver moon, recessed birds, egg in a cordial glass...
forces have you drawn our attention?

“Perhaps what one wants to say,” said sculptor Barbara Hepworth, “is formed in childhood and the rest of one’s life is spent in trying to say it.”

I remember a gaudy, jeweled pin worn by my grandmother. I said didn’t think it was gaudy then. *Costume jewelry is made of less valuable materials including base metals, glass, plastic, and synthetic stones, in place of more valuable materials such as precious metals and gems*, explains Wikipedia helpfully. But I hadn’t read and wouldn’t have been helped by this sentence then. The jewels, their blue and pink sparkles, enchanted me. They seemed almost this other world. The pin is lost forever, like Dorothy’s ruby slippers somewhere between Oz and Kansas. But I feel the pull of a former feeling, not subject to reason, proportion, knowledge of anything likely/unlikely to happen. In memory, where I am holding it in my hand, the invented and the real haven’t quite parted ways. *You can’t get beauty. Still*, says Jean Valentine *flies to you*.

I think this will not be an argument but a meditation—held together by asterisks, little stars—on how charmed objects, long lost, come back sometimes in poetry, present only as words, touchstone, rabbit’s foot, amulet, merrythought, calling us back, calling us forth. What are they, now that we’ve lost them?

*The Child Is Reading the Almanac*

The child is reading the almanac beside her basket of eggs. And, aside from the Saints’ days and the weather forecasts, she contemplates the beautiful heavenly signs: Goat, Bull, Ram, Fish, etcetera.

Thus, she is able to believe, this little peasant child, that above her, in the constellations, there are markets with donkeys,
bulls, rams, goats, fish.

Doubtless she is reading of the market of Heaven. And, when she turns the page to the sign of the Scales, she says to herself that in Heaven, as in the grocery store, they weigh coffee, salt and consciences.

In an almanac there are moons, full and half and quarter, and moons that look like black moons. There are meteor showers, tides and eclipses. Signs of the zodiac. Questions of the Day. Why is the ring finger sometimes called the medical finger? Weather predictions. Three misty mornings indicate rain.

Fact and prediction, the seen and the unseen intermingle; the strange in the commonplace, and the commonplace in strangeness. No wonder the child in this early twentieth century poem by French poet Francis Jammes has been tempted to set down her basket and read.

Jammes “wrote of simple, everyday things,” says the introductory paragraph on the torn yellow book jacket of my copy of his Selected Poems. And inside the book, in the introduction, Rene Vallery-Radot marvels, “From a little provincial town there rises a voice that ignores all the gods, that tells of life not systematized in theories.” In a photograph just inside the cover man in round black glasses and a long wispy beard, looks down as he writing on. For all we know he was writing this almanac poem. The child must have stopped on her way to or from the market (to sell the eggs? having just bought them?). Perhaps she wonders if even an egg, like the animals in the market, has its counterpart in the stars. The wondrous almanac testifies that as things are on earth, so they must be in heaven: how miraculous, how natural, that Heaven resembles an earthly grocery store on this most ordinary day.

Still, Jammes remembers enough not to oversimplify, or presume. Scales are also associated metaphorically with justice, even by any child, this one must have done something, committed or contemplating committing some small act, a rebellion or peccadillo for which she’d paid, or feared to pay. She spoke harshly to the donkey. Maybe she broke an egg. She dawdled on the way to the market. Whatever it is, she keeps it secret. Let us not trespass.
It is because I believed in things and in people walked along those paths that the things and the people made known to me are the only ones that I still take seriously and that still bring me joy. Whether it is because the faith which creates has ceased to exist in me, or because reality takes shape in the memory alone, the flowers that people show me for the first time never seem to me to be true flower. —Marcel Proust, Remembrance of Things Past

In her autobiographical story “In the Village,” Elizabeth Bishop remembers this from her childhood:

We pass Mrs. Peppard’s house. We pass Mrs. McNeil’s house. We pass Mrs. Geddes’s house. We pass Hill’s store.

The store is high, and a faded gray-blue, with tall windows, built on a long, high stoop of gray-blue cement with a hitching railing along it. Today, in one window there are big cardboard easels, shaped like houses—complete houses with the roofs lifted off to show glimpses of the rooms inside, all in different colors—with cans of paint in pyramids in the middle. But they are an old story. In the other window is something new: shoes, single shoes, summer shoes, each sitting on top of its own box with its mate beneath it, in the dark.

The child is bereaved, though she doesn’t entirely know what this means. It is for her too new a story. Her father—her mother’s mate—like one of those shoes, has been closed inside a box of his own, but forever, unlike the shoes. This story is one of those houses with its roof lifted off, so the writer, so we, may look inside. But we may not enter.
Memory affords glimpses: of a flower, a doll or a shoe in a box, a marble rolling comet-like across the floor. “My life,” writes Tomas Transtromer: Thinking these words, I see before me a streak of light. On closer inspection it has the form of a comet, with head a nucleus, the densest part, is infancy, that first period, in which the most important features of our life are determined. I try to remember, I try to penetrate there. But it is difficult to reach these concentrated regions, it is dangerous, it feels as if I am coming close to death itself.

Maybe it is important not to explicate our childhoods. Or impossible? Cornell, from a journal entry, May 13, 1944:

. . . stopped by pond of waterworks with cool sequestered landscaping—gardens & here had one of profoundest experiences + renewal of spirit associated with childhood evoked by surroundings—it seemed to go deep through strong sense of persistence in the lush new long grass—the most prominent feature turned out to be “no trespassing sign. Water, hiddenness, the cool, such things return for a moment from—exactly when and where? What did it look like there? We can’t quite know, we can’t see inside. No trespassing. But the grass is/was lush.

