The Northridge Review

Spring/Summer

1997
The staff wishes to thank Luisa Villani for her help and wealth of knowledge, without whom the publication of this magazine would have been much more difficult. We also want to thank Karin Castillo in the CSUN English office, Scot Feinberg at American Litho, and everyone else from the CSUN English Department who have contributed to the production of this magazine.

Send submissions to: The Northridge Review, English Department, Mail Stop 8248, California State University Northridge, 18111 Nordhoff St., CA. 91330-8261. Send work in triplicate with 3.5 disk. MS Word preferred. Submissions will not be returned unless accompanied by SASE. Send artwork in BW graphic format.
"One thought fills immensity."

- William Blake

Spring/Summer
1997
What It's All About:
Some Words From The Editor

At the beginning, back when I took this job as Editor, they told me I would get two pages where I could say anything that I wanted. I thought, great, I've always wanted to do that! Two pages, in a published magazine, where I could say whatever I felt like, what an honor.

Well, I have to tell you all that these two pages are the last things going into this magazine. Yes, even though they appear as pages four and five, they are the last entries in this, the Spring/Summer edition of The Northridge Review. I mean very last. I mean so last that I nearly missed the deadline, last. I really didn’t know what to say.

Oh, sure, I’ve thought many times throughout the semester of all the witty things that I would tell you all. I thought about how I would explicate, in great detail, everything that I know about art and literature. But then I realized that I would still need to fill another page and a half. I thought about how I would fill everyone in on the specifics involved in the making and editing of a magazine like this one. But that much information would never fit, and probably bore you all to sleep. I thought about how I would like to thank the editorial staff, faculty advisor, and the whole English Department for the hard work they’ve put into the making of this edition. But I figured this would not be the place for that.

What I decided to do is explain a little about why I write. I can’t pretend to represent any of the other writers in this edition, but what I say here could mean something similar for all of them. Their words would merely be different words.

For me, the writing in this magazine, the writing in any magazine, or any book, is just a bit like fine architecture, or like finely crafted furniture. Writing is a creation.

Some one builds a building, or makes a shiny walnut table. We could say that it is like any building or table. It is not. Each creation is unique, not only in itself but it is also unique to the creator. Each work has its own particulars, a certain style of eave, or a
strangely patterned grain. And each piece becomes an extension of the craftsman, artist, if you will.

As time moves on, the artist ages. He will never be in the exact same place in space or time, as he was when he made his creation. But though the artist changes, the creation does not. Well, usually it doesn’t, as long as they can leave it alone.

With the proper care, an artist’s creation can live on well after the artist does not. I own a china cabinet that used to be my grandmother’s. It’s made from solid oak. It was originally made somewhere back in the Nineteen-teens, I think. It would cost a great deal of money to manufacture nowadays. Except for a minor mishap that occurred during an earthquake (a rather famous one to those of us here at the Review) it would still be in my home today. Restoration is on the way, however. It is due to be admired once again.

To me, writing is like this, like a grandmother’s china chest, or the Taj Mahal; like Mona Lisa, or Stonehenge. With all style and critical analysis aside, as a writer, the greatest thing that I could ever hope for and, in my opinion, the greatest any writer could hope for, would be that his work would live on.

In some age, far from now, someone may look on. That someone may be the artist’s ancestor, or it may be no one in particular. It may be an art critic or a painter, a famous writer or a trash collector. And even though the creator of the piece, the architect, the craftsman, or writer, has been gone for oh, these many years, he or she may live again, if for only an instant, when that someone says, “Hey, that’s art!”

T. S. Leas
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Luisa Villani

Interview

Luisa Villani

Music, Mystery, and the Art of the Unsayable: An Interview with David St. John

Graphics

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Madoka Takagi

Contributor’s Notes
An Everyday Miracle

Hurry! She pants in an oxygen mask, 
braces one foot on the setting moon, 
one on the rising sun, 
holds the tide at her back, 
panting, panting, 
as each wave tries to wash her to shore.

A doctor and a nurse criss-cross the room 
with a frenzy of green sterile paper.

His voice comes from a cliff-top. 
You’re doing fine, Honey, you’re doing fine. 
The larger hand that wrestles two-by-fours 
into new rooms, expanding the house, 
softly cradles the hand that knits and sews, 
fine stitches in cotton and silk. 
But all the densely-muscled arms and chests 
of his entire gender, straining together, 
can’t help one woman 
resist the pull of the moon, 
and hold back the ocean.

After a stinging betadine wash, 
and a snip of surgical scissors, 
the doctor says O.K.

She pulls back her knees, 
obey the tidal surge, 
and carries a new voice toward morning.
Julie Kornblum

Awake at Three A.M.

I roll onto my back, open for you
as though a waiter has lifted a silver dome
with a flourish before a hungry man.
My steam rises to fill your face.
You must nibble at the neck, but
may have mouthfuls of breast,
all the way down to the ribs,
bend up the leg and thigh, watch
the juices run from the opening
to the plate.
Have me, have all of me,
until you can’t hold anymore,
and I am spent, can only breathe
the herb and spice of you.
The alarm rings, I rise, not easily,
but without resistance, to shower alone.
No body with the stupor of climax,
presses me to the mattress.
You don’t pull me back roughly,
clumsily, for one last squeeze.
Although I lather with soapy hot water,
my hand will smell all day of me,
and your absence.
empty pickle jars line
the bottom of the pantry
gossiping in vinegar.
they await the alchemist's blessing,
eager to join the consecrated vessels
amassed above
flush with tarragon and mint,
saffron and thyme.
the cupboard is a shrine
each tea tin a reliquary
every burlap rice sack a benediction.

"try this," you murmured,
and laughed as I puzzled over
the red leather bulb,
a fat sunburned king
with a tiny stem crown.
It was my first pomegranate.
I made chai as a ten year-old
you let me,
praised me for it
though I was always the guest,
always will be.

twenty thousand
casserole afternoons
a lifetime of prayer,
forever on your knees
crushing lentils into paste
drying herbs on bronze platters
pressing forehead to floor,
have turned your spine into limestone
and you still start from scratch
one eye on the sun,
the other on me,
addasi, ash reshteh, ghorme sabzi,
I have tasted your love songs.
I.

she’s there again,
pouring tea leaves
onto the dew soaked lawn,
scattering rice scraps beneath
the weeping willow.
sparrows converge,
as always.

II.

“during shortfalls, your
grandmother would fast for days,
place her portion on our plates.
each time she’d insist,
'I have eaten’”

III.

sure as the dawn,
her first words are, “ghazah khordi?’”
“have you eaten?’”
as I mumble, “I have,”
naneh turns towards the kitchen
and replies, “eat again love,
eat again.”

1having no direct or indirect English equivalent, “tahrohf”
refers to the intricate rituals and decorum of host and
guest, giving and receiving, in Iranian culture
I am just beginning to remember my father. He is coming back to me like a collage. My memories of him surface randomly and unbidden. I lay each piece with the others I have collected and try to make it fit. A portrait is emerging, but the lines are not smooth and I cannot tell if it is really him, or not.

My father began playing the piano when he was ten. He was, and still is, a natural musician. My grandparents noticed this talent and decided that, out of their ten children, he should be the one to get lessons. When he heard the news, my father was so excited that he immediately stopped playing. He didn’t want to train his fingers wrong now that he knew they were going to get the chance to get trained right. His parents did not understand, and never asked. My Aunt Theresa got the lessons instead. I cut the memory in two and put it where I think his hands will be.

One night my left earring got stuck to my pillow. I, of course, was stuck to the earring. I hollered for a long time but I was so mashed into the pillow that all sound was muffled. I almost couldn’t breathe. It was nighttime and I was very frightened. My father rescued me, thereby confirming, again, that he would always be there. I will give that memory to be his ears.

My father and I used to play a game called Counting Kitty. He would cradle a cat like a baby and we would count: four paws, one tummy, one tail, one nose. I always let my father count the teeth.

Inseparable from this is the memory of the vet’s office on my twenty-fifth birthday, where I put that cat to sleep after seventeen years of being my closest companion. These two are his arms.

When my brother turned thirteen, my father began to treat him badly. Adolescence strikes not only the child, but also the parent that shares that child’s sex and
gender. The stakes are high and many families lose. The fights were as loud and as violent as those my father had grown up with. I do not remember them at all. I just remember that they happened.

*I place this memory as my father’s mouth.*

When I came home for the summers, my mother and I would drink wine on the patio, surrounded by plants. She told me, on one of those evenings, that I was conceived in less than ten minutes. It was an intuitive, imperative “Now is the time” on her part. My brother was in the bathtub, screaming that he was ready to get out now, and my mother couldn’t stop laughing the whole time. We both agreed, “Hats off to Dad.”

*In gratitude for half my genetics, I will make this memory his hips.*

The company my father worked for was very rich, until they folded. He was a senior vice-president.

At a Christmas party, I do not remember when, he spent a lot of time dancing with a woman who had joined the company a few months earlier.

I remember the look on his face as he flirted with her. He had rearranged his expression to appear more confidant, more virile, more available than he really was.

*This is my father’s face.*

My parents used to create wonderful gardens. My father guided the noisy roto-tiller, turning up the soil. My mother would quietly follow, planting neat rows of corn and beans. They were a living trinity: my father, my mother, the garden.

*He may have this as his legs and feet.*

Before my father left, he tried to explain to me why he was going. It was his only chance to be happy, to break out of this unhappy chrysalis, he said. I asked about mom. He said that she would be alright, that she would actually do better without him. He said that he had found true love and that these twenty-six years had been a lie. I didn’t ask if my ten minutes had been a lie, too. I didn’t want to know. I offered him all of my backpacking gear and told him that, if he wanted to leave, he should try something different. Why check-out of one marriage only to enter another? We cried together that night, but he was happy and I was dead.
I set this memory into his face as his eyes.  
My boyfriend at the time of my parents’ divorce lived far away. I traveled the freeways frequently and for hours at a time. Most of the time I was crying and so I drove slowly.

One night, as I was heading east out of the valley, I passed a dog walking down the shoulder of the freeway. I pulled over, as I always do for lost and hungry dogs, and got out.

The dog was frightened, every car made him wince. He saw me, and came cautiously along the asphalt. As he drew closer, I saw protruding ribs and a tongue heavy with thirst. Poor starving doggy! It’ll be okay. It’ll be okay.

My heart beat fast and I was almost crying. This always happens when a person cares, earnestly, foolishly cares, about another creature’s well-being. It cannot be avoided. I gestured for the dog to come to me.

It spooked and ran away into the traffic.
This is the final memory I have to give my collage-man father.
I will place it in the empty space between his face and hips. On the left hand side.
I think it is his heart.
I sat with my friend Melanie at the bar. It was Thursday night during Happy Hour at a Mexican Restaurant.

“Have you tried the personals?” I inhaled from my cigarette.

“God no. I’ve heard stories about those. Bad ones.”

Melanie was drinking Merlot. I drank Strawberry Margaritas. Melanie got drunk after two glasses. I took longer. We sat next to angelfish swimming in an aquarium, near dangling pinatas and sombreros pinned to the wall.

“How about church?” I tried again.

“Are you kidding? That’s where I met my ex-husband.”

Melanie was a bleached blonde who wore red. Her hair was pinned up, bringing attention to false eyelashes and perfectly shaped eyebrows. Her lipstick never smudged.

“I’ve always said, if somebody goes to church as much as he did, they’re hiding something.” She lit her cigarette. “Two weeks after we were married he pulled out the pornos. You should have seen them Kathy. He had stacks and stacks of them. That pervert.” She inhaled smoke. Exhaled. “The son of a bitch couldn’t make love to me without them.”

“I’m sorry, Melanie.” She always brought this up.

“Yeah, well, I’m glad to be rid of the schmuck.”

“That pervert.”

“Asshole.”

“Double asshole.”

I could hear waiters singing Happy Birthday in Spanish to a party in the background. I dipped a tortilla chip into mild salsa.

The bartender must have heard us swearing. He put two shots of tequila on the counter.

These are for you two lovely ladies.”

“Thank you.” I was glad to get free alcohol.

“Salt and lime?” His eyebrows raised.

“Yes. Please.” Melanie watched him move. “He’s cute.”
"Melanie. Let me give you a piece of advice." She looked at me. "Never sleep with a bartender."

"How would you know?"

"Trust me." I spoke quietly.

I glanced at the brightly lighted aquarium and saw a dead fish floating on the top of the water.

"What shall we drink to?" I lifted my shot glass.

"To water under the bridge, new horizons and God only knows what." She was beginning to slur her speech.

"To our new found freedom." I wondered what I would do with mine.

Unlike Melanie, I didn’t have anything bad to say about my ex-husband. He never hit me. Never cheated on me. Never watched pornos. I never understood it, but being married to him was like the slow death of my soul. I gasped for air like the fish in the aquarium. Before it died.

We stopped talking for awhile. Blew smoke rings to pass the time. We pursed our lips together. Let out smoke. Circles filled the air.

"You know," Melanie was speaking with exaggerated arm gestures, "we really should quit smoking. Men hate it."

"I’m not going to quit smoking for any man."

"Me neither. If a man’s gonna love me, he’s gonna love me for who I am." She pointed to herself.

"Yeah, you and your bleached blonde hair."

"You and your fake boobs!" She pointed to them.

We laughed wildly. I stood up on the bar stool and leaned over the counter. The bar stool wobbled.

"Hey bartender. Do these look real to you?" I was wearing a white cotton, button down blouse. The buttons were mostly undone.

He looked up from behind the counter, "Well now. I don’t really think it matters."

