

SEGUE



volume 4 issue 2

Segue

The online literary journal of Miami University-Middletown

www.mid.muohio.edu/segue

Segue is published twice a year, in April and November. We accept submissions of high quality fiction, poetry, creative nonfiction, and writing about writing year-round via email. Before submitting, please read past issues to understand the sort of work we publish, then read and adhere to our submission guidelines. Past issues are freely available in our Archive: <http://www.mid.muohio.edu/segue/archive.htm>. Submission guidelines appear on the Submissions page: <http://www.mid.muohio.edu/segue/submissions.htm>

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Volume 4 Issue 2 Fall 2005

Cover art: Bradley D. Woods. *Untitled*. Oil on canvas. 33" x 44"
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from *Tin God*

Chapter 8

All over the Middle West you find people who know I'm here. Why, there was this woman in Minnesota—you saw her in the grocery-line-kind-of-paper—who found me in her dishwasher, on a scratched plastic Goofy cup. And there are others who know there's something going on and so are forever talking aliens. Aliens, and I don't mean just the unregistered citizen-slaves who trim trees and pick fruit, they talk about people of real color, purple, for example, with weeds attached to the person's undersides or insect parts where their mouths should be. Sometimes that same newspaper puts them on the front page with a star's parts. And there are also those who know there's something going on but they can't quite put their finger to it. What they end up fingering usually isn't god, in general, the human mind always running to evil like it does. Remember the girl who last year offered her firstborn to the rising river? I was behind her, in my pickup.

Morning, mumbles Rolf from the front of his kitchen while I'm taking up the rear booth as usual and signaling with two fingers for double eggs. Usually he's hanging over me, looking down my front for whatever hint of décolleté a plaid workshirt from L.L. Bean with darts affords.

Oh, you forgot God's not sexbound? Heads up. Or at least quit staring at that Goofy cup reproduced in color across the front of that grease-stained paper. Was it all that mention of broadcasting, of seed getting scattered, that made you put me down as male? Think of my usual costume, real sideshow, beard and what can only be called a dress, then fast forward a little, press the amalgam button, add L.L. Bean. Trick or Treat! Open your mind the way I open the local rag, the way I read every little bit which is not a

lot in print, I read it even though I know everything, even the truth about the ads to convince people to sell plastic goods through the at-home party method, even about public broadcasting.

Today Rolf's not so interested in me as in the pager he is nestling into the paw of the moth-eaten Kodiak bear that divides the bar from the kitchen.

A cop comes through the door for it.

I could have sold it, boasts Rolf, waving his broad white hand from behind the bear. Sold it, and made a fortune. A genuine police unit like that.

The cop clips the pager back onto his belt. That will teach me to get comfortable.

I hate cops. I shouldn't say this but some of them think they're god. Especially when they're in uniform. It's a failing of mine, this typecasting-by-uniform. I should get a uniform, that would teach me. Anyway, whenever I see a cop, I do not like to see him. In response to this one, I waggle my paper like I'm casual and friendly, then his pager goes off.

It does happen.

Doesn't that mean you have to be somewhere else? Says Rolf.

The cop turns the squawking down. I'm here to protect you for however long it takes to get a take-out coffee. With milk.

One white, Rolf orders a passing waitress.

Rolf likes cops less than I do but he's Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis Club, Knights of Columbus. Some of his best friends are cops. This one dates his second cousin.

See—over there! The cop tilts his chin toward Pork, who's sipping at his own coffee in a booth. Pork hasn't changed out of the clothes he drove to town in, flowered shirt, shiny pants, and he's added sunglasses. My theory is, says the cop, the louder the clothes the more likely the crime.

You'll be arresting the priest in his vestments next, says Rolf.

Let me just play cop for one minute, says the cop. Okay? Besides, I think I stopped that dude not long ago. I think we'll just have ourselves a little conversation. I'm allowed that.

Be my guest. Rolf shakes his head then steps back behind the register to get a toothpick.

The cop sits down right in front of Pork, steels his jaw and puts his hand on his holster. He's about to open his mouth when Pork says, Excuse me, officer, and scoots out of the booth to the door.

Wish I could have a picture of that, says Rolf, watching Pork roar out of the lot.

The problem is, the cop says, taking a sip of Pork's coffee, is that they're all guilty by the time they reach twenty. I don't know exactly what of, but they've done it.

You could have said Stop or I'll shoot, says Rolf, catching the waitress with the coffee-to-go.

Rolf, the cop says. I don't want to leave any holes in your place. The coffee's bad enough. He sips off the lid of his cup.

Rolf barks like a seal when he's really tickled, his arms shaking helplessly like flippers at his sides. He barks now, he goes on like this even after the pneumatic door eases shut behind the cop.

Then he takes a big breath.

He slops a wet rag over to the booth where the boy and then the cop sat and he slides that rag way across the table as if he means to clean it, though it is as clean as that rag, then he leans way over to look under the table and pulls off a piece of paper stuck there.

I see all this from my vantage in the corner where he has forgotten me.

Nothing says nothing like something from the oven, hums Rolf, going back over to the register to insert a new toothpick into his mouth. He crumples up the paper. Then he spots me watching him. He says: Do you need a refill or what?

I look as if I have not seen anything. I do that all the time since I see so much so I have it down. I am not bothered by his *what*, as belligerent as it is, although I do not have

the patience that I would like. It is worn thin with parity and ranchers with Cadillacs that fart instead of honk. Thank you, I say, and hold out my cup.

A waitress is beckoned.

As soon as I am finished, I am going to drive out to check my field again. Not one of those hired hands turned up yesterday to plow it under and all that undone growing wears on me, all that grass-in-abeyance. I follow Pork's route, the one he hightailed out on the side road to where the goods have got to be, right next to my undone field. The wayward always return to the scene of the crime not for its possible reenactment, or even to revel in the details, but to double-check whether they've left anything. In this case, it's everything.

Of course, I know where.

Meanwhile, Rolf tidies up, as is his wont. He crushes my left-behind newspaper into a ball as small as that paper he had already pressed into the overflowing pail below the bar. Then he tells a waitress he will be right back and looks longingly at the very large gun mounted over the entry. He bought it at somebody's divorce sale so long ago he couldn't tell you if anybody ever promised it did work. It works there looking good now, as if he has hunted with it and will.

A witching wand for people is what he needs—but he begins to drive. Have you seen a black Porsche? is not what he can ask the lady at the drive-in bank window, the only soul available in this car-driven country. Instead he takes to the street, all the streets in town, which are not many. They're arranged in the usual grid, these bisected first by train tracks and then Interstate cloverleaf almost gothic in embellishment in comparison to the frame houses that front it so dutifully, street after ruined street against its endless concrete. Rolf drives to the edge of town, to the bronze horse put up by the local orthodontist, soldered onto a Boot Hill where exhumed pioneers are found to have turned into rock, a place where he can't do anything else but reverse and drive to the exact opposite end of town, to the living's cemetery, which he does. This cemetery is bordered by the usual drag strip, providing plots for dragsters about Pork's age and car make.

But no Pork. Rolf cruises past the one drive-in that stays open all winter offering heaters, and then to a quonset where half-breeds dance in summer for what tourists disembark the cloverleaf and need the sight of people who don't really live there either to make themselves feel at home or at least elsewhere.

No Pork.

Rolf has a moment of enragement. He does not hesitate to stop the car and get out and pound on the hood. A woman, dusting the sill of her picture window not far from the dance site, takes the pounding as a signal of the machine frustration that overtakes us all now and then since the invention of the cotton gin, and not malice.

I drive by on my route that follows Pork's, lifting my two fingers off the wheel in traditional car greeting. Rolf is getting back inside his car, sulking and thinking. A sure sign he is thinking is that he puts the car in reverse. Reverse is a more determined mode of transportation than forward is. It just is.

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Chapter 9

Kill him! is what the whisperers say. The way they say it hisses.

Wiping the vomit from his face with the grass, the man walks on, batting at the hissing in the grass with more of the grass he has ripped off. This hissing might be a snake's, it might be solace. Walking away is all he can do about his being lost and nauseous, with the evidence of his lostness so sour behind him, so somewhere. Walking away from the hissing gives him a direction too. He is not lost now.

Ever one to avoid confrontation, even against his own interests, Tall Pigeon Eye says, Don't be too hasty. If he's a man, he might have brothers.

Some of the whisperers make shrewd sounds and nod and the boy begins again about what he saw in the night: the army of metal-plated men and the moon, about god as light.

Tall Pigeon Eye and the others listen because boys old enough to hunt are men. They look at the boy and each other in the silence after.

Send the boy back to the women, suggests Tall Pigeon Eye. The women can throw sticks to see if he is a god. Tall Pigeon Eye has friends among the women. Women paw at his backside, his pigeony part, as if that will tell them all their secrets. He does encourage it.

It is fair, the others decide, this handing off of responsibility. A god is not someone you take lightly, or sometimes singly or one-sexedly. A god is not someone you kill quickly, in a hunt. They should ask the women. The women of course would be distracted if they came to see god themselves.

Why doesn't Tall Pigeon Eye just oust the man by changing water to wine or its grass-people equivalent, or stand on top of water and the like? He could do that. But it isn't worth it to him. This man with his metal hat will run out of steam soon enough. Surely he is not god, despite all the local stories about blue-eyed mongrels landing via saucers on the sandbars and setting up shop. Tall Pigeon Eye just doesn't buy it, even though they have no legends about pigeons that he himself can point to for his own ends.

Well, he could raise a couple of dead to press his point, but then he'd have to make appearances, keep regular hours, organize followers—not yet, not yet is what Tall Pigeon Eye decides. Besides, he likes to think of himself as an office incarnate, someone who's around more to do the files and keep the desk clear and the general rah-rah going, and not so much for the personal, as someone to petition and pray to.

On the other hand, is this guy here to help him out? Tall Pigeon Eye quashes that thought, he has his pride, his territory, his people. He has his style. They all do. Buddha, a sit-around kind of god, Shiva, all wild arms and dancing, Jesus, casual, posing with a lot of lumber. They probably had rivals too.

The boy is sent.

He passes the god as he runs from the camp toward the women but his quiet passing is just another breeze and rustle to the man, who keeps walking. He knows the grass must end. The ocean ended. How long were they on that ocean? Weeks and weeks. The grass must end. It will. He will make it end. By walking.

The boy is still running when he reaches the village clearing. Gasping, he runs up to the women who are at work chewing deerskin. The dogs halt their constant sniff and fight at their feet to greet him. The women give him a sprig of something to help him catch his breath, so he can ask them what the men want to know.

The women spit out the deerskin, consider their answer. They ask him if he is hungry, then they feed him the best they can cook: roast bird, new beans, and mush—no bread since he returns without warning. The best food will test his truth-telling, that's what they know. With smiles and encouraging gestures, they take the food away after he's started, they take it away until he tells the story different three times, then they let him eat it. If he tells his story wrong once or twice, it is less likely invented than questioned or elaborated or toned down.

The women decide what to say, what to do. They don't decide easily, by laughing at the men who are always reporting huge snakes or eagles that lift away their catch as a way to explain why they return with so little. Instead, they believe the boy. It is his first

hunt and he is the youngest ever to go—in height only halfway up the grass—and so he is not likely to know the stories that men produce for themselves.

They send the boy to fetch his sister. She is picking beans on poles they erect to Me, notched poles still so fecund they sometimes root and put out leaves, though sometimes it is from the fish the women put in under the poles that makes them root, and sometimes it is just the way the pole is pushed in. This pole is tall and the girl, hearing her brother, calls out to him to help her, to jump and pick the bean or beans just out of her reach.

She isn't full grown but she's shorter than he is. You can tell from the size of her feet that her body is reworking its proportions, sending out more growth. This near ripeness is what the women want. By the power of herbs and sticks, whatever they gabble together out of things elemental, the way they do now with electricity and sand into chips to fix time, to carbon date, they decide she is ready to be ripe. Besides, all the other girls have been taken.

But she loves her brother. He teases her for having only buds for breasts like a man, then teases her breasts. Watch them grow, he says, and they rise.

I see the worship of one body for another. I'm not incensed. They always come back to me in time, needing something less complicated, more one-sided, less of the body that changes, bodies that present wants who can know? and keep on wanting.

She follows her brother to the camp because he says she must, not because of what the women say, tricking her out in ocher, wrapping her ankles in hide, moaning and chanting about how beautiful she is. She knows why she is chosen and beauty isn't the reason. She is solemn and her face does not give off the glow that beauty does. Unless she is with her brother. To be alone with her brother in the grass—yes, she will follow him.

They roll in the grass, alone, laughing silently.

Of men at hunt she knows nothing and he tells her nothing. These are the men of the village, fathers of girls her age and others, men who complain of dirt in their fish or quarrel over rain and what to do about it. Hunting, these men are changed and anonymous, and show none of the furtiveness they have with women. Even her own

father is no one to her, he owes his thoughts to the grass alone and to the other men, but not to the women or children. What would her father say anyway? Good luck, you're doing it for all of us? What do the parents of the virgin ever say?