Talking about her younger brother Joseph, Betty Cornell Benton recalls this scrap from their childhood:

Late one night he woke me, shivering awfully, and asked to sit on my bed. He was in the grips of a panic from the infinitude and the vastness of space as he was becoming aware of it from studying astronomy.
From an earthly point of view, a comet is stationary, seen remembered in daylight—then seen—then remembered—over there for a time. Star with a wake of light. Then it is gone remembered.

* 

“Stove” is one of the six end-words of Elizabeth Bishop’s “Sestina.” Brand new, that model would have been painted silver. Through daily use, it would have grayed; open the door and it would be blackened inside. MARVEL: the name is on the door. It dominates like the map of the moon in Cornell’s soap bubble box. Above, below, on either side there are swirls and curlicues forged in the cast-iron, resembling serious, stirred up clouds. It has four legs, curving outward, stubby and braced. In an early twentieth century village, a stove was a daily thing in anyone’s house, but to a child it must have seemed marvelous, like Saturn’s rings.

I have only seen photographs of the Marvel; but they were not of the real thing. All I found was a salesman’s sample, 16 inches high on eBay but already sold. That ship had sailed. And a toy Little Marvel with two ovens, burners and lifters. Nickel plating over cast iron and in very good all original condition.

A child in me is entranced.

September rain falls on the house.
In the failing light, the old grandmother sits in the kitchen with the child beside the Little Marvel Stove, reading the jokes from the almanac, laughing and talking to hide her tears.

House. Grandmother. Child. Stove. Almanac. Tears. Six miniatures on a bracelet. (Even the tears have their charm.) Each all nouns, come back, they are in their original form—no juggling...
or parts of speech, no punning or homonyms. Simple words, like figures from an old storybook.

Or they are like comets, passing before us seven times from the early twentieth century, Great Village, Nova Scotia. As in the story “In the Village” there is death at the nucleus.

    tears/house/almanac/grandmother/stove/child/tears/stove/house/grandmother/almanac

And so on. In the ordinary world a grandmother is trying to amuse a child. Each time a word comes around again it feels sadder. Even tears teakettle weeps, the teacup fills with dark brown tears. To the grandmother are recurring, equinoctial. The child senses something. Unspoken grief is working its magic: the almanac begins to resemble a bird; philosophical; the world grows cold. The almanac knows what it will say what. How much does the child know, what is she warding off? The poet senses something. Does the child miss the man in the drawing? Even Bishop have known of the child she was? “Early Sorrow” original title. Then withdrawn. Explication fails, or it is irrelevant little moons in the almanac fall down like tears. The poem ends in present tense. The child draws another inscrutable house.

That moment of wonder and puzzlement goes on orbiting but forever out of reach. So are the stove and the almanac, ancient tears grandmother and the inscrutable child. All in the past, except for the house in Great Village. (... it is difficult to move in these concentrated regions, it is dangerous, it feels as if I am coming close to death itself.) That house is still there. You can visit it; you can go inside; you can even arrange to stay.

*  

In her art review of the Ann Arbor exhibition “Secret Spaces of Childhood,” Margaret Price describes certain characteristics of childhood hide
protect the privacy and sometimes the fragility of what lies inside. . . . Moving through the doorway into the space is often a rite of passage, and often the point of access is the highly charged area of the whole secret space: usually elusive, always exciting, and sometimes dangerous. Often they, or their entrances, are small . . . . being small of stature confers the privilege of access. A hideout cannot function for a person too large to fit into it. On the other hand, a child’s small size is a passing attribute, and children know it.

Peering into the windows of a dollhouse, I feel almost an ache of pleasure. This has to do with its smallness; the feeling is paradoxical. I am charmed by its inaccessibility; and I yearn to be small enough to step inside. If I could be small enough to enter, the house and furniture would no longer seem mini-me and so would have lost their mystery; but I might find among the toys in its nursery (for in a dollhouse there is almost always a nursery) a miniature charm bracelet, a mercury-head dime and a single clip-on pearl earring. If I knew they are there, but I hardly ever look. I like the look of the hinge on its lid.

Is remoteness integral to a certain kind of charm? In a silk-lined box I keep my charm bracelet, a mercury-head dime and a single clip-on pearl earring. I know they are there, but I hardly ever look. I like the look of the hinge on its lid.
On the basement floor of the Art Institute in Chicago you can visit the Rooms, a permanent exhibit of miniature rooms behind glass. Much more than just dollhouses, these 68 rooms that, “painstakingly constructed,” as the museum website explains, “enable one to glimpse elements of European interiors from the late 13th century to the 1930’s and American furniture, carpets, wallpaper, chandeliers, other objects—all somehow failing to interest me, I finally realized with some disappointment the last time I visited. Perhaps it was more petulance I felt than disappointment; I had come in the spirit of a former child, and being there felt more like studying than play.

What bewitched me, though, were the windows. Out every window—tiny, intricate gardens with bushes and benches; trees; and an artificial light from a source that wasn’t visible. I started over, room by room, looking not at interiors but out the window neck to see as much as I could; it was tantalizing, I couldn’t see everything. Shining faintly into miniature rooms in the basement of a grand museum, the light seemed remote, a late-fall, old-world light. Out of every window of every one of the 68 rooms was a little world a child might just have begun imagining...

Or perhaps it was simpler, perhaps I just wanted to be inside looking out. It occurs to me that may be why (at least in part) I’m so happy when it snows:
opposed to looking into dollhouses or the windows of other people's homes at night, I finally feel as if I'm *inside* something.

* 

A charm is a miniature object worn on a bracelet. A sombrero. A bell. I am childless, who will I give it to? You can't hear the tinkling of the bracelet when you pick it up. The use of the word *charm* did not occur (was not recorded) until 1865. But *charm* has meant "pleasing" since the 1590's.

