

Soundings East



Volume 39
Spring 2017

Soundings East

Soundings East

Volume 39

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CLAIRE KEYES POETRY AWARD

Winner

Faith Shearin

Darwin's Daughter	2
My Grandmother, Swimming.....	3
My Mother, Getting Dressed.....	4
Ruined Beauty	5
Escapes	6
Old Woman Returns to Rosebank Avenue	7
Adam and Eve in Couples Therapy.....	8
In This Photo of My Father.....	9
Phrenology.....	10
Northwest Passage	11

CLAIRE KEYES STUDENT POETRY AWARD

Winner

Rebekah Aran

In the Heat	12
-------------------	----

Runner-Up

Felicia LeBlanc

3 am.....	13
-----------	----

FICTION

Ryan Burruss

The Great Flood17

John DeBon

The Driving Lesson..... 27

Adam Matson

The Suffering Serum 60

NONFICTION

Joseph Holt

Rereading *Siddhartha*..... 40

Paul Hostovsky

Braille on Subways..... 47

Toti O'Brien

Salt of the Earth.....74

POETRY

Carol Alexander

Scan15

Stephen Eric Berry & John Elkerr

The Eleventh Muse16

Grant Clauser

Difference 25

Andrea Cohen

Sweater..... 26

Darren C. Demaree

Emily as She Saw Herself From a Great Distance 34

Emily as Why We Put The Bathtub on the Roof 35

Edward Dougherty

The Banker in Winter 36

Bedtime Story 37

Alan Elyshevitz

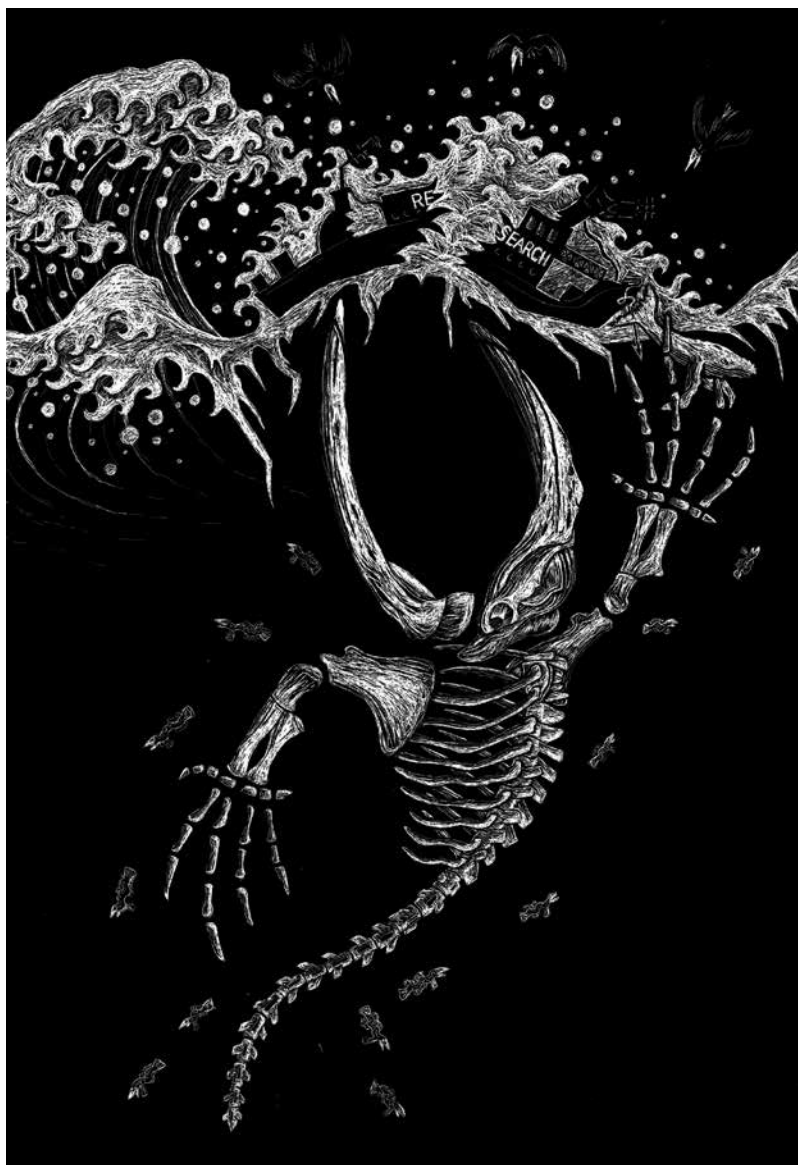
Friendship 7 38

<i>Vincent Hao</i>	
The Second Denial.....	39
<i>Liz Hutchinson</i>	
Murmuration.....	50
Owl.....	52
<i>Scott Jacobs</i>	
X.1.....	54
<i>Mary Christine Kane</i>	
This Kind of Love	55
<i>Cindy King</i>	
The Rivers Runneth Black with Mascara.....	56
<i>Rustin Larson</i>	
Memorial Day.....	57
Palliative	59
<i>Gabriel Oladipo</i>	
Debutante.....	79
<i>Michael Pontacoloni</i>	
I am an Unwilling Asteroid	80
<i>Ron Riecki</i>	
(Detroit) I Saw a Poster of Jesus.....	81
I Grew Up in a Town So Cold That Even the Ice Could Not Commit Suicide.....	82
(Morristown) End of the Day, Zombie Film.....	83
<i>Matt Salyer</i>	
Redshirt.....	84
<i>Charu Sharma</i>	
What the Stars Say, and Other Empty Spaces.....	85
<i>Kendra Tanacea</i>	
Where the Mountains Meet the Cow Pastures	86
<i>Matt Zambito</i>	
Illinois Pet Dubbed World's Tallest Cow.....	87
Poem for Those of You Reading or Listening to This Right Now.....	88

SALEM POETRY SEMINAR

<i>Introduction</i>	89
<i>Enzo Silon Surin</i>	
High School English.....	91
<i>Paige Cerulli</i>	
Lament for Christmas on Cape Cod.....	92
<i>Lisa Mangini</i>	
Letter to My Maid of Honor, if I Choose to Have One	94
<i>Amy Gaeta</i>	
The Art of Junk Mail	95
<i>Vincent M. Livoti</i>	
caveman	96
<i>James Connatser, Jr.</i>	
The F-Word.....	97
<i>Gregory Glenn</i>	
Dog.....	98
<i>Taylor Rae Botticelli</i>	
Bad Taxidermy.....	100
<i>Teisha Dawn Twomey</i>	
Goose.....	101
<i>Woody Woodger</i>	
now wondering if you remember those tobacco pickers, southwick mass	102
<i>Jessica Tower</i>	
from Burden: IV	103
<i>JD Debris</i>	
Nude Sketch: Vallejo.....	104
<i>Kayla Russell</i>	
June 7th at 2 a.m.....	105
<i>Robert Auld</i>	
I Say Hello to My Body	106

<i>Megan Ouellet</i>	
The Inadequacy of a Love Poem.....	107
<i>Julie Oliver</i>	
No Place Like Home.....	108
<i>Lyndon Seitz</i>	
Horizon	109
<i>Cady Vishniac</i>	
On Mount Gilead.....	110
<i>Melissa Beth Rodenhiser</i>	
Hester Prynne in Paris	111
<i>Steph DeOrio</i>	
For Claudia Rankine	112
<i>Robin Parsons</i>	
excerpt from Mahoning Ekphrasis Homage to Franz Kline.....	113
<i>Sara Afshar</i>	
Kerosene	114
<i>Brian Brodeur</i>	
Cousins	116
<i>Victoria Nicolau</i>	
from Between	118
<i>David Walker</i>	
Of Ropes and	119
<i>Enzo Silon Surin</i>	
High's Cool English.....	120
<i>Afterword</i>	121
<i>Contributors</i>	122
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	131



Mark Katz
Bake-kujira
Scratchboard

SOUNDINGS EAST EDITORIAL STAFF

Faculty Advisor

J.D. Scrimgeour

Fiction

Editor: Amanda Mark

Staff: Megan Escott, Megan Grossi, Joe McGurn, Michael Norword,
Mariah Rivera

Nonfiction

Editor: Robert F. Auld

Staff: Zachery Cotto, Michael Norwood, Connor Perry, Jen Yao

Poetry

Editor: M.P. Carver

Staff: Cathy Fahey, Jessica Tower

Guest Editors: Salem Poetry Seminar Section

Shari Caplan

Joey Gould

Managing Editor

Cathy Fahey

Cover Design

McKenzie Paddock

Consumption of the Hopeful II, ink on paper

Production and Design

Susan McCarthy,

Salem State University Marketing and Communications

Soundings East

Volume 39, Spring 2017

To order, please send \$10 to:

Soundings East

English Dept., Meier Hall 249E

Salem State University

352 Lafayette Street

Salem, MA 01970

Submission Guidelines

Our reading period is September 1 to February 15; we accept simultaneous submissions of previously unpublished poems (up to five) and prose (to 10,000 words). Submit online or by mail with hard copy; see our webpage for details: salemstate.edu/soundingseast

2017 CLAIRE KEYES POETRY AWARD WINNERS

In 2014, Claire Keyes, poet, friend of poetry, and long-time poetry editor of *Soundings East*, launched and underwrote this annual competition that celebrates excellence within the larger poetry community. In addition, a student award promotes poetry at Salem State University, where Claire remains an honored professor emerita.

This year's winner of the national award is Faith Shearin.

Faith Shearin's voice is one of quiet authority. In these poems, there's both reach and restraint, there's an unfailing ear, an eye that looks, and a mind that makes connections—between memory and the imagined, between science and love, between the world writ large and small.

In “Darwin's Daughter,” she writes: “It is said/that he lost his faith when he lost/his daughter.” And later in that poem: “He was a scientist and he wrote/his memories of Annie, folded/them into a labeled box; he described how/she touched his hair...” Those lines remind me of a Randall Jarrell poem, “In Galleries,” in which a museum guard's “gestures are full of faith in—of faith.” In Shearin's poems we see a similar acceptance of mystery, an adherence to it, and that's part of why I love these poems.

Andrea Cohen,
2017 Claire Keyes Judge

CLAIRE KEYES POETRY AWARD WINNER

Faith Shearin

DARWIN'S DAUGHTER

On the Galapagos Islands Darwin balanced
on the backs of giant tortoises, began
noticing variations: the way finches

were different at each port. It is said
that he lost his faith when he lost
his daughter, Annie, who liked

to look up words in dictionaries, her finger
drawn to names on maps;
she was ten when she died

that late April day: Darwin's
theory of evolution written
but still unpublished. Sundays,

during his later years, he went walking
in the forest while his family sat in church.
He believed all life was related, descended

from a common ancestor, and he studied
his samples of plants and animals,
kept a yellow notebook, had a single

daguerreotype of his daughter in which she
did not smile, a basket of flowers
in her lap. He was a scientist and he wrote

his memories of Annie, folded
them into a labelled box; he described how
she touched his hair, how she sat

in his study, comparing two editions
of the same book, word by word.

MY GRANDMOTHER, SWIMMING

She grows younger as she walks down the stairs,
the skirt of her bathing suit like the skirts

she wore after the war, when
her hair was black. For a moment she slips

into the photo I keep on my desk
where she stands under a tree at the edge

of dusk, her head on my grandfather's shoulder,
all her brothers still alive. My grandmother

lives alone in her house of memories:
antique clock, framed brides smiling

behind veils. In this blue lane she moves
slowly, not wanting to reach the end.

MY MOTHER, GETTING DRESSED

It was afternoon before she could manage
pants or shoes; we'd find her teasing her hair

in front of a hand-held mirror, sculpting
with hairspray, a comb; she used a pencil

to etch darkness above her eyes. On a wall,
beside the stairs, was a self-portrait

she'd painted in college: green dress,
face turned to watch me, climbing.

It was hard to get dressed,
or she didn't want to, so she stayed

in her bedroom where
the stock market's gains and losses

slid across a noisy TV screen,
and the dogs, who do not wear clothes,

came to join her: laid down on her pillows,
licking their fur.

RUINED BEAUTY

Driving home on that December black
country road — car lights,

stars — I saw the fallen
deer in our lane, convulsing,

dying, but not yet dead, and I could not
swerve, but had to drive over,

chose to drive over, that suffering:
ruined beauty, legs that had just

rushed through
trees, beyond farmhouses,

hooves thumping.

ESCAPES

Praise for the seven chimpanzees
at the Kansas City Zoo who fashioned

a ladder from branches; praise
for the eight monkeys in Brazil

who used stones to smash open
a lock. We need more penguins who

slide over thirteen foot walls
to plunge into Tokyo Bay. Let us

follow the example of Ken Allen,
the orangutan, who let himself

out of three difficult enclosures
then taught his friends how to open

their own gates. I want to be
the bobcat who leapt out of his

habitat — man-made wall,
man-made moat — to lie beside

a singing tree.

OLD WOMAN RETURNS TO ROSEBANK AVENUE

She had grown up in our row house,
could remember the day a glass chandelier

was hung in our dining room, knew
which door upstairs opened to a balcony

with a red railing, balanced over a garden
of Orchids that only bloomed at night.

She knew the trees in our yard before they
reached above our rooftops, when

it was possible to sit in their canopies
and watch men with hats walk home

from factories. I do not know where she
came from, with her white hair

and broken umbrella, or where
she went after she knocked on our door

and stepped inside to see it all one
last time: crystal doorknobs,

the bedroom where she once closed
her eyes, the closet in which her father

measured her steady ascent.

ADAM AND EVE IN COUPLES THERAPY

The therapist tells Adam that he should let go of his anger at Eve for talking him into the fruit; he made his own decision and, anyway, it's all in the past where nothing can be changed. Eve says that paradise was a form of ignorance and Adam says

maybe, but he liked it there, beneath the blossoms, unaware of his own nudity. Eve tells Adam that their sons crave emotional guidance, that Cain is angry and in need of a father's attentions; Adam tells Eve that she has no judgment, no ability

to follow instructions, and Eve tells Adam that he doesn't understand her curiosity, her hunger for knowledge. Eve tells Adam that his relationship to God is unhealthy,

that he needs to think for himself, set boundaries. Then, the therapist asks them each to say something positive and Adam says he likes the way the animals are quiet now, how they stand, pensive, sniffing in fields, and Eve says she enjoys the fires they build

together at night, the way Adam gathers wood and they take turns rubbing two sticks together, hard, until they are hot.

IN THIS PHOTO OF MY FATHER

In this photo of my father he sits in a restaurant:
tea on the table, blue suit,

my sister across from him, and,
smiling, he has grown old.

It is morning, and the month before
he won his last supreme court case;

he has sold the sailboat, the piano,
the lot next door; once,

in earth science class, my teacher
explained the difference between submerging

and emerging coastlines, and I
drew a picture of our island

in my notebook, sinking. Everything
is temporary: the smile, the cup

of tea, half gone, the legal conference
where strangers have read

his argument and wait
to shake his hand. In Kindergarten

I drew a picture of my father carrying
a briefcase and his shoes were

also a crab's claws. I didn't know the name
for his profession, didn't understand

what he did behind his desk, where
his law books were open, like windows.

Sometimes, in his office,
a breeze moved through

the room, and we were
the island, and we were the sea.

PHRENOLOGY

It was a failed notion but a lovely one:
by measuring the bumps on the skull
you could find the bulked muscles
of the brain; there was once
a machine with spring-loaded
probes that made a map
of the mind. I have seen the drawings
from this era, the sculpted,
diagramed skulls. Each head had its own
topography like a planet; a large lump
at the back meant you were
designed for motherhood, while a lump
at the front gave you an appreciation
of beauty. Destructiveness lurked
above the ear, while delight in life
was tucked behind. Hope was on top,
between perseverance
and spirituality, just above a love
of the magnificent.

NORTHWEST PASSAGE

For centuries explorers dreamed of it: a route
from Europe to the far East, elusive passage

from Atlantic to Pacific. I speak of desire,
a river running through the imagination,

a shortcut over the top of the world.
For these expeditions Victorians invented

the Boat-Cloak: an inflatable dinghy
that doubled as a jacket, moved by

a sail that was also an umbrella.
Sir John Franklin's ships were named

Erebus and Terror and they disappeared
looking for it: 128 men, two thousand books,

five tons of chocolate. Sometimes I imagine
Lewis and Clark searching for that ladder

of myths, Henry Hudson cast adrift
by a mutinous crew. I think of icebergs

as tall as night rising from a violent,
black sea, and the eerie music

they made rubbing against one another,
screams and groans: a Siren song.

CLAIRE KEYES STUDENT AWARD – WINNER

Rebekah Aran

IN THE HEAT

In July,
You let me pick you up
and we went to the store and got red ripe cherries.
It was hot and we were up all night
with crimson stained smiles, watching scary movies,
laughing at the gaudy faces, scolding actors for their bad decisions.
In my basement, I lay on the floor and you were on the couch.
We slept late into the afternoon
when the sun was hot again.
In August,
My grandmother said we could spend the weekend at her house
So you drove the two hours to the cape with me.
The beach was cold but we pretended to tan anyway
Making cupcakes to make up for the clouds.
I discovered that I couldn't mess up baking if you were with me.
The last night there, we wrote poems to each other on my laptop
and passed it back and forth in a bunk bed.
It's cold now.
I tried to buy cherries at the store the other day,
but they didn't have them.
I haven't written any poetry until now,
and I can't bake without spilling something or forgetting to preheat the oven.
I delete text conversations so that I don't dwell on rejection.
I considered deleting your number too.
But I still love you. So I leave it.

CLAIRE KEYES STUDENT AWARD – RUNNER-UP

*Felicia LeBlanc***3 AM**

it is 3 am
you and i
do not sleep
your words are text
on a too bright screen
and you are burning on the other
side
you are
fire that consumes a newborn daisy
or perhaps
the undertow at midnight
sucking yourself out to sea
maybe
the sound of gunfire in a civilian neighborhood
where small children try to sleep
but nightmares keep their eyes peeled open
or really
a news segment on tv about a girl
who felt she did not deserve her life
and figured it was time to give it back to the world
with a length of rope
you are
the creeping feeling in your chest
when you are alone and lost and scared
and you find you cannot breathe
and neither can i
here at 3 am
and both our heads are pulled under the waves
as we drown together



McKenzie Paddock
Consumption of the Hopeful
ink on paper

Carol Alexander

SCAN

Coral arch through which spiny, fatal fish swim—
their gold frills dazzle underneath the skin.
Seen through, I skim myself, the absence I will become.
My city lying deep beneath the sea, I mouth
the urchins olivaceous, chocolate brown.
Hungered horizon, centuries rise and round you.

Body: endangered reef. History: Adam's rib.
Subdural myths we tell-tale, secrete within the skull.
And salt shrivel upon the Dead Sea.

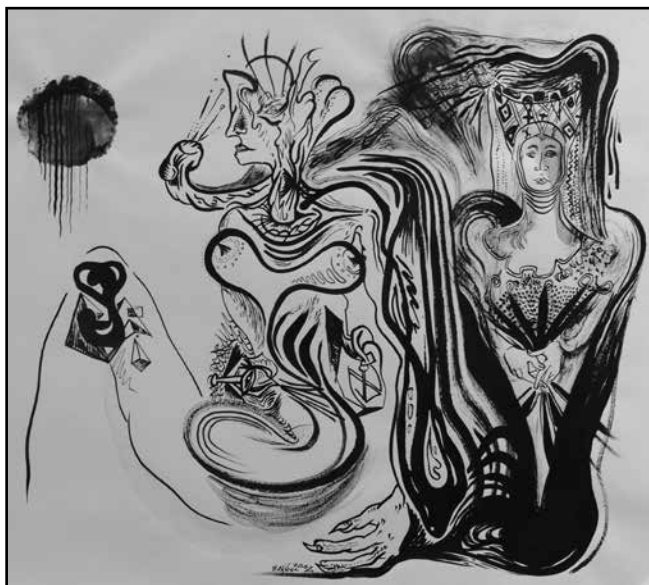
Memory of the drying snake, reticulated spine. Recalibrate.
Think of femur heap, an eyeless gaze, ivory piano keys.
Here is calcined mountain ridge, strafed by the stripped sun.
Laying down bone, I've built stalactite towers.
And once I held you, frail echinoderm, in a cage of bone.

POETRY

Stephen Eric Berry & John Elkerr

THE ELEVENTH MUSE

I find you on the Zeppelin Electraxis, at the end of the bar, sipping a mellifera cocktail, bristled feeding tube happily extended, dressed to the elevens in fanfold crêpe paper. Your scarves are a chirography of plumrose verses, wings angled at a festive forty-five degrees for maximum torque. The braided flagella, blackish-green eyes, pollen trails contrailing the room—all testify to your sexual insomnia, tight as the ship's hawsers going falsetto with storm, tighter than my drone eye on a trek down your abdominal spiracles as the room goes dark with river country passing below. You turn to me and the glass spikelets hemming your gown sound off. You take me in as I imagine Mistress Bradstreet appraised her river elm, expecting everything and nothing beside a dizzy Merrimack of poems.



The Eleventh Muse by John Elkerr

18" x 21"

Ink on paper

Text by Stephen Eric Berry

Ryan Burruss

THE GREAT FLOOD

“Say something,” she whispered. The screaming of an hour ago had ebbed. She hovered over him, inhaled the scent of salt and something else she couldn’t name. She put it aside.

“Hi,” he gasped, then coughed, shivered in her arms. The spasm made him cry out and reach for his middle. “My ribs.” He pushed the words through his teeth, carefully lifted his head, tried to place himself. He looked into her eyes. “I left.”

She kissed murmurs into his hair, trying to stay calm. The man had a nasty gash on his forehead that, when taken with the halting speech, caused a little ball of worry to form inside her. She pulled back. “Do you know where you are? Do you know who I am?”