The late evening crowd started to arrive. Business men in suits. Party girls in dresses. The light in the aquarium bothered my eyes. I squinted. Live fish were eating the dead one. Picking at it. Each time a fish took a bite, the dead one bobbed, like it was still alive.
"Melanie. Did I tell you I dated a doctor once?"
"No way."
"Yes. An anesthesiologist." I nodded heavily. "Guess how I met him? ... The personals."
"Now why would a doctor need to meet someone through the personals?"
"Um, ... because he was a pervert." I started to laugh. So did she.
"You won't believe this Melanie, but ... "
"Oh, I'd believe anything." She interrupted me.
"At the end of our first date ... "
"He kissed you. Romantically."
"No. He spanked me."
"What?" She leaned toward me.
"Like I would be into it or something."
"Oh my God, Kathy." She shook her head.
"I couldn't believe it. No kiss. Nothing. Just spanking. I got out'ta there as fast as I could." I put out my cigarette.
"That pervert."
"Asshole."
'Double asshole."
I started to slap myself to make fun of the doctor. We laughed again.

We were there for a long time. Drinking, smoking, and reminiscing. We were very drunk and very giddy. I guess we must have been pretty loud. I didn't hear the restaurant manager walk up behind us.

"Will you ladies be dining with us this evening?" He spoke with a Spanish accent.

I don't know what came over me. That question. It seemed so ridiculous to me. I looked at Melanie. I looked at the dead fish in the aquarium. I looked at the restaurant manager. I could barely control myself when I said, "Yes, I'll have the fish."

My laughter echoed. It rang in my ear. My body shook. I laughed the deep kind of laughter that makes you feel whole inside, increases the heart rate, induces endorphins. The kind of laughter that throws your head over your knees and back again.

I leaned toward the restaurant manager, grabbed his arm and pointed to the fish, "Look!" The cherry of my
Gina Manning

cigarette burned his face. He pulled away. The bar stool wobbled again and I fell.

Someone once told me a drunk woman is very unattractive. But I didn’t care. I thought it was funny. I laughed so hard I cried. Snot ran down my nose.

The restaurant manager put his hand to his burned cheek, then yelled to the bartender, “Call a cab for these two!”

The cab was non-smoking, but the driver let us smoke anyway. Melanie’s eyelashes were half off. My mascara was running. I rolled down the window. Cool air hit my face. I could finally breathe.

I watched the street lights as we drove by. Fixated on them like a deer before it becomes road kill. A light drizzle softened the windshield. Small drops hit my blouse. I was surrounded by water and light, like the fish.

I remembered what my ex-husband said to me the day I left him. We had been standing in the kitchen next to the dishwasher. His arms flailed. His face was red and his jaw twitched when he spoke, “You’ll never make it without me. You’re nothing ... do you understand? Nothing. The men will eat you alive. Do you hear me? They’ll eat you alive.”

Melanie fell asleep while we were driving. But I stayed awake. The street lights hurt my eyes.
Travelling through the Painted Desert

A looming straight-away
developing through the permanence of canyons.

If you look out the left window
(the one that’s rolled halfway down)

- across an enormous expanse of sky -

the Anasazi Indians carved rock-pile castles
from relentless stone.

They did this thousands of days ago.

Strong, bleached wooden ladders
(thinking of you)
support these indigenous dwellings -
They still stand.

A strewn tire rises up in a coil...
Ready to Strike!

Outside, natural pile flooring of sage, spirit.

Fine sand rests on top of your tanned leg
You feel me touching you
I feel the essence of earth.
Express Train Boogie-oogie

(Read left to right, and also vertically down indentations)

As the station recedes its lights blister
Into raindrop halfglobes
    Wet tracks shuttle the eye
    From path to path
Now the whole city is revealed gleaming
    Fishnet of light pulling in lives
Along the avenue painted numbers
    And panting engines flash into mind
Little balls of light the wind pulls
Across the glass like taffy
    And now the train slides out of town
    Into a flowering darkness
Here's the warehouse district and Club 333
A dark industrial geometry
    Dragging trails of signs and coinage
Across billboards
    Yellow fireflies packed in a jar
    Burst their bulbs
    Black trees and leaves in a black sea shivering
    Before they drown
People make random gestures
    A ragged man pasted on a bench
Where money mates with anatomy
Through the panting interiors
    The windowsquares of well-lit lives
    Peer through orchids and seaweed
Greenlit pines lining an empty block
Of grey concrete parking lot
    The thousand faces of a movie crowd
    Burst through the borders of my body
Of triple-X theaters
    And out the red velvet EXIT
    Here are plunging lovers behind half-drawn curtains
    And a woman's silent O as her mouth yawns open
A rainwet warehouse redslicked with rust
Long streets climb a hill and spill
    Where metal streamlines clash and overlap
    Against a canvas sky painted black
Someone looking up from his written pad
Windows like the slow frames of a film
Through my reflected body
Shining like the tines of a fork
   As carload after carload of light
   Flickers and is eaten whole
Cliff Jumping

My best friend and I found
five spotted frogs, camouflaged,
on the ledge of a rock in Wikkiup.
Their black beaded eyes
with orange lightning streaks
did not blend with the newsprint
colored spots on the rock.

She told me she was stressed out
with her life, having a hard time inside.
"I just want to be a frog," she said.
I asked her why not be a bird and fly?

We decided not to jump
off the cliff that day.

Instead we climbed a mountain
and sat in the dirt.
Baby flies flew around
my scabbed knees, sometimes
landing for a bite. Ants crawled
through our toes and in our hair.
We didn’t care.
For them it was business as usual.

We were people who take showers,
drive cars and make things.
People with friends like her and me.
We were statement girls
in a non-plastic world.

We hiked down the mountain
and sat on a rock together.
She sang some songs,
beautiful beer can music
rose through the trees.
Nature was everywhere, wrapped around our fingers in bands of silver and gold, covering our bodies in brilliant colors and holding our hair out of our faces. It darkened our skin with the red of a child’s cheek.
Meredith Kurz

Homesick For A Place I’ve Never Been

Homesick for a place I’ve never been,

I build in spaces
Based in clouds
And white,

Where under skies
Both blown in winds
And bright,

I bind in fences
Snugly held
And tight

A past and future that I’ve never seen,

The used to be
That may have been
And might.
Graphic by Shoshana Grunwald
Graphic by Shoshana Grunwald
On The Road to Key West

We subverted the structure of our lives, stretched it, abandoned it, slept half the day, stayed up all night, rented

a convertible, raced on traffic-less two lane roads, long narrow causeways, surrounded by water, sun mirroring back from both sides, hot Florida wind ironing our hair straight, a new look.

We swam in the gulf in the moonlight, water glowing with bits of phosphorescence as if the sky had fallen into the sea and we were swimming amidst stars, primordial;

experiencing in our separate bodies what the ancients must have first known in the smooth, dark, wetness where sentience began.

Reverently, we drifted on the white sand beaches where Hemingway walked. Wishing to be touched somehow by the same gift, we wrote our wishes, thoughts, on paper with motel letterheads and cocktail napkins,

stuffing them, like secrets, in our pockets, hoping time would transform them into great thoughts; immortalize these sensual days, hedonistic discoveries, translate this private fantasy into a myth that would somehow preserve these feelings, sanctify this bond.
Language Lesson

Under the porch
with my new friend David,
I place my school clothes:

dress, shoes, socks,
in a neat little pile
because Mama said,
"Don’t get them dirty."

Soft dirt slides between my toes
like baby powder. It’s cool
in the shade of the porch
where the grass doesn’t grow.

We push tiny cars down make-believe roads,
through cardboard tunnels;
choreograph accidents;
play tow-truck drivers.

“You better put your dress back on,”
David says, “or the lady across the street
will tell your mama nasty things.”

I look past wooden porch supports
smelling of dryrot.
Beyond a street undulating in September sun
my mother’s friend Mary
disappears behind lace curtains.

He teaches me the forbidden word.
Conspiratorially, I repeat it after him.
I wonder what it means.

At home, my mother grabs me by the hair.
I plead my innocence,
“I wasn’t doing it.”
“Doing what?” she asks.
I say the word.

She screams and washes it out of my mouth with Ivory soap. From then on I float through life only ninety-nine and forty-four one hundredths percent pure.
Donna Marsh

Pat the First and Second

Just before the end
my conversations with my father
consisted of brief interchanges.
"Hon, could you make me a sandwich?"
"Are you warm enough, Dad? Shall I
turn up the thermostat?"

I pictured him in his scout uniform,
jumping in the lake fully clothed
to save a drowning boy.

I read him some of my poems
while he gazed out the window
to some long remembered landscape
peopled by shapes that
no longer exist.
Not hearing anything I said,
he refused to be called into the present.

I remembered how he used to make me
a mouse out of his knotted handkerchief,
and the time we made grass skirts
from palm fronds, put rubber bands
over our noses and called our dance
the "Monster Hula."

I remember when we were a duo.

He took frequent naps.
I would call up my daughter
-she’s named after him-
and say: Let’s talk awhile now
when my conversation is worth hearing,
while I still have something to say.
I want us to know each other
while I’m still interesting to know.

I wanted her memories of me
to be happy ones, didn’t want her
to have last impressions
of feebleness and irascibility.

“Honey” I said, “Remember the me who stayed up
all night, finishing your costume
for the play; who applauded, whistled,
and took rolls of film,
the me who went hiking with you in the woods,
and drove you to endless riding lessons,
singing the songs from Oliver, in two parts.
I was Nancy; you were the orphaned Oliver.

Remember when we were a chorus.”
Raudin Mendoza

There is a Difference of 30 Degrees Between Shade and Sunlight in the Highlands of Peru.

N: In the gathering of the cold sunlight and shadows of giant mountains with gray hair live Alicia and her older brother Enrique. Enrique is walking two steps behind his breath, kicking pebbles whose morning shadows reach across the road. The morning is cold, like everything there, and he walks bundled in a homespun poncho and a hat that hides his ears. He is tending to his family’s three Alpacas that pace gently with their two toed feet like drums on the hard dirt. The road twists in and out of the mountains ahead of him. The thin blue sky scratches the back of the colossal collection of mountains with three woolly white clouds. Enrique, still dreamy from last night’s wonder, walks alone with a wild tight smile gripping his mouth ignoring the sky.

Along the expansive Andes sleep volcanoes and small villages where young girls like Alicia help their mothers break their backs. A fortress of green encircles the village at the crown of a mountain. Alicia is weaving on the side of the house in the sun. She too has a brown toothed smile that stuck from last night. Shining like a cat she believes she is capable of imagining what the ocean 4480 miles below is like. Angry water bigger than mountains and salty she thinks while at work. The words her grandfather recited last night worked her mind into a stubborn engine of imagination.

Alicia wanted to know if she would ever have a pencil and paper. Before answering he blessed them both with a toothless kiss, like a bubble bursting, on their dusty cheeks. The fire shone off his face that the years and weather had turned into leather. The brim of his hat sent a shadow shaped like a person with wings up to the heavens. Magic was everywhere that night under the smoke and sparks of the fire that reached the stars. They all sat around soaking in the sorcery of their grandfather’s meditation. Then the words began to swing with so much certainty that they clung to every part of all of their bodies. Every word of divination flew from his caved in mouth and expanded like a liquid into the dark of the surrounding mountains. Alicia and Enrique sat mesmerized watching the truth roll away like mercury from his elastic face.

X: How beautiful it is to picture a man named J in the middle of repose,
reposing. The air cleaning him cool like a clock and the leaves of the
trees around him caressing him to sleep. He is in a hammock thousands
of feet in the air, among leaves and monkeys and the sounds of busy
solitary insects that are wondering through the beautiful sunny day.

He isn’t the only one there. The entire army has agreed that
every evening there should be a time when they read and take naps
naked. The more fortunate ones share their hammocks with lovers that
are conveniently in the same legion. They passionately enjoy them­selves in blankets of giggles and sighs, moaning songs that in the right
ears provoke memories of a distant home. So, homesick they attend to
their nap and let the wind paint cool dreams across their closed eyes.
The sky couldn’t wish for better company and always treats them to
wind and warm sunlight.

In the night around the base of those giant trees, that are so tall
they make the moon go around, the army trains for combat. In uniform
they initiate in empty-handed battles that consist of everyone attempt­
ing to destroy anyone but their immediate selves. All in identical sky­blue uniforms, but they never get confused because everyone’s a target.
Holding nothing back they pound on each other’s soft faces and ribs
and scratch and kick and slobber sometimes laughing and blood is defi­
ant flying into the air in every direction. One has the other by the face
and she is punching him as hard as she can as if his face were a sack of
sand. Right in the eye over and over. He is failing miserably to fend
her off because she kicked him in the throat. It’s hard to see through the
masses of bodies at frolic with identical sky-blue postal carrier uniforms
tearing each other apart.

The fights end well into the night with everyone in a magnifi­
cent pile of limp bodies and two still standing long after everyone else.
One gets the advantage and buries the other one into the pile, strangling
him or her by the neck while the one being downed is clutching to
gouge their eyes out. Once the body is completely immersed in the pile
of other bodies with the soon to be a winner’s hands still holding on
until all movement ceases, the winner turns towards the moon and
screams so loud that the forest gets uncomfortable. Yelling, flailing their
tired bones at the sky for less than six seconds before they tumble back­
wards from exhaustion and their body rolls down the pile.