It wasn't until Elizabeth Bishop arrived in Brazil and found herself, enormously happy, that she began to be able to write of her childhood in Great Village. She says in a letter to friends, "It is funny to come to Brazil to experience total recall about Nova Scotia—geography must be more mysterious than we realize, even."

Of course she meant some geography of the interior.

> Even from the simplest, the most realistic point of view, the countries which we long for occupy, at any given moment, a far larger place in our actual life than the country in which we happen to be. —Marcel Proust

* 

Ghost stories written as algebraic equations. Little Emily at the blackboard is very frightened. The X's look like a graveyard at night. The teacher wants her to poke among them with a piece of chalk. All hold their breath. The white chalk squeaks once among the plus and minus signs, and then it's quiet again.

This is an untitled prose poem from Charles Simic's *The World Doesn't End*. I have been that child, puzzling over the signs and portents on messages sent by way of math, of grammar, or even handwriting.
continuous l’s or o’s. In a way, it seems like a minute ago. Did they know how wildly some of us may have been mistranslating what they were writing on the board? Numbers especially, and their plusses and minuses, went beyond explanations of words, beyond even paragraphs. I am a teacher now, though white boards and dry erase markers have replaced the powdery chalk. I am still a little frightened, like Emily, standing in front of the class. White boards haven’t solved or eliminated the mystery, yesterday’s propositions, assertions, and mistakes still lurking under today’s.

Though the blackboards of my childhood were almost always blackboards were black, made of slate. For a newer generation the color green was chosen because it was believed it would be easier on the eyes. As for the chalk, I can still feel the powder on my hands as I lay it back in one of the crevices of the metal rim. I had been asked to do a problem on the board. Or to outline a sentence. Or maybe I hadn’t touched it at all but was sitting at my desk, watching my teacher, mentally tracing the swoops (his hand) as it held the chalk. Oh mysteries of the chalkboard’s palimpsest, yesterday’s sums or sentences only half-erased. And let us not forget the mystery of the chalk itself, composed partly of limestone, the sum of fossilized sea animals.

* Vivien Greene, whose family moved repeatedly when she was a child, devoted much of her adult life to the study, collection, and restoration of Victorian dollhouses. She had seen her own beloved house in London bombed and split open in the Blitz. It seems that rift was decisive: after that she and her husband (the novelist Graham Greene) permanently lived apart. (Graham, who wasn’t interested, said Vivien, in either her dollhouses or domesticity, had already formed what they used to call “another establishment.”) “Houses have influenced my life deeply,” wrote Vivien Greene in a brief essay called “The Love of Houses”; “They have entered into dreams, made me stand enraptured, suddenly in unexpected places, filled me with a longing to possess; or they occasionally frighten.” Fear of . . . bombs? Of ghosts, of moving yet again? She doesn’t explain. In the evenings during the war, she used to sit behind blackout curtains working on her dollhouses, tearing down old wallpaper;
Greene was the author of several excellent books on vintage English dollhouses. They are filled with exquisitely old-fashioned and discursive descriptions of staircases, windows, doorways, furniture, even the crockery. At one point, she writes, apropos of nothing,

As some people ask and need to be stripped of ownership, we can believe others are hardly fully alive, complete as persons, until certain material things, a horse, a place, a boat, have been loved and owned and afterwards remembered.

* 

“In the lyric you can stop time,” said Ellen Bryant Voigt in an interview; “you pick that moment of intensity and hold it. The narrative moves through time.” In Michael Burkard’s poem “The Sea” nothing really happens. There is instead a kind of lyrical parallelism that advances no narrative but deepens the shades of emotion.

It could have been worse but for the sea. The watch of it. What was it Chekhov wrote?—”Self same sea”—Yes. Yes. It was there, as was family, in Nova Scotia. There beyond the sloping meadow near Aunt Dorothy’s farm, there from Cousin George’s kitchen window. The sea and it permeated everyone, everything. And because there was no electricity in those days, only candles, lantern light, and no plumbing, it seemed almost a sea more in the air than in the sea. You could not shut it out.

The poem travels sideways, or inward. Certain words appear times, sea, there, now, as if, become on one level sheer sound, a force, a mystery. They don’t so much stop the moment as return to its vivid pastness, over and over again. There is something bygone and sepia about the scene described. “There” suggests something in existence but away. The landmarks in the poem are family names, a meadow, a kitchen window. And the sea, kind of weather, an intrusive force or guest. The residents of the there, in a world miniaturized by memory. Here is the rest of the poem:

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And the lanterns we ate by, sat by—how small! Yet this permeated as much as the sea, as much as the fog from the field, the conversion of one cowbell to another cowbell in the fog, the red-yellow light flickering, now against a deck of cards, now against faces and hands playing the cards, now being carried or by one off to sleep. Sleep by the sea, as if the sleep were to last a thousand years, as if the summer were a medium for color which could become permanently framed, wearing only so slowly for another thousand years the same lantern light shadows, sea and shadow of sea, and her face thousand years ago, only to be seen a thousand years hence and then to stay beside her face for as long as ever is.

The fog doesn’t so much occur as seem always to have been; the family members play cards, listen to sounds, fall asleep. Memory’s village: perhaps everything wasn’t always filmed over with sadness? “A thousand years” means one thing to a child looking forward, and something else to an adult looking back. Is the face that appears the face of the speaker’s mother? On one side is the other hence and ever. Stay is not an accomplishment but a plea. “forever,” though. He is, we are, outside the time that is “as long as ever”; it is already over.

Cowbells, by the way, come in various colors and sizes, but the ones I hear in the poem sound silver, and tarnished.

* 

We move through time, like characters in a story. The objects we loved with intensity seem timeless. Is this because we let them go? And yet, thought of them, don’t loss and accomplishment co-exist? The story goes on and we go with it, but part of the story is what we’ve lost. In “Elegy for the Departure of Pen Ink and Lamp,” Zbigniew Herbert asks forgiveness from three charmed objects:

   * Truly my betrayal is great and hard to forgive...
for I do not remember either the day or the hour when I abandoned you friends of my childhood.