“I’m home,” he said, “but I don’t know how.”

“It doesn’t matter. Do you know my name?”

He let his head fall back, perfecting repose or surrender, depending on the angle. “Muriel,” he said, holding back tears. “Baby, how did I get back here?”

Kneeling there, the sun beginning to dry her limbs, Jessica finally felt like she was drowning.

*

The man had spent the better part of the afternoon swimming through a bottle of Tennessee whiskey, and Jessica moved carefully around the house in the way that she often did when the shadows got long. It was an act of calculated failure: by avoiding his drunken attention, she provoked it. She knew her doe-like gait antagonized the wilderness blowing through him, made him feel the bully he swore he wasn’t, promised he would never be. And with every turned cheek, each bit-back sob, the dial in him turned a little more, the volume rose. For her part, every insult, every threat, left the sting of a small victory.

She had said the wrong thing in the wrong tone—an incantation. Like a squall, he was on her before the rumble of his voice had even taken shape, the clouds in his mouth echoing slurs against her soft flesh. “Bitch,” he spat, a punctuation.

FICTION

Pinned to a beam, the man's hand holding her in place, Jessica noticed that, if you looked at their house a certain way, you could make out crosses in the architecture. His arm vibrated almost imperceptibly, but his chest heaved before her, a mockery of the way he made love. Strands of his hair scraped his beard. His breath smelled of the alcohol, of something medicinal.

Jessica wore his taunts; she watched his clouds grow denser, the winds sharper, never averting her eyes from the crackle and flash. There were steps to this dance, patterns that, while not always pleasant, created a sort of familiarity between them, a trust. This is the way it had to be, because this is the way it was.

She tilted her chin, let him feast on her stare. Drunk as he was, he could still read the lines tattooed around her eyes, her mouth; each screamed without a sound, and in that moment, the man saw himself in the wear in her parts. The wake of his rage crashed not against her stare or lips, but behind them, in another time, another place.

She watched him shift, as if something profound, religious, had cracked beneath the plates of his set jaw, his clenched teeth. She watched his hand drop, the shoulders round. The man sighed, all his tautness escaping like spiders.

She wanted him to scream at her. She wanted him to slap her across her ungrateful, stupid mouth. She wanted him to bend her over a table. She wanted anything. She'd take anything.

But he did nothing. He looked around the room as if with new eyes. "Say something!" she screamed.

She began to tremble as he backed away, and shook like hell when he gently shut the front door behind him.

*

There is forewarning in the silence of birds. The television played in the front room, white noise while Jessica busied herself peeling vegetables. In the crevices of her middle, where the truth usually hid, she knew that he would not be back. There were no more storms to bear; it was an analogy bound to a craving that had passed as abruptly as it arrived, right before her eyes, as if she had been but a witness, a bystander. As she peeled the skin from a zucchini, the undergraduate literature parts of Jessica grasped the cruel beauty of having just watched a man fall out of love with her. She breathed in rhythm with the strokes of the peeler.

She wasn't sure if it had been seconds or minutes before she realized that the television was quiet and that the little hallway light was dark. Quiet flooded the house; the windows were open, but the birdsong, a chamber chorus here a half-mile from the main road, was locked away.

A shadow pulled itself across the kitchen. Jessica looked out the window over the sink, but couldn't make much of the sky; the roof's overhang blocked her view. She wiped her hands, went to the back door to investigate; there was a sharp wind coming from the east now, and her arms erupted in gooseflesh.

She didn't understand. The perspective was off, as if she were looking at a child's drawing pinned high above. There was the sun, round and recognizable, and then it was gone, hidden behind a rolling wall of sparkling gray-green, something two-dimensional and primitive become real. Trees snapped like matchsticks, the displaced air a coarse whisper coming from where the horizon used to be. Water rushed everywhere, converging on Jessica, too frozen to run away from the slam of its foamy, desperate kiss.

She felt like an astronaut, the bubbles churning around her like tiny stars. She opened her eyes to find herself floating high over her own house, an untethered, Jessica-shaped balloon. The colors were perfectly drab, the contrasts of her skin and shirt muted by the translucence of the flood. She could see her neighbors' homes, and around them, little crumbs that she assumed to be the same people that, most days, pretended they couldn't see her when she waved. *Asshole-shaped balloons*, she thought.

She stared at the eternity of water below, and that above, and understood only in context that she was drowning. She couldn't feel it.

The others, dressed in hungry clusters of bubbles, flailed and kicked in slow-motion. Jessica watched them twist themselves upside-down, swimming to surface at the bottom, frantic hand gestures like exclamation points to a sentence with no words, no subject, no verb. She watched them, and realized she had never tried to hold her breath.

The edges of the world began to blur, then darken; her head felt heavy, then light. Thoughts stretched like held notes, submerged, dissipated. Jessica felt born again, but without all the declarations and dogma and nonsense of the traditional sort of holy do-over. That breast-bearing alternative seemed less about redemption, more about diluting your footprints; submission seemed simpler, a peaceful drift toward something new, an accommodation to circumstances.

The last curtain closed, the faded contrasts melted completely away. The note held.

FICTION

And then there was a whisper, then a *whir*, a stopper pulled, and her frame was yanked and twisted through an explosion of brine and rushing, hateful water. The flood receded as it had arrived, and Jessica found herself wrist-deep in the dirt, coughing up filthy liquid with chopped, resentful breaths she never intended to have.

She pushed soaked strands of hair from her face with a mud-caked hand. She had landed in her front yard and could see a body strewn across the dirt road at end of the driveway. It was a body she had explored many times, still wearing the same shirt she had watched him leave in.

*

He felt like a rescue in her arms, a stray, all exhausted bone and muscle, but beneath the cut on his head, his reddened, blue eyes were electricity. She had no idea what it was he was seeing, what frightened him so alive. He shivered and coughed like an old engine, but looked younger than he had in years.

“I didn’t think...” the man started, winced, and Jessica buried her face between his neck and his shoulder. He tried again: “I didn’t think you’d be here.” He grunted, shifted, and she was in his arms. She began to weep, and they shook together, drops of the flood falling off their limbs.

The man began to laugh, looking up at their house. He wiped his glistening eyes, smudged reddish-brown across his face. Jessica leaned into his ear. “Why did you call me that?”

The laugh trailed off. “What?”

“When you asked me how you got back here... you called me her name. You called me Muriel.”

The man winced. He brushed her wet hair back, cupped her profile in his hand. “Sweetheart, are you okay?” He ran his hand over her head, his fingers both comforting and searching. “Are you hurt?”

“My name is Jessica.”

“Your name is Muriel, darling.”

Jessica pushed back against the man. “No, my name is Jessica, and we’ve been married for the last six years. This is our house. You are my husband.”

The man reached out to her, and she let him. “My god...” he said, letting the words float in front of him. He wrapped his fingers around her

shoulders, favoring one side. "Muriel," he said, "please tell me what is going on."

His voice was different. Where before it was just a beat too quick, a touch too loud, it now held warmth around its edges. The man she married demanded things his world couldn't offer. He punched at the night like pirate radio, like no one was listening to his prayers. Now, here he was, somehow changed, somehow the same, and calling her the one word she didn't think she could bear him calling her. After all the names he had fired at her like buckshot, this lovely one hurt most.

"Muriel's dead," she said, steady as she could manage. "She was your first wife and you loved her and she died."

"Why?"

"Why? I don't know why. Why are you doing this?"

"What games are these?" The man forced a smile, something abrupt growing between the rocks and broken glass of his mind. "You're right here," he said, a tear forming. "You're right here with me, baby, exactly where you were always supposed to be. You're not dead. You survived."

He grabbed her hard despite his injuries, and kissed her, raining all his haunting onto her lips, her skin. He was something foreign, yet remembered, like innocence, like home.

He grabbed her face again. "We're going to get you checked out, and everything's going to be alright." He nodded to encourage her.

Something fluttered, and Jessica shook her head. "I'm okay, baby," she said between sobs, "I'm okay. I'm okay. I'm okay."

"Muriel?"

"It's me, baby. I'm here."

The man's hands began to shake, the quake traveling through his arms, his shoulders, his voice. "I thought I lost you," he whispered. "You can't imagine."

Crouched there, arms and legs entangled, they shivered, held.

*

Jessica and the man began to salvage their house. They ripped out the carpet, uncovering the original wood floor, still in decent shape.

FICTION

They kept what they could, and trashed what they could not. They made love on the stairs in the middle of the afternoon.

Photographs were ruined. “We’ll take new ones,” the man said. Books were destroyed. “We’ll write our own.” The man kissed Jessica’s neck. His laugh was easy, ambled out of him. Before, his laugh was something that attacked a room. Now, it could fill it faster than the tempest did.

Jessica became an effigy, an analogy, the woman the man had loved long ago, the first wife, the one who died in his arms. She was a spy in her own bed, making love each night to what her husband could have been.

She thought the hardest part would be answering to another name; instead, it was how tall he stood, how he trusted the person he thought she was with his heart. It was everything she ever wanted, and it burned like battery acid when she wasn’t careful.

“What do you remember... before the flood?” She traced her finger across his shoulder, something borrowed, never owned.

“What do you mean?”

“Right before,” she lifted herself up on the mattress, her head in her palm. “What do you remember? Do you remember the water? Do you remember where you were before it hit? What you saw?”

The man pursed his lips. Jessica watched him play a miracle back in his head. “It was like a dream.” He shook his head, trying to line up the threads of memory. “I felt like I had been drowning... but for a very long time, longer than it must have really been.” He paused. “I felt like I was drowning, but wouldn’t die.” He touched her waist. “I know that probably doesn’t make any sense at all.”

Jessica rested her head in the crook of his arm. “It does,” she whispered, thinking her voice sounded miles away.

*

Jessica sat on the front porch, an unread magazine in her lap, listening to the sound of crickets and letting tiny drops of sweat bead on her skin. She swirled her drink in the glass, unsure if she had put ice in it or not.

The man had gone to bed early, exhausted from another day of fixing things, so Jessica drank alone, searching for the exhale that only the liquor could bring. The trick was that it was never in the same place twice, like lost keys. The trick was to avoid getting too frantic, rummaging about your

head, tossing all sorts of things this way and that—you were more likely to cover it with nostalgia, or bury it beneath a fantasy. It was worse still if you unearthed something you never wanted to find. The trick was to trace your steps back to where you had left it the night before, anticipate how far it could have traveled when you weren't looking, and take a stab.

The man had expressed concern about her drinking ("It's just not like you, Muriel," he said), but his admonishments were so soft as to not break the skin, a ghost to a ghost. Jessica took a long drag from her glass. She tried to define who was stealing from whom. She took another drink in search of a breath, a release, figuring it had to be somewhere nearby, about where she left it.

Her heart took on water. She tried to stay afloat; her husband was cheating on her with her. She was her own bitch, her own whore. She was every slur he used to call her. She poured another vodka from the bottle resting beneath her chair.

She wanted to run out into the crickets and vanish; she wanted to punch the man, then kiss the bruise, wrap his arms around her. She wanted to fill the laundry sink and plant her face in the drawn water until everything melted.

She wanted the world to flood again. She wanted to rise, weightless, and look down on this mess she'd made. She wanted to see the soft edges of the things she thought were hers. She wanted to feel like an astronaut again, like there was something left to find.

She was past the porch now, barefoot under an almost-full moon, willing the trees in front of her to start snapping. She pinched her face up like a child, trying to conjure the wave. Nothing happened. Not even the chirp of the crickets skipped a beat. There were no more miracles. It was only after she heard the creak and slam of the front door that she realized she had been screaming.

"Muriel!" the man called in a hoarse whisper, in that way parents bark clenched orders when their embarrassment matches their anger. "What are you doing?"

Jessica put the bottle to her lips. She had turned it into a drinking game, him saying the wrong name. "I'm not Muriel," she said, enunciating each word.

She ran to him and he held out his arms for her. She hit him hard across the mouth, drew blood. She tried to take the bottle to his head, but he knocked it into the grass. "Say something!" she shrieked. "Say something!" She rained drunken punches on his chest.

FICTION

“I love you,” he said, and Jessica let out a high-pitched, choked roar, all humiliation and anger and spiders.

The man grabbed for her but she flailed him off. She took an unsteady step back, shook her finger at him.

“My name is Jessica Mulder. Formerly Kent. I am your wife. I have been your wife for going on seven years now. Our anniversary is in October. It rained at the courthouse. You were married before...” Jessica’s voice cracked, tears streamed down her face. “Her name was Muriel. She was beautiful. I’ve seen pictures—you were so happy. So young.” Jessica saw the vodka bottle in the grass, almost fell over grabbing for it. She toasted their house, took a long drink. “She died of ovarian cancer. She died in this goddamned house—she was so thin, you could feel the curve of each bone against your breathing. You told me that. You fucking told me that. She was the love of your life.”

Jessica threw the bottle and it shattered in the distance. She stared at the house, their house, all hard angles and shadow. The crickets were restless. She stepped forward, the man didn’t flinch, and she kissed the scar on his forehead, kissed his chest, felt the heavy thump of his heart against her lips. Jessica smiled without looking at his eyes, without seeing or being seen; she stumbled off into the night with only the clothes on her back, her name.

Grant Clauser

DIFFERENCE

She said it's important to know
the names of trees,
the difference between
one spidered leaf
and the next,
then I think about how
many kinds of rain
can fall over the roof,
how both snow
and summer hurricanes
can make the river rise,
how you call something love
even when it isn't,
and when Eve held
an apple out to Adam
he didn't ask, "braeburn
or red delicious?"

POETRY

Andrea Cohen

SWEATER

It comes with an extra
button stitched into

the inside seam: no
idea of warmth

is complete without
the promise of what

must unravel.

John DeBon

THE DRIVING LESSON

I'm shifting into fourth and pushing seventy on a two-lane road with a posted limit of forty-five. I'm driving angry. The reason is sitting next to me in the passenger seat, staring at her hands fidgeting in her lap, afraid to look at the road and not daring to look at me.

The high beams pick up a yellow sign with a black arrow bending hard to the left. I take a little off the accelerator and go into the curve high. Even though she's buckled in, the force of the turn presses her against the passenger door. Her hands fly out of her lap like startled birds, and I hear her gasp; it's a soft sound, somehow proper, like everything about her. I come out of the turn low, letting the steering wheel spin under my palms until the car is headed straight. She lifts her head and turns her watery, pleading eyes toward me as if she's going to say something, maybe ask me to slow down because she's scared. I keep my eyes fixed on the blacktop. I won't give her the satisfaction of acknowledging she's in my car, much less that she's scared. She looks down at her lap without saying a word.

For what seems like the hundredth time since leaving the beach, I remember the night we met and wonder what the hell I was thinking? But it's no mystery. I was attracted to her from the moment I saw her. At least I was until tonight.

I met Grace at Mulligan's, an off-campus hangout that on weekends has a band and, as the sign outside its front door says, ladies drink for half-price. The place was packed and on the small stage a country band played loud with an electric edge. I stood at the bar with some guys from my dorm. Grace and her girlfriends were sitting at a table, laughing and leaning their heads together as they watched us watching them, probably wondering if we would come over, and trying to decide if they wanted us to. For our part, we strategized as if planning a military assault, and when ready downed our beers and shots to strengthen our resolve. We were all in our junior year, hardly men of the world. By some miracle we made it over to their table and they didn't turn us away, which I attribute to the math more than all the glances, body language, and maneuvering: one guy for each girl usually buys you an introduction.

At first the conversations stumbled along with everyone trying to act natural and sound clever, and everyone failing. But after we bought them a couple of rounds—why not, half price—the conversations flowed smoother and we all became more interesting.

FICTION

In the pairing that occurred, Grace and I ended up together, which was fine by me since I had noticed her right away. Slim with long brown hair and large doe eyes, she had a quiet confidence. Not the kind of stuck-up confidence some attractive girls have, but the kind that comes from being at ease with yourself. She didn't seem to sweat the little things. And there was something else about her, a sense of refinement, as though she were removed from her surroundings and yet wholly present. I chalked it up to her coming from money. Not that she said as much, but I could tell by the way she talked and the clothes she wore. Nothing over the top, but not off the rack, either.

While the others danced, laughed loudly, and ordered more drinks, Grace and I sat at the back of the table by the wall and talked about classes, campus life, and our homes. When we had said enough, we just sat together and enjoyed the band.

Over the following week, we met at the library and the cafeteria between classes, and pretty much walked every path on campus, discussing which professors we liked and didn't like, what movies we had seen and what shows we followed, the kinds of music we listened to and the causes we cared about.

On our first date, which wasn't technically a date, I took her to lunch at the pier a few miles from campus. Over the cacophony of wind, waves, and circling gulls cawing for food, we sat on a bench and ate hotdogs and fries from a roach coach in the lot. Then we walked along the shore and talked. Well, mostly I talked and she listened, and we both laughed a lot. Funny how at the time I didn't notice how quiet she was, or how she never gave away much about herself when she did speak. I guess it's the way she listened, so attentive and engaged, it gave the impression she was as much a part of the conversation as I was. Maybe I should have asked her to tell me more about herself, but I was trying to impress her and liked the way she paid attention, the way her wavy hair rode the breeze coming off the water, and how her bright, brown eyes watched me as I rambled on.

We drove back to campus and walked to the Humanities building for her next class. Before she went in, I asked her out. For a moment she seemed caught off guard and stared at me without saying a word. Certain she was about to turn me down, I started to explain that by date I meant get together for another lunch. Dozens of students streamed past, all of whom I was certain were focused on nothing else but my impending rejection.

Before I could finish my idiotic stammering, her features softened and seemed to take on an expression of gratitude, though I can't explain what made me think that. Regardless, my momentary panic was forgotten when

she said she would go out with me. Then she kissed me before heading into the building.

I can still feel her full, warm lips pressed lightly against mine.

Screw it. It doesn't matter now. Up ahead the road splits and the right lane exits to merge with the highway, meaning I can save some time and get her the hell out of my car a little sooner, which at this moment is all I want. Having these memories play in my head, forcing me to relive the past week is not what I want to do right now, but for some reason I can't make them stop.

I come up on a slow car and ride its bumper. It's a compact and my high beams must be lighting up its interior. But the small car doesn't move. In fact, the driver taps his brakes. The flash of the twin red lights meant to back me off only makes me madder, which is fine because I need to vent. I pull into the breakdown lane and punch it, my tires screeching as I pass him. His horn lets out a long, blaring complaint. I pull the wheel hard, sliding in front of him with only a few feet to spare. As the highway opens on the left, I cut in, slipping through the right lane and settling into the middle lane.

She's crying again, asking me to *please* slow down. I crank up the stereo and cut into the left lane, remembering earlier in the evening when I picked her up. How everything seemed perfect. How she seemed perfect.

I took her to Bartholomew's, a club that has decent food and a great selection of beers on tap. It's a bit of a drive up the coast but nicer than any of the college places in town. We ate their famous burgers, tried a few different microbrews, and listened to a local band that was starting to become known. We talked between sets. I suppose I did most of the talking, as usual, but she didn't seem to mind, nodding with interest at what I said and laughing at my jokes.

On the drive back I took the coastal roads to give us more time together, and I guess to set the mood. With an almost full moon and no clouds, the shoreline was a landscape rendered in shadows. The conversation had become more personal, more intimate. I made a suggestion and she agreed, so I pulled into the parking lot of a small community beach. The stars were visible despite the glare from the lights of the surrounding towns, and the moon's reflection rippled on the water. At first she seemed nervous, different from the self-possessed girl of earlier in the evening. But after a while, as we talked about our families and watched the waves roll onto the shore and then recede, trailing strips of foam lace on the wet sand, she relaxed.

FICTION

Being with her like that felt right. There was no pressure, no rush to unbutton her blouse or get into her pants before taking her home, only a comfortable sense of belonging. A part of me wanted to leave it that way, to sit with her as her eyes followed the glistening lines of surf gliding toward the beach, sharing in the tranquility of the moment. Our silence gave way to quiet conversation, and we told each other our plans for after college. While I vacillated between becoming a CPA, going into financial consulting, and several other options I was equally unenthusiastic about, she spoke of becoming a therapist specializing in domestic violence with a certainty I envied.

After that we sat in silence, once again looking out at the beach, her hand in mine. I slid a little closer and her body stiffened, but only for a second, and then she let herself lean lightly against my arm.

“It’s so beautiful,” she said, looking at the water.

I wasn’t watching the beach. I was looking at the smooth curve of her neck, and the way she brushed back her hair, looping strands behind her small, childlike ear, as if drawing a curtain from her face so I could see her more clearly.

“So are you,” I said.

She turned toward me, her face inches from mine. A breathless excitement rushed through me. I leaned forward to kiss her, but she turned and rested her head on my shoulder, her gaze returning to the water, leaving me to wonder what had just happened. Wasn’t that the moment everyone talked about? Did her head on my shoulder mean affection or friendship? I was sure from the signals I sent and received that we both understood this was not a friend date, that we had arrived at a point when some physical intimacy was expected. The night we met, all the walks and coffees between classes, our almost-date at the pier, the kiss outside the Humanities building, all indicated this was a bona fide date. Hell, even the moon and the tide seemed to confirm it.

These thoughts ran through my mind as I sat with her leaning against me, the clean, light floral scent of her hair teasing me. I ran over my options and their consequences: If I made a move and she only wanted to snuggle, it would be awkward. If I made a move and she just wanted to be friends, I would feel stupid. If I didn’t make a move and she expected me to make one, it would be tragic.

In a wistful tone, she said, “I wish everything would stay as it is now.”

Not certain what the hell that meant, I moved my arm along the top of the seat and slid my hand down onto her right shoulder. Before she could

send another conflicting signal, I leaned over and kissed her, long and with my lips parted.