They all wake up as if synchronized with the sunrise and walk
in bunches to the stream to wash their bruises. The water is cold and
fresh and they wash the accumulated sleep off their faces. They all have
wings of stone on their backs, it marks them as the descendants of an
ancient generation of queens and kings. At the stream they wash and
scrub each other’s wings with steel wool sponges.
Raudin Mendoza

Like donkeys they dip their swollen faces in the cold water of the stream. Lined up along the bank it is easy to see the great numbers of their army. Today is the day of revolt. Trained and prepared they trek into the city like an earthquake and run towards their destination. The tallest building of the biggest city. Armed to the teeth with pencils and paper they tear apart whole cars that impede their progress. Like a mad mob they rush so peacefully yelling angry slogans with their pencils in the sky. Like a gathering of locust’s they reach the building and begin to run up the sides. The earth is toppling and turning under their shouts. Scribbling everywhere the truth and painting every side of the building with sky-blue bodies they scale to the top. Once at the top they begin to dive off and glide on their stone wings. Scattering in every direction of the world. Dispersing through the world like a ton of marbles dropped at once. All with postal carrier bags full of pencils and paper. They all land like parachuters on some lost land and like Saint Nicholas, a soldier called J delivers pencils and paper to a girl named Alicia with devilish brown eyes and a strong handsome boy named Enrique.

Y: Like tigers they dip their swollen faces in the cool water of the stream. Lined up along the bank it is easy to see the great numbers that their army has collected since the beginning; for some reason when they stand in clusters their numerical forces are reduced to handfuls. The beginning of the rebellion emerged from a small group of dissidents that strayed from their high ranking social classes through music at first. Their uniforms were crude and ineffective; store-bought beige uniforms and caps that barely let them move. They were children with stone wings, marked forever to their social positions. Armed to the teeth with weapons that they had unregulated access to thanks to their social standing, they began the revolution. Countless pencils and paper in their arsenal as means to liberate the world and create an egalitarian planet. That initial faction, in time, reproduced a military generation of rebels.

The second generation is accredited with several considerable contributions towards the development of the revolution. A soldier by the name of E, who had been affiliated with the postal service, replaced the prehistoric beige uniforms with postal supplies and dress. She introduced the postal uniforms that like the wings became a trademark of the rebels. The sky-blue uniforms were conventionally designed for the distribution of information in the most practical rate and manner. This was suitable garment for their mission that had now been modified from its original form into a more developed one: obtaining equal
access to essentials, information, development, invincibility, pencils and paper.

The classic age died with the emergence of the third generation and the discovery of a male soldier by the name of P. He sparked the demise of what he characterized as “the most threatening enemies of the rebellion: pencils and paper.” The first time he presented his idea of eradicating the use of these was during a windy October when all things die and everyone is half insane. He posed this question: “If they (those less privileged) have no access to pencils and paper, why should we?” P became a general and a hero of revolutionary theory. His disinclination for the use of pencils and paper became an unchallenged trend that grew deep into the following generation.

This, by this point dying, general’s theory, born from the initial concern for equality, expanded beyond all boundaries the instant it hit sympathetic ears. It was possible for this to happen due to the following authorizing variables and more: 1) The size of the military in circulation had grown so large that it began to emulate the structure of its mother’s system of hierarchical social classes. This created subcultures within the rebellion. Gaps between the subcultures expanded quickly, distributing power to a selected few. 2) Individual authority was gained through exhibitions of fanatical ideas (in this case creating P’s theory to expand beyond all boundaries.) With the hierarchy developing and enlarging so rapidly, many things, manipulated to extremes because of the urgency, became tools to succeed into the top subcategories. The uniform’s primary functions, for example, were forgotten. They were modified and turned into fashion accessories. Even P from his death bed attempted to put an end to things, but he like all others that spoke against these ideas was ostracized into the low ranking classifications of the lunatics and weak. 3) With the uncontrollable increase of subcultures, some of them began to blend back into the infrastructure and in time this became a bridge that not only led out of, but also served as a passageway and window into the rebellion. The world had access and growing interest in the dull unthreatening beast of an army that proved to be very marketable. With its growing popularity many involved in the rebellion learned how to sell the revolution and through them the outside world created a circus of sky-blue monkeys with stone wings who boxed with their own shadows.

By this point the competition for elite positions had created unheeding extremists with extravagant postal uniforms who stopped at nothing. Besides them, the rebellion had disintegrated into a few screaming idiots still trying to sell long after its death in the market. The bulk of them, still motivated by a god named P moved to the high
Raudin Mendoza

lands of Peru and built a village aboard a mountain. With no pencils around for miles, retired revolutionaries sit in insulated air-conditioned homes with central heating in the Andes of Peru with wings of stone.
Candy Box

My life is in this candy box
See here, this dark round truffle
You can poke your finger through.
Cherry syrup my aunt bled
when she slashed red both wrists.

There is my Grandfather
A powdery creme encased bitter chocolate
He was a beer can crushing sour man who liked to swear
There wasn't a flame hot enough to bake
Or mortician with balls enough to urn him.

This golden-brown peanut brittle is my Father
He used to make it every Christmas Eve.
That was before he left us,
My Sister the butterscotch drops
And my mother the after dinner mints

These toffee chips are my ex-wife
After we'd had our fill she married a man
With a sweet tooth for her skin and rock cocaine
He comes to gnaw on her and steal the silverware
She's the taste that leaves a man hungry

Like these almond paste wafers my dog likes to eat
Though they sicken him he'll eat from the box again
You'd think I'd throw or give these boxes away
But can't understand why some gorge on memories of pain
And do what dogs do.
The Old Piano Teacher

There is a birch tree in front of her house.
Tall slender-white limbs nearly wind bare.
Yellowed leaves lie on the grass.
And yet, a few stragglers hold fast to the branches,
Clinging precariously to life while the others molder.

The tree has shrunk inside fleshy bark.
I know the tree feels the autumn and winter slumber
But doubt death could catch it sleeping.

The white stray cat she kept pads across the yard
It stares over one shoulder,
The breeze overturns a leaf and it pounces.
She taught me to play the piano cat-like
To finger strike and relax, not to hang onto the keys because
I’d never last through the Rachmaninoff Third.

The cat moves off to a shady spot, curling itself into a wary ball.
I know by the way the whiskers twitch
That death will not catch it sleeping.

But I fear she may have felt an instant of terror
When the aneurysm burst in her brain
Breakfasting in a cafe in Europe.

“When the time comes I’d like to go in my sleep,” she said
One golden sunlight morning after our lesson.
We had played Brahms. She the orchestra, I piano solo.

Oh my teacher, my love, how you accompanied me that day.
Masking my flaws and soothing rough passages
“Quickly, yes.” I said to my silver haired treasure
But our finger song had kissed in the air and
I saw her quick laughing eyes.

There was too much of the tree and the cat within her
I knew that, though she hoped for it
Death would never catch her sleeping.
Remembering J.T.

Not a poor man, my father,  
nor necessarily an honest one.  
It’s said he once talked a  
tornado out of the sky,  
bottled it,  
handed it to the governor of Georgia.  
I do know the piano in the living room  
called out whenever he walked by.  
Old ladies gave him property for  
promises of eternal care,  
swore loyalty with withering lips.  
Not much on looks.  
An abiding intelligence  
misplaced like the foot  
on quicksand.

What do I remember when  
I think of my father?

St. Louis.  
Summer vacation.  
My sixteenth year.  
Week old driver’s license in my wallet.  
My father’s prized Cadillac.  
I hit a truck.  
My mother silent.  
My sisters’ eyes as big as  
bowling balls.  
I cringe in the back seat while  
my father talks insurance.  
He returns,  
opens the front door,  
tells me,  
“Drive, baby.  
Accidents happen.”
Dimensions of my unconscious.
So high,
So wide,
So deep -
A space to occupy.
A space to occupy when I don’t occupy space.
When I no longer need any space.

I believe my daughter is there.
Tiny in life, she’s much larger now -
Big enough to consume a whole world.
A Blackbird flies
over burnt plains.
We follow this lonesome soul,
sitting in cabaret darkness
with cigarettes and bourbon.
Our heads swim in the bluish-gray sea.
Our feet tap sporadically
to your horn, your groove.
The mood permeates.
Riffs ripple the ocean,
troubled waves.
And we chant silently
down through the intangible blue
surface, across the backs
of fish and up to just brush
the faint moon of dawn before falling
onto thick grass.

We lie with you for a moment
in silence, wondering
why do you cry.
You answer in F sharp,
Because you’ll never understand me.

You turn your back to us
and the blackbird returns,
wingtips spraying water
from the blue swells below,
each drop rising into the air
unaware of gravity, rising
into the morning and washing
clean the sky, following the bird,
spilling through clouds and scales,
shedding time signatures
and leaving words behind.
One note
holds over us
and we peer up unable to see the bird
in the young sunlight,
our eyes burning.
You smell the smoldering,
and you send him down -

One note
plummeting.
I was not narcoleptic, but how would they have known that? I dozed off constantly. I dropped asleep in Mrs. Sherwood’s third grade class just as we arrived at the most thrilling point in the history of Paul Revere’s ride. I curled up on second base for a nap when our Little League score was tied in the bottom of the ninth. I toppled from my chair in Sunday school when Jacob squared off against the Angel. What else could it have been?

They assumed that it was narcolepsy, but it was not. It was my response to suspense. I fell asleep not to escape suspense, but to preserve it. Sleep spared me the disappointment of resolution.

My condition first appeared in early childhood, when my mother read me fairy tales at bedtime. I loved being in the midst of a tale, but once the ending came and every piece clicked (almost audibly) into place, I felt disillusioned, cheated. It was the drug of curiosity, the delightful anticipatory angst, that I craved. Endings only robbed me of suspense. Endings relieved me of the condition I craved.

I trained myself to fall asleep when the story neared its climax. That way I could endlessly savor the suspense. I could imagine a plethora of endings where characters killed, married, betrayed or rescued one another in infinite combinations and variations. I was left dangling, day after day, over the magical abyss of possibility!

I slid from my Kindergarten chair each day during story time and collapsed into a snoring heap on the floor. Concerned school nurses recommended doctors. Concerned doctors recommended specialists. Concerned specialists recommended tests. My head was x-rayed. My ear canals were scrutinized. My abdomen was probed with warm, soapy fingers.

Narcolepsy, they decided.
In the fourth grade I was given medication that made daytime sleep impossible. And so, robbed of my escape, I was forced to preserve suspense any way I could.

In the last 35 years I have never seen the fourth quarter of a basketball game. I have never sat through the third act of a Broadway musical. I have never passed second base in a relationship with a woman. I have never finished anything.

I set my VCR to record the first 15 minutes of all my favorite TV shows. How will Murphy Brown rid herself of insomnia? Will Roseanne's son succeed in hiding his report card from his portly father? Will the new doctor in Alaska be able to find out why that really old guy with the really young wife keeps wanting to eat raw meat? Blissfully, I will never know.

While millions of Americans passively allow scriptwriters to encumber them with arbitrary endings every half hour, I can return to the midst of each plot and leisurely contemplate different avenues of choice. (Roseanne's son might run away from home and live in a youth hostel in Belgium rather than admit to a D+ in Home Economics.) I can braid the threads of different shows together. (The yuppie Alaskan doctor might very well treat Murphy Brown's insomnia when she heads north to do a story on the lingering effects of the Exxon oil spill.) By never permitting anything to come to its conclusion, nothing is ever impossible with me. I, of all men, am most free.

For what is suspense but the joy of uncertainty, the giddiness of potential, the wonder of ignorance? And what is an ending but the theft of possibility, the rape of imagination, the mind-numbing disease of certainty? For me, every plot stretches endlessly into the future. Every detail of my world is ripe with possibility.

I sit for hours each day in my local library beginning novels I will never finish. I read until I find myself immersed and then I move on to the next book that catches my fancy. (At times the title or cover is so inviting that I get no further than that.)

In my most recent aborted readings I have reached page 23 of Graham Green's *Brighton Rock*, page 57 of Wilkie Collin's *The Moonstone* and Genesis 3:6 of the King James Bible. (Imagine the suspense! Did Adam eat the fruit or not? Is this world hell or paradise?) The only book I ever finished was Italo Calvino's *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler*. 

47
Paul Buchanan

I flirt with women. I date them. I speak with them the charged language of sexual innuendo. I seduce them or allow myself to be seduced. But at the moment of highest anticipation and curiosity, when she begins to unbutton buttons or unzip zips, I hastily recall an urgent errand and leave the room promising to return. This can be inconvenient if we are in my apartment, but it is important that I escape before the mysterious unseen is revealed.

I call the woman in an hour, using a husky policeman’s voice, and tell her that I have been run over by a Toyota or that my body has been found floating in a public swimming pool. A simple obituary in the Times adds credibility. At times a tasteful funeral is necessary. I move to a new apartment. I change my name and habits. Nothing is lost.

I was in therapy for several years. The doctor told me that my condition stemmed from an intense fear of death. (The ultimate ending! The ultimate suspense!) I think he may have been on to something, but as we neared a personal breakthrough - when my sessions seemed to teeter on the brink of crucial self-discovery - I had him notified that I had fallen into the machinery of a Ferris wheel and had been torn neatly into seven pieces. He was skeptical, but the elaborately staged, closed casket funeral (involving seven, small custom made coffins for my various body parts) convinced him.

At one point my vast, fabricated web of past lives nearly raveled. Three friends, each of whom knew me under a different name, saw me rushing out of a cinema seven minutes into Ferris Beuller’s Day Off. They had all attended one or another of my funerals that year, and my sudden appearance caused them some consternation.

To soothe them I explained that I was enrolled in the government’s witness protection program after testifying against the Swedish Mafia, and that it was my lot to forever be killed and resurrected under different names. I swore them to secrecy and promised them an invitation to my next funeral, at which there would be hors d’oeuvres.