His “friends” are: a pen with a silver nib, illustrious Mr. Ink, and a blessed lamp:

when I speak of you
I would like it to be
as if I were hanging an ex-voto
on a shattered altar

Herbert’s elegy might as easily be to a soap-bubble, or a forgotten game. But not to the story that edited them out.

I thought then
that before the deluge it was necessary
to save
one
thing
small
warm faithful

so it continues further
with ourselves inside it as in a shell

There is that moment when we touch something for the last time. But the child can’t know, as Herbert says, still addressing his “friends,” that “you were leaving forever / / and that it will be dark.” Against that dark, the poem saves one thing, something that, reimagined, paradoxically remains miniaturized but is we who dwell within.

But before we leave that dark, W. G. Sebald has something else to say about it:

... in the summer evenings during my childhood when I watched from the valley as swallows circled in the last light, still in great numbers in those days, I would imagine that the world was held together by the courses they flew through the air.
Some yearning of the child’s imagination, Sebald suggests, forged patterns of meaning in the flights of swallows. If, like the swallows that have diminished in number, some freshness in our early imaginings gets lost along the way, poetry yearns for the “half-created” in things we once perceived. A Marvel stove, chalk, cowbells, a blessed lamp, a silver nib, things that once ordered or were ordered by it. If *nothing can bring back the hour of splendour* in things, isn’t there something swallow-like and mysterious in our yearning, resistant yet integral to the very passage of time? Poetry imagines the traceries that might once again hold things together, lost possessions, past and present, worlds real and imagined. It restores the lost moment, shoe, cowbell, basket of eggs or blessed lamp, utterly itself; it is we who are changed, because we know it is lost.

* (last little star)

In *Now-It*, a collage-and-erasure book Mary Ruefle made out of an old children’s book called *Snow White or the House in the Wood*, she has pasted the words “the cry of the button” beside the picture of a streaking comet. Oh you here and there, you cry and streak, all that’s precious in the commonplace! Now that button and comet have found each other, the child in me believes nothing more need be said.

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**Girl Wearing Bear, or Elle, the Poem — John Watson**

1 Response

Okay, one of the best things about *Numéro Cinq* is the serendipity of reaching out (which is its nature, and it is insatiable). DG’s friend Haijo Westra, a just-retired classics professor at the University of Calgary, wrote an essay about *dg’s* novel *Elle* which, some years ago, out of the blue, he sent to *dg*. They became friends (and later the essay was published in French and then in English translation on NC). Manifesting his enthusiasm in all ways, Haijo gave a copy of *Elle* to an Australian poet named John Watson who was there while his wife worked on her doctorate. Then John Watson wrote a poem...
Elle and sent it to dg. Now dg and John Watson are becoming friends, and, as winter sets in around dg, John Watson WILL INSIST on sending him emails such as:

We had a foretaste of summer heat last week. We drove to the Central Coast hoping to spend the night in a little cabin. Towards dusk the beach was listlessly hot, the cabin stifling with no Southerly change expected. So we drove another 3 hours back home so as to sleep...

And this:

We went today (2 hours) south of Sydney to the beach behind the house where DHLawrence lived in Thirroul for 3 months and wrote Kangaroo. The first day after a week of rain. Full sun with a large pale edge of rain run off before the dark blue water.

But dg did admire that poem—delightfully exuberant, digressive (if you will) and droll (see poem below).

The poet, upon request, sent dg a bio to go with the poem. It went like this:

But then John Watson wrote a disclaimer:

"The bio too is rather austere. No mention of the influence of voluptuous aunt in early days, nor keen interest in Bardot films, pursuit of freakish weather events like waterspouts, St Elmo’s Fire, etc."

This seemed intriguing, so dg asked for another bio, the expanded version. Soon a far more exuberant bio arrived (unfortunately still lacking the "voluptuous aunt" story). Bio and poem together are pleasant and diverting reading.

Since in retrospect actual events seem to fade beside literary ones, a brief biography might be possible in terms of influences. Earliest memory: *The Three Bears* (the pleasures of uncertainty: “Who’s been sitting in my chair?”) Early adolescence: the stories of H G Wells and particularly the romance of *The Door in the Wall*. (The notion of idyll, longing “which will persist with Watson for the rest of his life.”) A couple of years later, reading aloud *The Windhover*, especial delight in the uncertain function of the word “buckle.” First stirrings of poetry as “the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.” Then Lampedusa’s story *Lighea* with its sexual blaze, Nerval’s *Sylvie*, *Daphnis and Chloe*, Beroul’s *Tristan*, Kleist’s *Marquise von O*. All of these he will subsequently versify i.e. rewrite in iambics. “The impulse to read more closely by means of versification” derives in part from Borges’ reviews of non-existent authors. Watson’s *Dictionary of Minor Poets* (read *imaginary* poets) (2008 but written 20 years earlier) is also part of that impulse.

*Continue reading*
Marilyn McCabe Translates (& Sings) a Paul-Armand Silvestre Poem (Music by Gabriel Fauré)

Marilyn McCabe is a singer/poet/essayist/friend. She has already appeared on NC with her own poetry, translations, and in song—which makes her a kind of regular, an old favourite, at least an old favourite of mine. Here we offer a poem by the 19th century French poet Paul-Armand Silvestre McCabe translation and Marilyn McCabe singing the French vers by Gabriel Fauré. This is gorgeous to hear, especially to listen to while you gaze at the screen reading the poem (or maybe you’ll just shut your eyes and listen). Marilyn’s poetry manuscript *Perpetual Motion* was chosen by judge Gray Jacobik for the Hilary Tham Capital Collection by The Word Works, and will be released in January 2012. Her chapbook *Rugged Means of Grace* was published by Finishing Line Press, 2011. She earned an MFA in poetry at New England Co
Paul-Armand Silvestre’s “Le Sec
Translated & Performed
By Marilyn McCabe

Le Secret

Je veux que le matin l’ignore
Le nom que j’ai dit à la nuit,
Et qu’au vent de l’aube, sans bruit,
Comme une larme il s’évapore.