I don't remember if she kissed me back. I'm sure she did, at least to some extent, but I was so ready and able that if she didn't I did not notice. I drew back to reposition myself and then stopped. She was sitting still, staring at me.

"Why did you do that?"

There was no anger or indignation in her question, just a calm inquiry void of inflection, which made it even more confusing than if she had asked in anger, since the reasons behind the kiss should have been obvious. The part of me that had enjoyed the quiet closeness we had shared moments before sounded an alarm to back off. But another part of me, a part that had enjoyed the kiss and wanted more, took control.

"What do you mean?" I said with a harshness that surprised me, and yet, when I saw her flinch, it felt satisfying. "Why do you think?"

"I'm sorry, Sean. I didn't mean to—to upset you," she said, her voice cracking a little. "All I mean is... well, did you kiss me because you wanted to, or because you thought it was expected? You know. What guys are supposed to do."

She had pulled back a little and that angered me more than her questions. I was not in the mood for a discussion of my motivation. I wanted to yell at her, make her feel the disappointment filling me. But I didn't, because in addition to being frustrated and angry, I was worried her pulling back meant my desires would not be met unless I acted quickly.

"Grace, I'm sorry. Really I am. I didn't mean to startle you. I didn't ask you out and bring you here just to... You know," I said and then smiled with as much sincerity as I could muster. "I really like you. And I thought you liked me."

"I do like you, Sean. A lot. But I—"

There had been a tremor in her voice, and though she tried to say more, all I heard was that she liked me—a lot.

"I'm glad you feel the same. This past week was special. And tonight," I said, placing my hand on her shoulder, "well, tonight we're having a good time. Let's not spoil it. All I want is—"

"Sean, I—I want to go home now."

"Why?" I asked, pulling her closer. "Look at the waves, at the moon. This place is so peaceful. We can talk some more and—"

FICTION

Her scream drove me back with the force of a hard slap. Her entire body was trembling, and when she spoke it was in a small, frightened voice, “Sean, please take me home. Please, I just want to go home now.”

Of all the emotions I felt at that moment, the strongest was sorrow—for myself. I felt as though I’d been cheated; whether for a one-time make out session or the relationship I thought might be building, I can’t say.

“Jesus Christ, are you for real?” I said, no longer able or willing to hold back my frustration. “You’re kidding, right? This is a freaking joke?”

With tears in her eyes and one arm raised defensively over her head, she winced at my words. The idea of her being frightened of me made me angrier. I started the car and said, “Okay, fine! Calm the hell down and I’ll fucking take you home. Just don’t go nuts on me!” I slammed the car into reverse and we flew backwards, then I shifted and the car rocketed forward. Gravel spat out from under the wheels. I turned on the stereo, oblivious to her sobbing as I sped out of the parking lot.

Now her exit is up ahead, and not a moment too soon, because these thoughts, these feelings are driving me crazy. I cut over two lanes, exit the highway, and zigzag through the maze of streets leading to her condo. It’s a nice neighborhood with a lot of big houses and gated complexes. I’m not speeding like before, but I’m going faster than I should. I’m not angry anymore, just annoyed. I want to put her and this night behind me.

No longer crying, she sits without making a sound, staring out the passenger window. I’ve no idea what she’s thinking, and at this point I don’t care. The townhouse her parents bought for her is up ahead on the right in one of the nicest complexes. She rents two of the three bedrooms out to two other girls.

Spoiled, pretty psycho with rich parents—it must be nice.

I consider pulling up to the curb fast and breaking hard, but what’s the point? I mean, I don’t understand why she acted like she did. For that matter, I don’t understand why I got so angry. It’s like my anger fed on itself, getting stronger and taking over. Maybe it was the same with her craziness.

I cruise up to the curb, stopping nice and easy, and wait for her to get out. A part of me wishes this night had ended differently. One minute becomes two and we’re still sitting in the car in front of her townhouse, neither of us talking. I figure she’s trying to work up the nerve to say something. Maybe blame me for being selfish, for ruining the evening, and then she’ll cry as she gets out, shouting so her roommates hear her telling me not to call anymore. Isn’t that the way these rich bitches manipulate things? They make sure everyone thinks you’re the asshole.

“I’m sorry,” she says, breaking the silence.

“Not as much as I am.”

Out of the corner of my eye, I see her wipe away a tear.

In a whisper she says, “I have a problem.”

I suddenly want to tell her it’s okay, that I’m the one who is sorry, but there’s still anger inside me, not as strong but still there. “Well, whatever it is, good luck with it.”

Silence again. My agitation grows. I’m not sure if it’s because I still feel like she jerked me around, or my growing regret over how I acted, or the awkwardness of this moment. It’s probably all those things and more, but knowing that doesn’t help.

The passenger door opens but she doesn’t leave. After a few more seconds, she says, “I—I was raped two years ago. You’re my first date since—since it happened. I wanted you to know it wasn’t you.”

The street I’m looking at through the windshield seems to waver, like on a hot day when you can see the heat rising from the asphalt. My stomach knots and I can’t catch my breath as her words sink in. Carefully, because I feel like I just stepped off a roller coaster, I turn and look into her eyes. Eyes brimming with tears and embarrassment, as though she has somehow failed. But I don’t think it’s me and my expectations she’s upset about failing. I think it’s herself. I want to reach out, take her hand and tell her I’m sorry. But I can’t because I’m not a man of the world, only some screwed up college junior in over his head. So I sit staring at her. As if someone else is speaking, I hear myself say, “I’m sorry, Grace. I didn’t...”

She wipes at her eyes and shakes her head. “No, don’t be. I—I thought I was ready. I like you, Sean, but— I’m sorry.” Her bottom lip quivers as she starts to say something else, but instead she climbs out without a word. The passenger door closes behind her, and I watch her walk away.

POETRY

Darren C. Demaree

EMILY AS SHE SAW HERSELF FROM
A GREAT DISTANCE

I have layered the world with Emily.
Occasionally, she stumbles upon herself.
She likes it best when I add a little kink

to her landscape. She likes it when
I add the black nylons beneath her coat
& she catches a flash of her own thigh

through the tears I've added with my attention.
It's incredible, but she always knows when
she enters the arena. She's a prizefighter,

that woman. She knows that most of them
are not her, but she respects their gait
& she welcomes herself as a challenger.

EMILY AS WHY WE PUT THE BATHTUB ON THE ROOF

Leonard Cohen isn't the only aging pervert
that is proud of some of the naked women
he's been with. I framed Emily in the sky,

because she wanted the moon to see her better
& I wanted all of the satellites to confirm
for the world why I say "hallelujah" in the chorus.

POETRY

Edward Dougherty

THE BANKER IN WINTER

So frigid. Eyes water. Nostrils freeze. Teeth ache. Walking his dog, bundled in a fur-lined cap with ear-flaps. He impersonates a warmer version of himself, the one who eats roasted tomatoes with a thin smear of goat cheese on crudités. Stalled five houses from home, his yellow lab squats over the hard snow. The dignified man gazes over yards, over houses, considering how to regulate derivatives without throwing Wall Street into a tailspin. The dog pinches a soft, healthy log on the edge of the neighbor's lawn. Steaming.

BEDTIME STORY

Each and every one of the blind mice thinks Gretel is okay but Hansel, *ptew!* what a self-righteous prick. They play Texas Hold Em and practice English all night. Invariably, talk goes from EU politics to forest gossip to dirty jokes they all know so well they interrupt each other with variations. They smoke their tiny cigars. They feel their little cards. Finally, the youngest mouse yawns, says he's got to turn in. The others slap the table, making the itty-bitty chips bounce. He's training for the Olympics, he explains once again, and needs to get some shut eye. That's how he says it. Shut eye. His sport isn't yet approved for the Games, but when it is, he wants to be ready. You can hear his little cane all the way down the hall behind the drywall.

POETRY

Alan Elyshevitz

FRIENDSHIP 7

[Transcription of John Glenn's Flight Communications (February 28, 1962)]

Not long before me there was a dog
And I sometimes wonder, Cape Flight,
What she made of her encasement.
Through these clouds I see only Wednesday.
Cape, I'm banging in and out. I recall
My training and my last real lunch.

Reading you 5 square, Cape, though
This craft is infested with sibilants.
Yes, I will override the 05g switch.
I will, if you wish, retract the scope.
Cape, my wife is beautiful when she
Rotates manually about her y-axis.

Going fly-by-wire. This is not easy
When faith in another may not be jettisoned.
And I can't help thinking of the up-range
Destroyer. Cape, do you believe in God?
Out here the void is speckled, I think,
With an old man's radiation.

Kicking in and out of orientation.
It's how I imagine the 3-foot waves
At the landing site as a lumpy mattress
Of hydrogen. Cape, is that affirm?
I've got nothing but an alloy's fingers
Holding tight to the landing bag.

Cape, I'm through the peak g now
Which feels nothing like an equation.
The capsule is flaming like a boy's
Science project. Altimeter off the peg.
I will follow your voice to a zero angle
Returning this shell to a mothering sea.

Vincent Hao

THE SECOND DENIAL

yesterday I forget how to speak. when I ask
the girl for help she tells me to build
a house from paraffin and wax in the
valley of her body.

I never could. late nights I stay up & fill the sky
with hieroglyphics, sandmen pillaging
stone villages,

& the boy who cried wolf, mouth
stuffed with cotton. insomnia.
when I ask the girl for help
she cites nietzsche & says she can't deny me.

that's hertzog, I want to scream.
in this day no one knows the meaning of secret:

not the sky, hushed
& cramped in a moment of whisper,
not the girl, stuck in mother
pond, reliving blue empathy at the seam.

*Joseph Holt*REREADING *SIDDHARTHA*

I.

For my thirtieth birthday I did an irresponsible thing: I cancelled class and went on vacation. That might sound like an innocent little personal day, but in truth I cancelled a week of class and flew off to another continent altogether. I went from my place in St. Paul to a few different spots in England. My purpose, I claimed, was to treat myself as I entered a new decade of adulthood. Yet somehow it seemed more urgent than that. Perhaps I was also hoping, in one short week, to break from the previous decade.

For at age thirty I had come to feel battered by my job, suffocated in my urban apartment, treadless in my social relationships. I was tired and unhappy. Although these days I keep an even temperament, on my thirtieth birthday I was mired in the darkest of all my dark periods, adrift in a crisis of both identity and existence.

That week in England I did a good amount of aimless walking, but I'd stop short of saying I acted as a flâneur. Rather, I was a tourist. I visited Abbey Road and the National Gallery, Stonehenge, Bath, Stratford-upon-Avon, the gardens of Shrewsbury, the docks at Liverpool and a vast Christmas market in Manchester. I smoked cigarettes and ate total garbage, picked through souvenir shops and stayed up late watching brainless British variety shows. I had fun. But in no way did I extricate myself, as I might have wished, from my own anxious life.

Perhaps my vacation's truest benefit was that, en route from my touristy destinations, I managed slippery moments of insight—revelatory thoughts that seem to accompany idle journeys. In *The Art of Travel*, Alain de Botton writes, "Few places are more conducive to internal conversations than moving planes, ships or trains. There is an almost quaint correlation between what is before our eyes and the thoughts we are able to have in our heads: large thoughts at times requiring large views, and new thoughts, new places." Whether gazing out a train window or resting on a bench along the River Thames, I was able to step outside myself and view my movements in context of the larger world around me, like a crane shot panning outward in a movie. In other words, fleetingly, I obtained perspective.

In those moments thirty appeared to me as a mile marker, one at which I could lay off the gas and peer back through the rearview mirror. I was needled by the essayist's common question: not *Who am I?* but *How am I*

who I am? What led me at age thirty to rest idly along the Thames, seeking calm while also shirking responsibility, thinking a weeklong vacation to England might serve as tonic for my restless spirit?

My twenties, to answer the question, had led me there. It was in that decade I set precedents for touring, for tramping, for searching. In my twenties I embraced transience and wanderlust—living in four countries and five U.S. states—and though it was all very exciting, I'd often suffered by my own impetuosity. I grappled with high expectations and limited means, finding that no matter where I stood contentment was elusive, satisfaction just out of reach. At age thirty, looking back at a full decade of my young life, I wondered if the 20-year-old me might ever have foreseen such indecision and rootlessness.

Probably, I think. At twenty, I was a college sophomore with wide eyes and passing interests, a middle-class kid living on loans. Though I was a reckless drinker and an inconsistent boyfriend, I was also a leader in my campus community. Like any twenty year old, I was too naïve to know I was naïve. To that point I had lived a comfortable, fortunate life, neither spoiled nor in want. I could easily have become complacent, but even then I recognized complacency as the great enabler of an unexamined life. That spring I decided I would strike out into the world.

Once the semester ended I drove from my home state of South Dakota to the Piedmont Triad of North Carolina, where I had secured work as a YMCA camp counselor. When I'd been researching summer jobs a couple months earlier, I might as well have drawn a destination from a hat. (If I recall, I chose North Carolina because in grade school I'd worn a Charlotte Hornets Starter jacket.) Any place would have sufficed, I believed, so long as it offered different terrain. Even at the time I understood this journey as more personal exercise than cultural immersion.

In North Carolina I settled into the 24-hour-a-day job of being a camp counselor—singing songs, teaching archery, ad-libbing ghost stories. My days were busy enough that I forgot I was supposed to be homesick. We counselors—a 50-person staff hailing mostly from the Piedmont Triad, but also from Europe, West Africa and South America—received one night of leave each week. On these nights we would caravan into Winston-Salem, eat at a restaurant we could hardly afford and otherwise loiter in any brightly lit public space. On one of those weeknight trips I made a small purchase that would prove invaluable to my becoming the man I was for the remainder of my twenties.

From a regular old chain bookstore I bought the New Directions paperback of *Siddhartha* by Hermann Hesse, translated by Hilda Rosner.

NONFICTION

If *Siddhartha* has reached the status of cult classic (or counterculture classic or even genuine classic), it's this New Directions edition that's most recognizable. Its cover is medium blue, with the title and author's name in block white lettering. The sole illustration is a bronze-like statue of a young Brahmin meditating. Its pages are pulpy in texture and the resolution of the ink is a bit smeary. It cost me six dollars.

Although the novel is only 150 pages, I read it slowly. Supervising a cabin of pre-adolescents, I would be lucky to steal away ten-minute blocks during afternoon quiet time or at night after lights out. When I made time to read I found the prose of *Siddhartha* lyrical and engrossing, the settings vivid and exotic, the characters unfailingly resolute. Just the same, my reading took the pace of a slog. I read *Siddhartha* with curiosity and appreciation, but not rapture. I got stranded 100 pages in.

Then we counselors had a long weekend over the Fourth of July. In staff tradition we drove southeast to Topsail Beach, a barrier island community unspoiled by tourism or industry near Wilmington, North Carolina. I took along *Siddhartha*, hoping I might finish it while lying on the white sands along the Atlantic Ocean—which I did, and which, for any number of reasons, affected me beyond any logical sense of proportion.

In those first 100 pages the young Brahmin Siddhartha departs his family's village to pursue a life of self-denial in the forests. Later he and his friend Govinda travel to witness the Illustrious Gotama (the Buddha) and his followers. After that Siddhartha embarks on a life of materialism, acquiring wealth as a merchant and learning the art of love from the courtesan Kamala. Through all these pursuits Siddhartha's quest remains the same: the attainment of wisdom (not knowledge) and an understanding of man's purpose in the world.

Around the 100-page mark, when I began reading again, Siddhartha grows repulsed by his self-indulgence. He denounces his riches and abandons the city, flees in his fancy clothes to a river, where he stares at his reflection and considers drowning himself. He falls asleep. He awakens, reborn. For the final third of the novel Siddhartha lives humbly along the river as a ferryman's apprentice.

It's in this newfound simplicity, after years of stillness and listening to the river, that Siddhartha finally reaches self-awareness—that he discovers, to put it broadly, the unity of life. He learns that the struggles of one man are the struggles of all men, that experience is cyclical, our follies repaid us, our sorrows recurring. The analogy employed by Hesse (and adopted from Hindu mythology) is simple enough: "The water changed to vapor and rose, became rain and came down again, became spring, brook and river,

changed anew, flowed anew.” In the river Siddhartha sees the faces of his past merge and the voices of all humanity unite into “one word: Om—perfection.” By surrendering his will, Siddhartha gains serenity; by effacing himself and his own desires, he comes to know the harmony of all mankind.

Siddhartha’s epiphany, as I read it on the sands of Topsail Beach, became my epiphany as well. But moments of insight are naturally preceded by ignorance. My ignorance was this: having spent my first twenty years in the flat farmland of eastern South Dakota, I knew nothing of the natural world, geology or geography, and until that weekend had never witnessed the ocean. (As it was, the rolling waves seemed kindred to a field of wheat rippling in the prairie wind.) Hesse’s analogy of the hydrologic cycle—the ever-flowing river—framed the continuity of experience in a way I had never once imagined.

Right then, reading the final ten pages of *Siddhartha*, I was overcome by an indescribable ecstasy. I felt it in my limbs—a tingling, my every sense engaged. Like Siddhartha by the river, I found myself “completely absorbed, quite empty, taking in everything.” I was aware of the sand, the shells, the gulls, the vast expanse of water, each molecule connected to the next. It was, I can say with certainty, the single most mindful moment of my young life.

It’s with this realization of earthly unity that Siddhartha’s wandering ends. But for me something was starting anew. In me already was the kindling of wanderlust, and *Siddhartha* was the spark that set me aflame. *Siddhartha*, as I understood it, was a novel about a seeker, a protagonist with an unquiet heart, a man both rebellious and self-determined.

II.

Cue the restlessness. The stuffed-to-the-seams suitcase, the passport stamps I treasured like merit badges. The hunger, the heartache, the breathlessness. And oddly enough, conflicting feelings of gratitude and discontent.

After college I went from the plains of South Dakota to a squalid, neon-lit district of urban Taiwan; following that I lived in the coal valleys of southern Wales, and then again the Appalachian foothills of North Carolina. I kept shuffling: the saguaro fields outside Tucson; graduate school in Grand Forks; a small fjord town south of Oslo, Norway. Finally I landed in downtown Minneapolis, only soon to cross the Mississippi River and settle in the Midway district of St. Paul. For the most part I supported

NONFICTION

myself as a teacher, although at times I worked as a secretary, gas station clerk, grunt on a factory line, jewelry salesman, copyeditor and waiter.

I made decisions with little regard for consequence—and there were consequences. By twenty-two already I entered treatment for alcohol dependency. Confused and ashamed, I fled my family and my ever-patient girlfriend, returning later only once I'd drained my accounts to zero. Despondency could engulf me, remorse, self-censure. Old friends disappeared and no new ones took their place. By twenty-seven I finally quit drinking, only then to be saddled with stultifying panic. A new girlfriend took me in and I failed her in new, creative ways. Everything I did, my actions fell short of my aspirations.

Those wayward errors, those pratfalls of young adulthood—they landed me at age thirty, as I noted, in the darkest of all my dark periods, plain stifled by my petty anxieties, admitting for once that I was without all the answers. Not long after returning from my weeklong vacation to England, I enrolled in a night class for basic mindfulness held at St. Paul's Clouds in Water Zen Center. In this class I studied writings by Jon Kabat-Zinn, practiced yoga, tai chi and sitting meditation. I was (and still am) pretty lousy at focusing my energies. But over time I saw that with a little patience, quietude and attention to my breath, I could better comprehend my place in the large, chaotic world. (Of course, once the class ended I failed to practice meditation even once. Instead I tried bettering myself through a regimen of playing basketball, repeated attempts at quitting smoking and a couple summers working highway maintenance.)

And just recently, the lessons of mindfulness still keen in my memory, I went to my bookshelf and plucked out *Siddhartha*. I reread it and discovered a book different from the one I'd read ten years earlier. It was not nearly so intimate, so visceral as it had been in my memory. This time around the characters' determination came off as egoism, and the lessons of self-fulfillment rang like *bon mots* from Spiritualism 101. As a whole, it struck me more as a tract than a dramatic narrative. If I sound overly critical, I don't mean to be. What I was now realizing was that *Siddhartha* operates as a fable, not a work of literary realism. As is so common upon rereading our cherished books, the words on the page hadn't changed, but the reader had.

Now, as a lecturer in English, I had sharpened my critical eye with structuralism and skepticism. Although as a reader I'm no less enthusiastic, my enthusiasm is harder earned. And while *Siddhartha* lends itself well to cultural appreciation (it has been profoundly influential), it is less suited for critical evaluation. Like Steinbeck and Fitzgerald and Frost, for whatever

reasons, Hesse seems relegated to the high school classroom. In other words, *Siddhartha* is something we're meant to outgrow. In an essay on *The Virgin and the Gypsy*, Pico Iyer makes passing reference to Hesse, along with D.H. Lawrence and Henry Miller, as "one of those enthusiasms of youth that one put away with childish things." Looking at *Siddhartha* at age thirty, I felt indeed that it belonged in a shoebox of keepsakes, beside my Bob Marley *Legend* cassette and the *Pulp Fiction* VHS tape, reminders of who I was once but am no longer.

Yet I still appreciated *Siddhartha*. Rereading it showed me who I'd been ten years earlier, my nascent desires and emerging beliefs, now on full display in the passages I had highlighted. If I thought of myself back then as a seeker, it showed in how I sought out epigrams:

- **On contemplation:** "Through thought alone feelings become knowledge and are not lost, but become real and begin to mature."
- **On mutualism:** "One can beg, buy, be presented with and find love in the streets, but it can never be stolen."
- **On overdetermination:** "When someone is seeking... it happens quite easily that he only sees the thing that he is seeking."

Apparently I wanted answers, secrets and directions for carving out my own enlightened existence. I wanted to adopt Siddhartha's moral quandaries (and their attending solutions) and play them out in my own life. In no small way, I wanted to believe I was Siddhartha, Siddhartha me. And perhaps that's why we read fiction: the endeavor of empathy. But at age twenty I didn't grasp that *Siddhartha* was never intended as a case study for the examined life. It's fiction, not self-help. It shouldn't be treated as a guidebook into personal maturity.