Dutifully, I threw a lavish funeral at Oak Lawn and made sure there was plenty to eat.
Paul Buchanan

But eventually my vast inheritance (left to me by a grandfather who invented the taffy folding machine you see at amusement parks) abruptly ran dry. I did not foresee this misfortune because I never read my bank statements. (Imagine my suspense writing check after check on an account that I have never balanced!)

With no money remaining, I could not afford my lavish, abortive lifestyles. I would have to get a job. I would have to stop moving and changing my name. I could no longer afford a single funeral. My life lost its meaning.

I went to job interviews, but enjoyed the suspense of waiting for my prospective employer’s call, so I could not bring myself to answer the phone. I fell into a deep depression. I considered contemplating suicide.

I was eventually hired to work in the same, small library where I have read the first chapters of thousands of novels. But on the morning of my first day on the job, overcome with anticipation, I called and let them know that I was lost at sea. My body was never recovered. This spared me the expense of a funeral.

In my despondency I turned to writing poetry. I sent my work to several magazines, but when the self-addressed manila envelopes returned in the mail, I stared at them for hours, savoring the dramatic tension, never opening them. This scenario proved so electrifying, I wrote more poems and sent them to more magazines. My living room filled with unopened self-addressed stamped envelopes.

Acquaintances tell me that I am now the most famous American poet since Frost. I am loved by critics and public alike. My admirers intimate that several well reviewed collections of 12 line sonnets have appeared in my name. The woman who says she is my agent is instructed to deposit the royalties directly into my checking account without telling me. Nor is she to tell how my Pulitzer nomination turns out.

The author would have finished this story had he not died after eating some suspicious crab meat.
Daphne knows why she acts the way she acts.
She’s had a rough childhood that’s why.
How rough?

Rough enough to spawn a plethora of unresolvable issues with her parents that now mingle dangerously close to a tragically low self-esteem thereby setting the stage for a series of heart wrenching situational depressions triggered by not much more than the daily occurrence of life.

And that’s just for starters.
With dozens of designated afflictions running amuck amid thousands of undiagnosable symptoms she’s a veritable Heinz 57 of instability set to go off any time.
There ought to be a monument in her name.

Her friends suffer from similar though somewhat less debilitating conditions are entirely sympathetic constituting as they do an up and coming wave of psychological cripples. With Daphne marching bravely in the lead the neighbors don’t know what to think.

The news spreads quietly at first from word of mouth alone but as the media coverage kicks in neophytes pour out of the woodwork eager for a piece of the pie. Merely caught up in the fashion they are detested by the original true believers who were verifiably miserable long before the advent of style.

“How long have you felt this way?” Daphne demands of one. “I’ve always felt this way.” “You don’t look that bad. Maybe it’s just indigestion.”

Unwittingly, by not validating his experience she’s provided him a far more valuable social stigmata. Rejection from an expert witness. He runs off to organize the outcasts into competing groups each with
their own logo and gang color.
Soon plans for an Olympics of Despair are in the works
because the public demands to know. Who’s real and who’s only faking
is the question of the day.
Crass commercialism at its worst but what can Daphne do?

Official concern grows when polls indicate
most people are perfectly content being miserable. All measures to re­di­rect the movement prove futile.
The FBI cannot infiltrate because, upon contact their agents
enlist in secret. Scientists at the Center for Disease Control
slip into catatonic states when they fail to determine methods
of transmission. Even politicians who voted for the disadvantaged
scurry off to join the swelling ranks.

“What the hell is wrong with you?”
Daphne screams to the jeering crowds.
“What the hell is wrong with you?”
they parrot back in return,
laughing through the literal burn of metaphorically caustic tears.

That’s the report as of yesterday. No changes in sight today. Nuclear
war being considered. Don’t forget to watch the sky.
Music, Mystery, and the Art of the Unsayable

David St. John’s most recent collection of poems, Study for the World’s Body was a National Book Award Finalist. Where the Angels Come Toward Us, a book of essays, reviews and interviews was published in 1995 by White Pine Press. Among his awards are the Ingram Merrill Foundation Grant in Poetry, the Rome Fellowship in Literature awarded by the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, and a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship in Poetry. He received his M.F.A. from the Iowa Writer’s Workshop at the University of Iowa and has taught at a number of colleges including the University of Iowa, Oberlin College, and The Johns Hopkins University. Currently he teaches at the University of Southern California.

On a sunny afternoon as skaters paced the sidewalks of Venice, California, St. John met with Northridge Review former editor, Luisa Villani at the upstairs loft of Novel Cafe. With the spines of books lining the walls around them the conversation began with a discussion of the paradigm of language.

Villani: Let me start by bringing up something from Richard Jackson’s book Acts of Mind: Conversations with Contemporary Poets. In your interview with Jackson you said (and I’m paraphrazing here) that it takes a young writer about six years before they can approximate the correct voice presence in a poem.

St. John: As a teacher what I’ve found is that it really does take a young writer about six years of writing fairly seriously to work their way through their influences and arrive at a voice that represents them. In other words this doesn’t mean they’re not writing terribly competent and winning poems up until that time, but it
usually takes them that long until they mature to a point where they come upon a voice in their poems that they feel in some ways embodies who they are.

For me it’s important to think of poems as being verbal enactments of sensibility. Poems are pieces of consciousness. Just in the way you watch an adolescent go through all these presentational exercises, whether they dye their hair, cut their hair, dreadlock their hair (I watched my son go through this ten years ago), it’s all part of forging a presence in the world. For an adolescent it has to do with forging a physical presence as well as sculpting a kind of identity that they feel is individual. Poetic activity seems to me identical because poets have to create for themselves or reinvent for themselves a language that belongs to them. It’s important that stylistically the language represents their sensibility. Poets do this whether they write in traditional forms or “free verse.” Someone sculpts the mask of who they are in language. That’s how we begin to understand particular poets’ voices; we begin to see it. We see it through language and style.

Villani: You’ve also said that you find what you say inseparable from the way you say it. Do you feel the style of the poem is married to the content?

St. John: Style does seem to me an inseparable part of this. The things we talk about in poems are basically all the same—love and loss, death and life—it’s the particularities, the details, the specifics of a particular kind of content and more importantly the way in which something is said that’s crucial to the experience. The other thing you have to understand is that I believe poems are experiences, not objects. We experience another person’s sensibility and manner of perception in a poem. The poem is not an object to be regarded, just as I think any piece of art is an experience and not an object.

So, a poem is an experience. You’re experiencing another person’s consciousness as they perceive the world, as they reflect upon a particular dilemma or situation. The poet’s job is to create in his or her voice an experience that gives the reader the details from which they can draw their own conclusions. The poet should
never draw conclusions for the reader.

Villani: Why is it when poets get further into their careers we often hear them say, “I really don’t like my first book,” or “I don’t like my earlier work?” Is that part of the progression, finding that voice, finding that mask, realizing that you tried something on and it wasn’t right?

St. John: I think often what happens is that poets will publish too soon. They’ll publish a book of poems that in retrospect makes them feel uncomfortable because they feel it’s a book that reflects influence and imitation. Any first book in truth is going to do that. It’s just inevitable. Often poets disown early work in ways that seem silly because it’s wonderful early work and there’s no reason for them to disown it, but poets get tired of themselves just like anybody else. They also get tired of people assuming they know how a poet writes. Take a poet like W. S. Merwin. What’s extraordinary about Merwin is the way he manages to reinvent himself from book to book. He tends to write books in pairs with stylistic similarities. Look at The Vixen, his most recent book. In the stanzaic form of that book he created for himself a new poetic paradigm with which to work, a new way in which to push his breath as a poet. It’s a way of keeping himself amused, entertained and excited about the poems he’s writing.

Villani: So these shifts are a tactic to combat boredom?

St. John: Poets have different reasons for shifting what’s been even a successful style. The thing that you find in American poetry that’s somewhat disheartening is that once a poet hits upon a style that’s somewhat successful you often see them mining that style over and over until somebody gets it, or until they win the prizes they think they should be winning. I think that’s unfortunate because it precludes an opportunity for them.

Villani: It lacks discovery?

St. John: They may discover things within what they already do
well, but it would be interesting to see what they might do well that they don’t know yet.

Villani: Let’s talk about this in terms of your work then. You’ve said that in your early work you don’t like the sense of resignation or acquiescence, and you’ve also talked about your latter work in reference to using writing as a discovery of something a bit more unexpected or obscure.

St. John: I’m glad you brought that up. I don’t mind as much that sense of acquiescence in the earlier poems, especially the poems of The Shore. It seems to me a perfectly sane and mature response now. I think in the interview where I said that, I was at the time looking for something that would seem more active in how the poems were engaging themselves with the material. In fact the kind of meditative style of the poems in The Shore is perfectly natural. That distant sensibility now seems very accurate for those poems.

Villani: Where does the sense of discovery tie in to all this?

St. John: The discovery has to do with what I call mystery and with where poetry is at in this country.

There are two things that seem to be missing most from American poetry. The first is a sense of music. All poetry whether it’s written in traditional forms or not has to rely upon a profound sense of verbal music. The second thing—which is in more a dire absence—is the lack of a sense of mystery. I don’t mean obscurity or mystification. I mean real mystery in an almost, I don’t want to say religious sense, but in an ancient sense. There’s a mystery at the heart of the things we care most about. It seems to me poetry’s greatest virtue is its artistic form of language with which we can reach closest to those things that we’re least able to say. In other words the more prosaic elements of our lives and existence are those we can talk about with relative ease. We can talk about them with intelligence and humor. We can talk about them in moving ways and there are many poets who’ve built their careers and their aesthetics having chosen to do that. However, it seems to me that the things that are most difficult to talk about, those kinds of deep
resonant mysteries at the heart of why we love, why we care about the things we care about, what is faith—whether in other people or something else—that there’s some really urgent pulsing mystery that is finally unsayable. That doesn’t bother me because poetry is like firing tracer bullets into those dark caves of that mystery and it illuminates it, however briefly, with language.

Villani: Lighting a cave? Are we talking about the possibility of an epiphany?

St. John: Everyone’s had the experience of having some sort of epiphany or revelation—with or without chemical substances—where they suddenly feel in Huxley’s terms, “the doors of perception” thrown open. They see something about the mystery and the workings of the world that’s a revelation. Usually these things happen to us in ways that are non-verbal, as when you see a great abstract painting and you’re moved. Something happens to us in the experience but it’s not verbal.

Well, here you have an art form that relies upon language. The ways in which we’re used to using language are reductive and explanatory. In daily life we use language to get things done. What a poem can do is function like a painting or a sculpture. It can provide a kind of linkage of understanding through the medium of words that allows us to make a recognition that we wouldn’t have made otherwise.

What disappoints me in a lot of contemporary poetry is that language is used in its most available and in some ways domesticated form. The reason I think that’s a problem is because those possibilities for revelation are instantly diminished. I don’t want to presume to dictate anyone’s ambition. Any poet, any fiction writer can write in any way they feel matters to them. That’s their choice and their decision. I’m trying to explain why this is important to me, why it seems to be really urgent at this point in my work to try and find ways to approach poetry that are even more demanding, that approach, even more, what is unsayable.

Villani: Is there a danger in this?
St. John: The traditional danger to mystic writers is they quit writing. They move into a space where they simply chose not to write. I’m not interested in that. I’m not interested in personal salvation. I’m interested in poems that do the things poems do best.

Villani: It seems another thing to consider here is the semantics of “accessibility” versus “elitism,” because it would be a danger to have a world in which only poets could appreciate poetry.

St. John: This is a classic argument where poets say “I want to make the language simple so that more people can understand my poem.” My experience has been that audiences and readers are not afraid of difficulty. They are afraid of pretension, of a poet’s self-aggrandizement, of boredom. They’re perfectly willing to be challenged or provoked. They want to experience something that they haven’t experienced. It’s not an argument that persuades me because it’s contrary to my experience with people who love poetry.

Certainly if you were to walk into a room of people who may or may not be readers of poetry, the simpler the language in a poem the more quickly they’ll understand it. Readers of poetry though strike me as a brave bunch, a group of readers willing to read something more than once. I think the poems I want to write are difficult but not elitist. I think in fact, if anything, they resemble the most common kinds of ancient prayers of preliterate times. I think they’re ancient shamanistic ambitions with contemporary guises. They may wear Armani shirts but they’re still the most ancient of ambitions because they’re songs.

Let me ask you a question. What do you think the purpose of a poem should be? What is a poem? Why do people read them? Why do they exist?

Villani: That’s two different questions, why poems exist and why people read them. I think for any writer the question of why to write is linked very closely with why we live and why we die. There’s a compelling need to know. That compulsion leads me to think life is not separated into pockets of existence because we all end up at the same point.
St. John: You think it’s a whole sensibility.

Villani: Yes. I can certainly live it separately but I’d be short-changing myself. There’s a sublime subtlety to putting the letter “B” next to the letter “E,” and that subtlety gives me something to ponder. That subtlety carries off the page for me. I think people write and read to find that subtlety.

What I’m seeing personally as I progress is that along the way if you’re serious your dedication gets tested and people will drop out because they haven’t faced the question, what am I doing here? “Here” in terms of life and in terms of writing. One of the most frustrating things as a young poet in a workshop is to try and give somebody information about “here,” about what you find in their work and to see they’re not willing to come back to the page.

St. John: What I’ve discovered is that with even those people who seem most resistant to what a peer or teacher is saying, often a year or two later they’re able to hear it. It all has to do with one’s own progression as a writer. Sometimes you’re able to hear a kind of criticism and sometimes you’re not. It doesn’t particularly bother me if a student of mine seems unreceptive. I recently had someone say to me that the criticism she had in workshop from two years ago was just now starting to make sense to her, that finally she could hear it.