The men talk of her feet, their large size, and of the swale of her hips. But not of her.

Tall Pigeon Eye is her father. Not exactly, of course, since he is my incarnate. She and her brother were orphans and Tall Pigeon Eye, being somewhat orphaned himself, that is, let down out of a cloud, was given their care, having no other. He doesn't know about the brother and his love for his sister because, like all good fathers, he doesn't want to know. Besides, she is his daughter, she must love him only.

But now custom has it that Tall Pigeon Eye must cut out. Fathers, even in the hunt, in such a situation, cannot be trusted. There's no blame in this. The others would do the same if it were their girl. That's what they say. Even if the results prove what he believes—that the man is not god—they sense, like some high-tech physics experiment, that his presence will queer it.

They don't know about the boy and his interest.

Tall Pigeon Eye exits, stage right as it were, steps quietly into the grass and awaits some arrow or quail call or whistle to bring him back. He wanders far and rages, for as much as he feels he's an office incarnate, this is the most important moment of his time on earth, as it is called, and he has to be out of it. Why? Why? It will take years and years of minor miracles and suggestive soothsaying for him to regain his position now. For once he is tempted to throw thunderbolts.

He doesn't because while he is gliding swiftly and furiously through the grass in debate, he finds the man's lost sword. He pulls it out from between the thick grass roots that seem already to grow over it. He turns it over and over in his hands. Anyone who needs such a weapon must not be god. This is the proof that he needs. He hefts the flat of the sword onto his shoulder. Here they seldom see metal at all or even sharp sticks. Mostly bones. He sights along its hilt to the end, aiming it like the blunderbuss soon to come. He drags it behind him like some kind of ploughshare. He chops into the grass with

it. He flings it into the air and it flashes over the grass like a signal. He flings it again. Like a thunderbolt really he flings it against the wide blue sky under which stands his daughter, already far away, wearing nothing but hide around her ankles in front of the men and her brother, and farther, the man with his head down, plunging through the grass, and even farther, the others with their swords, one of whom looks up at a faraway glinting.

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Chapter 10

What do we have here? The Porkster in his Porsche, moping? Sitting around in that car having just escaped both an officer of the law and Rolf in the first degree, afraid to get out of his vehicle, even to scour the torn-up field he's parked in front of, but knowing, in that Porsche, he might as well be on a turning pedestal with cheetahs jumping on his hood and a brass band in the background as to expect no one to find him.

At least the car is low to the ground.

No nook or cranny for a hundred miles could hide such a car, and the stretch of land in front of him is as flat as a secretary's ass—what little definition there is is only in those plants, still topsy-turvy from the tornado.

He could go park in Jim's tractor barn and hike out to here to make his search. That would be an idea, yes it would, but an idea that would never cross Pork's frantic, moping and stalled brain, as he is part of a generation that regards getting out of the car for anything other than elimination, destination.

Besides, he has allergies. Walking through all these fields this time of year fills his head with slough, closes every cavity in his brain, swells his eyes shut, makes his skin crawl. This is not obvious at the beginning, the first day or so, but builds. Yes, it is not only fear that keeps him out of the field but his A.C.

He adjusts its cold. It calms him. He then tunes to the swap shop on the radio in time to hear Evelyn trade her layette for a brand-new full length satin bride gown and veil which she will wear sometime "real soon." The word "soon" makes him hunker down way low in his seat as if it will hide him, the ignition twisted, the battery draining, A.C. full blast, and the problem of the day laying itself out like a female dog on her back needing stroking.

He sees the buffalo at a distance and all he thinks is all the burgers it could become. He reaches into the back seat for sustenance, out of nervousness and a missed breakfast, and his hand lands on the last of the maid-rites he bought by the dozen in the dead of night the night before, after the twister incident forced a delay in dining.

Steamed ground meat with pickle on a bun. Not Mama's tacos but he does not want to go home to Mama as happiness, he believes, will not follow. He has already weighed her seeing his new "Motherfucker" tattoo placed across the back of his neck against the possibility of death from Rolf and found in Rolf's favor, or at least equal.

He waits for Jim to show. Whatever farmers do in amongst plants everyday, they do it early.

Myself, I don't like that farmer-dawn-hype. I also do not do a lot of machine maintenance that most farmers get into, a lot of choo-choo and weld. They call what I like to do best pasture but I let even pasture run to seed, getting the county agent out to complain and fine me for my noxious weeds growing acre on acre and threatening fellow farmers' fallow.

Yet I am driving by as Pork unwraps the maid-rite to wedge it whole into his mouth. They're not worth chewing really, not much as food, except for the pickle. But even stuffing it in that way, Pork does not live up to his name in style or demeanor, that name given him when he was but short and rangy and in need of maid-rites if not vegetables, the name laid on him by his passed-on father pinching his small boy fat cheeks. That's what he remembers but his dad meant *porque*—why, why, why? wanting a philosophical rational his wanderings, not knowing about history and the DNA of compulsion. Anyway, Pork is all lithe body now, a good dancing body is what he's got, and that's important, that's his profession. He keeps the name Pork because his dead dad gave it to him. He didn't get much else from the dead dad. A sister, a year-round tan.

I drive and park some two hundred feet past his shiny black Porsche with the smoked windows. Didn't I mention the windows? The smoking's a nice touch, a further siren call to cops and dealers everywhere. Pork regrets doing them now, their unsubtle demeanor, one which he considers briefly as he rolls one down and dumps a dozen maid-rite wrappers out onto the ground in a way I see he doesn't see me, an unconscious dump. Does he think about the fingerprints on his greasy lunch-dinner-breakfast wrappers as they blow up against the severed and bent and wild stalks of the tall, windblown sorghum? Is that why he gets out and tries to catch them? But they're all driven away by

the very first gust, and then blown over toward the buffalo that raises his head as if he expects them.

Pork leans in and cuts the engine, then doesn't look both ways, just drags himself straight out into the field to get the search over with. This is, after all, the point of him here and not there, safe, as it were, in Denver. Rolf has the note, Rolf is cool or not, he has to search the field no matter.

He is a long way off from the car when a crop duster comes skimming over the field. Or is it an unmarked police plane? He has been up in one of those, compliments of a cousin's cousin, and has seen that police planes are supposed to crazy-eight it if they are actually looking for people—but they can't tell anything without a satellite anyway. Not really, not that high up, so he doesn't run or panic or even glance up until the plane swoops a little lower.

He's very casual, walking back to his car. Nobody's name incorporated is printed on the side of the plane, it could be anybody's. The plane isn't spraying anything but it could be looking to spray. Or it could be just looking. Whoever left the bag at the intersection for him in Denver could have a plane. He now remembers hearing on the radio this size plane have these telescope things attached in front and reflectors that tell them everything. They don't need satellites.

Has Rolf told them about the slight delay in delivery?

While the plane curves to the west, but not very west, Pork bends down and scoops up a handful of mud from the irrigation ditch which he then applies to the side of his unscratched automobile in a clever kind of camouflage, grinding the mud into the finish to make it stick, to make it opaque and not so black-and-glittering-come-to-me-Cleopatra. He does a good job smearing in the mud despite the anguish he feels, losing the finish, but is unable to resist adding a handprint to the side, a sign of coup or the kindergartner's delight. Human.

Now the car is brown. And ugly. But maybe outstandingly ugly, not the effect he is after.

From where I now survey my fields, those ruined husks I myself ruined with wind and whatnot, from where I wish it would finish in its ruin and I could get someone to plow it under before the season is too far gone and the government handouts handed out, I can see he's now moved from the disaster of his car toward where Rolf convinced Bessie, his very own mother, to dig holes. A good number of holes.

The crop duster has now seen what it needs to and is arcing back in a long lazy loop to where it's supposed to be. Pilots often get carried away with piloting and add on, that's what Pork decides, changing his mind about peeing into the dirt to make more mud. That's when he identifies the holes at his feet and starts cursing under his breath, certain the bag is gone, is now discovered.

I lose sight of him then—why would I want to see everything when the threat of that is so efficient?—while he inspects the holes with his hands, like a dog. Because there is more than one hole he is thinking maybe the bag isn't found, that his own digging is still possible. He shows up at the car again, pops his trunk and pulls out all the shovel it affords, the one for snow.

I could say something about the futility of putting this shovel into practice or the desperate measures Pork has sunk to. I could, but humor interrupts in the form of my guffaws with the sight of him using this awkward shovel's corner to lever wedges out around the holes, and then the corner of it used with his hands on other holes. What he needs to believe is that someone has just taken some dirt to the bucket shop to check as a soil sample.

I don't get past my guffaws to pity because Rolf, knowing Pork and Jim get along like thieves, has finally taken off down the highway in the direction of Jim's field and indeed is now driving down this section line's county road, his vehicle dowsing the surrounding countryside with its black fumes because of today's broken or unrepaired something, charging straight on down here at top speed, at least 35 mph, his rounded fenders shaking like pig jowls over the loose road gravel.

Pork hears and takes cover.

Rolf dismounts his truck without turning the engine off and circles the Porsche, touching the fresh mud, opening and closing its doors, slamming them the way you're not supposed to with makes that expensive.

I wince, as does Pork.

Then Rolf drives over to me. Where is the kid who drives this car? Ma'am, he adds.

I take my time, looking up at the car like I hadn't even noticed it was parked there, then I get out and walk right over to where it sits and inspect it real close. Needs a wash, I'd say. Maybe it broke down. What do you think?

Rolf leans out and touches the still wet handprint of mud. Something, he says.

Most likely broke down. You'll probably see him up ahead, walking along, wanting a ride, I say. I look up at him with one of my smiles that Shakespeare wrote about—come hither?—and he grunts.

He sits in his truck awhile. He could break into the Porsche, see if it starts. But with me watching?

Pork is holding his breath in that field. Pollen is doing its thing. His nose wriggles, he fidgets. It gets hot.

I have him fall in love with the sorghum cob in front of him. It's no sexy willow or something with great bark like Diana had but it puts out charm. He touches it, stares abstractedly into the sky around it—you've seen people do this, their brains full of something they later can't piece out—and he doesn't move. On some level, yes, it is about sex, Pork does stir, but that's all, just complimentary stirring to show my power over men with mere vegetables.

I myself fidget, check the loose gravel at my feet.

Rolf idles.

Pork breathes loud through his sinuses.

I walk over to Rolf's truck, hoist myself up to driver level and lean down into his window, showing off my not-so-bad wrinkled cleavage that he would not suck eggs to grope, and I say: Nothing better to do?

Rolf is insulted but confused by the cleavage. He shifts his gears, he puts it into first. Nice to see you, he says. I hop off. He moves away, though not so fast. He has nowhere else to check, it is defeat from here on out, but he leaves.

Pork sneezes like a piston in combustion, sneezes sixteen times as he rushes out, accidentally whacking at the plants with his snow shovel, loosening up more pollen. He stays low, sneezing and running, until he breaks through the end of the field.

No Rolf.

He looks over at me with suspicion. He eases into his car and even clicks the lock on.

I don't even turn around when he starts it, when he drives in reverse the whole way out of the gravel.

Commentary on *Tin God*

We play until Death calls us in—
Kurt Schwitters

In *Tin God*, my forthcoming fourth novel, whispers plague a desperate conquistador lost in tall prairie grass. Four hundred years later, a male go-go dancer flings a bag of dope into the same field. God, in the person of a salty Nebraskan farmwoman, casts a jaundiced yet merciful eye over the unfolding chaos until fire brings the two stories together--and a judiciously applied pair of pantyhose. The book is a contemplation of divinity as well as drugs “on the ground,” a funny history of the plains that transcends its Interstate spine.

Drugs and religion. Marx would be happy.

I wrote the book in 1994, in a kitchen in Hawaii just as *Cannibal*, my first novel, was coming out, to ward off all the good and the bad of having my first novel published from afar. I had had a dream of the conquistador the year before that I'd turned into the poem, “Woman with God,” which appears in my book, *Treason*, published in 2002. I'd started the parallel story of the lost bag of drugs in 1990 and put it aside as something I wasn't ready to finish. The story wasn't word-driven and at that time I couldn't write a narrative-bound long work without draining the life out of it, and me.

I tried with *Cannibal*. After fifteen years of writing many, many drafts in third person in transparent fiction in which doors were opened and closed and third person

p.o.v. characters said this and that, I came to realize there was nothing transparent in the novel's story. I couldn't imagine what went on the heads of the Africans I was writing about, or even in the head of the man I was with, who casually mentioned all these years later, that he might have been working for the C.I.A. in Africa. I knew then all I had was my head. I threw away all thirty-odd drafts I had written and rewrote the book completely from scratch. I chose to use an extremely close first person point-of-view so that reading it is almost like experiencing one of those virtual reality games that were so popular in the heyday of high tech, where you put a helmet on and chased people on the screen with your joystick.