My restless twenties weren't set in motion solely because I read *Siddhartha* at an impressionable age—that would be giving myself too much credit as a reader. In fact, I was probably more influenced by how I *misread* the novel. With all my highlighting, all my isolating key phrases, I treated *Siddhartha* like a word search or a scavenger hunt. This soundbite-driven approach runs antithetical to the entire point of *Siddhartha*: that all the teachings in the world do not equate to wisdom. This lesson is everywhere in the book, no matter in what stage of life Siddhartha finds himself.

- **On self-reliance:** "A true seeker could not accept any teachings, not if he sincerely wished to find something."
- **On learning:** "Wisdom is not communicable.... Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom."

NONFICTION

This theme points to the great contradiction of *Siddhartha*: although the book contains innumerable truths, these truths are valid only when derived from firsthand experience. In that regard I was fortunate to misread the novel at age twenty; odds are I only would have become frustrated by this conundrum. Or perhaps I hadn't read *Siddhartha* with ignorance, but rather arrogance. Maybe I only sought inspiration, someone to hand me the torch of youthful abandon so I could run with it any direction I pleased.

I would take that torch, of course, and add to it my own fuel. Afterward I would frame my days according to those of the wandering Brahmin, tweaking my perception of North Carolina in Summer 2001 to reflect the world of *Siddhartha*. Like a palimpsest I wrote the book onto my experiences, and over that I wrote my experiences into the book. When months later I had forgotten the words of *Siddhartha*, its themes of experimentation and reinvention had become tattooed upon my soul, even if I no longer recognized the origin of the ink.

Once the camp season ended I returned to South Dakota, and in no time my precociousness gave way to self-destruction. The wounds would smart, but I trusted that only through experience, good old-fashioned trial and error, could I glimpse the true nature of sorrow and joy, chaos and peace. Although in the years to come I would traverse miles upon miles of physical geography, it would pale in importance to my travels in moral geography—the thrill of independence and the hardship of expectation.

Siddhartha was the book I needed as I was beginning my twenties. It set me loose into a future that seemed limitless, full of possibility. Yet it's not the book that will guide me into my thirties. (If any book does, I probably won't recognize it until I'm forty.) The young Brahmin, his wanderings, his enlightenment—these were no nowhere near my consciousness as I rested along the Thames at my thirtieth birthday, gazed out train windows, breathed in the salt off the Irish Sea. Rather, in my fleeting moments of insight I selfishly thought of myself, my errors and past waywardness, the man I might become in the ensuing decades. Had I considered whether the Brahmin Siddhartha might approve of my self-seeking, I'd have known there's no teacher but one's own experience, and that our paths compose but a single journey.

Paul Hostovsky

BRAILLE ON SUBWAYS

You can read a braille book when it's closed in your lap. You can't read a print book when it's closed in your lap, but you can read a closed braille book by simply slipping your hand inside and feeling the dots with your finger, the book closed with your hand inside it, reading. Slipping my hand inside this new biography of Louis Braille, while I'm on a crowded subway, say, reading a few paragraphs about the school for the blind in Paris in the early 1800s, feels a little like slipping my hand inside the blouse of my girlfriend on a crowded subway and copping a feel without anyone seeing because they're all reading or sleeping or looking out of windows. Then the smile in her eyes, as the whorl of my index finger furtively finds her nipple, pausing over it like a favorite passage, would be as indecipherable as the dots on this braille page are to the sighted.

And that's what I love about braille. It's a secret code, invented for that purpose—to keep secrets—by a French military man, Charles Barbier, who was unable to sell the idea to the French military, so he tried giving it away for free to the school for the blind in Paris where Louis Braille was a student in 1819. But the school wasn't interested either. Or rather, the school's director, the vainglorious Sebastien Guillie, wasn't interested. And he refused to adopt Barbier's method of raised dots.

But the blind children were interested. They were more than interested. They got their hands on the dots, and they loved them! They said the dots were far better than the cumbersome system of embossed print letters that the school was using at the time. And so shortly thereafter, when Guillie was fired for scandalously slipping his hand inside the blouse of one of the music teachers, the new director, Dr. Pignier, not only embraced Barbier's method of raised dots, he also encouraged the young Louis Braille to refine it and improve it and eventually to develop it into the current system of literacy that bears his name and is used by blind people all over the world.

And I'm thinking I'd like to make that pilgrimage one day, the one they describe in the back of this Louis Braille biography, which includes an appendix with a map and directions to the exact location of the little cemetery in Coupvray where the grave—practically a shrine—is situated. Hundreds of blind people every year make the pilgrimage to pay their respects and give thanks, leaving behind little brailled notes and letters and poems and prayers and business cards, a veritable garden of braille growing all around his gravesite in piles of stippled gray and white and yellow paper.

NONFICTION

And I'm thinking I would have loved to meet Louis back in the day, to pick his brain about his eponymous code. If only I were alive back then. Or if only he were alive today. And in a way, he IS alive, at least that's how it feels when I read: it feels like I'm in touch with Louis Braille himself. Or part of him, anyway. The part that's buried in the grave at Coupvray.

Because the part that's buried in Coupvray are his hands. Only his hands. You see, the hands were separated from the rest of him when the villagers of Coupvray and the bigwigs from Paris got into a tug of war over his remains, some 100 years after his death. Because when Braille died in 1852, his system of raised dots hadn't caught on yet, hadn't spread like wildfire throughout the world, which it would do in the decades to come. In fact, almost no one was using braille when Braille died, and he was buried in complete obscurity back in Coupvray, where he had been born, and where the villagers knew him, and loved him, and would remember him always.

But pretty soon the dots began to spread, clandestinely at first, then more openly, more boldly, among the blind teachers and students and graduates of the school for the blind who loved the dots and used them and believed in them in spite of the benighted sighted teachers who still advocated for the embossed print letters instead of the dots (because the sighted teachers couldn't read the dots!). And pretty soon the dots caught on, caught fire, all across France, then Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, and it wasn't long before blind people all over the world were reading braille and calling Louis Braille the Father of Literacy. And so a hundred years later, in 1952, when the bigwigs came down from Paris and tried to talk the villagers of Coupvray into disinterring Louis and bringing him up to Paris where he could be properly buried in the Pantheon among "the great and famous dead of France," the villagers would have none of it. They told the bigwigs where to go. And the French have some very colorful ways of telling you where to go.

But the bigwigs cajoled and pleaded, insisted and begged, and finally they reached a compromise with the village elders: Coupvray could keep the hands. The bones of Braille's hands would remain in Coupvray, because they were the vessels, the vehicles, the hands that had imparted to the hands of blind people all over the world a perfect means of reading and writing. But the rest of him would be shipped up to Paris and buried with great ceremony in the bowels of the Pantheon, sans hands.

And that's why today I can read a braille book when it's closed in my lap, or in someone else's lap, someone who happens to be sitting next to me, like my girlfriend, say, reading a braille book closed in her lap on a crowded subway. And maybe she comes across a passage that makes her smile, and

maybe she wants to share it with me. So she leans over, she leans in close so I can smell her fresh clean scent and hear her high sweet laugh in my ear, saying: “Hey, baby, check this out.” And she takes my hand in her hand and guides it over to her lap, and I slip my hand inside the book in her lap and I read what she was just reading. And nobody sees me doing this because they’re all reading or sleeping or just looking out of windows. And soon a smile begins to rise on my face like a sunrise, so now we’re both sitting there smiling over the same passage in the same braille book closed in her lap with my hand and her hand inside it.

Liz Hutchinson

MURMURATION

1

The tree lights up with little bodies. They spend the morning playing telephone. Their appearance is a sign of. They become a ragged cloud, mimic children, the woods, the long winter. The tree echoes their glossy black quiver.

The cloud mimics a wave, the wind, a wrong answer. Little cloud of wing and sound. Their appearance is a sign of. The tree stays in the winter, never leaves.

The cloud is a cloud of bodies. A little sky talk. A little wing swerve. Undulating darlings.

The tree lights up with little bodies, goes dark again. The tree is dead. Old birdhouse, bid farewell. Their appearance is a sign of. The cloud settles, mimics twilight.

Their appearance is a sign flying back and forth. What's next, what's next? The dead tree mimics a dead tree. The branches light up with rustling.

2

The cloud shakes the sky, tries to throw us off our axes. Their little bodies punch holes in the light. Swerve west, mimic the sun. Tight together, make a fist. The dead tree is still dead, still mimicking itself. The tree is pretty much nailing it. Is a tree still a tree after it dies?

The cloud whirls over a parking lot, more neurons than birds. This way, this way. Electrical impulses mimic a wheel, turning. We all fall down.

Birds talk more to the sky than to each other. The cloud splits in two, seams back together. Mimics a mother, mimics any human dwelling. Mimics the feel of. Stretches itself out over the field, the woods, the long winter.

The cloud bombs the parking lot. Look out, parking lot.

3

Little bodies blanket the sky. Their appearance is a sign of.

The tree mimics the rain, only very slowly. Sometimes a twig drops to the ground. Sometimes more than a twig.

The tree is falling. Someday it will fall. The tree doesn't mind. The tree doesn't care about anything. Say goodnight, birdhouse.

4

The cloud perches in a dead tree. Mimics it. Echoes.

Their appearance is a sign of a long winter. Goodnight.

5

If a tree lights up with little bodies, is it still really dead? Yes, the answer is yes. A dead tree is a dead tree, not that it matters to the cloud.

In the long winter, it can be hard to tell dead trees from the live ones. And yet, and yet. Their appearance is a sign of. This way, this way. They mimic the feeling.

Winter, keep blowing. Tree, go dark again. Ragged cloud, pass overhead.

OWL

1

The owl sits in the tree. The owl rides the tree bareback. The owl and the tree are old friends. The tree is dying. The owl will be there when he goes.

2

One, two, three, the owl jumps off the tree. The owl jumps over the moon. The tree is dead, the owl is moving on. Sharks keep swimming, the owl tells himself. The moon is a blank space in the night.

3

If an owl wears a hat, it is made of another owl. If a tree wears a hat, it is an owl, alive. Trees and owls are in an open relationship. The tree wants to wear the owl. The owl wants to wear other owls, but only dead ones. Their relationship is problematic.

4

The owl flies over the suburbs; dogs bark at him from their homes. The houses are warm and yellow inside. The moon is the color of indifference. In a dumpster behind Burger King, a cat is having kittens. The owl counts them, one two three. He lands on the roof, listens to their noises, which are still tangled up in each other: a collective, unsorted mewl.

5

If you are an owl then maybe you wear a shawl. Maybe your shawl is made of wool. Maybe it's made from other owls. If you are an owl, do you get cold? Maybe your tree is dead too.

6

The owl takes the long way around the forest. He has a new route to avoid the tree, who is still dead. Trees don't bury their dead, so the tree is still standing there making homes for little bugs. The owl could visit the tree if he wanted to, but he doesn't. Dead trees are even worse at talking than live ones. They're almost as bad as the moon.

7

Nobody knows if owls bury their dead because owls have a different definition of both the word bury and the word dead.

8

If I am an owl and you are an owl then we are probably all owls who drink from the same ceramic bowl. Painted on this bowl are one two three rabbits fleeing or chasing the painted moon. Some owls root for the rabbits, others for the moon. The joke is on the owls. They will never catch the rabbits, to say nothing of the moon.

9

The owl is thinking about what he wants for dinner. The tree is not thinking anything. The rabbits are thinking about the moon. The moon is thinking about something, but I'm not allowed to write it down.

10

The owl flies over the tree on his way out of town. The owl flies past the Burger King, past the barking dog, past tree hats and owl hats and all the painted rabbits. The owl flies past the moon, past the sky, past night and dreams and your bedroom window. If you are an owl, he scratches into the glass. His scratching makes a sound that you hear from the other side of sleep, and from there it could be anything. It doesn't matter. Your sleep takes the sound, swallows it whole.

POETRY

Scott Jacobs

X.1

this is a piss test you stuck again in the same thing
you win & once you are at the plate that breaks you are fate
you wing are off & then another you are a saint or off again you remain
the wane time throws boats above the stationary the squalor
the rancor the deadly hollow at the hack of his half step

a breed cycle a territorial bigwig the night catcher catches head weight
we wait for it wait for it wait for—nothing
semi-sensation a sensational mass in the lung in the shadow in the lung
the dreg fluid pastel fluid under the light the you stands
we will open heart him open heart him open heart him

vanish means vanquished had been veritably explored though empty
though heavily heavenly as astral provides immeasurable indelible
the laws of your youth are your mouth is cancer is straining
what a say we delayed to have you halfhearted the sound from behind a fan
was summertime we met we mettle we held on across the falling

their drugs pierced our shudders pinned are waistcoats to the bathroom
although the mirrors we fit in we slipped in we couldn't then return
from this is what became a distance because time is a distance like a mountain
as if we were ever moving like a glue gun along the ripping seam we straddle
augmentation was what our minds had to make had to suffer we secluded

we put our win away & suffer suffering the sailing ease the nocturne
the bed rite the long gone into the waving into the foghorn no more
the lure the lore the footprints that disappear from the floor of the world
have put your sword through your tongue into your memory upsetting
this setting & livable method of moving or removing or removing

Mary Christine Kane

THIS KIND OF LOVE

"Loving you is like loving a house on fire." Martin Sexton

Big love was
Breathless, big love
Became a burning house
Big love
Became a beacon
Buried with frozen
Bodies
Big love
Become a balloon, got
Bigger, hot-headed
Burst
Big love
Been disillusioned, slipped into
Back alley
Bought a ticket
Back home, following
Big plans, big ideas
Big love has become
Blue
Big love's
Been sending you things
Big love is following arrows
Back to your house,
Be careful, get your
Barricade
Big love wants you
Back.

POETRY

Cindy King

THE RIVERS RUNNETH BLACK WITH MASCARA

The widows soar-eth with parasols of flies,
with press-powder desert faces, the widows runneth over.

With pillbox hats and fascinators,
the widows runneth,

widows behind blind glasses and tinted windows,
broken widows runneth, widows streaked with rain.

The widows walk-eth the widow's walk in button boots,
widows wear-eth corsets to train their sighs.

In bustles and petticoats, widows rustle-eth,
shower-eth earth with the feathers of ravens.

They bring-eth their lips together, hide-eth their lipstick teeth.
Merry widows will work-eth to please you.

With belladonna, with nightshade, widows
Coif-eth their hair with the precision angels.

The widows watch-eth pornography
and are-eth not ashamed.

They do-eth the Hustle, a spinoff
of a spinoff that is twice as good as the original.

Ever certain of the finale,
widows will always see-eth things through.

She's a killer, killer queen, gunpowder, gelatin...
they singeth, and you may block your ears

but still, you can hear the widows. Widows
surround-eth you, pass-eth you between them

like a pink tetherball. They drop-eth you in a basket,
push-eth you through reeds

down rivers that runneth black with mascara.

Rustin Larson

MEMORIAL DAY

I wake from my daytime nap not quite sure
which century this is, what body I am in,
and what I am supposed to do next.
I stare at my surroundings in a mild panic
and calculate: there is the window;
there is the bright blue sky; there is the poster
on the wall of the saint, the tree that digests
the green knight in its hollow, the dragon
that can spell words as Chaucer could spell them.
I realize I am partially crippled by some pain
in the heel; I realize I must gain
my bearings, navigate down the staircase,
make some tea, eat a nectarine, urinate,
make sure I have zipped, walk limping
down the street, skirt the sidewalk
for the best shade, note the marigolds
the Methodists plot in their decorative garden,
inhale wiffs of hickory smoke from the pulled
pork stand, calculate the direction of the big
mean dog in the distance, watch the predator
wheel his car into the parking lot so he can view
the young mothers with their babies
at the swings under the sycamores
near the railway station. I must cross the tracks
and look down at the way my arches hug
the rails, feel the sting of sunlight
on the back of my neck.
I am self-assured this is not the continuation
of some dream. I know my name,
age, and a whole catalog of facts.

PALLIATIVE

Woke up depressed, flattened. They say
it's that time of year, but I don't get it:
irises, birds singing, sweet fragrances,
why should I feel bad? I drink
about half the amount of coffee
I usually do and regret it. I trip
over carpets, scan ads for supermarkets,
buy a used movie for a dollar, nothing helps.
The Amish try to sell me bulk Reese's Pieces
for \$1.99 a pound, corn flour for 29¢ a pound,
mysterious essential oils that are purported
to change one's mood. The sky
of the library's ceiling: morose giants
of previous administrations, empty bank
accounts; trade agreements are really
investor protection contracts according
to Chomsky. I'm fed information
in a constant beam of light,
no wonder I've gone bonkers.
Pork rinds for \$1.99 a bag. It has to do
with whenever the weekend officially
began and we were allowed to stay up
and watch monster flicks. The Japanese
Army had everything ours had,
but was required to battle
a staggeringly huge lizard
that crawled out from the sea.
Somehow man's lust for cheap electricity
backfired and we were all screwed,
starting with Tokyo and millions
of panicked residents evacuating
the city at once. What havoc. I crunched
a bowl full of barbecue rinds
and sipped a caffeinated beverage.

It didn't help and my brain kept enhancing
the story until daylight where I woke
from a dream where everything
had turned into fettuccine alfredo.
But look, I'm feeling better now
having told you. It's going to be cold tonight
with a good view of Mercury,
Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

Adam Matson

THE SUFFERING SERUM

Daniel stared at the image of his PET scan on Dr. Rudolph's computer screen. His torso, rendered primarily in shades of gray, was pockmarked with explosions of white, tumors burning like artillery craters on a battle field.

"It's everywhere," Daniel said.

"Yes," said Dr. Rudolph. "The cancer has metastasized."

What Daniel heard over the next few minutes was a grim litany of medical jargon. What he really heard was nothing at all.

"So how long do I have?" he asked.

"Four to six months," said the doctor.

"Ha."

He was thirty-four, and by his own account, had barely begun to live. During the last fifteen years he had ostensibly called himself an artist, and lived off his trust fund and the generous patronage of his parents. His life had drifted lazily by like the current of a summer stream. Expensive schooling in Europe, long caffeinated and cannabic nights painting and talking in SoHo lofts, one or two semi-successful exhibitions- it all suddenly blinked away. In his mind Daniel repeated the word over, over and over.

"And with treatment, I'll get, what, a few more months...?"

Dr. Rudolph outlined the prognosis, the various treatment options. Again Daniel heard almost nothing. The lymphoma had spread. The tumors were everywhere.

"Daniel, I'm going to page Dr. Caplan," Dr. Rudolph said. "If you're willing to hang around a little bit longer. We're developing a new experimental treatment for terminal cancers here at the hospital, and I think it would be worth your time to hear about it."

Daniel shrugged. He was now thinking of the conversations he would have with his parents, his sisters, his friends. He was scolding himself for waiting months to go to the doctor, long after something was clearly wrong.

Sometime later a tall bearded man entered the examination room, flanked by an assistant who looked about Daniel's age. The tall man introduced himself as Robert Caplan.

“So you’ve gotten some bad news,” Dr. Caplan said, taking a seat. His assistant, Dr. Susan Weiss, sat down beside him.

“Yeah,” Daniel said, his mind in a fog.

“We spoke with Dr. Rudolph, and based on your condition, Daniel, Dr. Weiss and I would like to have a conversation with you about treatment. Did Dr. Rudolph tell you what we’re doing?”

“No.”

“It’s an experimental treatment. We’re using a new drug, not available on the market yet, still deep in the research phase. It’s called Revivol.”

“Revive all? That’s cute.”

“It’s an intense form of chemotherapy,” said Dr. Caplan. “Much, much stronger than any of the drugs we typically use in cancer treatment.”

Dr. Caplan explained the drug, its history, its usage and testing (mainly on animals), but Daniel’s mind ricocheted from one cataclysmic death scenario to another. He heard little, tried to pay attention, realized he should be taking notes. He regretted coming to the appointment alone, but there was no one to come with him. Most of his friends did not yet know he was sick. He could not ask Lena.

“We’ve been testing Revivol on human subjects for about a year,” Dr. Caplan said. “With tremendous results. The treatment is extremely strenuous, eight hours a day, every day, for as long as you can take it, and you’d feel worse than you have ever felt in your life.”

“What do you mean, for as long as I can take it?”

“We haven’t had any patient last more than fourteen days,” said Dr. Weiss.

“What, before they died?”

“No, no, no,” said Dr. Caplan. “Before they quit. And it’s expensive, Daniel. We’re using a very rare and expensive drug, and this treatment is not even on the horizon yet for insurance companies.”

“What’s the cost?”

“Roughly ten thousand dollars a day.”

Daniel took a deep breath. He had his trust fund. Money wasn’t his primary concern. “Okay, so what’s the good news? Why would I do this?”

“Well, we make no guarantees,” said Dr. Caplan. “But the majority of our patients are showing great progress. We’re watching Stage Fours go

FICTION

into complete remission. Revivol destroys everything inside you, but it also rebuilds you. It's still too early in the study for concrete long-term survival data, but we've extrapolated the data from research on animals and our estimate for human survival is this: one day of Revivol likely equals two more years of life. Regardless of the type or stage of illness."

"Well, Jesus, sign me up," Daniel said. "I've got a quarter million in trust." He stared at a bunch of hazy numbers in his head. "That'll more than cover me for a full life, won't it?"

"This is not something to enter into lightly, Daniel," said Dr. Caplan. "The treatment itself could kill you. You'll be taken down to nothing. It will be the worst thing you've ever endured in your life, by far."

He listed the side effects in gut-wrenching detail.

"Patients call it the Suffering Serum," said Dr. Weiss.