Villani: Is this true for graduate students and undergraduates? I’m wondering if graduate students are more receptive.

St. John: Graduate students have very different needs which make them resistant in very different ways, all of which have to do with their own sort of psychic survival. Undergraduates are in general much more receptive.

I really think the most important thing a young writer can do is read. If a young writer can be resistant to my suggestions or criticisms that doesn’t bother me, but if a young writer is resistant to the idea of reading then I know he or she will never write. It’s that clear. It’s hard for them to stay interested because they won’t
write if they don’t read. Give me any young writer—and I don’t care how mediocre their work seems—if they’re a voracious reader, if I tell them, “Go look at this passage of Rilke, go look at this book of Paul Celan’s, go look at Emily Dickinson,” and by the next week they’ve read those poems, then I know they’ve got a good chance.

Villani: I wanted to ask you about your translations because we were talking about the importance of language and enactment. For a work that has been translated many times we start to see vast differences in the nuances which make the poem alive. When you think about the words being married to the subject, or so closely linked, does that really mean in order to truly understand the poem you have to go back and read it in its original language?

St. John: No. I think that what you do is you make available to yourself those translations by poets you trust and whose sensibilities you trust. For instance Vasko Popa translated by Charles Simic is a good match. There’s a translator of Neruda who I won’t name whose famous for his errors, for his liberties, for inserting lines that aren’t there, things like that. Fortunately we have great translators like Alastair Reid, W.S. Merwin, Robert Bly.

My attitude towards translation is the more versions of something I can see, the better. Inaccuracy bothers me, but you have to realize that the poet translating is trying to do that most difficult thing. He’s trying to recreate in this other language an experience of the poem that’s somewhat akin to the experience in the original language.

One of the reasons I think Willis Barnstone’s anthology, *Modern European Poetry* is a wonderful collection is that Barnstone selected brilliantly from all of the available translations in all of these languages. That made me realize what a good ear Barnstone has and how trustworthy an editor he is. Certainly there are alternate versions of many of the poems in that anthology and you could go find them. I’ve probably read six different translations of the *Duino Elegies* by Rilke and I learned something from each one.

Villani: Why did you choose to translate Baudelaire?
St. John: The two versions of Baudelaire that are in Study for the World’s Body captured something I felt had been missing. There are great translations of Baudelaire including Richard Howard’s, but it seems to me that there’s some element of danger missing in some of the translations I’ve read because one rarely gets the sense of why Baudelaire was so upsetting to the readers of his time, for other than little things like heresy and obscenity. The book was also brought to trial for other reasons. It was deeply disturbing to the culture of the time because the work dealt with how the modern mind was working.

I wanted to do something in my versions of those poems that would give a sense of that darkness, that complexity, that real sense of danger in Baudelaire’s work.

Villani: What were some of your first experiences in working with translations?

St. John: I was out of graduate school at the University of Iowa and working on the quarterly there, The Iowa Review, and a friend was working as the administrative assistant for the International Writing Program and he introduced me to an Iranian poet, Reza Baraheni?

Reza was very well known. He’d been thrown in jail by the Shah twice. Finally PEN (Poets Essayists Novelists) got him out of jail and he came to the United States. He wrote for Harper’s, the New York Review of Books, sort of anti-Shah articles. He’d taught at universities and his English was perfect.

This friend asked me if I would help Reza with some translations, a book of poems about being in jail, about being raped by the guards, a very political, very savage book, because of the subject matter. There was a particular long poem that Reza wanted help with. You have to understand, his English was perfect. He had translated Eliot and Joyce from English into both Turkish and Farsi. His knowledge of the language couldn’t have been better. I was happy to help but I asked him why he wanted me to.

He said no matter how good his English was, he was not a native speaker, and there were things that he thought he might
make musical and rhythmic mistakes about, and mistakes in phrasing that I, because I'm native, would never make. He said, "You know in English what it is I want."

Reza was so sophisticated in terms of languages—he spoke I think six or seven—that he knew he had to have these young poets to sort of stand guard over his translations to make sure they were the best that they could be.

Villani: That's interesting to hear about someone who understood the rigors of language so well that he knew when he needed assistance. It seems that the most resonating poets are the ones who approach their craft with reverence, no matter what language they're writing in. How do we carry that resonating reverence into our lives, or do we just let it stay locked on the page?

St. John: I think it all touches upon the basic question, "How do we name the unnamable?" How do we touch the kind of basic mystery that informs our lives. We're still a Puritan culture and the idea of transformation and ecstasy is very difficult for Americans, less so to cultures that have a longer tradition of excess and abandon. Americans are laced-up, which makes the idea of mystery very alarming. It either has religious connotations or sexual connotations. Mystery is one of the things that as a culture we're not good at addressing, but poetry can do this.

I have an interesting anecdote about this. In the past twenty years that I've been at universities teaching poetry, maybe three or four times a year I'll get a phone call from someone outside the university who's been told to call me because I'm sort of the poet in the area. The nature of the phone call is always the same. The person wants to know if I can help them locate a particular poem, something they've read, usually in high school, sometimes in college. They describe to me a little about the poem, what it was about, what it was like, and I'll try and help them locate this poem.

Early on I began to ask these people why they wanted to locate these poems, and the answer was always the same. They'd recently lost somebody close to them, father, mother, daughter. There had been some close death and what these people felt was
There had been some close death and what these people felt was that they had no language commensurate with their grief. They had no language with which to speak their grief, but they remembered that there was this example somewhere in their past, this poem that had moved them. They instinctively knew that what this poem had done was to have tapped a depth of emotion that was unique in their experience and they wanted to see the poem again because they think if they read it again they'd understand a way to give voice to the things they're feeling.

Villani: That's a pretty powerful example.

St. John: It's one of the things I think of when people ask me why poetry matters. It's really simple. Poetry gives people the language for things they don't have language for. As a culture we're not good at giving people the ways to talk about complex responses and emotions. The poetry becomes a kind of paradigm of how to contend with language. How do we deal with difficult passages? We can bust up the hotel room. We can yell and scream, but how do we do it with language? A poet's job is to free words from the meanings that have imprisoned them. Language becomes petrified. Words become petrified. A poet's job is to defossilize.

Villani: Do you think it's possible for someone to get that benefit from the poem, to make that deeper connection, then meet the poet and be terribly disappointed, because we did say earlier that the poet learns to find a mask from which to speak?

St. John: We have to remember that writers are often extremely elegant liars. We certainly have extraordinary evidence that artists we love and admire have been monsters in their personal lives.

Villani: How do we reconcile this?

St. John: We all have our ways to understand how someone we admire tremendously is somebody—if we sat next to at dinner—would make us want to throw up. It's a very difficult thing.
Certainly there are times when there are things you discover about a particular artist that really makes it impossible to appreciate their work in the same way.

What I would say is that there are wonderful paintings, wonderful poems, wonderful pieces of music, by people who I know I would loath if I met them. I still try to appreciate the art that they made. One can say to oneself that these artists are trying to bring a more idealized understanding of the world into their art than they were able to bring into their personal lives. You can make any argument you want but it's probably going to be insufficient. You either recognize and deal with the art for what it is or it isn't.

The thing about poetry is you engage in a type of personal transaction when you read a poem. I think the experience of loving somebody's poem and then going to a reading and being disappointed by the way in which they read the poem should not diminish your appreciation. That poet may just be a terrible reader. However, if you go to a reading and what you see is the poet congratulating himself on his own sensitivity, then I think the disappointment is valid. The poet has to come through for you and I don't think that's asking too much. This touches on the self-absorption I see erupting in poems all around me where poets are basically asking their readers, "Aren't I sensitive? Isn't this moving?" These poets are asking their readers to congratulate them on their deep feelings. Well, the readers have deep feelings too.

I think each reader has to negotiate this on his or her own. It's even more complicated if you're trying to be a writer and there's a writer you particularly admire, and suddenly you spend some time with that writer and your disappointment is compounded by your admiration. Then you say to yourself, "What do I do with this information?"

As a human being you try to understand that the world is painfully complicated and as a writer you realize there are things you love and admire in that writer's work and which you can make use of in your own. You just don't want to make use of that person's life as an example.

Villani: That's good advice for young poets, but it's also very
sobering. How would you like to close this interview?

St. John: I think there's the tendency to think of the things I have to say about mystery and poetry as being intrinsically looking for a poetry that feels rarefied or elitist. I think in fact that this is the most democratic and elemental of all poetics. If you look at the origins of poetry from the pagan days, from Greek days, and its linkage to music and dance, you realize it's a celebration. Those poems, those performances, those dances, were all in celebration of how little we understood, of how much was beyond us. It's always those things that are beyond us that we need to celebrate, to honor, to praise. If we don't praise what is "other" than ourselves then we do lose our connection because we lose our empathy.

Just remember, poetry is capable of a great empathy because it can praise what is other than itself.
sails inhale,
the boat resurrects
on tracks of wind.
behind the horizon,
fists of forecasted clouds.
Where I Got This Grin

Other lovers
may be bound
by rules
but our bed flies
through the G-force
our limbs boomerang in space
re-emerge inside each other’s sockets
the wettest place on earth
is where we meet.
Bury me, bruja,
under your stone.
My dust doing cartwheels
forever into yours.
Wire

thirteen, seven, we find a beginning
in ourselves, and beginnings move, circle
toward destruction. it’s a coiling
of wire. eight, twelve. it’s a threading inward,
a helpless and rapid removal of more golden distance.
negative
two, twelve
negative ten,
five.
it’s all copper and fiber/optics,
a meshing together of technologies,
a twisting of purpose to make
sculptures from numbers and numbered sculptures
from negative ten, negative four.
it’s a naming, an invocation
of anti/thetic kay-bell-ism--
ex and why,
ex & why, no and yes,
no and know and ex & why
and why the binary apathy
all of a sudden, the apprehension
of ex and why, ex & why,
confronting generations, genes con/
flicting, perpendicular
realities,
linear modes pulled toward meaning--
negative three, negative
ten.
falling into four, falling into negative ten.
nine,
negative five.
20 points inside the body, 20 points growing
from somewhere in the hand
and foot and neck and groin,
where in the chest.
a phone rings with no one on the line,
the line curving inward,
the silence spiraling, a nautilus of compaction,
the compacting
being something not inside
the in-
different, not inside
the receiver.
nine,
one.
a phone doesn’t ring and a phone
doesn’t ring, five, five, a phone
doesn’t ring, and a page goes unanswered,
one,
five.
negative two, two.
negative two,
negative one.
zero,
negative three.
wires tap message-less inside like veins
emptied of their blood. two,
negative three.
three,
negative two. three,
zero.

insides are all meshed copper,
fiber/optic without function,
no keys struck.
two, one.
no device sound.
nexus below throat.
light falling.
atoms shutting down.
one,
one.
the final spinning
into zero point origins
that last forever.
Dressing French

I squeezed in
close to my father.
My uncle, tall and sparkling,
climbed in next.
His furrowed face,
turned down towards mine,
exposed a half century
of feeling.

Long tangled gold chains
hung like tinsel around his neck.
His chemise
opened down to the buckle
revealed a majestic myriad
of auburn bristle.

I pretended I could understand
the soft sheaths of language
that divided us.
The gentle smile,
twinkle,
the cologne, probably Armani,
that gesture that made my father’s brother
a mystery,
my American culture,
the one I couldn’t accept,
lifeless.

I pictured myself:

How elegant
I would be
walking,
smiling,
dressing,
French.

I kissed him good-bye -
once on each cheek-
and I cried.
Porno/Violin - Laaaaaaa!

Pornography in pictures - but the violins. There are violins, but not in the pictures. Pornography's in the pictures. The violins are being played. The pornography is old. It is old because the people who are displayed openly and in the light are old. If the people are old, this does not mean the pornography is old. It could be new pornography displaying old people. This is not true. It is old pornography displaying old people. The young do not belong in pornography. They do not need pornography. The old need pornography, because the old should not move - they are old. They should watch. The young are meant to move, to go - in-and-out, to go - lick-gurgle-lick, to go - bite, gnaw, gnaw, bite. The violins are careful -careful violins. They are careful not to squeak or stutter while the old look at their pornography. The old must concentrate, to wonder and drool over a thigh, or penis, or anus, or ear. The violins are played in the corner - 4 violinists. The old men and women masturbate, sitting in chairs, to pictures - 6 old men and women - to porno pictures.