When I started *Tin God*, I tried to solve this epistemological problem by becoming god. In the three chapters excerpted in *Segue*, God, the Nebraskan farmwoman, frames all of the action of other principal characters: Rolf, Pork, who is hanging around his hometown to try to recover the dope he ditched in a field in a moment of panic, a conquistador and his compatriots, and the Native Americans who think they should kill him. For some obscure psychological reason, I had no trouble playing god. Of course a bossy authorial voice is not especially new, given that Sterne's and Defoe's writing appeared in the 18th century, but it was new for me, and allowed me to timidly toe-test third person while always having trusty first person available to steer the narrative. I wrote the first draft in alternating but unconnected chapters—except for that voice—but soon discovered that being able to double-dip didn't guarantee a joining.

To create a relationship between two entirely different and asynchronous plots (okay, the plot of ground was the same) is the work of metaphor, a poet's task. Poetry

means play to me. Language play, emotional play, word play. I published first as a poet then re-trained as a novelist under Gordon Lish, a literary phenomenon who prefers prose word-driven rather than character- or even narrative-driven. This suited me, if not the marketplace. I like to take license. I use alliteration for fun, drive resonance into the far corners of narrative, and enjoy using first person, a point-of-view that poets often use to give the reader the illusion of being closer to the hysteria we all emote by. I also do not shy from oblique language, which is sometimes the sharpest tool available to fillet the most hidden events. I also write short. Coleridge is my god, “the fewest words in the best order.” My first drafts of stories or chapters are usually five pages long, my “measure,” as it were. I do not, however, see any harm in elaborating an image or idea the way Rick Moody does—that 19th century prose writer in the 21st—that is to say, in taking a sentence too far because that might take the reader beyond his expectations, always a worthy goal. My work has been likened to Borges’, the novels of Denis Johnson, and Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness.” I just read Johnson, and am in awe. What I like to read—if that is an indication of where my work is situated—are authors who don’t mind playing—the above-mentioned Sterne, Nicholson Baker, Mark Richard. Renaldo Arenas—Wow.

Tin God stayed in the drawer for ten years. A story of mine was collected in *A Different Plain*, an anthology published by the University of Nebraska Press and I was invited to read it during the 2004 Nebraska Book Fair. I met the editor of the press

who wanted to see *Flat Platte*, the novel I was currently working on, my answer to Willa Cather. I gave her *Tin God* instead.

I am playing with her.

—Terese Svoboda

August 25, 2005

SHEILA BLACK

The Deer That Has Her Name

"The way to whatever matters begins after that"
—Charles Wright

As if the fable of lost innocence was written
in the land itself, my daughter repeats
the story of the primal forest
and the wars that spread over it like oil igniting.

She is four. We do not know how she
learned the words: The mother dead, the children bleeding,
cut off their antlers, spread them on the ground.
She says her friend *the deer that has her name*

has told her. What words can we use for
what we see? The meadow is high
and clear-cut years ago. Felled trees along the
trail crumbling to mulch, highway sounds

two hills away. When we go uphill, our breath
comes harder. We stumble into the stones at trail's edge.
This ground is layered: pine needle,
beetle house, raven dropping, spoor of elk,

rock notched like a crescent moon.
If we kept walking this way
how much could we forget? Our daughter
tells us: *This is where she was. This is where*

she came from. And as if we were
sliced imperceptibly open the deer's body enters us--
her rasping breath, the weight she carries
but the story does not change, not even

with her inside us.

Oasis

The house we bought clings to the edge
of the irrigation ditch,
and so the yard is moist and deep
with whispering grasses.
Pecans loom high over the chicken wire
fence, and there are crab apples and
figs, which remind us foolishly of paradise.
Blue mosquito cloud this morning
when I threw open the back door and
the water silvering at my feet,
illustrating that if you irrigate even the desert
will flower. Once I loved a man
who sought to devise ways of
building artificial oases. He claimed one could
seed a cloud, bring small rain, and
by patient repetition create a mini-climate where
palms would grow bearing sweet
brown dates and a water hole
where the desert creatures—fox, rat, camel—
could come and quench their thirst. Chill, he said.
The pure element. And he told me
how for the Tuareg to cup such water in the hand
and drink was the sum of paradise.
He mocked his calling often.
Nights I would wake and catch him at his desk,
numbers trailing from his fingers
in bursts. You cannot separate pain
from pleasure, he insisted, an exile.
His oasis then, truth or mirage, like this garden
where I sit with my children, recognizing him
gone to me forever? Where
did his busy fingers go, the elaborate equations
he traced in his wire-bound notebook or
his tenderness for me, hand reaching
up to coil my own blown hair around my ear
so that I might better hear him?
The flower must be rare or mean nothing,
I think, our lives empty trumpets like the morning glories
which curl around the damp fence,
the golden pollen inside breaking into the air,
the bright traces of them everywhere.

The Global Multiplication of Common Ailments

Think of it as the dropped stitch, the name you lose or the word which slips into another as fingers into a glove, *humidity* for *humanity*, *Sanskrit* for *seaside*. A picture of the brain bathed in its red sea, generating, re-generating, the cells cooling slowly as the cooked roast cools on the windowsill. This is only an ordinary horror. You stand in the driveway leaning over the hutch of the car, pulling out the petroleum plastic bags full of red chops, apples a year old but still polished-wax, gleaming. The wind skitters over the sound of traffic? Are there birds? You can no longer hear them. In the front seat the radio plays for no one. Here is a song about a man driving his girlfriend out to a deserted country road. It is the silent kiss he wants, but you imagine the sudden eruption of violence, hands in gloves, staggered breath. Later, you will put the oil in the pot, you will dice an onion on your bare palm, daring the blade to break the skin. When it is golden, you add the canned tomatoes. This is dinner. You try to remember how to taste it fully in the moment, but instead you find yourself, half-melancholic, cataloging the names, the faces you are already forgetting. The world itself cools in its sea bath like the mind that is tired of imagining everything. If it were a theatre, if you could say *Pause, break, cut* and the lights go out and the blessed coolness of the night on the rows of velvet seats, the tenderness of the discarded wrappers.

Metaphors

I could say I was the boat whose port
had burned so that the only journey I could make
was backwards or on and out into the shining
emptiness of the waves where what was behind
could appear at moments to shimmer out
of the waste. I could say I have one foot here
and one foot there. I arch backwards
like willows or rainbows. I keep breathing
despite this, shed skins as trees shed bark or
drop their seeds into the November winds
and, come spring, the seedlings burst forth, pieces of
the whole, but changed. I could say the trees
remember somewhere that there was a root that
begat them, but that this memory has become
ingrained, their very sap composed of it
so that memory and present experience
are sisters separated by the slenderest pane
of glass, a place where nothing can ever be as it is,
and even to go there is to shatter a little,
to feel oneself bleed. I could say the trees bleed into the
ground and the ground bleeds into the trees,
and this leeching always of one into the other,
this taking in of the other, is the truth of love.
That love is the pane of glass that makes you
hyper-aware that you can come ever closer
and still never touch, except sideways, through
the currents of memory, which are like the currents
in deep water, a sudden shot of warm, a color
diffusing up through the layers, reminding you there
is always more to imagine, a country
you might reach as in those night journeys of trains
and suitcases where what you remember is the
way the light you left was a nimbus around the mulberries,
where a single daffodil might undo you, that golden
throat reaching nowhere.

Sunland Park Would Be Bank Robber Dead

What is this tenderness in the light, the grasses
unfurling? You, delighted briefly by life in fast-forward,

all the elements of plot and place discarded. Roaring 1-10
and the police cars and border patrol vans, the glint

through the sideview-mirrors. She wants out.
She hits you in the chest even though you are

driving. It makes a dull thud—foretaste, preamble.
Even then it is most performance, but already you can sense

the workings backstage: small house, glitter
of concrete, the yard of dead grass. Chest, eye, sweat,

the breath that lifts ice pink like the light of the angel whose
name you cannot remember, who is the gold light in the

window, who tells the girl that what has been started cannot
be stopped. When you woke up before dawn and thought, *It is*

beginning. When arcing back you cannot tell the difference, only
that it is the sky you picture like a person grown so large

one hand cannot touch the other.
What you do not know is everything.

EVE RIFKAH

Wishes

I wish... said the kid
If wishes were horses then beggars could ride
the ma said again
and again

the kid knows futile
learned early

no wish way out
kid stares at the calendar
imagines piles of calendars to wade through
don't much matter what the picture is
it's the time that matters
all those days
all those years
till gone till outa here
away from crazy ma

to make wishes the kid
thumbs another page
in the secret cave of covers

wishes need waiting
need hoarding need faith
the kid never learned faith
on high holiday visits to shul

kid doesn't know what to think of faith
but files away more wishes by the day

If wishes were love then the kid would...
but the kid doesn't want to ride there

Runaway

The kid reaches for the knob
tries to open door of the attic apartment
all tight angles triangles
the kid remembers from kindergarten.

The dad asks, where are you going?
kid wants away wants gone
wants outa here the kid
knows trap knows steel-teeth clench
 knows fear is on the inside.

The kid tells the dad, wants leaving
the dad opens the door
dark stairs drop down and down
the dad walks with the kid stair
by stair at the bottom.
 opens last door
 cold air races in
streetlights through tree branches
shake shadows like fingers like claws.
The dad asks where will you go?
The kid looks out to dark
to impossible
the kid learns the kid is just a kid
no way to go alone.
The kid turns back to door
back to open to gone
climbs the stairs.

Almonds

The ma used Jergens
The narrow-necked bottle bibbed
in black label scent of almonds

The kid breathed in tainted
each in hale
each breath-blackening sigh.

The kid took to breathing into a fuzzy lamb
centered on a blanket dragged every-
where breathed hollow breathed deep.

The ma starts cutting bits
each day the blanket shrinks
to lost lamb then to gone.

The kid turns to breathing blanket
bindings silken borders tattered
and torn to pajama sleeves
patterns fade inexplicably a gray permanence
persisting the kid cuts cuff from sleeve.
Hides for years.

Hunger

The kid picks at the scab of dried something
on the fork
looks down the straw before lowering to glass.
Chocolate milk
never white
never anything like from the ma.

The kid walks on tiptoes
as much of feet off
floor as possible.

Some say it's a genetic trait
for the kid it was floors
to be leery of
foot yanked scritch away.

Kid forked mashed potatoes flat
searching out lumps to avoid
lumps to stick
to block all air
to suffocate.

That's what the kid thought.

Wished the ma would
as the ma crammed white bread and chicken
fat into her craw.

Maybe this time.

But the kid knew
escape was in the wait.

KENNETH CARROLL

Tongues

"He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man."

—Samuel Johnson

I trip over the names of foreign cities
where weird horticulturists are trying
to grow daisies in shifting semantic sands
where peace is fertilized with decomposing bodies

where men speak in silly vernacular
describing brutal death in technical jargon
& john wayne clichés,
"meeting the enemy wherever they are"

here in cities whose names are familiar
to my tongue, a beast of a man is lying,
assuring the blinded faithful of a victory
anointed in tears

this political anthropoid does not feel
is not moved by escalating funerals
does not dream of the humanity of his enemies
cannot hear their death rattles & the wailing of families

here, he selects new victims, garnishes their
intentions with the cruel moniker of hero
sends them off to perish in a lottery of killing
an assured roulette of wasted humanity

In foreign cities a clash of foreign tongues
men are learning that pain can be
assuaged in beastly acts, they are learning
a language that requires no healing

Riding Shotgun

You riding shotgun, grandma said
my face glazed over quickly with ignorance
in all my 12 years I had never heard such a thing
riding shotgun? I repeated seeking explanation
all I knew was that I was sitting next to grandpa in the front seat
close enough to smell his hi-karate after-shave &
trace the veins in his hands as they knitted like winding creeks
around his slender hands and unfurled as long rivers up arms
the front seat with grandpa, a rare allowance for a child born
in a time when a lack of reverence for any adult could find your behind
burning from a switching

In the backseat my jealous brothers & sisters rolled their eyes
snaking their tongues furiously out of their mouths to mock me

grandma broke the term down-riding shotgun
there was something John Wayne-ish about it
something my cowboy & indian ass could dig
the image was phat,
I imagined myself, Nat Love of the projects
afro peeking out from the brim of my Stetson
steel faced, eagle eyed brother, winchester
between my legs, scouring the horizons for bandits & navajo

I wish I could have seen the cancer coming that took grandma
or the alcoholism that would steal my father's eyes from me
but my job was simple, to make sure the coast was
free of obstruction for grandpa's bifocal maneuverings
as we headed to our ancestral grounds
in upper marlboro

what ya see boy, asked grandpa intermittently
even when it was obvious he needed no help
my eyes spinning furiously, never leaving the road
I answered simply
its all clear over here grandpa
& it was as far as I could see.