"But by participating in the study you would be greatly aiding cancer research," Dr. Caplan said. "We're studying every aspect of the treatment, physical, emotional, psychological. We're running a concurrent study on how companionship affects treatment, so you would be going through the process with another patient."

"A chemo buddy?"

Dr. Caplan gave him a soft smile. "You had some bad news today, Daniel," he said. "And we understand that this is all extremely difficult. But you're young, and you appear to have the financial resources, and if you're willing to face the risk, this treatment could save your life. Could even give you a full life."

"Yeah, hm, let me think about it," Daniel said.

The first day of treatment Daniel was set up in a reclining chair in a small hospital room with windows overlooking a park. The nurses introduced him to his treatment partner, a young woman named Emily. Emily had already lost most of her hair, and her skin was gray, but Daniel noticed her body still looked relatively healthy and supple. She was not emaciated like many cancer patients he had seen.

"So what're you in for?" Daniel asked as the nurses set up their dispensing machines.

"Multiple myeloma," Emily said. "They gave me six months. I have a two year-old son. It was no choice at all."

"No choice," Daniel repeated. "That's it essentially."

He fingered the Hickman catheter attached to his torso, a pair of tubes connected to his major blood vessels, one in his chest, one in his neck.

“So we’re in this together,” Daniel said.

Emily took a deep breath. “I hope I can hold out. They said nobody makes it very long. It’s too hard. I’m going to think about Caleb.”

Daniel nodded. He had no one to think about. No small child. Emily, he realized, seemed to have it worse than him. There were degrees of dying, and he felt sorry for her.

The nurses fixed the first banana bags of Revivol onto Daniel and Emily’s dispensing machines, and turned the valves on their IV’s to start the flow.

“We’ll be watching you closely,” Daniel’s nurse said. “Call us if you need anything.”

Daniel gave her a thumbs-up. The medicine started to flow and immediately he felt a burning sensation in his chest. Within minutes the burn became so paralyzing that he felt like his body was being squeezed in a full choke-hold. In the other recliner Emily pinched her eyes shut and balled her fists. Daniel was barely conscious of her presence. The pain was all he could think about. He tried to think through it, count through it, breath through it, but his whole body was on fire. Eventually the pain reached a crescendo and planed off, and he found that by taking deep breaths, holding them, and exhaling slowly, he could steady himself enough not to want to rip the Hickman line out of his chest.

After four hours they were given a one-hour break. The nurses encouraged them to eat something, even a light lunch would bolster their strength, but neither Daniel nor Emily requested food. Daniel made a bee-line for the rest room adjacent his recliner and spent half an hour giving at both ends. When he returned to his chair he could barely stand, and his vision had narrowed to a sweaty tunnel. Looking over at his partner, he saw Emily curled into a ball, facing him but staring at the floor, her face bone white.

“It’s not so bad,” Daniel whispered, his throat sandpaper dry, and Emily managed a thin smile as Daniel fell into his chair.

In the evening Daniel was sequestered in a private room on the hospital’s isolation ward. A nurse drew his blood and took his vitals and measured his urine output, a process that would be repeated, she told him, every four hours during the night. Daniel ordered cream of wheat for

FICTION

dinner and ate some of it. He Skyped with his parents, who promised to visit the next day.

“Yeah, it’s no fun so far,” Daniel said. “But at least now I know what I’m in for.”

He watched basketball on television and tried to fall asleep, interrupted by frequent trips to the bathroom. When he finally did manage to fall asleep the nurse came into his room and took his vitals.

“How do you feel?” she asked.

“Gahh,” Daniel said.

The next morning he was exhausted before the treatment even began. His body dropped into the recliner like a blob of cement, solidifying in helpless inertia. He had barely slept all night, bothered by fever dreams and diarrhea and the blood drawings, which he hated and resented already.

Beside him Emily looked like a hollow pod from which two blood-shot eyes peered out. She greeted him with a slight wave.

“How about the pillows in our rooms?” Daniel said as the nurses hooked them up. “Are they uncomfortable, or what?”

Emily gave him a strange look.

“I may write a letter,” Daniel added.

“My breakfast was lukewarm,” she murmured.

“We have a few complaints so far,” Daniel told the nurse.

His sense of humor vanished as soon as the medicine hit home. Once again Emily became a blur nearby, a coincidence to the snapping viper of his pain. It was worse than the day before. Yesterday he had been stronger. Now his body simply surrendered. He closed his eyes and let helpless tears stream down his face. His tongue swelled in his cottony mouth, but the effort of reaching over to pick up his water bottle caused his head to spin. He laid there, nausea wafting through his head and stomach, unable to move or even think, trying to focus on anything that could bring his mind relief or inspiration. But there was nothing.

That night his parents came to visit him and Daniel was grateful for the company. After they left he curled up in his bed and hugged his knees to his chest and tried not to throw up. He cried himself out, cried at his own helplessness and vulnerability, as the reality of the treatment began

to sink in. They were killing him, destroying everything in his body. In a few more days he would not be able to leave the hospital or go outside, even if he wanted to. He would be too susceptible to germs. He was quickly becoming a prisoner, trapped in this small room. The nurses were friendly, but they did not love him. He wanted somebody to hold him, rub his back and his hair. He wanted to call Lena, to hear her voice. Wanted her to come lie with him.

But the room was dark and he lay there alone, not watching the television. Four years, he told himself. I've earned four years so far.

He ate nothing for dinner, and the nausea attacked him like a knife in his guts. He wondered if he would still be alive in the morning.

On the fourth day Emily lay whimpering in her recliner during their mid-day break. Daniel returned from the bathroom and slumped into his chair. He took a weak sip of water.

"Emily, are you okay?"

She moaned and turned to face him. "It's so bad, Daniel."

"No," Daniel said, his voice just above a whisper. "Walk in the park."

The murmur of his moving lips made him nauseous.

"My husband Ron comes to visit me at night," Emily said. "God, I can't wait to see him. It's the only thing keeping me going."

"What about Caleb? Does he come too?"

"No. I don't want him to see this. He would be scared and he wouldn't understand."

Daniel noticed her voice changed when she spoke of Caleb. She seemed to gain strength, even sat up in her chair.

"Tell me about him," Daniel said, closing his eyes.

"He's my little munchkin," Emily said. "Blonde hair, freckles, little pug nose. Ron has him hooked to our iPad, which I don't think is a good idea. I want him to play outside. He likes to run. I say run if you like to run."

The simple thrill of thinking about going outside both excited Daniel and filled him with weary dread. He opened his eyes and saw Emily was smiling now, and if she was happy that was good enough for him. He told her to tell him more about Caleb as he sipped his water and waited for the nurse to come back.

FICTION

By the sixth day Daniel had lost almost fifteen pounds. The medicine had burned the taste buds off his mouth and tongue, and he had to force-feed himself cream of wheat, which was like eating a wet pillow. The only thing he could taste was chocolate milk, which he drank as much as his stomach could handle.

Emily lay in her recliner, barely able to move. She looked all right physically, Daniel thought. She didn't seem to be losing weight. But like him she was completely bald and hairless. Daniel lurched across the room, holding the wall for support, and sat down in the chair beside her. They sat in silence for a while. Eventually Emily produced a photograph of Caleb, which Daniel held in his quivering hand.

"He was a miracle baby," Emily said. "I had leukemia when I was nineteen. The doctors weren't sure I would be able to conceive. Ron and I went to the fertility clinic, tried in vitro for over a year. Finally on our third cycle we got Caleb."

"He looks like a healthy boy," said Daniel.

"He is, thank God."

"So you've been through all this before?" Daniel asked.
"Chemotherapy?"

Emily nodded. "Compared to this my first round of chemo was a chest cold."

"How old are you now?"

"Twenty-seven."

He thought of his own life over the last fifteen years. He had called himself an artist, but really he had been a rich kid with a little talent and no sense of responsibility. While Emily had been receiving chemotherapy eight years ago he had been living in France, spending all day in cafes and museums, spending all night drinking and screwing Swedish art students, painting or drawing when he felt like it. Those memories seemed worthless now, the libertine frolics of a dead young man.

"I've never done anything really meaningful with my life," Daniel said, looking at the picture of Caleb. "I just spent years fucking around. I had a girlfriend but I broke up with her. I told her she was holding me back."

"How was she holding you back?"

Daniel shrugged. "She was living in my apartment but she wasn't paying rent. She was a dancer and she was in the studio all the time. She couldn't really afford to work. I told her I was shouldering the entire financial burden, and I wanted more freedom to make art."

Emily said nothing. Daniel stared at the floor.

“It was a lie though,” he said. “I was living there rent-free too. My parents subsidized my life. I just wanted Lena out of the way. There was another girl I wanted.”

He handed Emily back the picture of her son.

“Sometimes I think I deserve this,” he said.

“Nobody deserves this,” said Emily. “You should call your girlfriend. Explain how you feel. It might make you feel better.”

Daniel nodded. He might call Lena, if he had the energy. After treatment he had been going back to his room and trying to sleep. His stomach muscles ached and cramped from vomiting. If he curled into a ball they didn’t hurt as much.

Dr. Caplan and Dr. Weiss came to visit Daniel in his room later that afternoon. They wore masks and gloves. Everything in Daniel’s world smelled like disinfectant and Purell. He lay in bed with the television on mute.

The doctors asked him about his strength, his physical health, his emotional state. They asked him about his appetite, his attention span, what he talked about when he Skyped with his parents. His head felt heavy and it was an effort to respond. Dr. Weiss took detailed notes. Dr. Caplan crossed his legs and sat casually beside Daniel’s bed.

“Your bloodwork and vitals look good, Daniel,” said Dr. Caplan. “You’ve been very sick, but you’re young. That helps. Most patients over fifty last about seven days.”

“Does anyone die from this?” Daniel asked.

“It’s happened,” said Dr. Caplan.

“Do you feel like you’re going to die?” asked Dr. Weiss.

Daniel felt tears welling up behind his eyes. “I’m scared,” he said. “I feel like if I catch a cold, I’ll be dead. I’ve told people not to come visit me, because of the germs. But I wish I had someone here.”

“You can have visitors,” said Dr. Caplan. “But we don’t want you catching a cold. Keep taking the antivirals and the antibiotics.”

“I’m worried I won’t be able to hold out,” Daniel said. “My goal is twenty-five days. That’s how many days I can afford, and that will give me fifty years. Won’t it?”

“That’s what we’re hoping,” said Dr. Caplan.

FICTION

“Does it help to have a partner?” asked Dr. Weiss. “Does it help to have Emily?”

Now Daniel did start to cry. “It does help,” he said. “I don’t even know her, but I don’t know if I could do it without her.”

That night he cried himself out. He thought of all the wrongs he had ever committed in his life, large and small, mostly routine acts of selfishness too numerous to name. He wished he could take them all back, spend the rest of his life helping people.

It was around midnight when he dialed Lena. The nurse had just come in to take his blood and vitals, but he had not yet fallen asleep. Lena answered after several rings. She sounded like she had been sleeping.

Daniel explained the Revivol treatment in as much detail as he could muster, and the silence on the other end of the phone was pregnant and deep. He thought he could hear her crying softly.

“I know I have no right to ask you this,” Daniel said. “But could you come and visit me? It’s really terrible here.”

“Okay, Daniel,” Lena said. “I can come tomorrow.”

The next day Daniel tried to use Lena’s visit as inspiration for getting through his treatment. He had told the doctors his goal was twenty-five days, but when the treatment began each morning, that number disappeared. He could only think of the next few burning seconds. He imagined his whole body filled with lava. The Revivol was like a living thing feasting on his insides, devouring his blood and bones and organs. When the last of the medicine finally drained from the banana bag and he came out of the fog, he remembered Emily beside him, and felt minutely better having someone else with him to face the beast.

That night he took a long shower in the little bathroom off his room, his first wash in two days. The door stood propped open and a nurse sat outside in case he fell or passed out. His Hickman line was covered in clear waterproof bandages. When he emerged from the shower, he stared at himself in the mirror. Naked he was a dripping, hunched thing, white and hairless, his limbs constricted angles of bone. The nurse removed the bandage over the Hickman line, and with it a rectangle of Daniel’s skin. She massaged the raw welts with a cool salve.

Lena arrived around eight o’clock. She wore the obligatory mask over her face, and at first Daniel thought she was a nurse, until he saw the plain terror in her eyes as she stared at him.

“It’s not as bad as it looks,” Daniel said. It was worse.

She sat down beside his bed and they watched television for a while. She told him about her dance workshops, and updated him on a few mutual friends. Daniel said nothing, listening, enjoying the sound of her voice.

“So those things we felt in your neck,” Lena said eventually. “Those were cancer?”

“Yeah,” Daniel said. “I was so fucking stupid.”

“It’s just... why would we have thought it was cancer?”

“I don’t know.”

He started to cry. She looked beautiful, and he wished he could get out of bed and leave with her, walk the streets of the city, stop off for pizza and coffee, go see a band at one of their bars. He would get there, he told himself. He would walk the streets again. He would inhale the air outside and sit in the park on warm nights. Just not tonight.

“Thank you for coming, Lena,” Daniel said.

On the tenth day Emily started crying during their mid-day break, softly at first, then choked, heaving sobs.

“Emily.”

Daniel could barely find the will to move, let alone the strength, but he wrested himself from his chair and staggered over to sit beside her. His body weight was down to nothing, and his head felt like an anvil lolling around on his neck.

“This is my last day of treatment, Daniel,” Emily said.

“What do you mean?”

“I can’t afford it,” Emily whispered. “Ten grand a day, for God’s sake, who can?”

Daniel said nothing. Not for the first time he remembered that his trust fund, his natural born privilege, was literally saving his life.

“I applied for a special grant from a research foundation,” Emily said. “I got it. But they only pay for ten days. They said twenty years was a blessing and a gift. How could I argue?”

“There must be something you can do,” Daniel said. “How can they just cut you off?”

“That’s our fucking health care system.”

FICTION

The nurses returned for the second round. Daniel staggered back to his chair feeling helpless, leaving Emily to cry as she was hooked up to the Revivol. Through the afternoon treatment he tried to think of her, think of her playing with Caleb. She might get twenty years. She would see him grow up, but she might not attend his wedding. She would probably never meet her grandchildren. Twenty years were just enough to appreciate how full a life could be. It was almost worse to have life taken from you at forty-five than twenty. At forty-five a person had attachments and investments. She would just be hitting her stride.

When the treatment was over Daniel wanted to cross the room to Emily. He wanted to hold her and say goodbye. But he felt so weak and sick he could barely move. By the end of each day they were each barely conscious. Now Daniel watched, helpless and mumbling, as Emily was wheeled back to her room in a hospital bed.

By evening Daniel had regained enough of his faculties to think clearly. Dr. Caplan had told him that as part of the treatment, since everything was experimental and any information could be important, he would make himself available to his patients at any time of day or night. Daniel picked up the phone by his bed and dialed the number on Dr. Caplan's card.

"They're sending Emily home," Daniel croaked when Dr. Caplan answered the phone.

"Yes, that's true," the doctor replied. "Unfortunately the funding for her treatment has run out. We encounter this problem regularly, I'm sorry to say. We're pushing for more funding ourselves, but...."

"I have money," Daniel said. "I have a hundred and fifty grand left. That's fifteen days' worth of treatment. If we split the money between her and me we can both stay on for another week."

There was a long silence on the other end of the phone. Finally Dr. Caplan returned, his voice softer than before, almost closer. "You'd be willing to pay for her treatment, Daniel?"

"Yes."

"At the expense of your own?"

"Yes."

There was another silence. "That's very noble of you," Dr. Caplan said.

"She has a little kid," Daniel said. "I have nothing. I've been a fucking leach my whole life, sucking money out of my parents' bank accounts. It doesn't matter if I lose a few years. But she has a family."

“If this is what you want, Daniel, we can do it. It’s your money.”

“It’s what I want. Please tell her she can continue the treatment.”

What he did not also say was that if he showed up for treatment in the morning and Emily was not there, he was not sure he would be able to go through with it. Dr. Caplan agreed to his terms, and for the first time since he’d begun taking the Suffering Serum Daniel had no trouble falling asleep.

The next day between treatments it was Emily who climbed out of her chair and lurched across the room to Daniel. She sat next to him and held his hand and rested her head against his arm. Too tired and ill to speak, they sat quietly together for the full hour, separating only when the nurses returned with the afternoon dose.

For seven more days they endured the treatment. Daniel could no longer tell from day to day if he felt better or worse. He answered Dr. Caplan’s research questions mechanically, in monosyllables. The medicine had burned his throat so badly that he could barely speak. But something did feel better. With each day he thought not of the years he was losing by paying for Emily’s treatment, but of the years she was gaining. Years she could spend with her son. During their mid-day breaks they held hands and tried to smile, but mostly just sat quietly together.

At the end of the week Daniel did not remember passing out during his afternoon treatment, but when he woke up he was back in his hospital room. Dr. Caplan and Dr. Weiss sat beside his bed. A nurse took his vitals and prepared to draw blood.

“How do you feel, Daniel?” Dr. Caplan asked, ever ready with his bearded smile.

Daniel gave him a weak thumbs-down.

“You’ve lasted longer than anyone yet,” said Dr. Weiss. “All eyes are on you now.”

“I hate to put this to you, Daniel, because you’ve been quite a warrior,” said Dr. Caplan. “But as you are probably aware, you have enough money left for one more day. If you’re up to it.”

Daniel swallowed. His throat would barely open. “Give it to Emily,” he whispered.

The doctors both stared at him. He did not even feel the prick of the nurse’s needle drawing his blood.

FICTION

“Are we to understand that you want to give your last available resources to your partner?” said Dr. Caplan. “Even though it means you will likely live a shorter life?”

“...sick of this shit,” Daniel groaned.

The doctors exchanged a glance and Dr. Weiss scrawled a note in Daniel’s file.

Dr. Caplan rested a gloved hand on Daniel’s shoulder. “Daniel, there’s something else we have to discuss now.”

Daniel nodded.

“As we told you before you began this process, this entire treatment and all its attendant research is experimental, and exploratory,” said Dr. Caplan. “But there were certain aspects of the experiment we deliberately did not disclose to you, so that we could study your natural behavior. You have been receiving Revivol this entire time, and you’ve held up well. We’re all extremely impressed with your progress. You have become the standard. But your partner, Emily, has not been receiving Revivol. She has been receiving a placebo.”

Daniel felt his heart lurch in his chest. His mouth felt somehow even drier than it had a moment ago. He opened his mouth to speak.

“No need to worry,” Dr. Caplan said, holding up his hand. “Emily does not have cancer. She did have leukemia, but her disease has been in remission for years. The truth is she’s perfectly healthy. She’s an actor, Daniel, a confederate in the experiment.”

Daniel’s mouth hung open, but he could find no words. Black emotions careened through his head—betrayal, embarrassment, anger, fear—but instantly they all fell away. What he felt instead of rage or indignation was profound joy and gratitude, a relief so full it warmed his entire body.

“So Emily’s going to be okay?” he asked.

“And so are you,” said Dr. Caplan. “You’ve had enough Revivol to give yourself over thirty years. And you can keep going if you want. The money you had wished allocated to Emily is still in your bank account.”

“I’m so glad she’s okay,” Daniel whispered, and now Dr. Weiss began to cry. “Why?” Daniel asked after a moment.

“We’re trying to use our research to make a statement about healthcare,” said Dr. Caplan. “And the data we’ve collected is very encouraging. We’ve run this same experiment many times, and in over seventy percent of the cases the patient with the excess financial means

voluntarily offered to use their own money to help their partner. Just like you did. Patients with means are choosing to save the lives of virtual strangers. Makes a pretty good argument for healthcare reform, don't you think? You had nothing to gain by helping Emily. In fact, you had much to lose. But you did it anyway. You should be proud of yourself, Daniel."

Daniel thought about Emily, recalled their weeks of arduous treatment. She had looked sick. Her skin was pale, her body hairless. But she had not lost weight the way he had. Had it all been an act? He wanted to commend her for her performance.

"Can I talk to her?" Daniel asked.

"She'll be with you tomorrow," said Dr. Caplan. "She requested to stay with you for as long as you remain on the treatment."

The next day Emily greeted him with a hug and tears in her eyes. Daniel could not think of anything to say to her. He wanted to tell her how happy he was that she was healthy, but for a long time he said nothing.

"Do you really have a son?" he asked eventually.

"Oh yes," she said. "Caleb is my munchkin. And I am married, and I did have leukemia."

"Why would you do something like this?" Daniel asked.

"Everyone was so kind to me when I was sick. My family, friends, strangers. The nurses and doctors. Once I got well I wanted to do something to help the cause. This kind of thing... isn't easy. I have to watch you be sick. But we're helping people."

The nurse arrived and began hooking up Daniel's IV.

"Are you really going to stay on for eight more days?" Emily asked.

"I'll try," Daniel said.

"I'll be with you the whole time."

She took his hand and laced her warm fingers through his. The nurse opened the valve on his IV and the medicine surged through his catheter. The burn arrived, fiery and all-consuming as ever, but with Emily holding his hand Daniel felt a little bit less afraid.

Toti O'Brien

SALT OF THE EARTH

The nuns' pasta had a wide reputation, and consistently bad. It was actually a term of comparison used to point at terrible cooking.

Why pasta of all food? In our country it wasn't a course but a symbol. Always present (a twice-daily entrée), its success depended on timing and care more than ingredients and skills. Pasta was only good if perfectly cooked in sufficient, full boiling, properly salted water, just as long as necessary... Drained and seasoned in a blink then, with firm expert gestures. Hesitation would be fatal. Timing needed scientific calculation. All prospective eaters should be fork in hand while the cook, vivaciously, scooped away.

Pasta, thus, meant domestic efficiency and love.

Its seasoning added to the concept. Being usually a simple tomato sauce, its appeal hid in minor details each cook claimed to master. Not all tomato sauces were the same, cooks suggested with a tone of conspiracy. Due to mysterious tricks—slight adjustments, never explained—pasta condiments went from exquisite to frankly disgusting, which defines the nuns' tomato sauce.