Pg. 22 - Taken from the magazine - "Two tons of love", read by Steven. Steven - "I do enjoy it immensely, though, I am unable to see the penis or vagina entering one another. Not once. Or anus. Or the penis entering the anus. Mouth I can see. I can see the penis entering the mouth. The ripples of skin that overlap and stretch on top of each other, again, and again, and again prevent me from seeing all the usual forms of penetration. This is good. Very good. They are just two bodies then - slam-packed! Sorry. Sorry. That was not an appropriate word to use. It was a good word to use. slam-packed! Two bodies together - the intercourse, the actual intercourse is left for me to find, or imagine, or create with a pencil or crayon on the picture itself. It is hidden. I have paid to observe a penis entering a vagina or anus and they hide behind flabby-flab. That penis is a scared penis. It's afraid I'm going to find it under all that warm blooded skin and stick it somewhere dirty and moist. Well Mr. Penis man, I can't stick you anywhere. You're a picture. Hear me Mr. Penis man! Come out! I have given up on the vagina. It is hidden in the flabby-flab. The penis sticks out, maybe. It has nothing to do with the flabby-flab. The vagina is sewn into it. I feel sympathy for the vagina, it can't get
Chris Cole

away. It’s eternally trapped in the flabby-flab.”
Pg. 22 Description - Fat tub-man. Fat tub-woman. Woman on top of
man. Plenty of skin. Woman's skin - scarred with acne, full of hair.
Man's skin - A brown blotched, freckled woof-woof. Facial expres­
sions {Both} - mouths closed. Eyes closed. Cheeks, forehead, and lips­
calm.
The violins were found in the closet of the house. A wide closet.
Without any windows! Without any windows! Heee-heee! The clos­
et had shelves - 12 shelves. All 12 shelves - stacks of pornography on
all 12 shelves. There is a variety of pornography offered on these 12
shelves. A variety that is willing to venture beyond the traditional big
tit, big dick, big ass, mighty balls, full hairy pussy, hairy yum-yum
butt, traditional yawn-yawn routine. Those other kinds - The ones
with old men, dead adults, and furry animals. why not? Old men,
dead adults, and furry animals have holes too, tight loving holes that
can be pushed in and out of. But more importantly, photographed.
Without the photograph it isn't pornography, is it? The camera is
needed. Remember, the camera is needed!
The violins are on the floor of the closet. An arm, just an arm - with a
hand, with a hammer in the hand = Hammer hits the top shelf -
Breaks the shelf = Pornography goes to floor. Hammer hits the 5
remaining shelves = The five remaining shelves break, and more
pornography, much more, goes to the floor. All the pornography is on
the floor. With the violins now. Violins are more expensive than
pornography. Pornography requires two bodies - Usually two bodies
- Usually two human bodies, and lights and a room and a camera.
That shit-cheap! Violins must be assembled. They’re a craft item,
with many parts. The parts are cut from old, old, oak tree. Then
shaped. Someone must be paid to cut, shape, and assemble it. This
someone is paid well. These Someones are paid well! Why? There
aren’t that many of these Someones around, only a select few who
have been selected, trained, and passed - tests can do this. Two bodies
in a room - one putting something in the other can be done immedi­
ately and almost by anyone - right?
The violins and the pornography are in the closet. These are not fan­
tasy items that will begin to talk, walk, or jump to each other or
around each other. They are dead objects that must be picked up and
used. One of the violins lies on top of a picture. The picture of a man
She-male = Puck! Puck! What the violin prevents anyone from seeing due to its large wood base is - only the male's ass and the She-male's toes - only that, and such a large wood base too! The toes are needed! What is seen is a large hair man's penis in a pink-white tushy. This tushy has a groan. And the groan has a penis - biggest. The toes tell us what is happening. curled toes - Thrusting penis. straight (Relaxed) toes - Withdrawing penis. There are no toes. The pornography and violins are to be positioned - repositioned. That will do something. Maybe something. A someone opens the closet door. A child's voice describes what is happening - "The magazines are going, are going in the middle. In the middle of the room. The instruments are around it. They're in a circle that goes around the magazine. "Repositioned = Magazines - Center. Violins surround the center = In a circle. Circle! Circle! If someone wanted to read a piece of pornography - Look at, not read! Look at, not read! They would have to step over or jump over the violins to get to the pornography. They could kick the violins away, then walk to the pornography. No stepping over or jumping over needed then. The violins will not be kicked. The majority of the people that enter this room respect violins - They are expensive and appear on television.

Violins on television - Held by men in black suits. Always black suits. To play for an audience. The man holding the violin and wearing the black suit appears on stage. The man will play for 2 hours. He will be watched for 2 hours. Then the audience will leave. The T.V. turned off. That will happen.

A person opens the closet door. He has been told there is pornography in this room, that is why he is here. No one told him - violins were here. The violins make him not think of Breasts, Lace, and La-la Lips. The violins disrupt these-items as desirable and needed. The violins want other things. Things that make him curious. Breast, Lace, and La-la Lips aren't curious. No! No! No! Same thing always happens with them! Yes! Indeed! Yes! Same thing - Look at - Pink panties up ass, Dick in mouth = then rub! Rub! Rub! Rubbbbb!!!! Up! Down! Downy! Downy! Up - come! - Close magazine. Violins want those things found in rooms with walls and a boy, adolescent or man. Pick a boy. A boy = A boy in a room with playing violins. There cannot be other people here - In the room - Present. Only the boy.
Chris Cole

Why cannot other people be present? The violins would not want this! Not at all! No! They want the boy alone. They do not want to contend with dialogue, movement, and you know, you know. The violins believe they would lose! They would not. Anyway. The boy is dressed for play. To play-hopscotch, hide-and-seek, and peek-a-boo. He will do none of that here. He will listen to violins. But it is Saturday at ten o' clock, and Saturday at ten o' clock this boy plays hopscotch with Henry and Sally, his down-the-street pals. This is what he wants to do. He will not do this. The door is locked. The violins play. Play what? They play something that violins play. The boy wants out. He is not getting out. He turns the knob, kicks the door, and screamy, scream, screams. Door does not open. It is locked. The violins want the boy to listen. They want him to do something as a result of this listening. He is not listening he is screaming, crying, and pulling his own hair. These reactions are not a result of the playing violins. It is because he is trapped, and alone. No mommy at all here.- But there are violins. And they're playing. Playing all by themselves. Yes, indeed. They must be alive. How can they play by themselves if they are not alive? He is not alone - Boy thinks that. Boy - Stops crying and listens. The violin makes a honking clown noise - Honkety - Honk - Conk - Honk. Special self playing violins can do this. The boy jumbles his legs and Laugh - Laugh - Laughs. He is not alone and the violins are funny. The violins want him to dance. Not play but dance. Definite distinction here ---- Play - Kick the ball, Crawl in the sand, The swing set - legs up, legs down. Play has no other meaning than play. Play will be forgotten until it is time to play again. Dance different. Dance not an action. It is an act, like a sex act or violent act. Dance has consequences - Not just - High pitched flaky voice - "Wiggle that ass and Shake, Shake, Shake." If someone were to position their shoulder, calf, arm, etc... So that it might lead to penis erections, wet vaginas, or blood stained skin, that position would be remembered - In the case of the penis erection or the wet vagina - Written down - Drawn out, in a picture, used for masturbation later. In the blood stained skin instance - Used for possible trial proceedings. The positioning would be videotaped and marked - Evidence number 27 ---- The boy does not play, he does dance! He knows not to play, but to dance. Anyway, he would not want to play, anyway. He thinks play would be a silly thing to do here. It is not appropriate.
Yes - A boy thinks that! There will be no ballroom dancing here. Or Fred Astaire dancing. Or Hip Hop - Club dancing. That dancing is for the public, the public that loves their children and eats chocolates. No one watches here - except violins and violins are not people. They do not have children or eat chocolates. The boy will do dancing that does not depend on a rhythm or form, or calculation. For instance - Someone - "One step, two step, one step, two step. back straight! Heel to the side! Now twist and shake." He will do dancing that cannot be organized into a routine. It will be a mixture of positions that will be captured and stored away and drooled on later. He bangs his knees together. The violins are playing. He bangs his knees together some more. How can they take this from him? He stops. He shakes his chest. This is not good, a pattern is forming. Knees to chest. Someone could remember this or write it down - Bang knees, then shake chest. They need to take one away - Immediately, doesn't matter which. Just one. Taking away one stops the pattern. The banging of the knees. The violins do not need the knees. The knees can still be used to be straight or be bent. Need just the banging. The banging will be enough. So they take it! Take the banging. How to take the banging? - Snatch the motion. The motion is invisible = Clear, and non-smelling. Without the motion - Straight clear knees. No banging possible - Without the mo-mo-mo-motion. The violins have extra string-in case of this. Motion can be tied - confined by the tie - no! Yes! No! Yes! Violin strings can tie motion. Violin strings can do this - Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! The motion is tied - Then divided into three and tied again. The tied motion is put inside three of the violins. How do violins do this? They do this! The boy looks at his fingers and thinks of his face. His fingers and hands can go in stuff. He can put stuff in his face. He puts his left fist in his mouth. This is good! Very good! The violins are pleased. This dance of his is not the traditional yawning - yawning - shut eye twice, shaking and jiggling - "A round we go, spin, spin, spin". The boy has discovered insertion. Putting things in holes! Insertion/Putting things in holes is a dance. The boy does not know this - It is his dance. He thinks he has to get back to shaking his rump-rump-rump booty some more. That's later anyway. He thinks it's later, anyway. He has many thing to try - Eyes, nose, mouth - Again, ears. Does nose - A two - fingers up his nose - A yo, yo, yo. Remember the boy does not consider this his dance - He wants to
finish the insertions - Then dance. The violins - It is his dance. The violins need a tune quickly to accompany this dance. The violins do the pluck. Plucking strings - The thick ones, not the little ones. The fingers stay in the nose - stuck? No. The fingers are exposed. The boy thinks of the sentence - Stop digging your nose. He thinks of someone telling him - "Stop digging your nose!" The violins know he is digging his nose. He thinks - I am not digging my nose. I'm not taking any bugger snots out. That's digging. I'm just putting my fingers in my nose, so there. So there! - To who? The violins. The violins are aware he is not digging his nose. If he were digging his nose he would have snatched the snot already and flicked it on the walls or possibly on one of them - the violins. The boy likes how his nostrils get bigger when his fingers are in them. He thinks of gorilla nostrils. He thinks it will be neat to have gorilla nostrils. He could be a gorilla for Halloween and everyone will think he is a real gorilla because he has gorilla nostrils. Gorilla nostrils are not only big - Wide too. His fingers clamp on to the back portion of each nostril so they won't fall out. His fingers swing back and forth - Back and forth - Back and forth - Back and forth - For wide gorilla nostrils. The violins no longer pluck, they do a hurry-do back - forth - back forth - back-forth - back - forth across their strings. They feel the boy is developing. He is moving beyond his insertive technique. That's just an in - and - out doee - ain't it? His fingers are working within the confines of the space allotted. Traditional dancing-people jump on floors, roll in sand, skip on water. So much space. But nostrils - very tiny, not much to do, requires some intelligence and nerve. Nerve - Many would have panicked, afraid their fingers would be stuck-permanently in their noses - This not good for family occasions or wedding anniversaries - Not good. Intelligent: fingers - Up-nose has never been interpreted as a dance routine. The boy is redefining this action which is generally disapproved of by the public at large = Example - Skinny/Fat mama named: Beatrice - "Arnold take your goddam fingers outta your nose and finish yer salad! No one wants to watch you picken' yer nose while they eat!" - As graceful, innovative, something to be practiced, taught, an action if done well - A.K.A - Professionally - People will pay to see. Seats are - $10.95 - children, $15.67 - adults, $11.22 - senior citizens. Wait! Wait! One violin does not agree with this! This whole thing! The violin wants to speak. It can't! It will! It does! Violins
can't talk regular - Regular like everybody else, regular. They must assume a type. Because. Because. Type picked- old man rocking chair, black hat man. Explanation - Old man rocking chair, Black hat man - All one thinggy. Violin - "I don't like this. I don't want this. This boy and his nose. His fingers belong somewhere else. Not in his nose. They tell me to play, to fiddle to this boy who is dancing. I see only his fingers in his nose. They shout it is a dance. It can be, not for me. A dance requires moving feet and smiles for me. Bodies that move. Please, some bodies that move. I refuse." This violin, who just spoke, stops playing. The boy does not notice. The violins do not either. The boy - done with nose. Why? Many other things to stick. Like eyes. The boy sticks his left eye with his right finger. The boy yells -"ouch!" The violins like this. This "Ouch". It is painful - they know this. Pain that is not waaa-waaa, boo-hoo, throw a tissue to him - type. No, this is a different sort of "Ouch". It can be stretched. It first has to be captured, then stretched, opened, and the violins are agreed there will definitely be more there than = Sob-Sniffle, Sniffle-Sob = If there is not more there, the boy will not be permitted to say "Ouch" when he sticks his finger in his eye. He must say something else! The violins have no need for a Sniffle - Waaa-Waaaa - Boo-hoo sorta "Ouch". That is ... That is.... Not good. Not here! So there! The boy again - Stick finger in eye - "Ouch!" The violins snatch at the "Ouch" like snatching violins do. Somebody who is just a somebody asks - "How do violins snatch words?" Explanation by a somebody who is more of a someone because he knows the answer - "Violins snatch words by manipulating the vibrations which are produced by the lace bow that rubs slowly or fastly against the steel strings. These vibrations will catch the "Ouch" in the air. The "Ouch" is also a vibration, not an actual "Ouch". There are many more violin vibrations than "Ouch" vibrations, so they'll get the "ouch." This someone who was more than a someone because he knew this, is - wrong. The violins are having difficulty in catching the "Ouch". Why? Somehow the "Ouch" is able to transform the vibrations of "Ouch" into the actual letters of "Ouch". So "Ouch" is floating in the air. A floating word? Yes! No! Yes! No! Yes! Yes! Yes! So what? The what is the vibrations do not have the ability. Ability is to take the "Ouch", restrain the "Ouch", put the "ouch" where they want it put, Putteeey! The violins must do it. Why? The "Ouch" is solid. It is material. What kind of material?
What are words made of? Sing - "Used to be ink, blue ink, black ink, or lead, pencil lead, Ta-Da." It's not ink! It's doughnut! The word is made from doughnut. How? It is! It is, how? This is the first actual floating word and it's made from doughnut! There! Fine. There! There!

Photo by Shoshana Grunwald
I write because there is a one-armed harmonica player wearing black suspenders to hold his pants up and a ratty soft white t-shirt and he is old and black and has white hair and he lives in my head and he can only make music when I write. I write because in my head there is also a homeless, drunk pantomime and a hospital ward full of deaf paraplegics and when I write I tell them to dance as soon as they hear him sing—and they do.