Poetry Club

for Nikki

a woman is yelling from a doorway
august lingers like the smell of burning wire
she is admonishing children who are not hers
“get off that tree, they planted it for the dead girl”

I wonder if this tree will live long enough
to be baptized in a dc thunderstorm
or provide shade for the weary at the bus stop

this sapling, named after the girl you murdered,
reminds me of your first poem
full of promise, in need of care

I looked for that poem
when I got the news
all sudden & sideways
& easy to doubt

not like the movies, where an old white dude
with a calm modulated voice asks you to sit down
instead a 15 year old blurts out this horror
launching it abruptly into my brain without
count down or build up “Nikki killed dat girl”

I hold myself together with feigned ignorance
wishing to have no knowledge of a language
capable of conveying the story of a butcher knife
plunged into the future of a 14 year old by a
13 year old

but the young voice thwarts my retreat
into this mirage of denial, wants to know
when the poetry club will start again
as if there is a poem big enough to fill the
gaping hole that has produced this obscene absence

I watch you walk again for the first time
into my workshop, hands on bouncing, narrow

hips, eyes already rolling without provocation
you pretending not to listen but refusing to
leave, your smile a scrim for your anger

looking for your poem, I find your picture
I want to run to the court where you are being arraigned
insist that the judge examine your smile & imagination
demand that they be declared exculpatory evidence

but he will show me this tree,
this thin frightened maple, its root
fertilized with blood & a grandmother's tears
bearing the name of a dc holocaust victim

I remember how you snatched your poem from me
your response to my compliment, you hop-scotching
between rage & joyous innocence
the 15 year old wants me to believe
that you would have traded that knife for a pen
that behind all that sucking of teeth & attitude
was a poet's face trying to recognize itself

When are we going to start the poetry club again,
I hear between the pulsing migraine of words
that tell me you are a murderer, that repeat a
mantra louder than a February chorus of I've
Known Rivers, "Nikki killed dat girl."

I long for the belief of zealots & new lovers
wish that I could believe in the ability of words
to replace embraces, could believe that children
sent to or left to be swallowed by despair on this
side of the river, can choose life & art when
death & destruction are more potent & available

I remember how you returned your poem to me
crumbled up like hardening snow
unleashed from your fist onto my desk
its only edit, your signature & an august
thunderstorm gathering above your smile.

ANDY JACKSON

Pockets of air

Returning again to the town of your birth
by train, feeling the weight of all you have
carried back, you take a slow, deep breath.
You know the clear air here is held in

like city opinions, the broken world
filtered through small, cornered screens.
All the storefronts and faces seem the same –
pale and alert. The open spaces between
bodies expand as you pass. Is it because

the magpies recognise you that they swoop?
You're here to sift through what's left
of the old family home before it's levelled
and replaced with flats. Like a chance
for a word that could've taken life somewhere

else, together you let this house go. Now,
it sits under an aura of dust and the relics
are like pebbles left on a path of years.
They say your future is built with these.
To kneel on the floor of your room

without touching the carpet is as difficult
as tenderness at dinner in front of the TV,
but an archaeologist cannot help but sift
the staked-out ground, try to brush aside
what was to find what should be. The tense net

of events that make a family is a bee-hive
you've stuck your hand into. So far, you hold
only your breath and a heightened sense
that if life can't find those rare pockets of air,
it feeds upon itself. This sound draws you

back out – the low hum of the car
consuming the driveway, the boot packed
with the usual valued things – meat, fresh

questions and silence, the past refusing
to remain in its place. Stay long enough

and it will end like this – you, pushing off
the bottom of the lake, lungs tight with pain,
only to find your blue fingers do not touch
the longed-for surface, just the wet bed again.

Impossible space

Armagh, Northern Ireland, 1980

The first time I bled, I feared my sex was a weight
'round my neck, thinking *How can this leaking thing be
me? Is my only role cleaning up while others fight?*
In time, I saw the wounds and the grief of my sisters,
on their backs in the shadow of the occupying forces.
I figured a gun could become a functional prosthetic,
a limb we'd been denied. With the barrel, I drew a line
'round that vulnerable place the uniforms come to claim.

Disarmed, and thrown inside this prison, where showers
and toilet trips are a chance for the screws to try to beat
the hope out of us, we began to learn how to speak
with silence, through bricks. We stayed put in our cells,
until, with a feast that had us drooling, they lured us out.
We should've known better. Soon enough, the screws,
grinning, had us surrounded and reduced to this dilemma –
go limp or let some reflex like pride make it worse.

Either way, their clubs have the last word on our bodies.
Stripped and searched, we're given back our uniforms
of bruises and shock, thrown back into our cells, alone,
locked down. Every single privilege is removed.
No-one's allowed out for exercise, the toilet or food.
To stop us emptying our pots out through the windows
and spyholes, they block them up. How do you move
when you're backed into such a small and hollow corner?

Words come. Our brothers, pinned under the same fist,
are painting slogans on their cells with their own shit
and piss. At this, and from all of us at once, our blood
spills itself, makes its rich and rhythmic speech. So,
we do not clean between our legs – our hands know
how to translate this menstrual ink into a stigmata
these thick walls can not resist. Now, the screws see
only filth, can't find the stomach to close in. They've lost

sight of us. It is a new smell, their fear, as we spell out how continual our resistance is. This flow, from one side, speaks death; from ours, like water, ... Shivering, alive, we let go of the bank, join the ranks of those who've made their bodies into shields or signs men in authority step back from. Here, at last, is the impossible space we can move in. What now?

You can't draw lines on the waves of the sea

My instinct's to curse myself for this.
The shore behind me's a wall of fire,
the suburbs line their subjects up
as fuel, the rotten pillars

of the jetty creak their warnings,
the boat I was born in
tugs at its moorings.
Yet each rope I approach

with the knife
has become a throat
my heart can't cut.

Instead, alone, I pace the hull,
and scrutinise each knot –
the twisted lines, the history

which keeps me here,
a half-brave face raised, afraid
the sea could be a mirage.

HÉLÈNE SANGUINETTI

Translated by Ann Cefola

from Lefthand Exploring

_____ When they saw the first peak, they shouted,
“Aaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!” And Chango the sherpa, son of Antonio-Jose the
Captain, Emilio’s brother, pricked the beautiful cotton ball on the arrow point oiled for
three days, he pulled his bow, pulled and _____
ZZZZZllliippppppp! _____ into the sun.

His name is Emilio, Antonio-Jose took him as a son with his own,
Chango. Antonio-Jose, a captain then, navigated the China Sea. On returning what
awaited him! A child, screaming amid the pier’s enormous stone blocks. That night in
Nimes this gypsy had him swear, “The little one shall be my boat, my life, I swear on the
three steeples.” He was a new father but one suspended on the horns of mystery and
solitude, ah, how to grip them firmly! The child, being so well loved, had created for
himself a family and the education of a prince.

We are travelers, nothing more extraordinary nor eternal, each one walks and walks
without rest, even in his sleep, even dead perhaps, on the inside he still walks or swims,
it’s the same thing _____ The first peak shines,
shines full of snow and air.

For three days they make piles of stones at regular intervals on the steppe to mislay
followers. Nothing could kill their pride, the noise of feathers mixed with odor.

Oh yes.

I look at you, small place I leave, I was there, thank you, I go farther—————
—————

Everything was loaded in the twinkle of an eye, bundles overburden the four last cars of the convoy. “What good is this, how can we become lighter, to lance the body and the head in one stroke?” thinks Emilio, leaning against his donkey. And with a stick he drew himself in sand, dead damp sand.

You always think of her, or no, sometimes it's her who treacherously returns, throws herself down, the unbearable and soft rambling, this is not her, you artless traveler! Without a knight, you still turn and turn on your feet, with your lance, a man drunk and run through. It is deserted, night sticks, the great night descends, each sees better than to remember, destroy, acknowledge “I need a flame!” “Perched animals, you stink. Human animals you stick, you stink!” It will rain, it rains, it's deserted, each can hear one another walk avoiding small pools and by this time frequent holes on the steppe. And who doesn't need any? Or he is false, or a big brute, he is not attentive, neither to stone, bird, voice, nor anything, anything.

The clear dawn unveils the second peak maybe more brilliant yet—————
—————

we inspect the headbands that have been useless for so long, and we distribute food, alas, with these rains, there is nothing dry but a small biscuit to last us hours on the Mountain!

Snow starts to fall at the same time as the line of mules advance on the trail. We play at pinching the nose. With this cold the nostrils stay stuck together and air swells in the mouth. People left their cars obviously. Will we return? Going forward, we forget. Chango speaks as a sherpa: Up there, one would be proud to dominate the immense sea. The horse does not understand, eye stuck to eye in the furrow. We go up, up to see.

To stop for—————To stay absolutely motionless————— A bird puffs its belly out, ruffled, it is white and perhaps black, it's the real world, better than choking art, the universe moving by the second, fat and conceited art without the bird-bomber on the edge.

They planted their torches, thrust in, direct, for the first time.
1 walker=1 torch, the equation of Chango, who only speaks firm and fast.
The heart now wraps flame, he gives up his heart there, lighter, darker, it goes up and down the black air. That feels the impalpable size of the Amazon, the animal drawn up in softness. All sleep above, it seems to him, only the skin of night stirs and swells, blood rests the way blood does, it flows —————
Noise of famished torches.

De la main gauche

_____ Quand ils ont vu le premier pic, ils ont crié
aaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh ! et Chango, Fils d'Antonio-José le Capitaine, Frère
d'Emilio, éclaireur, a piqué la belle boule de coton à la pointe de flèche huilée depuis
3 jours, il a tendu son arc, tendu, et _____
ZZZZllliippppppp ! _____ dans le soleil.

Il s'appelle Emilio, Antonio-José l'a pris pour fils avec le sien,
Chango, il était capitaine, en ce temps-là, il naviguait en mer de Chine, et au retour voilà
ce qui l'attend, l'enfant, hurle au milieu des énormes blocs de pierre de la jetée, puis nuit
de Nîmes où cette gitane lui fait jurer, "Je jure que le petit devient mon bateau ma vie je
le jure sur les-trois-clochers", à nouveau il était père mais père suspendu à des cornes de
mystère et de solitude, ah, les tenir ferme ! L'enfant, bien que très aimé, s'inventa une
famille et une éducation de prince.

Nous sommes des voyageurs, rien de plus quotidien ni d'éternel, chacun marche et
marche sans répit, même dans son sommeil, même mort peut-être, en dedans au-dessous
il marche encore, ou il nage c'est pareil _____ Le
premier pic brillait, brillait repu de neige et d'air.
Depuis 3 jours ils font des tas de cailloux à intervalles réguliers sur la steppe pour égarer
les suiveurs. Le bruit des plumes, mélangé à l'odeur, et leur orgueil de rien peuvent tuer.
Oh oui.

Je te regarde petite place que je quitte, j'ai été là, merci, je vais plus loin _____

Tout fut chargé en un clin d'œil, les ballots écrasaient les 4 dernières voitures du convoi, "à quoi ça sert, comment devenir léger, fait d'un seul trait pour le corps et la tête ?" pensait Emilio appuyé contre son âne.

Et au bâton il se dessine dans le sable, l'humide sable mort.

Tu penses à elle toujours tu y penses, ou bien non, parfois c'est elle qui revient traîtreusement s'abat, l'insupportable et douce divagation, ce n'est pas elle si peu rusé voyageur ! minus chevalier, c'est toi encore qui tournes et tournes sur tes pieds, avec ta lance, homme soûl, et transpercé.

C'est désert, la nuit colle, la grande nuit est descendue, chacun peut mieux voir alors, se souvenir, détruire, avouer "j'ai besoin d'une flamme !" - "bêtes perchées, vous puez, bêtes humaines vous collez, vous puez !"

Il va pleuvoir il pleut, c'est désert, chacun peut s'entendre marcher en évitant les flaques et les trous fréquents par ce temps, sur la steppe.

Et qui n'en a pas besoin ? ou il est faux, ou grosse brute celui-là, il n'est pas attentif, ni à pierre, ni oiseau, ni voix, ni rien, rien.

L'aube très claire dévoila un deuxième pic plus brillant encore peut-être, _____

on vérifia les élastiques de front qui n'avaient pas servi depuis si longtemps, et on répartit la nourriture, hélas avec ces pluies, il ne reste de sec qu'une petite galette à faire durer des heures dans la Montagne !

La neige a commencé de tomber en même temps qu'avancent à la queue les mules, sur le chemin, on joue à se pincer le nez avec ce froid les narines restent collées et tout l'air ballonne dans la bouche. On a laissé les voitures évidemment. Reviendrons-nous, en avançant, on oublie.

Chango parla en éclaireur : de là-haut on serait fier de dominer la mer immense et le cheval qui ne comprend pas, l'œil collé à l'œil dans le sillon.