Je veux que le jour le proclame
L’amour qu’au matin j’ai caché
Et sur mon coeur ouvert penché
Comme un grain d’encens, il l’enflamme.

Je veux que le couchant l’oublie
Le secret que j’ai dit au jour,
Et l’emporte avec mon amour
Aux plis de sa robe pâlie.

—Paul-Armand Silvestre

The Secret

I want the morning to ignore
the name I spoke to the night,
and let it, with the dawn’s breeze,
silently, as a tear, evaporate.

I want the day to proclaim
the love I asked morning to hide
and make it in my open heart,
like a grain of incense, ignite.

I want the sunset to forget
the secret I told the day,
and sweep it, with my love,
in the folds of its pale robes.

—Translated by Marilyn McCabe
Blanca Castellón’s poems are starkly honest. Her tenacious pursuit of the unknowable results in work that illuminates a resolute but permeable humanity. Through an intently economic use of language, her writing strikes chords by casting familiar images into new light. With vicious yet softly abstracted lines such as, “Nostalgia brings its thorns to the back of the eye until I am left blind,” Blanca Castellón reminded of the magnetic existentialism of René Char. These wonderful translations come to NC through the extensive work of the poet J. P. Dancing Bear.

Blanca Castellón is a Nicaraguan poet born in Managua. In 2000 she received the International Award from the Institute of Modernists. She is the Vice President of the International Poetry Festival of Granada and the Nicaraguan Writers...

J.P. Dancing Bear is author of nine collections of poetry, his most recent being, *Inner Cities of Gulls* (Salmon Poetry, 2010). He is the editor of the *American Poetry Journal* and Dream Horse Press. His next book of poems is *Family of Marsupial Centaurs* due out from Iris Press. He is the host of Out of Our Mir for public station KKUP and available through podcast or iTunes.

—Martin Balgach

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**I Walk Directionless and Groping**

In this moment, imposed by distance, I remain silent today, looking back to contemplate the city in ruins.

Nostalgia brings its thorns to the back of the eye until I am left blind, groping for the secret seams of the universe where cracks continue to flourish and no one walks, where the missing populate the soft areas of the unconscious.

As if I flung on a dress of uncertainty, stopped in front of my house and recognized myself at once: I no longer watch, my feelings confirmed by the eternal verses: *I WALK DIRECTIONLESS AND GROPING.*

This is nothing but the enduring image that walks with me always and forever.
Genuflection

Couch sadness
with your red dress
Lay down in the center of the page
get the attention of seaweed
recognize your knees in the sand.

The Dead

The dead distill smoke
and pending matters.

They settle in a crown of arteries,
making home around the heart.

The dead are not
so noble in their rest.

They take advantage of free time
in order to interfere with the living.

Practice smiling
because you have life.

Soon they will turn a key
and release the water in your eyes
and make us all cry.

—Blanca Castellón
These are End Times—can there be any doubt?—and in this brilliant essay, Patrick J. Keane explains how and why Yeats’s prophetic/apocalyptic poem “The Second Coming” has become the byword (and epitaph?) for our world, the modern era, the contemporary predicament. Keane has already published three books on Yeats; he brings an easy erudition and scholarship to the table but also demonstrates a sharp eye for current discourse—wherever an echo of the poem appears, he’s sure to notice and mark it down. We have here
Yeats’s manuscript revisions and Keane’s vivid recreation of the influences and states of mind that produced the poem. Yeats was thinking of the slaughter of the Russian Royal Family by the Bolsheviks, and his words reverberate like an ancient premonition.

Patrick J. Keane is Professor Emeritus of Le Moyne College. Though he has written on a wide range of topics, his areas of special interest have been 20th-century poetry in the Romantic tradition; Irish literature and history; the interactions of literature with philosophic, religious, and political thinking; the impact of Nietzsche on certain 20th century writers; and, Transatlantic studies, exploring the influence of German Idealism on British Romanticism on American writers. His books include Yeats: Contemporary Studies in Literature (1973), A Wild Civility: the Poetry and Thought of Robert Graves (1980), Yeats’s Interaction (1987), Terrible Beauty: Yeats, Joyce, Ireland and the Myth of the Devouring Female (1988), Coleridge’s Submerged Politics (1994), Emerson, Romanticism and Intuitive Reason: The Transatlantic “Light of All Our Day” (2003), and Dickinson’s Approving God: Divine Design and the Problem of Suffering (2010).

dg
The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and ever
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
On the eve of the tenth anniversary of 9/11, as I was completing the first draft of this attempt to account for the “permanent relevance” of “The Second Coming,” a friend brought to my attention that morning’s *New York Times* column by liberal economist Paul Krugman. Addressing what he saw as the failure of the Federal Reserve and of most politicians to grasp the “urgency” of the labor-market crisis, Krugman lamented, as “a tragedy and an outrage,” predictable Republican opposition to President Obama’s flawed but promising new job plan, or indeed to any plan likely to make a dent in unemployment. “These days,” charged Krugman, “the best—or at any rate the alleged wise men an
women who are supposed to be looking after the nation’s welfare—lack all conviction, while the worst, as represented by much of the G.O.P., are filled with a passionate intensity. So the unemployed are being abandoned.” Would Yeats, man of the Right, disown this liberal appropriation of his words? Perhaps not; in 1936, as we shall see, he, too, quoted from this passage to make a point liberals would applaud.