I write for the strawberry girl
who smiled as she knelt down by the side of the road.
I write one thought
one word
even just a letter
for every
laid back
Cadillac
insomniac
intoxicated
emancipated

full steam ahead
no holds barred
esoteric
enigmatic
or
automatic
thing I’ve ever done even if I only did it in my mind.

I write for the great spirit who dwells in the earth and in the sky and in every medium point, blue Bic pen because that’s where I feel him most.

For bubbles blown and the breath that fuels them, for tears shed and clothes shed and tool sheds, for hammers and nails and things that are built, I write.
Jenni Rosenhaft

There is a little girl in here
and she’s been afraid
for a very long time
and she’s far away
and safe

and hiding
and she makes me write sometimes too.

I stepped out of my musty barn into the misty
dew of the mid-summer, pre-dawn, half light.
As I took my first deep breath of the morning, before
submerging myself in dirty horse corrals, my lungs were
filled with cool air and the smell of fresh hay and hot
coffee... for these smells I write.

I write because I often get an itch that
I just can’t scratch.

I write because every time the phone rings, some part of me is sure it
will be the president finally asking for my advice and because some­
times late at night I can’t turn it off and the noise is so loud and there
are voices calling and yelling and chanting and explaining and asking
and music playing, or being played, and I can’t turn it off because noth­
ing is on so instead of reaching for a remote control, I write.

I write
because my muscles and bones and veins and capillaries and cells
and even my hair follicles ache afterward but it is a good ache like after
aerobics or a lot of sex and what all of my body
parts are telling me is that
I write
because I have to.

I write for every candle burned and the shadows cast by their flames,
mysterious on some random wall – solitary and sensual.

I write for chairs. Because for every mood there exists a perfect place to
sit. Now I feel like the forest green vinyl 1950’s beauty parlor in
Harlem or Tulsa chair with the hair drier helmet attached; but you don’t
know what that feels like, so I write.
I write for a place inside of me called Dakoda
- who is brave -
and sometimes that’s where I write from.

I write for the dusty busty, dirty old herdy gurdy man who sits by a trash bin that’s always full because even the garbage men won’t go where he is, to a place where the old brick buildings are tall and they block out the sun and a layer of soot shadows everything and clings like mildew in a Tilex commercial to everything and everyone in the herdy gurdy man’s world and I write because his world becomes my world sometimes.

I write for pin stripes
and polka dots
and plaid
and paisley
and flowery Hawaiian prints
and wild hoards of banshee tourists
who wear them all at the same time.

I write for tears – because they make paper wet but the ink makes it better. I write because I can make the rules up as I go and there is no congressional constitutional intergalactic law that matters as long as there’s a pen in my hand.

I write
because I think about
what I think about
what I think about
what I am thinking about
and I have to put it somewhere.

I write for the barely audible crushing crunchy sound the tires make when they roll over a layer of freshly fallen snow lying atop a lonesome gravel road and the taptap taptap taptap taptap rhythm created by the little girls with superior coordination who do fancy double-dutch tricks while they skip rope on the blacktop school yard at lunch time and one of those little girls is frail and her clothes are always too big because they were always someone else’s and she never has enough food in her tummy but she’s the best rope-skipper on the school yard and I write so sometimes she can be the heroin(e) instead of taking it.
Jenni Rosenhaft

I write for spoons
    and forks
    and knives
    and very formal table settings
with a set of utensils for each new morsel of extravagant food because I
know that sometimes it really is best just to use my hands.

Somewhere, there is an early morning walk on
a fog-thickened beach
with the white foam
and late winter chill whispering lullabies
and calling me to them;
in response,
I write.

Roaming the streets of a big city in the middle of nowhere is the bastard
child of a thousand wasted dreams
and he prepares himself for a new life:
the one just around the corner
the one he was meant to live
the one that must be just a phone call away ...
    more simple
    more meaningful
    more productive
    more elaborate
    more corporate
and instead of getting sucked into his magnetic force field of prepara-
tion and infinite anticipation,
instead of falling prey
to his insurmountable distrust of the present,
instead of being let down
by his insatiable thirst brought about
by an over consumption of reality,

instead of putting my faith and energy
into his false stability
I write.
MOST MORNINGS, BEFORE the early chorus of birds start their shit with me, I’ll close my eyes and hear EVERYTHING. Your knee will graze the sheets. It’s a soft sound, your skin against linen. I’ll hear Chairman Meow in the kitchen, slicking her tongue across her leg. I’ll even hear the shade in the attic as he plans his morning, pausing every once and again to look down on us.

THE SCREEN DOOR CLICKS shut behind you and keys skid across the kitchen counter. Outside, fireflies burn through the night like drunks. I open the refrigerator, reaching past jars of apricot fruit spread and Lucky Charms. I know you think it’s nonsense, but the marshmallows won’t shrink if they’re in the fridge, I swear it.

The phone rings.

It’s your mother. She never wants to hang up. Every time she senses an end to a conversation she desperately tries to prolong it. I hand you the phone - you hand me the cat food. I sludge the gruel into a plastic dish, and you nudge it under the table. Chairman Meow sneaks up on it, then barks.

“You’re a cat,” I break it lightly. “A cat.”

Upstairs, we change into comfortable clothes.

“Your friends were unbelievably rude to the waiter,” I complain. “What was their problem?”

“I don’t think they get out much,” you respond.

“Hell, I almost whacked your friend over the head with my shoe. I was gonna stab my chopsticks into her eye.”

“You should’ve.”

“I don’t get it,” I say. “Why do you find it so vital to keep things pretty between people? Why can’t you just let a few of your relationships go ugly?”

“I’m not you.”

“You have to learn to hate,” I say. “You have to.”

I wrap my arms around you and kiss your eye. And your nose. And your teeth. And your hair. The shade has the decency to stay away when we start kissing. Not all ghosts are rude, bless him.

These days, you have me out there fighting shadows, pumpkin. I remember when I could put my fingers to your lips and Braille read your words. Perfumed notes under the magnet, locks of your tired hair,
or little cards with wobbly words of love and a lipstick signature, “O”. We’re disappointing compared to the old textures of us. But I still love you.

I still kiss your knees when you’re cold.

WHEN I WAS small, I could close my eyes at night and feel my bed soaring, sailing between the clouds, twisting against the sky and the stars. But when my eyes opened, the trip would end immediately, returned to my room in a quiet jolt, the curtains fluttering against the window in a whisper.

When we become adults, we forget how to close our eyes.
We lose that ability to fly.

I dream about Grandfather: “When I was a young man,” he says, “I met the girl of my dreams. I fell in love for the very first time, and all the hurt I felt since childhood went away. But as it turned out, she was engaged to be married. Engaged to another man. And the hurt returned, as it always does. The wonders of the world were never the same after that. Frogs falling from the skies, Bigfoot, the Nazca lines, crop circles - those things made perfect sense compared to the mysteries of love -” Then someone unplugged him.

I wake up in the middle of the night to the sound of crickets and hens. I feel your pulse against my cheek. You’re awake too.

“My hand isn’t returning my phone calls,” I whisper. “It complains we never talk anymore. It says I’m distant. It suspects I’m seeing other hands.”

“Do you think it knows about us?”

“It just might,” I answer.

You think I’m crazy. When I was little, I heard that if you could draw a perfect circle it meant you were insane. I used to draw circles all day long, hoping at least one would come out wrong.

MY GRANDFATHER ONCE told me a story of a boy who imagined he had a third eye in the middle of his forehead. The boy believed so much in this auxiliary eye that powers soon sprang from his mind. He was able to chew corn with his thoughts, and subtract milk. It’s only later I discovered the story to be a half-truth. Milk cannot be subtracted.

“MY HOUSE IS haunted,” you told me. “It’s a young ghost, maybe eighteen or nineteen, I think.”

“So you’ve seen him?” I ask.

“Oh, sure - a couple of times.”
"How scary."
"It started with buttons. I kept finding them all over the house. On the floor, in the shower, under the bed, in the sink, everywhere you can think of. I’d check my clothes to see if I was losing them, but they weren’t mine."
"How many did you find?" I ask.
"After about a month? Fifty maybe. And they were a large variety of buttons too. Plastic dimple buttons. Tiny metal buttons. Even big, gold, pirate buttons. I started collecting them in a coffee mug. I still have it in my closet."
"When was the first time you saw him?"
"Something woke me up in the middle of the night. I saw him standing under the doorway watching me."
"What did it look like? Was he transparent?"
"It was almost like an echo in my eye or something. Like when you stare at something bright and it burns into your retina. I could see him better when I wasn’t looking directly at him."
"Jesus," I gasp. "What were you thinking?"
"I don’t know, there wasn’t really much time to think, you know? Or get scared. And I was half-asleep at the time, so that was a factor too. But I know I didn’t dream it. It was there."
"That’s wild. Don’t you get freaked out having a ghost wandering around your house?"
"It’s really not too scary. He’s friendly, you know? I never feel like I’m in danger."
"What about when you’re in the shower? Aren’t you afraid he’s watching and getting off on it?"
"No," you explain. "He’s very respectful. I never feel threatened."
"But isn’t it still weird? Like when you masturbate in front of your pets and you get that guilty feeling they know exactly what’s going on?"
"Um … I wouldn’t know about that."
"Right, okay, that’s cool."
"Uh-huh."
"It’s funny," I say, "because you’re telling me all this unbelievable stuff, but you’re so straight-forward and honest about it that I really believe you. If anyone else sold me this I’d think it was bullshit."
"Thank you."
"On the other hand, I’m not exactly a stranger to the paranormal world. I’ve experienced some pretty weird stuff myself."
"Do tell, do tell."
"Well, I can sense parrots," I explain.
"How do you mean?"
"I know when there's a parrot around. In fact, I sense a parrot on this street right now. A big, beaky one. As a matter of fact, there must be at least three parrots within a two mile radius because I'm bleeding from my nipples right now."
"You're making fun of me?"
"No, I'm just being stupid. I do honestly have a power though."
"Let me guess. You can see through glass?"
"No. I have excellent hearing. Ever since I was a kid, I've had super-hearing. Not just little sounds coming from the next room, mind you - I'm talking about being able to hear conversations going on in the house across the street. I have to admit, that's how I really knew about the parrots. I can hear them squawking."
"Is that so?"
"Yeah," I respond. "I can tell how much fuel is left in a car by the sound of the gasoline sloshing in the tank. It's very subtle. It varies from car to car depending on the size of the gas tank, but in my car I have it down to a science."
"You're telling me all this with a straight face and I still don't believe you."
"How can I prove it?"
"What do you hear right now?" you asked.
"Your heart's racing," I said.
Then I kissed you for the first time.

GRANDFATHER creeps back into my dreams: "The medical records say I died when I was eighty-three. But the truth is I died long before that. They say there are fifty ways to leave your lover. Well, there are six-hundred and thirty-two ways you can be LEFT."

I wake up much later, before dawn. The morning birds have yet to start shit with me. The Chinese food didn't sit well. My stomach's churning.

I feel your breath against my shoulder. I think about us and where we've been and why the hell it matters anymore. I can hear us dying. My super-hearing tells me things have run their course.

There's a hornet's nest nuzzled under an eve outside the window, and a cockroach skitters along the inside of the bedroom wall. Your knee grazes the sheets, skin against linen. Chairman Meow slicks her tongue across her leg in the kitchen. The shade has disappeared.

I close my eyes, and try to make the bed fly. But I can't.
Jesus, how I can’t.
  Relationships spoil like half-subtracted milk.
Saving The World

If we could just not ...
If we could just stop ...
If only we could ...
If only we would ...

Why can't we be ...
What if we didn't ...
If we just wouldn't ...
What if we couldn't ...

What if we were ...
If we just were ...
Supposing we stopped---Just stopped, now ...

... and didn't,
  wouldn't,
    couldn't ... anymore ...
This Town

Mama told me this town was like marble cake.

Light and dark dance an old-fashioned swirl, delicate lacing, a perfect curl;

one without the other inconceivable, to blend them, unthinkable;

Mama still takes care in keeping the colors apart.
Samisen

"A flat-backed, long necked lute from Japan with a skin-covered belly and three strings."

-Pocket Music Dictionary

In the bathroom at Zuma Beach
my sister and I saw the scar,
a misplaced rib
across my mother’s stomach.

Watching my baby brother
karate kick across the sand
we surmised that
"boys came out different."

We weren’t completely enlightened.
After the gray cat, Suzy,
poopéd a liter of fur cups
that fluffed into kittens,

we followed my mother
to the bathroom for a week
It was a short trip;
we lived in a two room house.

At night, Mama smoothed a sheet
over her ironing board, her back
straight as a shaft of rain. That
was the only wall between us.

Behind the theater of a bed sheet
my parents waited for us to sleep,
the August moon silhouetting
their silence. On the fold-out sofa,

Mother pulled the strings of her gown
while Father held the mattress
corners—surfing every swell—
his music staved inside her.
Is This Place Now Mine?