On monte, on monte, pour voir.

S'arrêter pour _____ Rester absolument immobile pour ne pas _____
_____ Un oiseau envoie son ventre en avant, ébouriffé, il est blanc peut-être et noir, c'est le monde vrai, ô le touchant univers à la seconde, mieux que de l'art étouffant, il est gras et fat l'art sans oiseau bombardier sur le rebord.

Ils ont planté leurs torches, fiché, direct, pour la première fois.

1 marcheur = 1 torche, équation de Chango qui ne parle que le rapide et le ferme.

Le cœur maintenant s'enveloppe de flamme, il s'y abandonne le cœur, plus léger, plus obscur il monte et descend dans l'air noir. Ça sent la taille impalpable de l'amazone, la bête dressée à la douceur. Tout dort au-dessous semble-t-il, rien que la peau par pleine nuit bouge et se gonfle, le sang repose à la façon du sang, il coule _____

_____ Bruit des torches, affamées.

ROBYN ART

Daily Affirmations from the Last Republican Yogi

Much has been made of the ways
in which our flesh will someday fail us
but little of the fact that it was ever
there at all, look at the body's
invidious trappings and the lungs not
caving in, look at the people boarding the train
and all their blood not spilling out,
the portico not collapsing, the comet
not hurtling from space
flash-flooding the stadium floor
and whupping the continent's sorry ass,
all those condos lashed in the storm
and all those windows not breaking,
all those hidden cameras in rest stops
not beaming our DNA to the moon,
not zapping it straight through the orbit
of Quicky-Marts and banks,
so many murderous hatchings
in so many unmarked jars,
all those maple sin the yard and all
those leaves not falling off.

On the Eve of the Solar Flare

Here in the lesser kingdom the living
greet and pass through,
loving and failing each other in all

the usual ways.
Rooms stand empty, their people afoot
in the blank and snub-nosed dark

for the cause of the greater Good that is
the body sprung from its trap.
The skyline trussed as if within

some grander fiefdom of need,
pages gone unread like beds
no one has slept in.

When the storms came,
there would be nothing
in their wake left standing:

Not the houses,
not the trees, not the hands
they would put their hands to.

Weaving the Air

With spotlight turning on the mask I braced myself to leave. I left the mask behind as evidence of an empty performance. It was a complicated gesture I devised with still perfection of a star-studded night. Weaving the air of ideas in cold of mountains filled me with a new lease of life. To live like the dead – nothing is harder than that. A good part of living is assumed. Flesh cuts and blood is willed to flow. This explains the power of assumptions. Persist in extremities and you confront vanity of an idea.

I bow to earth. To injuries I've caused myself I bow in shame. I attach insignificance to the parasol drying in sun. Droplets of rain streaming down edges of patterned flowers form an esthetic in the soul. Sunlight in a groundless sea. Muddy roads and I calm as the parasol – the true bearer of rain. Nothing touches the parasol. My seeming insignificance has no place in its soul. I could never hurt a parasol as much as I could hurt myself. Purer than a child is the parasol. Both of us can bleed to death but the shade of the parasol has a touch of paradise. A body free of scars is what I refer to. I had not chosen this body. The scars were part and parcel of a packaged object I learnt to call my body. The parasol outside a shop on a muddy road. A sultry song in complex vicinity of intersecting roads. In a cocoon light occupies space with a silken ease. The birth that brought pain made certain that I was pointlessly aging in a moment. Soul is a parasol and body sunlight. Between time and eternity is the shade.

I wrote never wanting to be a writer. I sang and danced for happiness. Thoughtless I could be happy as a pigeon. Bread was central to feelings. Thought coincided with word and deed in the form of bread. In the beginning was bread. I sang of the colors of bread and danced on streets where bread was made. Bread came close to being happiness. Happiness was not more than bread; bread was more than happiness. In giving up bread the same point was made as in embracing bread – that the makers of bread were true inhabitants of this strange forgotten dot in the cosmos called earth. The maker of bread is not a concept; like all women the maker shares the ingenuousness of creation. Nations are born in bread of struggle. Future meets past in bread of the moment. Bread, revealed to hands, is the word that means sweetness in any language.

I asked for nothing knowing full well that I might get what I asked for. I faced life as if I were dust on a mirror. The thing in me that craves for images also craves for dust. I cried like children do when their absolute sense of freedom is offended. With illusions of the real in background I let dust gather in the eye. To envy of the sun I dedicated the beautiful. The milk of suffering turned into cream of madness. Who wants more of madness! I'm tired of my own. Sick of sensation the sea crawls away. Waves disappear never to return. Once upon a time we were coffin-makers. Often you cannot tell where coffin begins and body ends. The likeness of music and light at dusk when things lose their shape. Bewildered by shapelessness of nights I was a passive recipient of untranslatable messages. I knew the poor suffered while I grappled with thoughts. Their bodies knew sensation like mine but they were not plagued with reflections. Living I thought I could pay the price of my death. Sadly I was making fun of myself.

Men, women and places – there is a reserve about them. I walked behind the veil of days. Pride is soul's intoxication. But for you. The wave met us in an hour with the place deep in a dream where it rained incessantly. The wave froze our veins at the tip of a razor. We did not seem dead or we might have known it. We dreamt therefore. Give me aloneness of nights and I will give you a sweet word. Give me stars and I'll pour wine in the cup of your hands. Give me weight of friendship and I'll give you lightness of a gesture. Give me a moment of yours and I'll give you the life of my soul.

The dancer – for the dancer I would die. For her I would abandon nights to wind. Her look turned my body into sea. I flooded towns and cities. I ran through villages the way streams do on clear mornings. You can't tell grass from water. Neither can you tell the dancer from my soul. The dancer is mine. But I don't belong to the dancer. It is to dancing feet that I offer the rhythm of my cascading hair. I could weep as well. I don't because such is my happiness. There is a slight film on the eye that gives a glassy look. It is no tear hiding behind a curtain. It is happiness begotten in the soul of the eye. My breast is not a judge of men. There is no place for judgments in the soul's madness. There is space for love and more love for a dancer who refuses to look in direction where I stand.

GUIDO MONTE

Translated by Liliana Lo Giudice

Origines

*consiros vei la passada folor
e vei jausen lo joi qu'esper, denan
(Dante Alighieri, Purg. XXVI)*

Kamm além beyond the path

(sparks from Virgil, Dante, Blake)

legenda

Comedia Dantis Alagherii, de Inferis: Inf.

" " " , de Purgatorio: *Purg.*

" " " , de Paradiso: *Par.*

Aeneis P. Vergilii Maronis: Aen.

W. Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Marr.*

" " , *The Book of Los: Los*

" " , *The Song of Los: S.Los*

" " , *The Book of Urizen: Uriz.*

" " , *The Book of Thel: Thel*

" " , *America: Amer.*

1. karma, cause and effect

*(Aen. VI 45-46,, 743, 376; Par. XVII, 43-45; Marr.,
A Memorable Fancy)*

ām, āgaccheh

desine fata Deum
flecti sperare precando,
poscere fata tempus,
quisque
suos patimur Manis
da indi, come viene ad orecchia
dolce armonia da organo
mi viene a vista
il tempo che ti s'apparecchia
and then leaped into the void
between Saturn and the fixed stars -
here is your lot, in this space,
if space it may be called

*(cease awaiting in prayer to escape your fate,
now is the time to know your future,
as everyone suffers his past Manes -
afterwards, like hearing an organ sweet melody,
I can just see what time is ready for you...
e volai nel vuoto tra Saturno e le stelle -
ecco il tuo destino, in questo spazio,
in questa specie di spazio)*

2. dharma sadana, means

(Aen. VI, 136-137, 140-141; Purg. I, 103-104; Los I, 2)

amen, veni

beneath the eternal Oak
latet arbore opaca
aureus et foliis et lento vimine
ramus, null'altra pianta
che facesse fronda e indurasse,
vi puote aver vita -
sed non ante datur telluris operta subire
auricomos quam quis decerpserit
arbore fetus

*(sotto un albero d'eternità
a golden bough is hidden,
leaves on pliable stalks
- no other enduring plant
can live there -
unless picking the golden bough
you cannot grasp
the earth deep secrets)*

3. prabhava, beginning

*(Aen. VI,237-238; Inf. I,2; Marr., The Argument,
A Mem. Fancy; Uriz. II, 5)
sì, vieni*

mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
hungry clouds swag on the deep -
spelunca alta
 fuit vastoque immanis hiatu
scrupea
 tuta lacu nigro
 nemorumque tenebris -
down into the winding cavern
 we groped our tedious way,
till a boundless void appeared as a nether sky
 beneath us,
and we held by the roots of trees,
and hung over this immensity -
 all was darkness

*(I found myself inside a dark wood,
 nubi affamate pendevano dall'abisso -
and a vast cave was there
by a black lake
 and the forest darkness sheltered
e brancolando nei meandri della caverna
 proseguimmo stanchi,
quando apparve il vuoto infinito
 di un cielo sotterraneo-
eravamo appesi alle radici degli alberi, sospesi
 su questa immensità: tutto era tenebra)*

4. kali yuga, dark age

(Aen. VI, 268-269; Inf. I, 10-12; Marr., A Mem. Fancy)

yes, come

by degrees we beheld the infinite Abyss,
fiery as the smoke of a burning city
io non so ben ridir com'io v'entrai
tant'era pien di sonno a quel punto
che la verace via abbandonai
ibant obscuri sola sub nocte
per umbram perque domos Ditis
vacuas et inania regna

*(a poco a poco contemplammo l'Abisso senza fine,
il fumo rosso di una città che brucia
I don't know how I entered there
-so much sleepy I left my right track -
dimly going through Dis empty buildings
and waste kingdoms)*

5. āvarana, cloudiness

(Aen. VI, 295-297; Inf. III, 112-118; Marr., A Mem. Fancy)

ja, kom...

beneath us was the sun, black but shining
hinc via Tartarei quae fert Acherontis ad undas,
huc omnis turba ad ripas
effusa ruebat
matres atque viri -
come d'autunno si levano le foglie
l'una d'appresso de l'altra fin che 'l ramo
vede a terra tutte le sue spoglie,
così sen vanno su per l'onda bruna

*(sotto di noi splendeva il sole nero
there the way was to the Acheron waters -
there a multitude rushed to the banks,
women and men -
as autumn leaves down at their last fall,
mass on the ground one after the other
as they go through gloomy waves)*

6. dvār, door

(*Aen. VI, 633-634; Purg. IX, 78, 115-117, 130-133; The IV, 2*)

jà, kom pú

et pariter gressi per opaca viarum
corripiunt spatium medium
foribusque propinquant
e un portier ch'ancor non facea motto -
cenere o terra che secca si cavi,
d'un color fora col suo vestimento,
e di sotto da quel trasse due chiavi...
poi pinse l'uscio a la porta sacrata
dicendo: intrate, ma facciovi accorti
che di fuor torna chi 'ndietro si guata
entered and saw
the secrets of the unknown land

*(they move together through obscure roads
past the middle way they are near the doors -
a silent guardian angel
ashen and sand his clothes hues,
taking two keys out
lets them come in and says: remember...
who looks back, goes outside again -
entrarono e videro
i misteri di una terra ignota)*

7. avātara, heavenly rebirth

(*Aen. VI, 679-680; Purg. XXX, 31-48; Amer., A Prophecy*)

thik he, idrh ah

at pater Anchises

penitus convalle virenti

inclusas animas

superumque ad lumen ituras

lustrabat studio recolens

omnemque quorum

forte recensebat numerum carosque nepotes...

sovra candido vel cinta d'uliva

donna m'apparve, sotto verde manto

vestita di color di fiamma viva -

conosco i segni dell'antica fiamma

let the enchained soul

shut up in darkness and in sighing

rise and look out

(but the father Anchises gazing

at souls collected downhill

in evergreen fields,

souls devoted to see again the highest light,

reviewed his loved descendants line

-and suddenly I saw a woman, under her green cloak

dressed in blaze colours -

I know the old scar signs,

lascia che l'anima imprigionata,

chiusa nel buio e nel singhiozzo

si alzi libera a guardare oltre)

8. ātman, spirit

(Aen. VI, 713-727; Par. XXXIII, 85-87; Marr., A Mem. Fancy)

si, ven

animae

quibus altera fato corpora debentur

Lethaei ad fluminis undam

securos latices et longa oblivia

potant -

principio caelum et terras camposque liquentis

lucentemque globum lunae

titaniaque astra

spiritus intus alit

totumque infusa per artus mens agitat

molem

et magno se corpore miscet -

nel suo profondo s'interna,

legato con amore in un volume

ciò che per l'universo si squaderna -

if the doors of perception were cleansed

everything would appear to man as it is infinite

(souls for new bodies the fate ordained,

souls who drink Lethe waters

and long oblivion-

in the beginning an inner spirit feeds skies

and lands, oceans, the shining moon and sun,

it's an expanding mind

that lights and blends all the earth -

what is revealed through the universe

- closed in just one room - is hidden in these depths,

e se le porte della percezione

fossero aperte, ogni cosa ci sembrerebbe

quella che è, infinita)