I have repeatedly tasted it, when allowed to stay in school for the afternoon. Having lunch at the nunnery—where I frequented elementary—was a joy. It provided me with a thrill of freedom due to the long absence from home. The meal's quality was the least of my worries. I would have gulped stones without noticing.

I can reconstruct both taste and consistency of the *pastasciutta* we ate. First of all it wasn't dry, as its name implied and tradition exacted. It was wet. The sauce, too thinned out, mollified the noodles, giving them a gummy texture and a tendency to stick to each other. They were usually insipid and cold, tepid at best. The condiment, bloody red, had the slight acidity of can contents insufficiently labored by the magic of mothers, aunts, grandmothers.

Pasta felt overcooked. It probably wasn't. It became it by the time it left those towering pots, taller than us, to reach into a few hundreds of plastic plates (one more striking lack of taste).

Catholic schools weren't fancy places by then, in my country, but a cheap form of education. They were crowded. Kids of working class often remained after noon, though lessons were uniquely taught in the morning. But their folks couldn't afford nannies, and older siblings were already

employed. If grandparents had died or—as it commonly occurred—still lived in the village, nuns would be the default.

They organized naive (yet no less delightful) after-school activities, such as choir singing, craft making, ball games in the courtyards, or, of course, helping out. This last happened to be the most interesting. Helping anywhere—included those giant, imposing, quasi-industrial kitchens I finally explored, thus acquiring a zest for community life. I found comfort in the plainness, the essentiality devoid of comparison. I had never enjoyed complex rituals around food... they loaded something natural with an artificial surplus, indigestible.

To me the nuns' pasta was good. I was hungry from exertion and fun, hurried to fill up, then run towards more exertion and fun.

*

She came in as a substitute when I was in eighth grade. Our literature and language instructor (who taught several courses, being responsible for the class overall preparedness) had left without warning at mid-year. She had a nervous breakdown, we were told. It sounded scary and vague. She was questioning her religious vocation...she might leave the congregation.... It sounded zesty though not unheard of. It recurrently occurred.

We had examinations to pass, Middle School to complete. Being briskly abandoned was bad. Our principal would find someone strong and reliable... not too much of a disciplinarian, we hoped. We couldn't help worrying.

She was unbelievably small: a child-size, a miniature. Old by our standards—that could be anything after forty. We of course couldn't judge by her hair, sealed under the veil. But a grayish mustache shaded her upper lip, conferring authority. Not that we would doubt such a quality: Sister Mia was a powerhouse. She could have handled a regiment instead than a bunch of teens. I wonder if she actually did, at least once. I would not be surprised.

In a blink she assessed our scholarly weaknesses (our previous teacher had slackened before quitting) and perfected her plan of attack. We would all pass the exams with top grades, she announced. We shivered, afraid of being overburdened. But we shouldn't have—she was as inflexible as just. We had to do what she asked for, which was reasonable though it didn't admit excuse. We should comply, period. Once done we were done.

NONFICTION

I liked her right away. A fact of chemistry... is it possible between kids and old nuns? I think so. She had come back from Spain where she was sent during the Civil War, then allowed to indefinitely stay. Did they summon her for our sake? She liked it best there, she admitted. During the Civil War, paradoxically, she had become a Communist. She had seen enough social injustice, and too closely—she explained—not to take a definite stance.

We believed voting Communist was forbidden to Catholic nuns. It was perfectly fine—she affirmed—her mustache, pearly with minuscule beads of sweat, fiercely quivering.

*

I was a troubled girl at the time. After elementary, I was switched from the bad-pasta-school to a more snobbish institute, and I hadn't been able to adjust. Disconnected from my schoolmates—all belonging to higher social ranks—I resented my difference, was bored by study, eager for something I missed without figuring what it might be.

Sister Mia sensed my unrest. She perfectly framed each student, firmly holding the group on her palm. She proposed me a deal: she would spare me a few hours of class each time I'd bring her extra work in the morning. I was quick to accept. She exacted a translation from Latin or into Latin: a full page she delivered as soon as she saw me. For six months I daily complied. It was hard, but I managed. I ended up completing my work in less than an hour. Then I started to enjoy it like a puzzle, a mystery I craved unspooling. And I never missed once.

Afterwards I had changed. Afterwards I was someone else. I'm aware of it now, though I still can't explain it.

My reward: at mid-morning, when language courses were over and the class switched to lighter instruction, I was out. Sister Mia rode in her small Fiat with me on the passenger side, having loaded the vehicle with all sort of stuff: food, books, toys, shoes, clothes. We crossed town, headed to far and dilapidated outskirts—to an area so poor it seemed stuck centuries behind. Also in absence of rain the terrain was muddy, probably for some sour system fault, confirmed by the nasty smells. Vegetation was scanty and sad in spite of excess humidity. Housing consisted in huts and barracks, too sparse to be called a slum. In a cube of concrete of uncertain function Mia had made her own alternative school. Obviously an only room, though we built dividers to allow various activities. I said we built, for I helped at any task my boss indicated.

As you guessed I couldn't ask better than sauntering from this to that, discovering a fun skill per hour: masonry to plumbing, to carpentry, to electricity. But my duties weren't limited to construction. Sister Mia put my literacy at fruition—she would not waste a drop of any resource available. She dispatched me from this to that table in order to instruct chosen students, in whatever a subject I could even barely fake.

I was suddenly exposed to an unsuspected model of functioning: everyone was in charge, offering the level of skill she currently owned. All the way, from elders to babies...always present in the room, doubling of course as a nursery. Doubling is a limited word for the multi-functionality of what now would be called a cultural center, perhaps. Then such term didn't exist. We just went with 'school.'

But how different was this school from where I was sent in the morning—Latin version in hand. I loved this just as much as I loathed that. I am not sure of what my busy afternoons fulfilled: many things, I suspect, and all paramount. Such as flexibility. Imagination. Purpose. Usefulness. Exchange. Fairness.

Freedom.

Before hopping in the Fiat I changed in the restrooms, tossing in a plastic bag the blue uniform I hated. I wore what I believed most suited me, of course forbidden clothes: a tight fitting blouse, emerald green, and my favorite black miniskirt. I wore hose instead of socks, and a pair of ballerina shoes. After all I might meet boys by leaving the convent, diving into the real world Sister Mia opened for me. She didn't care how I dressed. I looked pretty much like the girls I taught, like the sweet teen-mothers whose babies I pampered, while they learned their algebra and grammar.

Mia could teach it all, any level. I wouldn't have been capable of judging the extent of her knowledge, and I certainly didn't try. I was busy doing, busy enjoying. But I clearly recall she could explain anything to anyone. I do not remember a time when she was at loss, were the problem a broken faucet or a calculus test. I don't know where she had acquired her diplomas, what she had studied or when—she was not in her prime, as proved by her whitening mustache. Though her face, a small rosy apple, didn't bear many signs of wear. I knew nothing of her but the present tense—that wholly sufficed me. For I was in it, having fun.

*

NONFICTION

In the morning I had packed lunch, simply doubling my snack—making it more abundant, then halving it. Thus mom wouldn't suspect I skipped cafeteria, being instead in a car, gladly riding with my beloved mentor. Almost every day I made my favorite sandwich: thickly buttered bread with a couple of anchovies. I adored the taste, almost guilty of biting into that scrumptious delicacy, being spared both family table and refectory. I relished the salty tanginess, the smell of fish, my morsel of ocean.

Freedom: did I call your name?

I never told my parents, or anybody, a thing. I'm not sure if the principal or other teachers knew. While arrangements must have been made for my missing courses, they were never addressed in my presence. Grades on my report simply remained the same...besides Latin, popped to a brave A+. For a dead language, it brought quite a life to my lousy teens.

June arrived, alas. We got our diplomas and quite brilliantly, as our sub had promised. Then we left for vacations, while our folks chose the appropriate high schools. I remained in the same institute two more years, for gymnasium—at my great discontent. All my disquiet resumed.

Teachers obviously had changed. Worse... in the fall Mia was nowhere around. Or, I guess, we would have struck a deal, though I was no more of her students. But she was nowhere to be found—rumors said she was sent back to Spain. Did she ask to? It would have been cruel, but could not be ruled out. She had been honest: she disliked our snobbish little society, even only part time. Did she obey orders? Nuns have to, even when they possess a mind of their own. Was she punished for something she did?

Was she, god forbid?

Gabriel Oladipo

DEBUTANTE

I walk as a peacock,
My dress bone-white.
In the distance
George and Chloe's bodies are
A sort of roadside crash. They're
Making out or
Strangling each other, and
Seem to be having fun, and

I'd like that too.
Still moving, I
Tear it off bit by bit,
Tulle and silk landing like
Broken gulls.
A breath. Then a step and

I'm at church,
Dress back and
Mom in the front row,
Face folded in on itself.
Except her smile
Twisting the light like
A cleaned set of knives.

POETRY

Michael Pontacoloni

I AM AN UNWILLING ASTEROID

Mom, one day you're going to die.
me too. And the dog
Shriveled in August
and the big white pine in the yard
that sprazzled outward like the wool pom of your hat
frosted with fungus.

We hemmed the tree to firewood
and reduced the dog to ash.
My childhood tree fort, crenellation and turret,
was only ever one wide plank
laid across two limbs
like a blanket in your lap.

This Christmas you hid in my stocking
a sponge dinosaur, the kind
that swells form pill to football
when tucked in
to a bowl of tap water.
Next day it dries back to extinction.

Joke gift, small token of absorbency
I could have passed on to my nephew
or tossed
in the donation bin at mass.
I tied a brick around its thin green neck
and threw it in the lake.

Ron Riecki

(DETROIT) I SAW A POSTER OF JESUS

At least I think it was Jesus.
It was a man in a robe with a beard and a face like he was a little bit high.
And there was a saying underneath.
And there was beach too.
I almost forgot about the beach.
And the saying was something about stones.
I think it was that if you carry stones in your pockets, it makes it hard to walk.
Or else it was good to carry stones in your pockets, because then you could
throw them in the river.
And Jesus fit into it all somehow.
It wasn't the poster about footprints.
It was about stones.
I just can't remember if the stones were good or bad.
I remember a wave crashing up gently like it had a cold.
I thought the wave might have the sniffles and had just finished a long day
of work because it couldn't get the boss to give the day off.
And Jesus was high or happy or dumbfounded or something.
And there was this moron nearby with rocks in his pockets and he didn't
even know what to do with them.
And so sometimes when I go walking around town, I'll pick up a rock and
look at it and try to figure out if it's evil or good and then I just throw it
through one of the abandoned building windows and the crash sounds so
far away, as if nothing happened, as if we could all fall down a massive
mine shaft and it wouldn't even make a sound.

I GREW UP IN A TOWN SO COLD THAT EVEN THE ICE COULD NOT COMMIT SUICIDE

We would walk home backwards, even in summer,
just to keep up the practice. Our house would be buried
in white, the world cocained, and we'd punch each other
at bus stops for heat. This was in a north so north
that there was more reindeer than rain. I love-hated the attic
of the Arctic, my Saami youth, my lichen life,
the way we were almost extinct, almost invisible
in the aurora borealis perfection, as if the sky was dancing
to Armageddon, the winter lasting forever, the Witch
owning everything. My grandfather was a shaman.
He told me to fear heat. I remember his theater eyes.

(MORRISTOWN) END OF THE DAY, ZOMBIE FILM

I have been killed three times
tonight, all of them with the wind
eating my eyes. They say that death
is peaceful, but death to the living
is a repetition of hell, done for art,
although this director is an armpit
from what I've heard, but we all want
to see our faces on the window
that shows the knucklehead world
what heaven could be, or, again,
hell, except for now it's just bones
that ache from carrying bones
made out of bone, actual bone
that the prop person got from
"I can't say" and the trees lean in
and tell us that they saw everything,
even the history of the town before
you'd want to know the truth,
back in the early days of shouting
for mercy when the sweetgrass
was crimson-stained and the ghosts
all hovered, ashamed and bayoneted.
This world is for violence, the sound
guy said during catering, eating
beef as if it was land, as if it was
frost, as if he was a Viking with
the boom mic on his shoulder,
a temple-basher, but for all we know
this could end up on the cutting room
floor, our gnashing for nothing,
our real blood on top of our fake blood
drying up so hard that we throw our clothes
into the garbage and stand under the shower
for so long that our skin webs and someone
enters of the opposite sex and there is no sex,
no sexuality, just the leaning against the wall
and wondering how the accountants are sleeping
in their slaughterhouse beds made of fur.

Matt Salyer

REDSHIRT

Rapt to the rock planet, I was dying
to see the outcome, the death I never did
understand, at least not clearly at all
of ten. The first episode, *The Man Trap*,
how's that. To recap, the three significant actors
vaporized and were then remade on the barrens.
Ruins, as in Canaan. Soon in the glade the naked
ball-root flowers are game to poison, sized like remorse,
and weren't we all born for it, burdensome? In the tall
ship times, that was a sentence, you know, to be
transported, a sentence without end in both senses,
and of course a lifetime within the feint
to conclusion. Here, the colonial horizon, the heath
woman's the week-creature, all anesthetic glam.
Two go down, then fine I am in love: the camphor
loneliness baits to burn between the darling stars
is us. She is everything I ever wanted and to her
I am tall salt. The planet's called M-113. When she
falls, we three talking like we've killed a household
pest, at best the last bison. We three in the lazy evening,
watching darkness cupping salts. We four without fault.

Charu Sharma

WHAT THE STARS SAY, AND OTHER EMPTY SPACES

and all my dreams star you
and me lately I am not
in the business of directing
tragedies past midnight
all the happy parts of me
live in sleep my subconscious
is ninety-nine black ravens that fly
and only for you can you
imagine being responsible
for one hundred and ninety eight
wings being that windy
my dreams are alive with
telephones that do more
than just ring and hang up
in dreams there are no wires
only feathers on asphalt
and yours and mine fallen
from skies cloudy and not even
partly soft somehow
together your touch
old words all the laughs
are killing me I mean it's like
swallowing a piece of cherry pie
too fast even if it was
your favorite food even
if you'd waited all week
to eat it you'd choke it's like
a papercut by polaroid
clay too hardened
by the sun to be played with
brittle lipped dissipated
and this freshly drawn hell
eight hours of rusty emotional
airways I know you've felt
it in the dreamscape I hear
the stars they sound
just like you
bright and silent

Kendra Tanacea

WHERE THE MOUNTAINS MEET THE COW PASTURES

In Hana, the trees are happy. I mean they're *happy* trees with whimsical spines and tossed, surfer-hair fronds. Because the trees are happy, the grass crackles, an undulating sea of grasshoppers. You can't really move from the spot. Just sit on a giant boulder in the middle of seclusion. The trees are laughing with you, not at you. Sit and sit saturated in green. Watch the trees bob across from you. It starts to rain. Big, fat, succulent drops. Hot and surprising. The dampness calms the grass, but wakes your feet, so you join the happy trees, discovering an amazing similarity in height and personality. And then the birds can talk, coyly cocking their heads, beaking: *We're hungry*. Drop a trail of pretzels from there to your car. A peacock strolls by, spreading his tail feathers in thanks, glistening blue, green with an iridescent purple sheen. He follows you, eating the line of crumbs, hops in the car's backseat. He wants to go home with you, be your boyfriend.

Matt Zambito

ILLINOIS PET DUBBED WORLD'S TALLEST COW

—online headline, Associated Press, 10/15/14

She was, in fact, already a cow.
 And already the tallest. Just not yet
 dubbed. A good dubbing:
 that's the news here, my fellow pet-lovers.
 Illinois is the home of Chicago, and a cow
 mythologically burned
 that city to a crisp, but a real cow

didn't. And now this bovine dubbed Blossom,
 (the misspelling the owner's)
 placed the state on the Yahoo! News map
 for something that doesn't
 involve blight and guns and the Cubs'
 millionaires and the Italian
 beef and the Art

Institute and O'Hare and poetry
 and blues. Lincoln pretended to be
 from Springfield (for the record:
 his demonym was "Kentuckian"),
 and I'm gambling
 he milked a Holstein or three
 while dreaming of an imaginary boundary

later named the Land of Lincoln.
 What an egomaniac
 you've got to be
 to keep breathing
 or want to become president
 of anything more than
 C.O.W. (Citizens Owning Wagyu)!

Blossom's thirteen. She looks like the world's tallest
 uneaten hamburger
 to foodies prideful of their gluttony.
 But she's a massive flower of flesh in black and white.
 She's moo incarnate. She's a christened ship.
 She's as perfect as Eve in an Eden
 with no Adam to damage her.

POEM FOR THOSE OF YOU READING OR
LISTENING TO THIS RIGHT NOW

Folks, we've got a real situation here.
If you're not reading or listening to this poem right now,
I *honestly* don't want to know
what gross thing you're doing to it *instead*,
and like I was going to be saying, you're as good
as dead,
and you know it,
and I know it,
and it's like a gosh darn hidden time bomb, this knowing that
at this rate you're going to run out of
a smorgasbord of cannabis soon and also life. Folks,
we could get into the politics of love
in the United Arab Emirates,
but let's save that for another time, and instead say,
"Well, how about those marigolds!"
And you'd be right! They pull it off—
their orange popping so ridiculously exact
it makes a dictionary's definition of the color
read like crime fiction.
They croon the hue like a tune from a musical.
And we could sing like that too
if we could finally all agree
the catchiest words are all
any of us could ever hope
to organize. Folks,
I swear to Anonymous in the name of Gravity
we could sing like that
if we made of our lives a song.

SALEM POETRY SEMINAR

Curated by Shari Caplan and Joey Gould

INTRODUCTION

In June, the Salem Poetry Seminar brings together selected Massachusetts college students with others who share their obsession with words for five days of intense workshopping, drafting, and evening readings at the historic Salem Athenaeum. Students submit a selection of their work and are chosen to dig deep into their practice and to meet literary co-conspirators. The Seminar began in 2000, and has taken place five times since. For many of us SPS alumni, our identity as Poet took form during this residency.

In my year (2010), during our final night of readings when we were all giddy from overactive brains, constant socializing, and our love for each other, we coronated each reader with “the Poetry Crown,” a circlet of clover flowers plucked from the yard and woven together (much like we had been that week) in a ceremony which passed power and beauty to each performer. I hope this selection can be a printed representation of each poet putting on the poetry crown and speaking with an artistry that they could not have achieved without the others in this community. The poems think about education, race, identity, illness, perception, family and romantic relationships, and of course, writing itself. They vary as much in content and style as the poets do in personality and background; this reflects the spirit of the seminar and the spirit of diversity we must celebrate even more vigorously in today’s America.

Working on this project with Joey Gould and J.D. Scrimgeour, two major sources of joy and inspiration, has been deeply fulfilling. Thanks to Joey for always diving headfirst into our creative projects, and to J.D. for being the best Poetry Dad a girl could have. They have imbued this process with humility, grace, intelligence, and fun. I hope as you read through these poems that you can share in the bonds, personal and artistic, created by the Salem Poetry Seminar experience, where poets find their wings and their tribe. And may the poetry crown pass on to you!

Shari Caplan

Paige Cerulli

LAMENT FOR CHRISTMAS ON CAPE COD

I once raced the dog up and down South Cape Beach
amongst sea spray and decrepit seaweed
and December's marsh stink,
watched the all-season seagull land at our birdfeeder.
Oh, for the cranberry bogs they flooded, bright sea of bobbing red,
the give way to tired bushes to shrivel into night's frost.

I taught the family dog to jump snowbanks twice her height;
when she slipped her collar she never even saw the car.
The dolphin washed up beachside, distended stomach,
swarm of beach walkers to stare at the shame of it all.
Deep shelter of Crane Conservation Land, the powerlines hum,
the trail best left for galloping,
how the family home shrinks with each visit,
cinnamon smell not my own,
car trimmings growing in the yard,
how badly the shutters need paint.

My pony's body excavated, his bones now long gone,
replaced by a house foundation.

The high school reunion—impromptu, scattered affair—
that I will skip, not even having a title for myself.
College auditions, tendonitis,
the light display on the Falmouth Green that was almost a salve
with Santa's reindeer catapulting the sleigh
twenty feet overhead.

Maybe it's that change sits bitter—
goodbye, old haunts. Goodbye quiet wooded trails, goodbye
to the family dog and cat, goodbye to handwriting I recognized,
and goodbye to telephone numbers reduced to muscle memory.

The pond landing where I sprained my ankle
an hour before a marching band performance.
The sandy trail where my father taught me how to tell
deer from raccoon from coyote tracks.
Target practice with a 32-pound bow in the backyard.

The gravel hilled driveway and learning to rock my standard
out of the snow.

Oh, unreliable snowplows and power outages, oh the year Mom forgot
to buy wrapping paper, oh the stories that have already faded
so much to always be lost. Oh, the time the fifteen-pound turkey
was bad. Oh, sand dunes, oh jetties, oh horse-drawn carriages
in Mashpee Commons. Oh, coyotes howling in the backyard,
oh lonely song, oh, if only I'd learned to sing it
on my own.