This happens to me. With a list of things to do I end up working on something else. I check the newspaper stands outside, go to the bathroom twice, put another quarter in the meter. I say the light is wrong, I say the tables are sticky. I say I have to claim the space then look around. Callow faces Giant worms of air-conditioning ducts hang from the ceiling, dust clinging to their spiraled seams. I deny dust. The yellow marbled pattern of the walls? I know how to do that. Gold #3 Ochre #1, Harmon’s Paints. I even know which brush to buy. A summer afternoon, radio playing a rock song from the seventies, blue overalls and hair pulled back, right arm swirling a matrix of mood and gesso. Is this place now mine? The artwork—not me. I don’t paint women in half-slips, sunflowers ignited by crayons, glowing pools of abstract oils. The light fixtures? Maybe. Pointed sun hats from Saigon hovering over rice paddies. Nope. Never been. The neon sign commands OPEN. In the daylight its imperative diminishes to a faint coral, the color of dime store lipstick. Not me. Perhaps the dull sheen of the floor, the stripping and staining, my knees red and wrinkled from scooting across with a belt sander in hand, my cuticles dried and cracked under sawdust. Once that was me. Ms. Do-it-herself. Now? Loosed in the universe, trying not to look out of place I read the newspaper again. SWF with child seeks where she put herself these days that she can’t be found.
What I Wouldn’t Give

I bought these fisted peonies for you.
The ladder of eucalyptus was free.
The store, Floral & Hardy, made me sigh
a little, as if life had become a pun
for some purer existence, as if words
were never quite what we meant,
and I tried to write you something
appropriate for these flowers—
why I picked them
and not the phallic lilies
nor the flush, unfurling
roses—but I had to stop
because suddenly the idea seemed ...
weak. For hours I pivoted
from thought to thought,
everything is about itself,
  consciousness hides in words,
everything is about itself,
  doubt rising like an ether
from my hand. When I woke
in the dark, feeling the edge
of the mattress to place myself,
their tufted heads gave off
the only light in the room.
I searched for the blue
match-stick limbs
of my alarm clock thinking that some things
were just too damned easy.
I was born and raised on this here farm, and I'll one day die here, I reckon. It's really my Ma's farm, left to her by my Grandaddy, only Pa said it was his farm too. But it ain't true. Ma's family has owned it since long before the Civil War times, when Tennessee was still kind of a wilderness. It ain't all that big a farm, really. It's purty small, as farms go. But I figure it'll be my farm one day.

I don't never do none of the farmin'. Pa said I ain't good for spit on account of my bum leg. You see, my right leg is shorter than my left one, and kinda skinny. My right hand don't always work none to good neither. They say I was born that way. Doc Wilson over in Knoxville told me the reason I'm all messed up is 'cause before Ma and Pa got married they was cousins. He said they hadn't aught'a got married at all. I don't understand it, really. But 'cause of that Pa figured somehow that that made the farm his too.

I ain't allowed to drive the tractor or nothin' like that, even though I'm plenty big enough, but I do have chores. It's my chore every mornin' to feed the animals, every dad-burn one of 'em. Dogs, cats, chickens, goats, you name it, I feed 'em. I'm kinda slow gettin' around on my one walkin' crutch, but it's okay. The animals get fed all the same. Doc Wilson told me I aught'a use both crutches, but that only slows me down more. The one is fine. It's gotta brace for my arm so I can't drop it on accident. Besides, I don't want people to think I'm some kinda cripple or somethin'.

I done learned a little bit of mechanics outta some old Handyman magazines and a couple of books I found, and sometimes I fix stuff on the machinery. In fact, Pa made me start fixin' stuff on account of his being too tired and all when he came in from the fields. I don't mind it, really. I like doin' it. Mostly though, I like buildin' things outta wood.

The front of our house faces east, (wakin' up with the sun and all), and our old barn faces to the south. Around the back of the barn is my workshop. I got saws and planes and all kinda stuff in there, and no one ever bothers me. I've built some purty nice things. I'm gonna be a master craftsman someday. I built Ma's dresser and some little tables for the family room. I built our dinin' table and all six chairs. Every piece is really fine work, if I do say so myself. The old stuff was all busted up anyway, and we couldn't afford none of that fancy store
bought stuff. I sell some of the stuff I make from time to time, to a used furniture guy over in Knoxville. It helps ta' keep food on the table. And it keeps me in wood to build more stuff.

I remember though, some of the finest craftsmanship I ever done was a while back, around the time our old hound dog Barney died. I came out that spring mornin' to do the feedin' and our one farm hand, Zeb, said that old Barney was over by the well, dead as a squished weevil. I remember seein' Barney there, stiff as a dried cow pie, and I remember thinkin' that he was pretty old anyhow.

I stood there a while just lookin' at him. And then when Ma came over I started to cry.

"Barney's dead," I remember tellin' her.
"I know, Dear," she said, "Zeb told me. I told him to bury Barney out by the trees near where your Grandaddy is buried."
"Wait, Ma," I said, "let me build a box to put him in."
"All right," she said, "but he can't lay around here too long."

I crutched my way out to the workshop. And in no time at all I built a coffin just the right size for Barney. I chiseled some letters in the lid. "Barney" it said. Zeb put him in the box and I helped him do the bury'n. Zeb's a good guy. We help each other out all the time. In fact we all help each other out, Zeb, Ma, and me. All except for Pa. Pa don't help no one out. Pa only helps hisself.

About a month or so later I was out feedin' again when our billy goat tore a big piece outta my britches. And that night, when I saw Pa in the barn, he was furious.

"How could you let that goat do that to you?"
"I don't know Pa, he -"
"Do you have to pay for those clothes?"
"No. He bit me from behind. I didn't see him coming."
"I'll take it out of your hide," Pa said as he belted me across the lips, knockin' me down.

"It'll never happen again Pa, I swear."
"You're darn right it won't," Pa said. And he went stompin' off. I pulled myself upright and went to tend to my bleedin' lip. I passed by the goat pen on the way and gave Billy a piece of my mind. I gave him the hard end of a hickory branch too. I was so mad I couldn't see straight. I couldn't even look back at Billy, I just went in and washed up.

The next mornin' nothin' was changed. Pa was still furious. I went to do the feedin' and when I got to the goats, there was Billy, over on his side. Blood oozed from his head and was dryin' on the ground. The hickory branch was on the ground next to him. He was dead.
After a minute or so, Zeb came by.
"What happened here?" he asked.
"I dunno," I told him.

He looked at me like I aught'a know. I can't never hide nothin' from ole' Zeb. I ain't been able to lie to him once since Doc Wilson sent him over to help out on the farm. He helps me out a lot. And he talks to me about my bum leg and stuff, and about Pa. He's a good friend. But he helps Ma out mostly. And Ma really took a liking to him. Ole' Zeb, he's all right. But he still don't never let me lie about nothin'.

"Look," Zeb said, "don't say nothin'. We'll tell your Pa that the dang goat chewed through the gate latch and run in front of the tractor."
"But -"

"Don't say nothin'," Zeb said. "Just go on about your chores."

I headed on over to the barn and when I looked back, Zeb was draggin' Billy outside of the goat pen. Then he headed over to the house, I reckon to tell 'em the story. But before he got there I could hear some yellin' comin' from the upstairs window.

"What are we going to do with this kid?" Pa yelled.

"It's not my fault the clothes are ruined. He's your kid, too."

Ma yelled back.

"It's not the first time, ya' know. I'm tellin' ya', this kid is a thorn in my side."

"Yeah, well you're a pain in my -"

After that came the sound of slappin', followed by some crashin' noises. I went on over to my workshop where I couldn't hear it. To heck with the feedin'.

I puttered around for a long time and then got Zeb to drag out what I'd made. It was a fine pine box for the goat. All the edges was sanded smooth and I even put a hinge on it. "Billy" came out real nice chiseled in the lid. We had to move another, bigger project that I was workin' on in order to get the box out. The other project didn't really look like much, yet.

In the meantime though, Pa had cut Billy all up for supper. Well, I couldn't eat a bite all that night. And I didn't sleep all so good either, on account of all the racket Pa was makin'. He was pretty drunk, yellin' a lot, and bangin' things around. I heard Ma yellin' back at him too.

In the mornin' I saw Ma when she was leaving the barn. Her arm was all wrapped up and there was a bandage on her face. I didn't say nothin' about it though. Instead I asked, "Where's Pa?"
"He's gone out into the fields, but I don't care where the son of a -"  
"You should be restin'," Zeb said, interruptin' Ma as he came from around the side of the barn. "Come on, Mary, back to bed with 'ya," he said. And he put his arm around Ma's shoulders and started walkin' her back to the house. 'I'll finish up the chores after.'

Well, sometime later, one night when Pa came in from the fields, he was meaner than ever.

"Get your butt over to the barn and fix the seat on my tractor," he ordered me. "The damn thing is about to fall off again, and I gotta pull the harrow in the mornin'."

"All right, all right," I said, not wantin' to get hit again. He'd already been drinkin'. I could smell it. Ma's always said it ain't safe to drink out in the fields, drivin' around and all. Most anythin' could happen.

I went to the barn and saw the tractor, set up and ready to go for the mornin'. The harrow blades were brand new and looked nice and sharp. One of the bolts holdin' the tractor's seat on was busted. That kind of stuff happens all the time. The darn thing takes a lotta whacks, ya' know, bumpin' and bouncin' around out in the fields.

As I was lookin' through some old junk for another bolt, Zeb came in. I showed him the broken bolt and he helped me look for another.

"You know," Zeb said, "maybe we aught'a fix up all the bolts."
"The other's are fine," I said. "I already checked 'em."
"No," he said, "I mean we aught'a really fix 'em. Know what I mean?"

"Oh! Yeah," I said. "I know what you mean." Me and Zeb always could understand each other. "Like last time, just more of `um."
"Right!" Zeb said.

Me and Zeb fixed up all the bolts holding the seat on Pa's tractor real careful like. You'd hardly know there was ever a problem. We collected another full set of bolts to put in, just in case.

Well, in the mornin', while I was feedin' the chickens, I heard Zeb yellin', and runnin' up to the house. He was yellin' for Ma. "Mary, you must come. He's fell off the tractor. And Mary, my God, - Oh - iss'a terrible sight."

"Merciful God in heaven," she said.

"Don't go, Ma!" I yelled. But I was too late. And not able to run, of course, I watched as Ma and Zeb raced, hand in hand, out into the fields. I slowly crutched out to my workshop to put the finishin' touches on my big project. I'd been workin' on it for a long time. I found my polishin' rag and shined it up a little. It was a beautiful box,
bigger and finer than anythin' I'd ever made before. "Pa", the inscription read. The whole project was right purty, if I do say so myself. You know, I'm gonna be a master craftsman someday.
Contributors’ Notes

Chris Cole - grad student. Susannah LeBaron has been at Northridge since before the trailers. She lives in Simi Valley, works as a free-lance editor, and plays soccer. Alexis Frixione is born. He is sad. Mario Garcia is a graduate student at CSUN. He was an engineer for fifteen years and now teaches science at Northridge middle school. His work has also appeared in the Los Angeles Times, and he has done commentaries for National Public Radio. Shoshana Grunwald (photography) is pursuing a marine biology major and a photography minor, hoping to work as an underwater photographer. Julie Kornblum worked for fifteen years as a sample sewer and pattern maker in the fashion industry in Los Angeles and currently teaches at Otis College of Art and Design. She is pursuing a B.A. in English at CSUN, with a minor in Art, specializing in fiber and fabric art. She lives with her husband and two children in Woodland Hills. Meredith Kurz is a graduate student at CSUN, specializing in Rhetoric and Composition. She has just breathed a huge sigh of relief, having finally finished her Master’s thesis. P. Leas (photography) is a CSUN alumnus, and is proud to be a contributor to the Review. Ian Maclean is an actor, photographer, native Californian, and former rodeo bullrider. His photos have appeared in numerous publications. Donna Marsh was born in Pennsylvania and moved to California after living in several other states where she was involved in the theatre. She has a B.A. in English from CSUN and currently teaches writing while working on her Master’s thesis. Alan Mills is a graduate student at CSUN. He is currently the editor of two magazines and has just finished his first book of queer poetry, a collection called Building Interiors. Tom Moran is a lecturer at CSUN and a frequent contributor to the Northridge Review.
Lynn Root has lived in Los Angeles for the past six years. She attended Sarah Lawrence College and is currently a graduate student at CSUN. Leanne Ton is pursuing a B.A. in creative writing. She feels there is nothing more pertinent or witty to say. Luisa Villani is graduating senior in English/Creative Writing at CSUN. In 1996 she was awarded a fellowship to the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets. Her work has appeared in *The Lullwater Review*, *The Northridge Review*, and is forthcoming in *Phoebe* and *The Hiram Poetry Review*. She is president of the CSUN chapter of Amnesty International and was recently awarded a teaching fellowship to the University of Pittsburgh. T. S. Leas has been a student of writing for several years, both at C.S.U.N and L.A.V.C. He received the Harry Wiles Award for Poetry for work that appeared in *Manuscript Magazine*. Jenni Rosenhaft blows bubbles during her free time. Her hero is Pippi Longstocking and says that this is all we need to know. Gina Manning - Her favorite people in the whole wide world are her children Melissa, Jeffrey, and Cody. She also cares for a cat and a rabbit. She refuses to care for fish. Madoka Takagi is a photographer and a Los Angeles resident. Her work has been collected by The Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., The Museum of Modern Art in New York, The New York Public Library, The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston and The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Raudin Cubillo Mendoza believes that we can write until our bones swell, but nothing will change until we take up arms. Mua.
art (a:t) n. 1. a. the creation of works of beauty or other special significance. b. (as modifier): an art movement. 2. the exercise of human skill (as distinguished from nature). 3. imaginative skill as applied to representations of the natural world or figments of the imagination. 4. a. the products of man’s visual art. b. (as modifier): an art of the theatre. 5. excellence exemplified in a particular art to display; a. art film. b. art newspaper. c. art of threading rules of art of a. art down through crafts. nar-ration: a. nar-ration of the events. b. nar-ration of the events as part of or technical narrative poem. poetic (poet’ik) n. 1. literature in metrical form, verse. 2. the art or craft of writing verse. 3. poetic qualities, spirit, or feeling in anything. 4. anything resembling poetry in rhythm, beauty, etc. [C14: from Medieval Latin poëtria, from Latin poëta POET]