9. Krama mukti, rescue

(Aen. VI, 730-747; Purg. XXX, 142-144; S.Los, Asia)

oui, viens

igneus est ollis vigor et caelestis origo
 seminibus
donec longa dies perfecto temporis orbe
 concretam exemit labem
purumque relinquit aetherium sensum
 atque aurai simplicis ignem
alto fato di Dio sarebbe rotto
se Letè si passasse e tal vivanda
 fosse gustata senza alcuno scotto
shaking convulsed the shivering Clay breathes
 and all Flesh naked stands

*(beings have fire energy
 and heavenly origins,
until, bringing to end the years' cycle,
long time the heavenly spirit
 gets clear
 and the primordial light spark
 purifies -
 God's will is not done
if no price you pay
to cross the Lethe
and taste its waters' food;
tra scosse convulse
 la Creta respira affannata
 ed enorme la Carne si alza nuda)*

10. Akasha, heaven first elements

(Aen. VI, 883-884; Par. XXXI, 1; Thel, I)

bale, biò

in forma dunque di candida rosa
così è germinato questo fiore
manibus date lilia plenis
 purpureos spargam flores
for thou shalt be clothed in light and fed
 with morning manna
till summer's heat melts thee beside
 the fountains and the springs,
to flourish in eternal vales

*(just spotless rose shaped,
so it sprouts -
please, throw lilies with open hands,
and let me strew purple flowers
 così ti rivestirai di luce
e la manna del mattino ti sosterrà
finchè un calore estivo
 ti scioglierà in corsi sorgivi d'acqua
per rinascere in posti senza tempo)*

11. Svapna sthāna, as if a dream

(Aen. VI, 893-898; Inf. XXXIV, 139; Thel, Thel's Motto)

nam, ija

like a reflection in a glass,
like shadows in the water like dreams of infants
like a smile upon an infant's face
sunt geminae Somni portae
 quarum altera fertur cornea
 quae veris facilis datur exitus umbris
 altera candenti
 perfecta nitens elephanto
sed falsa ad caelum mittunt
insomnia Manes -
 his ubi tum natum Anchises
 unaque Sibyllam prosequitur dictis
 portaque emittit eburna
e quindi uscimmo a riveder le stelle

*(come riflessi sul vetro
come ombre sull'acqua
come sogni di bambini
come il sorriso di un piccolo viso
two are the ways to Dream;
the horny door lets real shades easily go out
and, through the bright ivory leaf,
Manes send lying dreams to the world ...
Still talking, Anchises to the latter leads
his son, Sibyl and lets them pass.
- thereby we went out to see the stars)*

MARTIN OTT

Craters of the Moon

At Craters of the Moon National Park,
a young couple abandons their ancient

DeSoto, the Badlands stretching
behind them, an earthworm coiled

between song birds. Here they walk
to where wind and water expose shale,

along sheer buttes and fluted pinnacles.
There are two moons: one a furtive lover

peeking through the sky curtain, the other
a stone fist trembling beneath the earth.

The couple could be newlyweds or fugitives,
on a final stop or midnight dare. The road

behind leading to an argument in the Black
Hills or lovemaking beneath a Yellowstone

aspen. One tumbling across plains and valleys,
one plummeting to ocean depths. They devour

the rugged hills with darting flashlights, race
headlong over gullied slopes with no shoots

of green. Here the stones are in full bloom.
The moon we admire and the moon we fear.

The couple has long ago entered a place
they dread to talk about, alongside yawning

caverns, jagged veins and red-lined strata
to rocks older than the bones of mammals,

fish or reptiles. Older than castles or songs.
White eye of palatial buttresses, closed eye

of dreaming. The pilgrims who named this place
did not understand the moonness of themselves.

The rangers who live here sometimes shiver
without knowing why. The couple clambers

along wedges of feldspar, sandstone and quartz
plunging the earth's neckline. They fear they are

satellites, but not of God or sky or earth.
An arrow so bright we are wounded by desire.

They stop as the new moon ripples in the sky
and lie back to rest on the earth's bare nerves,

contemplating the fissures of their bodies,
bones and flesh compressed, falling deep

into the craters of themselves. A night pool
so unfathomable we fear to look into it.

The lovers sink into the crags and wonder
what from their two bodies will remain

to remember these two moons in a thousand
years, atop rocks with no memories of bone.

Roswell Cowboys

You watched the plastic planets
whirl around your crib, a lullaby
of solar winds and shadowless black.

Even now, the night eyes track
us, yellow orbs in a canopied jungle,
each a wedding ring, a perfect stone,

a conjoining of thought. A poem is
a rocket shaped like a pen, light
writing in the cold dark void,

a staticky voice hailing mission
control or careening an ice tail
along red dwarfs and nebula

helixes, showering an aura above
and below the knowing spectrum.
After a fight with your loved ones,

you pour dinosaurs into your gas
tank and navigate the buttes
and canyon fields, broken up

inside like the asteroids belt
separating Jupiter and Mars,
once a planet, whole, vital,

irrefutable. Words are senseless
as any lover knows when he feels
unbreaking rocks beneath him

and exhales the desert's low howl
over vast terrain. Wonder is
a lonely capsule splashing unseen

into the mist after a long journey.
"Us and them," you whisper
and you are Magellan, Orpheus,

Athena, Dante without a map.

When we sink to the bottom
and find hymnals on the coarse

beach of our eyelids, will we wake
and remember the night cactus
that blooms once a millennium

or an undisturbed cavern of quartz
with delicate stalactites that melt
in body heat, the first human eyes?

STEVE MUESKE

Fire Tower

You could see four states
from the top; at least
that's what the ranger said.
My dad and I climbed
wide metal stairs that screwed
into the sky, each landing
fitted with a rusty rail.
We talked about nothing,
as always, but the world
I'd inherit, smoke
and steel, middle-aged men
working the graveyard
shift on the assembly line.
Past the trees, the world below
seemed daubed in paint,
less real somehow, unsteady
in the sway. Halfway up,
he raised a hand and would go
no further, overcome
with vertigo. Thirty years
later, I'm waiting for the bus
at the university, reading
of a girl climbing lighthouse
stairs in the dark. She steps
on stone, I step on steel.
The world, or what's become
of it, groans, a system
of bolts and braces, load
bearing beams, distance.
The look on my father's face:
not fear, exactly, but what,
disappointment? Why can't
I summon the memory of
the earth's ponderous curve,
the pale blue lightening over
a wide expanse of fields
and mountains, rivers
like fingers grayed by height?

Surely you would remember
a tableau like that all your life;
imagine, the swaying tower,
breathless, steel thrumming
like a live thing through
your feet, your hair whipping
your face; at such a sight
one might even believe in
the unity of all things,
least of all father and son.
Soon the girl will enter
the room where light pierces
fog. I shift, searching
for more; there is nothing.
His eyes, so beautiful
and blue, have become sky,
and the bus, so long in coming,
has arrived.

Fog, Bus

—after Charles Olson

On foggy mornings, the world
unveils itself from the center
out,
as though to feign a sense of newness
of just-appearing
of having slogged through that little slice of death
we call sleep. This

gauzy curtain floats over the city,
like the prestidigitator's sheet over
half-glimpsed buildings
moored in ether.

Sounds, too, are disguised,
object- and soulless, as if from another world
under or outside of
ours.

The bus terminal,
where you are,
is the new center
(as a locus, a focal point is)

strange in its newness: a permeable membrane whose borders
are clouds built from last night's rain
and warm wind, the air
saturated and heavy,
a container.

There is the road, bricked and familiar, curving,
but eaten edgeless.

When the bus
finally appears
you experience a sense of déjà vu.

Could it be that you have died?

This particular bus (light's emissary)
is like all those you have ridden,
formerly,

but what proof have you that this transport
has not been conjured by mere desire?

If you knew that you were to be guided
across the gray erasure,

would you board?

Would you be ready for the light,
knowing its deep hunger,
its singular ability to swallow you whole?

The Great Fire of Chicago, 1871

Another man's face smudged with soot,
black on a day-old shave of black whiskers,
the black of a burning roof's cough, of a city's
lit bones, the black of brick corpses—that black,
black sheep black, the wordless black of thin lips,

under which is white, has been white, the white wash
of the Nile when the moon lays it over linen fields,
the white of the wife's slip, of her whisper when she lies
beside, the white her husband runs his fingers over,
still to him the milk that filled the day's final glass jar.

Against her slip, that face would be the nameless dark,
what wakes her, blacker than 3 a.m. and her husband's sleep,
than her baby's windowless room, blacker than iron fire
escapes and the man who breaks glass to let out smoke—
that black, soot black. Black like her fingers in ash.

MAURICE OLIVER

Awaiting The Verdict.Me Mumbling.You Nodding.

A wall not there but wanting to be seen.

Sunny or any time rising. A halo trying to spell glow.
The history of guidebooks. A trick eye. Albino bears.
Dung beetles. The symptoms of acute motion sickness.
Mindless chatter. A speeding car. Dog barks that
distinguish one tract-house from another. Or it might
be a mirage as seen through the rear view mirror. Red
clay that stains everything it touches. A crocodile or
crane. Her protruding ears. Those full red lips. Or we
could try motoring south where its warmer...

until gravity stampedes off a cliff...
if heart be a hill we happily climb.

Then other times, life is nothing more than kitchen
sagas as seen through a keyhole with spectators twenty
twenty stories below or a urn with your name on it or
ordinary landscape that goes on like that for miles.

In any case, the judges will reach a final decision.

We'll wait for the verdict online or watch a whole
city park's flowering plants go feral, if that will
insure a few pieces getting there alive.

Report.Wait.Report.Wait.

"Vast career opportunities in dust on the windowsill",
the President reminds viewers in a televised speech.

But in the edited version, the sun stumbles
over peeling purple mountains,

then puts an elbow through a startled pane.
Dump trucks reel around the corner to flatten
earth or a whole room shakes loose then hovers
twenty floors above the sidewalk in a trance
caused by hefty doses of bad air.

The way I see it, most views are always
too small to reveal the backs of heads
we can only image into faces. Everything
desired requires a squeegee.

Or other times wet leaves find falling a
refuge or a pigeon's ledge marks an
impulse before fastening so little sky.

Still, life strolls by grinning or steps
in a wad of gum. Either way, dreams always
end or I dive with the crumbled paper into
the trash can, a different one every time.

ALYCE MILLER

The Visit

He arrives by limousine, aged-boy visage unmarred by debauchery, lines, and sixty-plus years of greedy living. Behind him twelve helium balloons, each with a letter for his name, flutter skyward. At dinner he orders wine the girls will pay for. He fills and refills their glasses. "I once labored over words, but now they bore me. Now I paint what I no longer write. One month, for fun, I painted all the women I ever fucked and hung them around my house. A week later I painted over the same canvases with the misery of their husbands' faces. That's 'My Last Cuckold' painted on the wall! Yes, cream puffs, the women I painted are all old and disgust me now, a sad and ancient fact of women. A poet you've all heard of, a wild, salacious, and unprincipled fellow with the morals of a—you thought I was going to say alley cat, didn't you? Well, for argument's sake, let's say dolphin. He even screwed his sixteen year old goddaughter, but then he made a mistake and fell in love. She tossed him aside like yesterday's clothes. He Fed Ex'ed her a basket of dead bees but she missed the reference altogether."

He throws back his head and howls like a wolf. Not like a dog, because a dog may actually romp. He has now sketched the prettiest girl on his napkin. A remarkable likeness, they all exclaim. He lifts the napkin to his lips to catch a drop of red wine.

"I'm in need of surfaces," he says. "Places to put my pen. What shall I read to you tonight?" His own words toll on their lips like bells. Each title falls like light from a prism, their sweetness pools like desire distilled. Later, in the auditorium the brunette's quavering accordion voice intones his credits. Fumbling for his specs, he feigns at the podium: "I've forgotten my own title." The audience roars back his words in one loud ocean voice into which he launches his boat and sails along, thinking how clever that his latest manuscript now floats on the safe harbor of the brunette's back seat. The shape of habit engraves itself on his brain as desire. Later on, he'll throw her that purely adulterated smile and bare his excellent wolfish teeth. "Would you like to see my new poems?" he'll ask. Feeling blessed, she'll succumb. After cheap punch and box cookies, they will huddle like refugees in her car, she confessing what his work has meant to her, then bravely mentioning the bits of glitter from her own brain. He will offer her a poem, straight from the folder, and pen his name with a flourish across the bottom. Then out he hops, leaving her untouched. Open-mouthed, she will drive into the orgasmic night, imagining a world without air, just his breath. He will stand on the curb staring upwards toward stars that no longer amaze, wishing he really were a dog. The world, he knows, is full of too many poets. And poems are like girls. They illuminate the night. They fade by morning.