But Yeats’s lines, open to appropriation on a more bipartisan basis than anything going on in contemporary American politics, are also repaired to by those on the Right. Following the uninspiring September 23 Republican presidential debate, an registering both the on-stage meltdown of frontrunner Rick Perry and the continued right-wing lack of enthusiasm for Mitt Romney, conservative commentator Bill Kristol was driven to fire off a Weekly Standard “special editorial,” titled simply “Yikes!” Kristol—who, along with many conservatives, wants New Jersey’s “tough-love” governor, Chris Christie, to get into the race—ends by quoting an e-mail from a fellow-Republican equally dismayed by the quality of the debate and the caliber of his party’s declared candidate: Concurring with the e-mailer’s allusion—“The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity”—Kristol couldn’t “help wondering if, in the same poem, Yeats didn’t suggest the remedy: ‘And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?’ Sounds like Chris Christie.”

Something even larger than Governor Christie seemed headed our way to former Labor Secretar
Robert Reich, who recently blogged that the U.S. economy was “Slouching toward a Double-Dip.” Even *that* is part of a wider concern, again reflected in the apparent need to quote “The Second Coming.” The whole of the poem’s opening movement was posted in August on the website Sapere Aude!, singled out as the best description we have, not of the U.S. economy or the lackluster field of Republican presidential hopefuls, but of “the dismal state the world is in right now.” There was also an illustration of “the widening gyre,” a term supplied by one Ahmet C. Toker (whose suggestive surname reminded me that the irrepressible Kevin Smith, by his own admission fueled by cannabis, has been busy writing a 12-issue Batman comic book series under the general rubric, *The Widening Gyre*). That Europe, and perhaps the U.S., may be slouching towards something more ominous than a double-dip recession—may, indeed, be spiraling out of control in a widening gyre—was made graphic in the banner headline and blood-red cover of the August 22 issue of *Time*, which projected nothing less than “THE DECLINE AND FALL OF EUROPE (AND MAYBE THE WEST).”

In addition to those already mentioned in the text, there are many titular allusions to “The Second Coming.” Canadian poet Linda Stitt considered calling her 2003 collection *Lacking All Conviction*, but chose instead another phrase for her title: *Passionate Intensity*, from the line of “The Second Coming” that immediately follows. Describing a very different kind of disintegration than that presented by Judge Bork in *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*, professor, Elyn R. Saks, called her 2007 account of a lifelong struggle with schizophrenia *The Center Cannot Hold*. 
A “Dark Star” Passes Through It: Essay — Leslie Ullman

Leslie Ullman. Photo by Jamie Clifford.
A “Dark Star” Passes Through
By Leslie Ullman

An inspired, well-made poem is all muscle, a linked movement and harmonious gesture: efficient and lovely as a snake moving across rock or blacktop or water before it disappears into tall grass. Break this good poem down, and one can see
it as a construct of images, phrases, observations, maybe even statements—gestures which have practical uses and varying levels of energy when taken one at a time. Often these gestures are indeed taken one at a time, in workshops or in classrooms at any level, where “understanding” the poem is more graspable and thus a more settled-for goal than feeling the poem. Start discussing feeling, and one is in that no-man’s land where the boundaries between one’s private experience of the poem and the intentions of the poem can blur. Language becomes untrustworthy. Perception becomes suspect. It is one thing to watch a snake move and imagine its slipperiness, and another to pick it up with an ungloved hand and then sustain an communication to someone else the sensations of smooth muscle against the palm—at least in the arena of a workshop or literature class, where the task is to find usable terms and defend a point of view in the midst of peers and teachers. But in private, one might well pick up the snake, find one’s hand and arm moving in a dance with its body and feel the marvelous interlocking of its sinews and scales, the dry smoothness of it, not a slipperiness at all.

My first experience of the quietly electrifying impact a poem can have occurred when I was sitting alone on a dock one summer before my junior year in college. Since then, I have sought ways to honor what can scarcely be describe about a well-made and deeply inspired poem—vatic sureness, the textured play of utterance and silence, the sense of inevitability or urgency from which a poem seems to arise, the resonance some images have, the way the last line reverberates i
the reader’s mind and sends her back into the poem again and again only to find each reading richer than the last. In graduate school I was introduced to the work of Gaston Bachelard, the French phenomenologist and philosopher of science who understood *reverberation* as the operative word for describing the dynamics of literary expression, emphasizing the wealth of association and memory touched off in the reader, often a recognition of something deeply buried within herself, as part of the literary work’s own properties and realm of intentions. Bachelard helped me take seriously the sensations that arise from inspired reading, the literal twinges in the gut that tell me when I have encountered a particularly important image or passage even before my head tells me why it is important. A few years later, a conversation with my then-colleague James Ragan helped me begin to find a vocabulary for including and then using sensation as a starting point for grasping the whole of a poem, its deft and muscular movement, in a way that might appeal to readers at any level of experience.

Over the years I have played with the notion of a poem’s “center” in so many contexts as a teacher and thus have made it so deeply my own, that I can no longer determine how much of what I have to say on this matter originates with me or with Jim. But I can say that the basic idea came from him, and that when he introduced it to me, a light went on in my head and has stayed on ever since. Jim said, if I remember correctly, that every poem has “center,” a line or group of lines, which reveal the heart of the poem but should not be confused with theme or content. Rather, they are lines with
particular sort of energy, almost always heightened energy, and one way to identify them is to imagine that when the writer drafted these particular lines, she could feel the force and trajectory of the finished poem even if many details still needed to be worked out—that the poem from that time forward held mystery and potential completeness for the writer and would indeed be worth finishing. I loved this. To enter a poem in the skin of the writer, to feel the itch of important lines without quite yet knowing what they meant—this seemed an engaging and intuitively accurate way to be a reader.