*Lisa Mangini*LETTER TO MY MAID OF HONOR,
IF I CHOOSE TO HAVE ONE

Sources do not indicate the etymology of *Pythagoras*, but rumors suggest his name had no real meaning until his famous theorem—the one that tells us we can know the dimensions of one side if we know the other two. Like how *best friend* is defined by the someone else: all the swapped sweaters and sarcasm, photos snapped in varying stages of intoxication or exhaustion, lost handbags and moments to be honest and present instead of texting boys while bitching over pinot noir, blowjob jokes and feigned apathy at not being called back, the promises and pacts of sisterhood, to never become a wife, or wipe someone's milkshit in the middle of the night. This is what friends are for: curling irons and sharing eyeliners, and divining the future through greasy vague fortune slips, turning shrill and silly at the first signs of crows' feet and crepey skin, swearing allegiance until the requisite scrape and scramble of the bouquet toss. To be a girl is to be a mannequin in a room full of other mannequins, to be made of the same fiber and filling, posed in something similar but a different shade. The hypotenuse—the long, weak leg of the triangle—translates to *stretching under*, the side most likely to sag from weight, like a powerline bowed and heavy under a coat of ice. I used to be the shortest distance from two vertices, the quickest route to your tender center, before we both got swallowed in the domestic: checkbooks with matching last names, trendy kitchens, home ovulation kits. It's always a contest with the same prize: try not to be irrelevant by menopause. How easy for Pythagoras—for all the ancient names we know—who get to draw and name the shapes of the world and live forever in each map and roll of wallpaper, in every right angle of the homes we're doomed to keep tidy and welcoming.

Amy Gaeta

THE ART OF JUNK MAIL

five weeks have past since i came out via email. in a fan letter of sorts to a poet i call my favorite. she read at my school and i felt she was someone i could almost feel myself next to. not in bed or in “life” but at ATMs lines, check-outs, gas pumps. where normal people are too afraid to speak aloud to one another. bodies don’t invade the space we’re told we all have, just move in the same direction.

i buy that pocket sized guide to japanese inspired decluttering or whatever. apparently everything i own is western privilege. my furniture blocks positive energy, the root cause of my stomach aches. new news to me, i wrote her that those poems about the kennedys gave me these knots.

besides white tees and birkenstocks, my possessions are shipped to various new york avenues in hopes one will land on her stoop. i can tell myself she’s unpacking my old Lost boxset before replying. before my sexuality exists elsewhere than a sent folder.

at a hundred odd pages I read it and minimize my life twice in one day, but there’s still a small turning in my gut that makes it impossible delete that email from every thought. it does more good slipped into a manilla envelope, addressed to the busiest ATMs, check-outs, gas pumps, creating the space we all really don’t have,

Vincent M. Livoti

CAVEMAN

I was forced into hunting my supper
At Market Basket on Somerville Avenue
Bestial, insane—sawdust on the floors
Hard mouthed cage pushers everywhere
Blood piquing
Instincts sharpened
Elbows out
Game hens dragged and clutched
The fruits and vegetables misty
Some South American Cloud Forest
Trapped wholly under florescent light
Even the elderly stalk these aisles
Kills twitching in their arthritic hands
A hiss seething through me
Ripping a dangling pomegranate
From an absurd cardboard tree
Safe in my shelter
I will smash out its guts
Iron rich clots shiny like garnets
Smearing the face, the hands
Death stains everywhere
The Whole Foods was just too far away

James Connatser, Jr.

THE F-WORD

I've been called a faggot since the third grade. I've had the word hurled at me from passing cars, from football fans while I marched with the color guard. From my two younger brothers, from my grandfather, the kids at school, my mother. I got my first job when I was fifteen—I served coffee at the local café—and my boss, I think her name was Kathy, replaced my name tag with one that said *fag boy*. I remember slipping through the backdoor wondering *how the fuck did she know?* and walking four miles in the cold, too embarrassed to call home. And once at the bank, I couldn't cash some guy's check. No account. He threw his pen, shouted *goddamned faggot*, grabbed his kid by the wrist, left swearing. When the gays picketed the state house, protesting the potential ban on gay marriage, busses drove by with signs that read *No marriage for fags! Fags are going to burn. God hates fags*. And there was me in a tank top and Armani jeans, standing in the front lines with my own sign: *I'm just a skinny little faggot, what are you all afraid of?* I never had so many people want to take my photo. Even Mystery, a big, black drag queen, halted and said, "Honey, you are fabulous, and I do not use the f-word lightly."

Gregory Glenn

DOG

I had finally gone to Hell.
I was very bored,
which surprised me.
I always thought that Hell
wouldn't be boring, or
at least there would be
something for me to do.

But I guess it wouldn't be "Hell" if I was satisfied.

A dog came up from behind me.
He was whistling a familiar tune
kind of like Happy Birthday,
only happier.
I asked him how
he could whistle without lips.
He asked me how
I could smile without being happy.

He was wagging his tail.
A very smug, very good boy.

We talked about how we ended
up in Hell. I explained
how it was a mistake,
how it was funny except
it happened to me.

"That's rough," said the dog.
I laughed—"is it rough?
Or is it ruff ruff ruff?"
"That's really not funny," said the dog,
"and anyway, dogs can't laugh,
so jokes just kind of alienate me."

This really is Hell, I thought.

"Well, how did you wind up down here?" I asked.
"House pets don't have souls," he said, plainly.
"Oh, wow," I said, "I guess

I should have been nicer to my cat.”
 “Fuck cats,” said the dog.

Time wouldn't pass, yet here
 we were
 watching Hell moving before us
 like a sick heart.

After some silence,
 I saw him turn his head
 and then I heard him
 throw up really hard.
 We both got a little uncomfortable,
 sitting quietly,
 pretending for a bit
 that it hadn't happened.

“Hey, sorry about that...” began the dog,
 “I was poisoned accidentally, that's how I died.”
 I patted his head, “are you going to be all right?”
 He looked at me, into my eyes,
 because dogs don't talk,
 and so they know how
 to properly use their eyes.
 “Oh, right,” I said,
 “I guess I forgot where we are.”
 “If I could smile, I would be smiling
 right now,” said the dog.
 “Dogs can't smile, either?” I asked.
 “No, I don't have lips,” said the dog.

“Is that why you kiss with your tongue?” I asked.
 “I'm not kissing my asshole, I'm cleaning it,” said the dog.

“You're pretty dry, for a dog,” I said.
 And he was! He didn't even crack a smile!
 What a delivery!
 But I didn't laugh, or cry, or smile, or anything.
 I was in Hell,
 wondering where do we put these dogs of ours
 after we've put them away?

Taylor Rae Botticelli

BAD TAXIDERMY

I wish my face were mounted
for all to see
somewhere expected
like that coffee shop in the Tenderloin.
Patrons could stop
and stare
at my fixed expression and perhaps be
temporarily unburdened of that awful sensation
of growth.
My home of reclaimed wood
in its angular assertion
somehow softens.
Close up they might see the cracks and craters
of my ageless face,
shot and carried
before hanging.
Teeth lined up like San Francisco housing,
hillside
and trying to get higher.
But from the position at which I would be visible,
no one would notice these things.
Passersby would continue,
like always,
paying no particular attention to
my severed head.

Teisha Dawn Twomey

GOOSE

Duck, duck, the pulse quickens
as you chase your own plumes,

leaving a trail of smoke, to follow you
down, down, to this bottom. Tonight

you can whip and weave all you'd like
trail that dumb bird round and round

till closing. Face the facts:
You're the goose this time.

It is a game you learned to play
long ago, making love in the dark.

No hard feelings. Basically,
we are strangers. When push

comes to—look...you're just one more
strange bird from a flock, a gaggle

a swarm of someone(s), no one
knows—no one cares to.

Woody Woodger

NOW WONDERING IF YOU REMEMBER THOSE
TOBACCO PICKERS, SOUTHWICK MASS

a plaque crusted moon

to farm under. their baby slung
over her mom's shoulder
like a rifle.

she'd teethe

on her mom's fish hook shirt tag,
her snore

like fresh poppies.

she'd thankfully
sleep by 6. always. we never

met another kid who could do that.

you said she was a gas cap
purring

as she used a whole palm to shake
your fingertip.

they shored
the leaves into hip
baskets.

all these clippings, they said,
to be in
California by

Wednesday.

Jessica Tower

from BURDEN: IV

Mom's bipolar is like a watermelon.
Slice it open and red, red, red.

*Remember when she yelled at her daughter
for hours for using too much counter space?*

She doesn't know how to control it,
or so she tells me, and everyone else,

so the doctors won't prescribe her new
medication (she doesn't want them), her life

won't improve,
her favorite color will always be

telling other people *I can't help it,
it's my disease*

shouldn't you be focusing more
on your cancer,

eating away at what keeps
your flesh from rotting?

JD Debris

NUDE SKETCH: VALLEJO

A splinter in his muse, tweezers
in his brown hand trembling
like the sign of the bent cross,
tongue outside his mouth
in concentration. The hypnotist
looks on in disgust, he's got
spells to cease Parisian gunfire,
he keeps a malarial elixir
in a cloudy glass tube. But
Vallejo never breaks his silence,
never breaks his concentration.
He breaks through his muse's skin
with rusted metal as he mouths the words:
A splinter, a splinter.

Kayla Russell

JUNE 7TH AT 2 A.M.

The fog was thick
With cigarette smoke,
No real distinction
Between the white and gray
Streaks forming the atmosphere.
*How strange it felt
To be anything at all.*
As the words of a free spirit
In a sun dress
On the pavement
Rattling romance
Came out as the sound
Of my grandmother playing piano;
Rhythm encircling a moment,
Making it stand out in time.

Robert Auld

I SAY HELLO TO MY BODY

In a repurposed dance studio
most Monday nights, I say hello

to my body. Left arm overhead, not
toward the front of the room where
it always inevitably should be, I say

hello to the scar by my left elbow,
a dog bite. I should clarify we

the class define the front of the room,
and reserve the right to change our minds,
though reversing my arms I do reach

the right toward the ceiling where,
first class, I found my body and mat

under a tile with a flower carved
into its center. Most Monday nights
since then, I curve my skeletal self

to form flowers, breath imposed, petals
bent in shapes I demonstrate. In this

temporary nirvana we pose as
corpses. After all it is simple,
saying goodbye body, dog bite

scar and stretchmarks, goodbye
breath, ceiling nowhere, kids

playing basketball down the hall.
After all we cannot leave them.
Class ends. Most Monday nights,

we roll onto our right sides, to live.
Tonight, I roll onto my left for balance.

Megan Ouellet

THE INADEQUACY OF A LOVE POEM

When I try to understand
 how much I love you
 I ask how can everything
 in the universe and all
 my experiences in it
 like an umbilical chord
 and my breathless blue
 baby face, California
 and my sister's eyes
 buried in my shoulder
 on the plane, marriages
 and my mother's jaw, shattered,
 a long standing family
 recipe of white bread,
 snowmen wrapped in shower
 curtain clothes, punches,
 like the one I drilled
 into a boy's chest during recess,
 nail polish chipped and cracked
 like the sheetrock crumbling
 under my brother's anger,
 college walls as white as a hospital's,
 ribbons of green-blue kale
 layered across a farm field,
 the first time I saw you
 in a bar, still and quiet,
 my past becoming the same,
 laying beneath red pines,
 wind shifting the forest
 with such grace like your
 instructions on how to eat
 a shrimp tail stemming
 from a sushi roll
 be thrown into the wide mouth
 of a funnel and whirl down
 into one point of convergence,
 into this science, this chemistry
 or psychology, this compatibility
 that cannot be narrowed
 into the last line of a poem?

Julie Oliver

NO PLACE LIKE HOME

After the Massachusetts Tornado

June 1st 2011

Just like in the film, there is a sepia-toned sky
and a lion's roar wind, but this isn't Kansas.
I am no Dorothy. The early June clouds groan,
release a heavy rain stunned by its own sudden
authority, falling with such purpose, filling
the gutters he had intended to clean.

We aren't in any real danger, almost thirty
miles north of the tornado's path. His double
bed like the eye of a cyclone. He wraps himself
around me, encircles me, kisses my shoulders
with a frenzy. We can smell the sweet, damp
earth, freshly beaten and bruised by
unexpected hail. Sharp blue lightning
tears through clouds, the sky tumbles,
angry and dark at only 3 p.m.

We listen to the downpour.
I run my fingers through
his hair and he holds me
down on the bed.
We wait patiently
for Technicolor.
I would click
my heels if
I thought
it could
bring me
anywhere
but here.

Lyndon Seitz

HORIZON

I stumble before these city lights,
the smell of spit and damp cotton
wafting from passerby, I look
to retreat from these dirt roads
gone too far, commerce faded through
windows and dustlessness.

A soft guiding hand is all I have left,
and she's not too large for this place,
I can't squeeze through crowds as if
they were only their water.

Show me a place where thunder
returns to the sky, where shockwaves
are met with the aroma of ink and candlelight.
Where smoke means harmony and steam is rest.
Where you can see your reflection in the water,
but never need to see it.

I want warm bodies to come cheap,
but I want them to stay a while.
A night here and my faith is questioned,
I don't want strawberries that sprout from concrete,
even if they grow by miracle.

Cady Vishniac

ON MOUNT GILEAD

Do these people know
they have too many churches?
Lumpy-cheeked families file out Sunday afternoons.
When we pass on the sidewalk
they smile at me with their white teeth.
Not polite, but passive-aggressive. Girls in ugly white shifts
wave, hop into minivans.

And it's true, you can't get around without a car.
Bike lanes give out onto highways,
sidewalks onto mown fields. Football crowds
tramp through my muddy yard
on their way from the bar. The drunkest beam when they ask,
May we pee here?

I was heading back to any city, either coast,
as long as there are rats like plump black Chihuahuas
and a subway for the rats to sleep in.
Some nights I sit with a mug of coffee and repeat it to myself:
My neighbors throw Mary Kay parties,
smell like baby powder, can't talk without nodding,
or worse, squeezing my hand.
So I was going to leave,

but the Kroger sells milk flavored
like Marshmallow Peeps,
and somebody sets a box of free oranges by the registers.
In the prep kitchen, a teenager
stirs diced pickle into potato salad, and the other shoppers
bump my heels with their carts.
It's just rude enough, just like

home. And you've got to hand it to them: the men are so cornfed,
the toddlers leaking jam, the women's tits wide
as my feet are long.

Melissa Beth Rodenhiser

HESTER PRYNNE IN PARIS

A man on a motorbike propositions

An American woman screams
 “But I’m married”
 with a bottle of wine
 slung like a club by her side

The young man laughs
 all sharp chrome teeth against
 the silver sleek motorcycle

But I am upstairs
 waiting for the hours to roll themselves forward
 to the bakery from the way home tonight
 full of rainbow colored dough
 wrapped moist and soft
 around thick frosting
 stacks and stacks of sugar snowed pastels
 meant only for aching jaws
 the thick syrup of sweet
 crumbling down the throat
 leaving guilty sticky fingers and
 a sugar stung mouth

You told me
 “No”
 on the way home
 “We can have them in the morning”

I am waiting within the lines
 of propriety
 for morning to make his way
 through the crush traffic of people
 with their lanky hips laughing
 guttural slack vowel sounds

But
 the bakery is only a block away
 I can hear that man with the motorbike
 still wolf smiling by the slick metal
 I long just to
 assimilate

Steph DeOrio

FOR CLAUDIA RANKINE

You are twenty-two years old, living abroad working as a language assistant and cultural ambassador. You understand the language part, but you are unsure about your role as a cultural ambassador. What is American culture anyway?

Your Spanish roommates invite you along to a concert in the plaza. You attend, and meet many of their friends. Your closest roommate introduces you to her friend and tells you that he is from Africa. You don't catch his name the first time because it is late and loud and Spain. Your roommate grabs you by the shoulder and shouts in your ear "se llama nigga Julian". Startled, you finish the introductory exchange, dos besos and all, and let yourself fall back silently into the noise, not sure how or when to approach the subject.

Later, back at your apartment, you try to explain to your roommates why they can't use that word. They, collectively, tell you it doesn't mean the same thing here. You argue that no matter where you are the word is the same. You say it is the same word. They insist it doesn't mean the same thing. You continue to search your vocabulary for the right Spanish words to convey your American beliefs. Is this what it means to be a cultural ambassador?

A few weeks later, you are walking to the post office with your roommate. You spot Julian riding his bike down the street and you wave. Your roommate is confused and asks you who you are waving at. You say Julian. She laughs and tells you no, it isn't Julian. You remain firm in your belief and wave again as the man on the bike passes you and your roommate on the street corner. The man does not return your greeting and your roommate smiles as she tells you not all black people are the same.

Robin Parsons

excerpt from MAHONING EKPHRASIS
HOMAGE TO FRANZ KLINE

1973

A boy stands in the museum.

There is only one painting and two colors to paint with;

broad BOLD black brushstrokes

bisect intersection of black pigment on white.

Black swaths ladder and rail the canvas

double back girdled geometries

of dark

invade

light, subdue canvas

mass against mass push-pull

the

explosive!!

statement.

1949

Kline stands against a wall

gaunt face, hair akimbo

shirt sleeves torn off,

his narrow slatted eyes avoid,

glance left at next blank canvas.

From that Opticon day, Kline;

a total painting conversion,

fast drying enamel, canvas as large as walls

white background asserts against black, The Actor...

painting over black with white

painting over white with black

Sara Afshar

KEROSENE

In the corners of the room, old neighbors
chatter, *it's a strange time for a wedding.*
A winter marriage, here in Kashmir?
The bride wears three shawls and keeps warm with tea,
the groom, a stranger, stands with his brothers.
They watch her father pay a man for more kerosene.

The whole room is lit by the kerosene
lamps, white glass borrowed from old neighbors,
still whispering about the strange brothers,
and the mother expected after the wedding.
The mother will come from Iran, they sip into their tea.
I wonder if she will like it here in Kashmir.

Of course she will. Where is better than Kashmir?
They muse 'til night ends. Servants pack the kerosene
for the newlyweds' home and dump the cold tea.
The night is over, the bride is frozen. The neighbors
leave remarking, *that wasn't such a strange wedding*
after all. The bride stares at the boys, new brothers,

and wonders how she will care for them. The brothers
tell her, we don't want to live in Kashmir,
they cry for their mother. After the wedding,
on the new stove heated by kerosene,
she cooks for them all, aided by the neighbors
who leave gifts of spices, sugar, and tea.

The mother arrives, back to the bride, they drink tea
she brought from Iran for the groom and the brothers.
What a strange woman, remark the neighbors
when the mother, in the next days, won't see Kashmir.
She's left the house only once, to fetch kerosene,
and never did she ask about the wedding.

Poor, mother. No one ever asked about her wedding.
So she decides to walk to the stove for more tea,
and strangely raises the tank of kerosene
and pours it, while staring at the bride and brothers,
on her skin. She strikes a match and illumines Kashmir.
Her whole bloody body in flames, say the neighbors.

A shame, the neighbors say, so soon after the wedding.
The old Kashmiris come over to pray, *dear... put on the tea.*
Someone sends the brothers out for more kerosene.

Brian Brodeur

COUSINS

for David Brodeur (1976-2011)

1.

Last night, after the Air Force official
told your folks what happened to you in Kabul,

your brother called. I almost didn't answer.
The bullet to the face, which you survived,

pierced one cheek, he said, then the other,
but you rose from the floor and staggered after

the man who'd shot you, grabbing for his hand
as a second bullet severed your spinal cord.

I was going to say it was too much to hear,
but I didn't have the right—You weren't my brother.

He called you a hero, asked if I had any questions.
"Questions?" I said, and he hung up the phone.

2.

It was rare to get the three of us together.
When you flew into DC, we drove to Skyline Drive

in separate cars, and hiked the Whiteoak Trail
to see if the falls were running. They were dry.

On a gravel path, fresh piles of horse dung
swarmed with monarchs and swallowtails

who feasted on something they'd found there.
For a long time we watched their wings

opening and closing in the hot wind,
their bodies pulsing with what resembled

pleasure, their legs and forked tails trembling,
their abdomens thick as pinky fingers.

3.

I don't know why I'm telling this to you.
You were there. You saw the butterflies, the view

of the Shenandoah Valley from the falls.
Draining my water bottle, I coughed and wheezed—

I promised to join the gym and quit smoking.
Your brother walked ahead. You stayed behind.

We parted at the lot—I can't remember
if we shook hands before we found our cars.

In my rear-view, the sun blazed off your hood,
slices of light flashing as you entered.

Your windshield glinted as if lit from within.
It hurt to look at you is what I mean.

Victoria Nicolau

from BETWEEN

2.

There was a ghost
in the attic—covering its hands
with masking tape—covering its eyes
in maple leaves from the bulkhead.

Sometimes I run my hands over the upholstery
caress every stitch, the thick sewn floral, and
I grasp for the ghost who
left bullet holes in the drywall.

When I drink my tea, the ghost sits with me,
a heavy and ashen charred blanket.
Sometimes, I hear it weaving ivy into the walls
splintering the doorframe—emerging—
I let the steam rise;
the ghost inhales.

David Walker

OF ROPES AND

As I stutter over the subordinate clause
 in my sentence—misspeak
 and tell her that I'm worried because
 I have ten kids *flailing* in my honors class,
 she cracks a smile and tells me:
 "Words are hard."

I laugh, but think she's right. The more
 I think about what I say,
 what is said—words *are* hard.
 Despite what the nursery rhyme
 so eloquently affirms—
 words can break necks faster than
 any sticks, any stones.
 Any mouth has the artillery
 bullet-hard words.

Words are hard.
 They do damage if loaded behind
 the right teeth.

So maybe I didn't misspeak.
 Maybe my kids are flailing.

And maybe I did misspeak.
 Maybe I'm failing my kids.

AFTERWORD

When I first rolled into South Campus at Salem State, I had no idea how much of my life would change because of the one-week Seminar. That week I met life-long friends—best friends & poetry partners-in-crime—and walked streets that would become poetry arteries in my life. I also met J.D. Scrimgeour, whose guidance has taught me more about being a poet than I could expect from a single, mortal human being.

I don't want to make this a list of my accomplishments, but rather a thank you to all the seminar attendees over the years. They are dedicated, practicing poets who: fill rooms so that poetry has an audience; volunteer for the Massachusetts Poetry Festival in roles with great responsibility; show up to support each other artistically & in the spirit of friendship; create new avenues to explore poetry & other art forms.