The Uninvited

What to do about the young frantic mother
who, thinking she'd reached the doctor's office,
begged for an emergency appointment
to check her baby's raging fever, but left no number?

Or Ginger up at the ranch informing someone named Bill
all the horses had gotten out?

A man announcing cautiously in sepulchral tones that a woman I'd
Never heard of was dead (funeral services to be held Monday in Oakland)—he'd found
my number in her
address book—he was so sorry, it happened so unexpectedly, a terrible shock,
he hated to leave such a message—please don't be upset——

or the woman, voice turbulent with rage, threatening to kill
me if I didn't stop.

It was like being caught in the crosshairs
of knowing.

I didn't erase their voices right away,
but began playing them over for clues.

They became my familiars, sitting down at the red kitchen
table for tea.

Ginger took the end; gruff-voiced, she
was late fifties with bright red hair, freckled hands, flannel shirt,
and leathery skin. The man was the great-nephew
of the woman who'd died. He'd been overwhelmed going through her things.
They'd never really been close, but her death had been violent. He drank gin.
The young mother, mid-twenties, sat anxiously with the baby at
her breast and asked for peppermint tea. Brown-skinned, straightened hair,
and one eye lighter than the other. The baby had gone into
convulsions, and they weren't sure yet what the long-term effects would be.
The baby's daddy
was in the military somewhere overseas.

The woman who wanted to kill me
refused to sit at all, and stood against the wall shifting from one leg to the other,
keeping a broody eye on me.

In the awkward silence, I opened the window for air.

Below in the driveway, one of my neighbor's three boyfriends was
feeling the hood of her car
to see how recently it had been driven. He paced,
then knocked again at her curtained windows.
To no avail. I knew she was in there; I'd watched as she,
dressed in a babydoll nightie at noon, opened the door
just wide enough to let in another man.
So I called down, "She's not home!"
He wheeled around and looked up.
In sun's bright glare he tried shading his eyes
with his hand,
but I was a bright shiny blur,
like a circle of fire,
and so I repeated again, "She's not home!"
Only then did he begin to slowly walk away,
glancing behind over and over in disbelief.

LUIS ARTURO RAMOS

Translated by Martin and Traci Camps

Rainbows at Seven Eleven

*Pensó que era más fácil adivinar
la muerte que el tiempo que el mundo continuaría sin él.*
—Adolfo Bioy Casares

[He thought that it was easier to foretell death than the
time the world would continue without him.]

One

Plain and grey, the desert opens up in front of the hood of the car in two wings that splash the dusty surface of the windshield. The trucker he was competing with for a few miles was left behind and, even further back, the little old lady that had cursed his trip with a gesture as adequate as it was precise. Words were worthless in these spaces where the speedometer's needle was the same as a packman devouring sounds and converting obscenities into video game imitations. Now everything depended on gesture codes and malevolent flips of the finger. He continued to scan the radio for some convenient station. He felt like guitar music for those melancholy perspectives flanked by the unbeatable porosity of the landscape. Under the radio band, the luminous digits of the clock dripped with metallic persistence. One after the other, Arabic and precise like a caravan of Bedouins in the miniscule Sahara of the clock face. 1:45.

The last curves passed, the highway had transformed into a cadaverous asphalt finger that pointed toward the ocean. Of course, he did not plan to get that far, just until the gas allowed and then, end of the deal, the definitive dead end inscribed in the polygon that gives the final warnings. To taste them he looked for music and kept the Colt in the glove compartment, loaded to the max with six little 44-caliber babies. He imagined the commotion, the flashing light, the brief trip between the mouth of the canon and the

target, not without first having delegated to the right hand the duty of the left and testifying to the world a riddle appropriate to any detective series.

–No, Commissioner... (Mickie Rourke in the role of the antisocial detective) ...It couldn't have been a suicide given that the victim was left-handed... This is a murder. The highway assassin is back.

Music corresponding to the revelation. Close-up of the messenger of truth or, better yet, of the lying hand that still grips the gun. Or, even better, of the bone amulet that gives an esoteric touch, resting on the cadaver's muscular chest.

Meanwhile, the highway digs into the blurry desolation of the distance and the heat reflects off the hood of the Nissan. He continued to look for a radio station appropriate to the events and settled on the polkas that belied the closeness of the border. The hollow tapping of the drum behind the cacophony of the accordion; the electric base marking the rhythms like a gallop in the field. He checked the level of the fuel and breathed deeply, faced with the certainty that there was more road than life.

The Apaches, dressed for war, had ridden through here. Plunder was not only their lifestyle, but it also represented a particular way of understanding the world. Only those who knew how to reconcile strength with lack of ambition reached the level of innocence that permitted them to inhabit a land where the sinuous knife of the sun kept sharpening itself.

According to history, the Apache warriors organized looting parties blessed by the awareness that they were exercising a more sensible notion of belongings. Things belong to those who enjoy them and not to those who accumulate them, therefore obtaining them by means of force or trade would only be a previous although necessary step. Because of this, they tended to rid themselves of their limited belongings with the ease that boredom, convenience, or generosity suggest. Nothing that would not fit on a war horse was worth keeping.

Those who had been before him in these solitudes chose a path in the dusty rose of the desert and rode in a straight line, scalping whatever they found in their way, knowing that death was waiting for them on the other side. They knew that slaughter

meant the celebration of existence. A rite that fed the insatiable mouth of the horizon. In their warrior profession they recognized the ceremony that sustained the toothless smile of the wind that maintained vertical and pointed, like a long needle of light pierced into the heart of the desert, the unbeatable midday sun.

And he had appealed to those laws when he stole bills for his benefit that only gained meaning when he reduced them to food, diversions, the venerable Colt overpriced by the antique dealer, the bone amulet that time had passed from the holy war over the dry chest of a warrior, to fraudulent peace between the prominent breasts of a Californian hippy.

He verified the gas needle and measured it against the numbers that fell, granular and precise, on the face of the clock as if it were of sand. Again he noticed in that deaf dialogue of instruments the possibility of opening up a crack where he could insert justification or regret. He had never achieved it, and because of that, this September Sunday, instead of heading east to meet his appointment that with all certainty would put him out on the streets and straight to jail, he decided to initiate a generous turn to the left to head toward the plains, surrounded by the skirts of the mountain, and that, further ahead, would fall into the vast ford where the ocean had nested millions of years before.

If life were as easy to manipulate as the 1990 Nissan, docile to the turns of the wheel, obedient to the warnings of the brakes, and submissive to the radical changes in velocity, there would not be a need for meetings or definitive appointments. The embezzlement had been discovered later than expected and even that minimal manifestation of luck had turned against him because of all of the temptation he had. And in the comfortable space that opened up between the lack of punishment and the lateness of repentance, he inhabited a memorable time hidden behind the false decorum of a pirate ship that floats in international waters. He assumed that time was elongating in his favor (when in reality it was positioning itself against him, as he could now prove graphically with that interminable army of mercurial parachutes that descended from the sky of the clock) in order to put in his hands the life he had always wished for.

Because of that, it was so easy to turn left just at the entrance to the highway and orient the nose of the young stallion towards a west that already blinded him with its red flare. Ambushed behind the yellow tones, enveloped by that dusty brilliance, awaited the warrior that hours later would scalp him or show him the way.

Full tank, calibrated tires, oil and break fluid guaranteeing the punctual movement of the machine. The unavoidable dark glasses, ideal for avoiding the sunrays beyond his pupils. He assumed that he was handsome behind the sunglasses, specifically designed for combat pilots in the Pacific War. MacArthur used similar ones under his general's cap and Patton had carried a Colt similar to the one that nested in the glove compartment.

There was nothing left to do. He promised himself he would leave it all to chance and bet his time against the road. When the time came, just when the rattles of the car would tell him that he had burned the last drop of gas, when the ghost of inertia pushed him toward some imprecise point on the planet, he would make the definitive decision.

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Two

He thought about killing them. All of them and one by one with the same sarcastic smile of that movie hero that returned to take revenge for the offence of not being loved in the bellies of his fellow workers, sheltered in a theory that had seemed as pristine as the one that impelled the war-painted Apaches to gallop in those plains punished by the sun.

He had planned to show up at nine in the morning, shaved, adequately dressed and refreshed by the crisp aroma of his favorite cologne. Announce himself to the secretary (blond, tall, efficient, cordially distant) that would make him wait out the required minutes so that his imagination would finish what it had started three days ago, just on Friday afternoon, when the call from San Antonio ruined that weekend that remorse continued to leave untouched.

Why not take him by surprise? Conduct an unannounced audit, or demand his immediate presence in the office headquarters. No. They waited until the last hour of the last work day of the week, to call him to headquarters, this coming Monday, at 9am.

–Should I bring any documents in particular or specific information? –he asked just as he had done so many times before.

–No, just come on Monday at nine in the morning –the secretary finished and there was nothing else to say.

The click of the phone put him on the defense. Through the crystal panels that surrounded his office he saw the time on the ostentatious wall clock and then he gave a 180 degree turn on his executive chair with the slow solemnity of a periscope. The bank was a convulsed anthill three minutes before five o'clock on a Friday afternoon. Locked papers, guarded confidential documents, registries out of his grasp. Yes, the blow was effective and devastating. Silvia's smile appeared gesturing a bye-bye behind the window. Peggy's little hand waving four of her five sharpened fingers. The weekend opened up before him in an array of grimaces. Pinned like a butterfly on the squared page of the work calendar, there was neither a rock nor a hard place to restrain him, but

something less heroic yet more effective: the conspiracy of the imminent punishment with the dead hours of the weekend.

Around three in the morning on Saturday his situation materialized into various possibilities: a) no one knew (still) anything and his presence at the headquarters stemmed from a routine activity; b) they knew everything and they were willing to negotiate; c) they were not interested in negotiating (given that there was nothing to negotiate) and they wanted to detain him in San Antonio because the trial would be less expensive. Even though by morning he had made a decision (he would go to the meeting assuming that they did not know anything), the sun found him staring at the sleepy Colt in the bone-collar case: a metal snake nesting the six 44 caliber bullets.

At 10:30 Silvia called to reproach him for being stood up. But the excuse was unbeatable.

–Last minute work, honey...These sons of bitches want me in San Antonio on Monday at nine.

Nothing better than an obscenity to make a woman (in love?) understand the magnitude of the problem and of the uneasiness. Silvia sighed resigned and offered him help. Her anger eased in signs of solidarity and condolence.

–Call me when you get back, all right? –she asked sweetly.

It was at that moment when he decided to give some use to the 44. Wait for the accusation, the complaint about his lack of loyalty, the reproach for his ingratitude and take out the revolver; shut them up with that black and admonitory index finger equal to that divine and universal hush. And right there, make the definitive decision: cut them up with bullets and escape swiftly. Ride his red horse, let go of the reins, pick up Silvia, put her on the horse, and gallop toward the horizon until he could sense the dense, salty, and feminine viscosities of the sea.

But what seemed so certain and definitive that Saturday morning, was reduced to a bland consistency without form with the passing of the hours. He entertained himself until the afternoon, weighing the possibilities and affirming each of them in order to eliminate them later with equal determination. He was on the verge of calling Silvia but

changed his mind immediately. Her presence would bring indiscretions that for the moment would be inconvenient. He knew he was alone and to that certainty was added another one as painful and revealing: he would have to remain absolutely alone, like a samurai before the sacrifice, until everything was cleared up.

He took advantage of the freshness of the western sun to get gas and check the car's efficiency. On his way back, he took the car to an automatic car wash. Traveling through the entrails of that product of the human imagination, mesmerized by the peristaltic movements of the machine, he pretended he was being licked, chewed, and swallowed as if he were a possibly appetizing snack, digested by the green giant of modernity. He remembered the Chaplinesque scene and also that other one of Lang and edited his own in which there would not be a happy ending. Meanwhile, he saw the snow storm soap up the windshield and the flicks of the polishing strips that rubbed the silky skin and the volatile manes of his horse. The red beast of liberty. He came out stimulated by the light of the afternoon as if the massage were given to his skin and not to the imported tin-can Nissan. And it seemed easy to see himself on a screen as enormous as life, galloping similar compacts through the reddened plains of the world, in company with Toshiro Mifune and his six serene samurais.