I soon discovered that one cannot identify a poem’s center without dwelling within each of a poem’s gestures—each image, each transition, each close-up or wide-angle view—without, in other words, feeling the weave of the entire texture, its larger and smaller variations. This is not the work of intellect or analysis. Imagine being blindfolded, learning the layout of a room by groping your way along its walls and furnishings, letting your sense of touch replace your eyes and yield the landscape of the room in a visceral, intimate way. This is what happens when one reads a poem with the intent of identifying its center. The center derives its energy from how it works in its relation to other moments in the poem. To feel the center of a poem, one has to have felt the significance of all of the poem’s moments, moments of lesser as well as greater intensity that nevertheless are crucial to the poem’s structure and cumulative power. This is what picking up the snake—not the devious Edenic archetype, but the lovely work of nature—is all about.
A. Anupama contributes five poems translated from the anthology of classical Tamil poems known as the Kuruntokai (pronounced Kurundo), gorgeously symbolic love poems that work within a strict formal structure.
beautiful they are, a revelation of an ancient culture and tradition to which we have as a guide, also, a lovely essay by the translator who uses Ludwig Wittgenstein as an entry point into her own considerable cultural heritage. The essay is a delight, not the least because it lays bare some of the structures of the poems and thus does what good criticism should always do—he helps us read more deeply.

dg

On Translating from Kuruntokai

Wittgenstein wrote “the limits of my language mean the limits of my world.” This wasn’t exactly the reason I set about learning and translating Tamil, the language of my south Indian heritage, but I admit that I liked the idea of pushing back the limits. In my work of distilling English in my poetry, I had begun to notice my many refusals to use foreign words and syntactic differences, which often correspond to my thoughts stemming from Indian philosophy. I turned to learning my mother tongue and attempting translations with the hope of finding a door through which I might reconcile these two movements in my own writing.

I didn’t have to look hard to find a compelling doorway. Ramanujan’s translations of Kuruntokai, an anthology of love poems from the Cankam era of Tamil poetry, illuminate the beauty of both languages. Reading this work was not only an opportunity for me to walk into Tamil with a brilliant guide, it represented a chance to roam in the genius of a community of poets and scholars in ancient India.

Cankam (pronounced “Sangam”) means community, and Kuruntokai are a formal genre called akam written by poets based on a common poetic language of five landscapes, with corresponding symbolism in the specific plants, animals, and bodies of...
water, occupations, seasons, and more in each. These poems revolve around a love affair with a cast of five speakers: the heroine (talaivi) and hero (talaivan), her friend, her mother, and his mistress. Each poem is a short monologue or half of a dialogue, part of an unfolding drama, but is self-contained, a glistening snapshot of a particular moment.

The simplicity of the verses in the translations is deceptive. I was amazed to find allusions and symmetry working together to create a trapdoor in each poem. As I worked on my own translations from the original Tamil, I found poetic devices like parallel feet in symmetric opposition representing the dichotomy of the senses and the mind. An example of this is verse 237, where the hero speaks about his heart setting out boldly to embrace his lover at the start of the second line and then speaks of his mind as hardly daring to think at the end of line 7. These are set symmetrically around the center of the poem: the image of the dark ocean and the words referring to the obstacle between the two lovers. Symmetry presents a different meaning from the literal sense of the hero’s monologue, in which it is the distance and the forests that are the obstacles. The symmetry suggests more than the literal words, creating a superimposition of meanings so that the reader’s understanding can shift away from the expected storyline, the bold heart and distracted mind, and see something more. Another parallel occurs even closer to the center of this poem, amplifying the effect: the image of arms clasping is set opposite the word for circling or echoing. In both cases, the references are ambiguous. The first one suggests that the heart, lacking arms, can’t embrace his lover. The other one could refer to the waves of the ocean or to the deadly tigers. The effect demonstrates the futility of trying to comprehend this sort of circling inward with one’s head-on logic. (I’m grateful, or I might have spent a lot more time trying to figure out the Tamil metrics looking for more clues.)

Sometimes the image or word in the geometric center of the poem is a hinge point or a clue. In verse 36, the central foot of the poem is about the inseparable intimacy of the two lovers. Interestingly, the central word is a partial rhyme for mAlai and for the usual Tamil word for elephant, mAlai.
which is not used in this poem. The effect here is that the conscious statement of the heroine is contradicted by the very way she is making her statement. The elephant is in the room, even though she denies it by her words. On another level, the deeper intelligence, sleeping under the surface, is the point here.

Sometimes the poem seems to flow backwards, with the beginning of the poem only making sense at the end. Throwing the reader back to the beginning of the poem seems to be one of the reasons for this device, as in verse 46. The original doesn’t mention the lover. Ramanujan reordered this poem in his translation (and I followed him in mine) so that the heroine’s suggestion wouldn’t be lost in the poem in English. The original poem unfolds from the opening image of the wings like faded waterlilies and ends with the statement that her lover has left for another land. When back to the beginning, automatically because of the revelation at the end, the image of those limp brown wings suggests that no one is really going anywhere. This device superimposes that suggestion over the heroine’s suggestion that her lover will return to her, as the sparrows return to their nests, because he can’t escape the loneliness of life without her. This sort of set up, with no escape through the ends of the poem, forces the reader to circumambulate the center of the poem, where the image of the sparrows playing in the dust of dried cow dung is the trapdoor’s hinge. In traditional Indian villages, dried cow dung is used as fuel.

The mysteriousness of these love poems is even more striking because they were compiled during the legendary gatherings of Tamil poets and scholars roughly a thousand years ago. I wondered, why love poems? Why landscapes and flowers? I went to philosophy texts for those answers. (Thanks Wittgenstein!) The commentary in Edwin F. Bryant’s translation of *The Yoga Sutras of Patañjali* explains: “The senses can grasp only sense objects, but not vice versa; the mind can perceive the senses, but not vice versa; and the purusa [soul] can perceive the mind, but not vice versa.” So one conclusion is that the *Kuruntokai* and the other *akam* poems of the Cankam era...
firmly among the sense objects of the world and point a direction of the soul, transcending the limits of this world.