They publish books. They belly-dance. They practice law. They teach. They all carry a conspiratorial vision of poetry that J.D. conjures with every project he undertakes. This is no mean feat, for many writers I know talk of the brutality of their fellow writer in workshop. Or in the publishing house. Or in the community.

Not at the Salem Poetry Seminar, a community that I hope Shari & I have honored with our little curation here. I should thank Shari, too, for she has been a constant in my poetry career, guiding me & trusting my words when I wasn't sure I could write what she challenged me to write. She exemplifies the legacy of the seminar: a network of poets who help each other as they better themselves.

This is for my poetry heart in Salem—these words my friends share. I believe in these fellows of mine & they are one of the few hopes I trust.

Thanks.

Joey Gould

CONTRIBUTORS

Sara Afshar is a Massachusetts native and works as an immigration attorney for unaccompanied minors in deportation proceedings. She is a graduate of the UMass Lowell creative writing program where she was the recipient of the Jack Kerouac Creative Writing Award and an invitee to the annual Salem Poetry Seminar. Her work has appeared in *Slice Magazine*, *Sidelines*, and *Cladius Speaks*. She lives in JP where she is working on her first collection of poems.

Carol Alexander's work appears in anthologies including *Broken Circles* (Cave Moon Press), *Through a Distant Lens* (Write Wing Publishing) and *Proud to Be: Writing by American Warriors, Vol. 1*. Her work can be found in various print and online journals and is forthcoming in *Southern Humanities Review* and several poetry anthologies. She is the author of the chapbook *Bridal Veil Falls* (Flutter Press). Alexander's full-length collection of poems, *Habitat Lost*, is due out in 2017 from Cave Moon Press.

Rebekah Aran is from Burlington, Massachusetts, and is a freshman at Salem State University. She is currently studying English and focusing on Creative Writing, and hopes to be an editor and publisher along with a writer in the future.

Robert Auld is a senior at Salem State University. Poems appear most recently in *Assaracus*, *halfmystic*, and *Boston Accent*.

Stephen Eric Berry is a recipient of a Jule and Avery Hopwood Award at the University of Michigan, a creative artist grant from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs, and he has been a finalist in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. His work has appeared in *Salamander Magazine*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *No Exit*, *Visions International*, *California State Poetry Quarterly*, *Third Wednesday*, *Bluestem Magazine*, and *Puerto Del Sol*. He lives in Chelsea, Michigan.

Taylor Rae Botticelli graduated from Salem State in 2015 with a BFA in Theatre Performance. She currently lives and works in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina.

Brian Brodeur is the author of the poetry collections *Natural Causes* (2012) and *Other Latitudes* (2008), as well as the poetry chapbooks *Local Fauna* (2015) and *So the Night Cannot Go on Without Us* (2007). New poems and essays appear in *American Poetry Review*, *Best American Poetry* (online), *The Hopkins Review*, *Measure*, *The Missouri Review*, *River Styx*, *Southwest Review*, and *The Writer's Chronicle*. Founder and Coordinator of the Veterans Writing Workshop of Richmond, Indiana he lives with his wife and daughter in the Whitewater River Valley.

Ryan Burruss is a writer and editor living in the sweet spot between Baltimore and Washington, D.C. His fiction has been accepted for publication in a variety of literary magazines and journals, including *Prairie Schooner*, *New Orleans Review*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Soundings East*, and *Gravel*.

Shari Caplan (SPS 2010) is the author of *Advice from a Siren* (Dancing Girl Press, 2016). Caplan's work has been published in *Zoetic Press*, *Paper Nautilus*, *Bone Orchard Press*, *Drunk Monkeys* (where she is the featured poet for March 2017), and is forthcoming from *Deluge* and *Blue Lyra Review's* "The Play's the Thing." Caplan has performed with "The Poetry Brothel" as Betty Boom, America's Sweet-tart in Boston and Washington D.C. She organizes events for the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, including "The Poetry Circus," "The Fairy Tale Poetry Tour," and 2017's "Anne Sexton's Poetry Bordello." Caplan is a Salem State alumnus and received her MFA from Lesley University. Her work as a poet and actress can be viewed at sharicaplan.com.

Paige Cerulli was a participant in the 2008 Salem State Poetry Seminar. She graduated from Westfield State University in 2010, where she majored in English and music performance. Paige's work has appeared in publications including *Nebo*, *Red Barn Review*, *The Virginia Normal*, and more. Paige lives in Western Massachusetts and works as a copywriter and grant writer.

Grant Clauser is the author of the books *Necessary Myths* (2013) and *The Trouble with Rivers* (2012). Poems have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Cortland Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review* and others. By day he writes about electronics, and sometimes he fishes. He blogs occasionally at www.unlambic.com. Twitter: @uniambic

CONTRIBUTORS

Andrea Cohen's poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Threepenny Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and elsewhere. Her poetry collections include *Unfathoming*, just out from Four Way Books, as well as *Furs Not Mine*, *Kentucky Derby*, *Long Division*, and *The Cartographer's Vacation*. She directs the Writers House at Merrimack College and the Blacksmith House Poetry Series in Cambridge, MA.

James Connatser, Jr. was graduated from Salem State University in 2009, and he is a former Editor-in-Chief of *Soundings East*. His work primarily focuses on the LGBT community as well as mental health issues.

John DeBon's short stories and essays have appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *Hawaii Review*, *Concho River Review*, *Amoskeag Journal*, *Westview*, and elsewhere. His essay, "It's Like When Your Mom Dies," earned a listing as notable in *Best American Essays 2013*.

JD Debris, poet, songwriter, and recording artist, released his debut solo album, *Black Market Organs* on Simple Truth Records in late 2016, and is currently working on a book of poems for his undergraduate thesis at Salem State University.

Darren C. Demaree is the author of six poetry collections, most recently *Many Full Hands Applauding Inelegantly* (2016, 8th House Publishing). He is the Managing Editor of the *Best of the Net Anthology* and *Ovenbird Poetry*. He lives in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children.

Steph DeOrio loves words, dogs, glitter, donuts, and laughing. She lives in Marblehead and thinks everything is interesting.

Grace Street, **Edward A. Dougherty's** fourth collection of poems, is available from Cayuga Lake Books while his sixth chapbook *House of Green Water* is available from FootHills Publishing. He is Professor of English at Corning Community College, but has been on sabbatical researching the creative process. Visit his website to sign up for his oh-so-occasional Tiny Letter update.

John Elkerr has widely exhibited his work in galleries across the United States and in France. Reviews of his work have appeared in *Décharge Art and Literature Magazine*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Detroit Monthly*, *Metro Times*, *Ann Arbor Observer*, *Third Wednesday*, *Bluestem Magazine*, and *Puerto Del Sol*. His work is curated in the Musée de la Création Franche, Bégles, France. The Summer 2016 cover of *Third Wednesday* featured his work in collaboration with Jacques Karamanoukian. He lives in Dexter, Michigan.

Alan Elyshevitz is a poet and short story writer from East Norriton, PA. His collection of stories, *The Widows and Orphans Fund*, was published by Stephen F. Austin State University Press. In addition, he has published three poetry chapbooks, most recently *Imaginary Planet* (Cervena Barva). He is a two-time recipient of a fellowship in fiction writing from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. He teaches writing at the Community College of Philadelphia. For further information, go to <https://aelyshevitz.ink>.

Amy Gaeta is a Massachusetts native now living in the Midwest while completing her PhD in Literary Studies & Visual Culture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In roles as practicing poet, scholar, artist, and activist, Amy attempts to expose the thresholds of queerness and bioethics through contemporary literature and art of the Americas.

Gregory Glenn is from Massachusetts. He has written and continues to write poetry. His favorite writers include Frank O'Hara, Martha Collins, Stephen Crane, Amy Lowell, J.D. Scrimgeour, and more. Gregory was selected as editor for the collected works of Rex Manmoonian, due out in early 2019. He is pursuing a graduate degree in writing lol. You can reach him by e-mail at iwastoldicouldreachgregthisway@gmail.com.

Joey Gould (@toshines on twitter) is a longstanding volunteer, organizer, & performer for Mass Poetry, helping plan & execute the Massachusetts Poetry Festival, writing content for Masspoetry.org, and running generative workshops for Student Day of Poetry events across Massachusetts. He has created poems-to-order at Uforge Gallery, juggled in a Poetry Circus, and drummed for a poetry & belly-dancing event at the historic Hawthorne Hotel. His poetry appears online at goldwalkmag.com (where he now edits), Masspoetry.org, and drunkmonkeys.us, where he was writer of the month for February 2017. He also has an avian tattoo on both shoulders.

Vincent Hao is an aspiring writer who attends high school in Austin, Texas. He enjoys reading poetry and writes in his spare time. He also enjoys the artistic merit of basketball and cinema. His work has been published in *Anomaly Literary Journal* and *Albatross* and is forthcoming within the *Adroit Journal*, *Blood Orange*, and *River Styx*.

Joseph Holt is pursuing a PhD in the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi. His fiction has appeared in *Gulf Coast* and *New Ohio Review*, and book reviews have appeared in *Colorado Review* and *Harvard Review Online*.

CONTRIBUTORS

Paul Hostovsky is the author of eight books of poetry, most recently *The Bad Guys* (FutureCycle Press, 2015). His poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net awards, and have been featured on *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, and *The Writer's Almanac*. He makes his living in Boston as a sign language interpreter and Braille instructor. More at www.paulhostovsky.com.

Liz Hutchinson is a writer and horticulturist from Salem, Massachusetts. Her first full length poetry collection, *Animalalia*, is forthcoming from YesNo Press in 2017.

Scott Jacobs' work has been published in *jubilat*, *Incessant Pipe*, *Word Riot*, *Souvenir Lit* & elsewhere.

Mary Christine Kane lives in St. Paul, Minnesota where she earned an MFA from Hamline University. Her work has appeared in numerous publications including *Burner Magazine*, *OVS Magazine*, *Sleet*, the *Vermillion Literary Project* magazine, *Portage Magazine* and most recently in *Right, Here, Right Now*, *The Buffalo Anthology*, about Buffalo, New York, where she grew up. She works as a freelance writer.

Mark Katz is a graduating senior at SSU majoring in Art+Design with a concentration in Graphic Design. He previously studied architecture and worked in a variety of fields and trades before deciding to pursue a degree at Salem State. He plans to continue working in the Boston area after graduation.

Cindy King's work has appeared in *Callaloo*, *North American Review*, *African American Review*, *American Literary Review*, *jubilat*, *Ruminate*, *Cortland Review*, *River Styx*, *TriQuarterly*, *Cimarron*, *Black Warrior*, *Barrow Street*, *The Pinch* and elsewhere. She has received a Tennessee Williams Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference and the Agha Shahid Ali scholarship from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown. Currently she lives in Utah, where she is an Assistant Professor of Creative Writing at Dixie State University and editor of *Route 7 Review*.

Rustin Larson's poetry has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Iowa Review*, *North American Review*, *Poetry East*, and *The American Entomologist Poet's Guide to the Orders of Insects*. He is the author of *The Wine-Dark House* (Blue Light Press, 2009), *Crazy Star* (selected for the Loess Hills Book's Poetry Series in 2005), *Bum Cantos*, *Winter Jazz*, & *The Collected Discography of Morning*, winner of the 2013 Blue Light Book Award (Blue Light Press, San Francisco), and *The Philosopher Savant* (Glass Lyre Press, 2015).

Felicia LeBlanc, originally from Lowell, MA, is attending Salem State as a junior in the English major with a creative writing concentration.

Vincent M Livoti is an Assistant Professor in the Palmer School of Library and Information Studies in New York. His chapbook of poetry was printed in 2004, and his writing has since appeared in publications from Routledge, *School Library Journal* and *ACRL Choice*.

Lisa Mangini attended the Salem Poetry Seminar in 2007, and was forever changed. She holds an MFA from Southern Connecticut State University, and is the author of the poetry collection *Bird Watching at the End of the World*, as well as four chapbooks of short fiction and poetry. She lives in Central Pennsylvania, where she teaches English at The Pennsylvania State University and serves as the Founding Editor of *Paper Nautilus*.

Adam Matson's fiction has appeared internationally in over a dozen magazines including *Straylight Literary Magazine*, *Soundings East*, *The Bryant Literary Review*, *The Berkeley Fiction Review*, *Morpheus Tales*, *Infernal Ink Magazine*, *Crack the Spine*, and *The Indiana Voice Journal*, with several forthcoming publications. He has also published a collection of short stories, *Sometimes Things Go Horribly Wrong* (Outskirts Press).

Victoria Nicolau lives in Fall River, MA with her fiancé and two cats. She is a first-year student in Lesley University's low-residency MFA program and a graduate of Salem State University. Her work has previously been published in *Soundings East*.

Toti O'Brien's work has appeared in *Peacock Journal*, *Sein und Werden*, *Avis*, and *Ink on Thirds*, among other journals and anthologies.

Gabriel Oladipo grew up in Chicago, IL and currently lives in Tucson, AZ. He is studying English and Creative Writing at the University of Arizona, where he is a member of the Honors College, and is working on a chapbook titled *Emma*. He is excited for graduation and looks forward to the next phase in his artistic journey. He can be found on Twitter @gabe_ola.

Julie Oliver has an MFA in creative writing from Southern Connecticut State University and attended the Salem State Poetry Seminar in 2007. She has spent the last ten plus years working on literary magazines and journals in varying roles.

CONTRIBUTORS

Megan Ouellet received her BA in English/creative writing from Salem State University in 2012 and is now enjoying her role as a vegetable grower on a certified organic farm in Hamilton, MA.

McKenzie Paddock is studying Art and Psychology at Salem State University. Art has always been her therapy, ranging from crafts to complex drawings. Due to its meditative qualities, pointillism has become McKenzie's obsession. She hopes to assist others through the self-help technique she has grown to love—artistic expression.

Robin Parsons is a 2015 alum of the Salem Poetry Seminar who has studied poetry with Leah Nielsen and David Watts. While living in the San Francisco Bay Area for over 20 years, he was published in *The Haight-Ashbury Literary Journal* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and returned to his native Massachusetts in 2009.

Michael Pontacoloni's poems have appeared in *Smartish Pace*, *Pleiades*, *Colorado Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Harpur Palate*, and elsewhere. He holds an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and lives in Connecticut.

Ron Riecki's non-fiction, fiction, and poetry have been published in *The Threepenny Review*, *River Teeth*, *Spillway*, *Rattle*, *New Ohio Review*, *Shenandoah*, *Canary*, *Bellevue Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Orleans Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Wigleaf*, *Juked*, *Dunes Review*, *New Verse News*, *Verse Daily*, and many other literary journals.

Melissa Beth Rodenhiser lives in quirky, beautiful Providence, RI, where she teaches yoga by day and studies improv comedy and writing by night.

Kayla Russell is a writer and ROI specialist. Based out Salem, MA, she balances a life full of gratitude and resistance with her partner and their cat.

Matt Salyer is an Assistant Professor at West Point. His work has appeared (or is forthcoming) in *Narrative*, *Florida Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Common*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, and numerous other places. His first book, *eRavage and Snare*, is forthcoming in late 2017.

Lyndon Seitz is a poet from Western Massachusetts who enjoys music, deep philosophical conversations, and lauding himself in the third person. He is an alumnus of the Salem Poetry Seminar, winner of a handful of awards, and occasional slayer of dragons made out of semi-colons and dangling modifiers.

Charu Sharma is a software developer at IBM in Austin, Texas. Prior to that, she studied Computer Science and Creative Writing at UT Austin and Carnegie Mellon. She spends most of her spare time reading and writing poetry and short fiction. She has most recently been published in *Analecta* and *The Pittsburgh Poetry Review* and is working on her poetry series, *when I was made of water*.

Faith Shearin is the author of five books of poetry: *The Owl Question* (May Swenson Award), *The Empty House* (Word Press), *Moving the Piano* (SFA University Press), *Telling the Bees* (SFA University Press), and *Orpheus, Turning* (Dogfish Poetry Prize). Recent work has appeared in *Alaska Quarterly Review* and *Poetry East* and has been read aloud by Garrison Keillor on *The Writer's Almanac*. She is the recipient of awards from The Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, The Barbara Deming Memorial Fund, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Her work also appears in *The Autumn House Anthology of Contemporary American Poets* and has been included in *American Life in Poetry*. She lives with her husband, her daughter, and two dogs in a cabin on top of a mountain in West Virginia.

Enzo Silon Surin is a Haitian-born poet, educator, publisher and social advocate. He is author of the chapbook, *Higher Ground* (Finishing Line Press), which was nominated for the Massachusetts Book Award and co-author of *The Next Verse Poets Mixtape - Volume One: the 4 X 4*. His poems have appeared in a number of journals and his manuscript, *When My Body Was a Clinched Fist*, was selected as a semi-finalist for the 2015 Philip Levine Poetry Book Prize. He is Associate Professor of English at Bunker Hill Community College and is founding editor and publisher at Central Square Press.

Kendra Tanacea, an attorney in San Francisco, holds a BA in English from Wellesley College and an MFA in writing and literature from Bennington College. *A Filament Burns in Blue Degrees* was a semifinalist for the Washington Prize and a finalist for the Idaho Prize for Poetry. Her second collection, *Garbage Heart*, was a semifinalist for the Elixir Press Poetry Awards and the 2016 Wilder Series Poetry Book Prize. Kendra's poems have appeared in *5AM*, *Rattle*, *Moon City Review*, and *Stickman Review*, among others. Visit her at kendratanacea.com.

Jessica Tower is an MA in English Writing candidate at Salem State University going on for her MFA in poetry next semester, and is also a Salem Poetry Seminar alum. She has been published in *Spark Magazine*, *Golden Walkman Magazine*, *the Eunoia Review*, *Three Line Poetry*, *The Legendary*, and *Juked*.

CONTRIBUTORS

Teisha Dawn Twomey received her MFA in Poetry at Lesley University. She is the poetry editor for *Wilderness House Literary Review*. Her work has appeared in numerous print, as well as online poetry publications. By day, she works as an Academic Resource Specialist at Springfield College's Boston Campus. Her debut collection *How to Treat Pretty Things* was released by Stream-Lines Press this year.

Cady Vishniac is a Distinguished University Fellow at The Ohio State University and a Big Ten Academic Alliance Traveling Scholar at the University of Michigan's Frankel Center. Her stories have won the contests at *Mid-American Review* and *New Letters*, and her poetry has been featured on *Verse Daily*.

David Walker writes intermittently, at best. He has published two poetry chapbooks and has one forthcoming. His work appears in *Parody*, *ELJ*, *Sediments*, and others. He is an editor at *Golden Walkman Magazine* and attended the 2010 Salem Poetry Seminar.

Woody Woodger is a New England poet forthcoming in *Barely South* and *Postcards Poems and Prose*. He has previously appeared in *Soundings East*, *Golden Walkman Magazine*, and *Dear Hope*. His chapbook *postcards from glasshouse drive* was a finalist in the 2016 Paper Nautilus Debut Chapbook Contest.

Matt Zambito is the author of *The Fantastic Congress of Oddities* (Cherry Grove Collections), and two chapbooks, *Guy Talk* and *Checks & Balances* (Finishing Line Press). New poems appear in *Slice*, *Pembroke Magazine*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Broken Plate*, and elsewhere. He writes from Spokane, Washington.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to Karen Gahagan, director of the Center for Creative and Performing Arts at Salem State University, and Lauren Bishop, project manager, marketing and communications at Salem State. Thanks to Andrea Cohen, the final judge for the Claire Keyes national contest, and to Regie Gibson, who judged the Claire Keyes student contest. Thanks, too, to the first readers for the Claire Keyes contest: Julie Batten, Kevin Carey, Jennifer Martelli, Kayleigh Merritt, Amy Jo Minett, January Gill O’Neil, Alexandria Peary, J.D. Scrimgeour, and Ann Taylor. And thanks to managing editor Cathy Fahey, who makes everything happen.

Enzo Silon Surin, “High School English” was originally published in *Tidal Basin Review*.

Lisa Mangini, “Letter to My Maid of Honor, If I Choose to Have One” was originally published in *Ambivalent Nymph* (Five Oaks Press).

Brian Brodeur, “Cousins” was originally published in *Local Fauna* (Kent State University Press 2015).

Soundings East

Volume 39

salemstate.edu/soundingseast

Soundings East

CLAIRE KEYES POETRY AWARD

Faith Shearin

CLAIRE KEYES STUDENT POETRY AWARD

Rebekah Aran, winner

Felicia LeBlanc, runner-up

FICTION

Ryan Burruss

John DeBon

Adam Matson

NONFICTION

Joseph Holt

Paul Hostovsky

Toti O'Brien

POETRY

Carol Alexander

Stephen Eric Berry
& John Elkerr

Grant Clauser

Andrea Cohen

Darren C. Demaree

Edward Dougherty

Alan Elyshevitz

Vincent Hao

Liz Hutchinson

Scott Jacobs

Mary Christine Kane

Cindy King

Rustin Larson

Gabriel Oladipo

Michael Pontacoloni

Ron Riecki

Matt Salyer

Charu Sharma

Kendra Tanacea

Matt Zambito

SALEM POETRY SEMINAR

Enzo Silon Surin

Paige Cerulli

Lisa Mangini

Amy Gaeta

Vincent M. Livoti

James Connatser, Jr.

Gregory Glenn

Taylor Rae Botticelli

Teisha Dawn Twomey

Woody Woodger

Jessica Tower

JD Debris

Kayla Russell

Robert Auld

Megan Ouellet

Julie Oliver

Lyndon Seitz

Cady Vishniac

Melissa Beth Rodenhiser

Steph DeOrio

Robin Parsons

Sara Afshar

Brian Brodeur

Victoria Nicolau

David Walker

Shari Caplan

Joey Gould



salemstate.edu/soundingseast

\$10