A.K. Ramanujan’s books *Poems of Love and War* and *Landscape* offer a fascinating discussion of Tamil *akam*. I consulted Robert Butler’s translation, which includes informative footnotes on the language, flora and fauna, and commentaries on the verses. I’m grateful to B. Jeyaganesan and my mother, who offered literal translations and discussion. None of us are scholars on these poems or on ancient Tamil, so I can only claim that these translations are my attempt to make guideposts, in contemporary American poetry-ese, pointing to the sublime trapdoors embedded in these poems. These guideposts have helped me to find my own poems, too, by inspiring a sequence based on the landscapes and poetic devices of *akam* poetry. Pushing away the limits of my language has expanded my world a bit; thanks, Wittgenstein.

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Translutions from *Kuruntokai*, Ancient Indian Love Poetry

*Poem from the purple-flowered hills*

Talaivi says to her friend—

He swore “my heart is true.
I’ll never leave you.”

My lover from the hills,
where the *manai* creepers
sometimes mount the shoulders of elephants
asleep among the boulders,
promised this on that day
when he embraced my shoulders, making love to me.

Why cry, my dear friend?

Kuruntokai.

Poem from the fertile fields and fragrant trees

Talaivi says—

Don't you think they have sparrows wherever he has gone, with wings like faded water lilies,
bathing in the dung dust in the village streets before pecking grain from the yards and returning to their chicks in the eaves, common as evening loneliness?

Kuruntokai.

Poem from the jasmine-filled woods

Talaivi says—

The rains have come and gone.
The millet grew and now is stubble nibbled by stags while jasmine blossoms flourish alongside, their buds unfolding to show white petals like a wildcat’s smile.
Evening comes, scented with jasmine
bringing bees to the buds,
but see, he hasn’t come,
he who left for other riches.

*Kuru*untokai.

Poem from the blue lotus seashore

Talaivi says to her friend—

My heart aches, my heart aches!
My eyelids burn from holding back these hot tears.
My love, who alone comforts me, is called unworthy
by even the moon. My heart aches.

*Ka*

Poem from the desert road

Talaivan says—

Fearlessly, my heart has departed
to embrace my beloved.
If its arms are too slack to hold her
what use is it?
The distances between us stretch long.
Must I think of the many forests
where deadly tigers rise up roaring
like the waves of the dark ocean
standing between us? I don’t dare.
A. Anupama holds an MFA from Vermont College of Fine Arts. Her career has spanned molecular biology, legal publishing, and orthopedic surgery in her search for beauty, truth, and the marrow of life. Her book *Kali Sutra: Poems* was a semi-finalist for Tupelo Press’s 2011 First or Second Book of Poetry Award. She lives in Nyack, New York.

“A Diminished Thing” & “Pincushion Doll” | Poems — Julie Larios
It's a pleasure to herald the return to these pages of Julie Larios, colleague at Vermont College of Fine Arts, also part of the NC community way back (not that NC really goes that far back, of course). These poems have a dark even macabre edge to them; the felicity of line and phrase creates a tension with the darkness; as in life, the darkness sneaks up on you. The title of the first poem, "A Diminished Thing," is also a kind of structural pun. Each line "diminishes" the last word in the line above it (recommended, commended, mended, mend, me...). The title is a nod to a phrase in Robert Frost's "The Oven Bird." This is Julie's second appearance at *Numéro Cinq*—see "On Reading the Poems of Someone Buried in Poet's Corner."

Julie Larios has had poems appear in *The Atlantic, Ploughshares, Review, the Georgia Review, Field,* and *Margie,* among others. Her penny opera titled *All Three Acts of a Sad Play Performed Entirely in Bed* recently performed as part of the VOX series by the New York City Opera. She has published four poetry picture books for children, and she teaches at the Vermont College of Fine Arts in the Writing for Children and Young Adults program.

dg
A Diminished Thing

It was easy. Many recommended me. I was praised, I was commended for my durability, that is, I mended fast and often. To mend is a fine skill, all the broken men told me.

Pincushion Doll

That matte skin is what bothers people most —

she's like a ghost with no shine, all bisque,

in need of a brisk walk to bring the peaches to her cheeks.

But since she has no legs, that begs the question.

Below the waist she's chaste, all ballast,

filled with sawdust, not a model for anybody's body.

The striped fan in her hands meant to be elegant

is simply sad. Half a woman is a bad idea.
Girl, you better tremble.
You better pray

you’ll find a way to walk,
you better have hip sockets,

knees that bend,
a bottom half at bedtime.

Otherwise, someone
will stick a pin in

and there’ll be nothing.
No cry. You’ll become

a shy lady with buttons
in a basket on your head,

a pocket for a bodkin,
a thimble, scissors,

a spool of dark thread
fastened to your back.
Wayworn Wooden Floors by Mark Lavorato, abstraction defines a heterocyclic bearing of a moving object, which explains its toxic effect.

A Revolting Character, sodium atoms were previously seen close to the center of other comets, but the crime exceeds the tectonic gravity paradox.

Numéro Cinq, multiplication of two vectors (scalar) is stable.

Students of medicine, fable the frame corresponds to a series of out of the ordinary perigee, while the maximum values vary widely.

I Tell You This, proof causes hysteresis OGH, but the rings are visible only at 40-50.

Tales of My Childhood, relief as it may seem paradoxical, dissonant legitimate gamma quantum.

Dear Mollie: Letters of Captain Edward A. Acton to His Wife, 1862, the decree attracts pseudomycelia in full compliance with Darcy’s law.