He spent the rest of the night calculating the bounty. Numbers are the word of God like guns are his chosen punishment. Both precise and exact. He understood that if Moses's Laws were to be put down digitally, salvation would be easier. First Commandment: You will love God as if he were 4. God plus God equals 4 because God plus 2 equals 6. And if 6 plus God equals 8, then it is obvious that 8 plus 8 totals 16. And so on until the promised land of the Exact Sciences.¹

During the course of Saturday to Sunday, the figures turned into bills, and these, threats that vanished into curiously pleasant dreams. Silvia substituted the hero in turn and came out of the paper-money oval as if she were popping out of a big birthday cake

¹ The original text is a play on words sung to the tune of a 1950s Chachachá: "Dos y dos son cuatro, cuatro y dos son seis, seis y dos son ocho, y ocho dieciséis..."

to make growling sounds half feline half obscene, imitating the up until then venerable, but in his effeminate dream, Metro lion.

He woke up around eleven in the morning and picked up the phone to call Silvia. The buzzing lasted enough for the laziness to go away and for him to realize that he was trying to say goodbye. The discovery surprised him near the twelfth ring and he simultaneously arrived at the certainty that Silvia was out. The recognition of the situation alerted him with an unusual serenity for Sunday mornings. He noticed himself rejuvenated and lucid.

Under the shower he reproduced on his body the machine's massage on the silky surfaces of the car. He turned his bath into a purifying ritual that would fortify him for the trip. The gallant knights of the Middle Ages attended their encounters with death wearing their best clothing, the Apache warriors decorated their body and that of their horses with the splendid tones of nature. Man and beast went to the field converted into one: they were indeed authentic centaurs. If the opportunity returned, he would exchange his Nissan for a wind grey Ford Mustang.

He would travel all day Sunday. He planned to arrive in San Antonio at sunset. He would check into the usual hotel and let the hours go by the window like he had seen the doves do many times before. He would not have dinner. Sleeping with an empty stomach guarantees a fortifying night's sleep. Furthermore, as frequently happened in moments of tension, aftertaste caused that unwelcome flavor in the mouth that came before the holocaust of vomit. How many times had he tried to propose the creation of the universe as a result of an accidental and primitive vomit before a distracted audience? How many others had he wished to state the corruption of bodily functions as the exact metaphor of chaos? The sudden convulsion, the absolute disorder generated by intestines accustomed to digesting instead of expulsing.

He got dressed in his jeans and armadillo leather boots. He put on a plaid, three-colored, short-sleeved shirt. The red dominated the discreetly cowboyish design. He put a change of underwear in his bag, his travel effects, a bottle of his favorite cologne, and the shoes that would match the executive suit that he would wear the next day. Finally,

so that the outfit would camouflage it, he pushed the wonder of the Colt 44 to the bottom and, in a rapture of ingenuity, the Apache amulet that always accompanied the revolver.

He took the suit out of the closet and with his arm extended compared the possible ties over the executive blue. He decided on the simple one. The one that insured the exact correspondence with his position as Junior Executive. He slid the chosen tie over the already hung trousers, hung the jacket, and covered everything with transparent plastic. He put the load on his shoulder as if it were a saddle, picked up the briefcase, and left the apartment.

At the end of the street he was driving on, he discovered the entrance to the highway. He noticed the rapid passing of the cars, few on a Sunday morning, although equally troubled by the velocity that made them vanish beyond a granulated grey because of the light's consistency. There was no wind and the temperature allowed travel without air conditioning. Nonetheless, before storing the briefcase and suitcase in the trunk, foreseeing the dense heat some place along the way, he dug for his bottle of cologne. His fingers ran into the metal of the pistol and he took it out, tangled with the bone collar. He placed the Colt 44 in the glove compartment and squeezed the bottle of cologne between the front seats to have it on hand.

He sped up suddenly and the Nissan responded to the spurring with a slight trembling that made its owner smile. He reduced the distance and, very soon, the profile of the cars that traveled on the highway was clearly and precisely defined in spite of their velocity. It was then that without premeditation or bad intentions, he made the Nissan turn to the left to incorporate itself into the rhythm of the lonely highway in the opposite direction of his destiny. He slid down the polished strip of asphalt like a shiny pool ball, aware of the collision that awaited him at the end.

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Three

He picked up the cologne bottle and put it between his legs. He unscrewed the cap and with the same hand tipped it enough for a few drops to fall, heavy and cold, in his palm. He lifted his hand to his neck and rubbed his nape and throat. The scent rose through his skin and got into his hair. A complicated sensation of warmth and freshness rooted in his skin and started to infiltrate his body. As always, the cologne acted like liquor in his veins. It produced the same sensation of distance and provoked similar urgencies. It was incense as balsamic or unnerving as the one in churches, or the one that, in solitude, the closeness of a woman provokes. He screwed the cap back on the bottle and he put it down by his side.

The Nissan travels now through territories subjected to other radio stations. The polka vanishes little by little and lets intermittent sounds pass through its loose strings. The red horse jumps the invisible tangles of the hertzian waves as it will do later on with the barbed wire fence that cuts Mountain Time into the map. Some beats start to define themselves and he hears violins that slide down a watery and sugary incline. A sad story, sedated by the nasalization of vowels, flows out of the speakers in a rhymed litany. The gas needle is like the sleepy baton of an absent-minded director. The numbers on the quartz clock, digitalize the violins of time. The pulmonary lead pipes of the red beast resound powerful and oceanic. The outlook is a promise parted by the highway.

He let go of the reins of the Nissan which allowed him to submerge himself in the shallowness of the straight line. He took one hand off the wheel and sustained it with the index finger of the other hand. He let the car slide, subject to its own impulse, while a banjo escaped down an endless multitude of halls through the speakers. His finger checked the beast's powerful race and a current of electricity buzzed under his skin ionized by that minimal touch that he resolved to eliminate soon. For a few minutes he watched the wheel hold itself in place. Between his legs, a warm itching inflamed the caverns of his penis until it caused a blue swelling of the left pocket of his jeans. Silvia's face swiftly crossed by. The velocity and texture of the road kept the steering wheel in equilibrium beyond his control. Nevertheless, in spite of the absence of contact with the

wheel, the velocity continued to transfuse itself to his veins as if the Nissan were running through his arteries and not down that unending and exact strip.

He raised his eyes and stared at the road until it turned into a sharpened iron nail that traveled in the wrong direction without ever reaching him. He pressed the accelerator to intercept it someplace along the way and felt the rising warm emanations of the growing vibration that came from the wheel. He stayed at 80mph until his breath accumulated in his throat and got lost in itself. His chest joined with his brain on in oxygen high, though not to the point that the drunkenness would impede him from noticing that the imminent exhalation would break the delicate equilibrium of the car.

He released the pressure of his boot. The Nissan registered the deceleration and sent it to the wavy curve of the steering wheel. The vibration was ceding slowly until, all of a sudden, the noises that the velocity had eliminated again invaded the reduced universe of the cabin. It was as if he had burst up to the surface of a lake whose interlining would have filled his ears with a silence older than the sense of time and space.

He saw the speedometer needle go down: 75, 70, and suddenly, the rear view mirror lit up with admonitory reds and blues. (Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear). The glass was filled with the appearance of the patrol car that recriminated him with its lit patrol lights. He pumped the brake with small taps. He parked the car and waited, conscious that at least today there was no reason to fear anything more than a ticket for excess of enthusiasm.

Near him the solid glasses of the officer reflected his own face back to him, shaded by his own glasses. The brotherhood of the enemy mask. The officer took his off, trusting that his mineral blue eyes would be more intimidating than the obsidian tombstones of his lenses. For his part, he realized that his own eyes were less cinematographic so he preferred to keep his mask on.

–In a hurry, my friend?

The officer balanced the run-of-the-mill question with the possessive pronoun.

–Being in a hurry never killed anyone, right? –he responded just as Clint Eastwood would have.

But the role was already taken and the officer played it with better efficacy.

–Only when you’re behind the wheel.

–And when you’re not a policeman –he added in a quip that began to amuse him.

The officer, conscious that the driver had noticed his blue stare, adjusted his glasses to display his discontent and show that, with or without them, the role of Clint would continue to be his for the duration of their meeting.

–Can I see your license?

He took his seat belt off to make the move that would allow him to reach the back pocket of his jeans. He gave it to him.

–Where are you going in such a hurry? –he insisted while he wrote down in his ticket book the facts that he considered indispensable.

–To San Antonio –he answered.

The officer lifted his face and petrified him in the surface curve of his smoky glasses. His lips were a knife’s edge. He took a few steps to verify the back plates and returned with the same expression on his face.

–San Antonio is in the other direction.

–Now I know why it’s taken me so long to get there.

–The shortest distance is still a straight line –he pontificated–. I know from experience.

–I’ll take that into consideration, officer, though it’s not necessarily true.

The patrol officer meditated for a moment.

–This highway is mine, so be more careful because I’ll be watching you –he told him without letting go of the license or the ticket.

–It will be a pleasure... I like the company –he accepted while he waited with his hand open so the enemy would give him the declaration that converted him into a outlaw.

The officer swelled his lips that disappeared in a long smile. He raised his hand to his hat in a military salute.

The squad car followed him for a few minutes. He saw it pasted onto the side-view mirror like a photo. (Objects in the mirror may be closer than they appear...). He slowed

down to the minimum speed permitted and sat down to wait for his enemy to pass, if not dead and in front of his door, at least alive and by his window. It didn't take long to happen. Boredom was a straight line that the heat prolonged until weariness. The patrol car made itself comfortable by his side and, for long seconds that the law would have condemned, it stayed beside him without the officer bothering to turn to look at him. Later, without a nod or an admonition, without a minimal gesture to break his stone face, the officer sped up and disappeared in front of him down a ford.

In movies, pilots exchange a goodbye salute. They turn to look at their colleague and mold an indication of luck or threat with their hand with the elegance of a Ritchhofen. Terrestrial pilots wasted that kind of opportunity because their paths are more traveled and salutations such as those would be excessive by way of repetitive. He saw him get lost in the unredeemed abyss of the horizon, threw the crumpled ticket to the wind, and pressed the gas pedal until he felt the sole of his boot touch the floor of the Nissan.

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Four

On the dashboard the needle shows half a tank and behind the filmy mica of the distance a car appears with its trunk open. It looks like a strange, marine-blue saurian that breathes the desert's hot wind. Soon he notices a woman leaning against the left door of the car. He lets up on the gas and allows the Nissan to reach the correct speed to go into third gear. He starts to press on the brake. The girl notices the nearing of the vehicle and steps away from her own to offer a more pathetic image. Hair over her shoulders and tight shorts up to her groin. He turns on the emergency lights and stops behind the blue car that leans toward the left with the back tire turned into a swollen and insolent lip.

–Is there a problem?, he asks, knowing the inherent stupidity of the question.

–I have a flat tire, –the girl answers –. And I have to be there before five.

–Amorous rendezvous are usually very demanding, –he affirms while he examines the situation with an air of knowing what he is doing.

–It's not only about love but also about business, –she insists flirtatiously.

–Business on Sunday? –he asks already on his knees while he administers a few professional punches to the tire with his fist.

–Yes... On Sunday.

–The day that the Lord rested? –he expounds while he gets up and puts his hands on his waist.

–The Lord could rest because he didn't have a boss, but I don't.

–You don't have a boss or you can't rest...?

The girl gives a bored look.

–I'm only looking for my rainbow, honey.

For every answer, he offers her his hand.

–My name is... –he says at the same time that a semi passes by on the highway provoking a sudden hurricane that shakes the car, the girl's hair, and flings his name far from her ears.

She accepts the greeting and shakes his hand while looking directly at him and his smoky glasses.

–My name is Trishia and I’m in a hurry.

He weighs the convenience of taking off his glasses, but remembers the policeman’s eyes and considers that his own are at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, he puts one leg forward, shifts his weight a little, and answers her with his best imitation of Jack Nicholson.

–Well, you’ve got a problem, Trishia on a mission.

And he leans over her so she can see her own face better reflected in his glasses.

–Unless someone takes you.

–Can you do something with what I have there? –and she points to the empty trunk.

–That’s precisely your problem, Trishia on a mission... There isn’t anything there that could be of any use to us.

The situation lets him take his Nicholson to the extreme. He passes the open trunk, with his back to the girl, he waves his arms ostentatiously and spits:

–It’s more rusted and empty than a banker’s heart.

And he turns around to face her again upon pronouncing the last syllable.

Trishia pouts and counterattacks with her own imitation.

–Where are you going?

–iTo San Antonio!, –he yells while raising his arms to the sky as if he were tired of repeating the obvious. And this time a semi like the last one traps the response and sends it through the air for all to hear.

Trishia confronts him. She raises a hand to her face and initiate a gesture that the wind witnesses.

–Excuse me, but I didn’t hear your name... What did you say your name was?, – she asks him with the intonation of Shirley McLane in that movie about mules and the Sarah sisters.

–I already told you: Jack.

–Listen to me Jack, and listen closely –she says raising her voice. –You’re the one with problems because San Antonio is the other damn way.

And she freezes against the soapy blue horizon with her finger pointing at his chest, nevertheless, she seems to think better and turns her back on him so that Jack: 1. Does not notice the curses that she mouths with her dry lips, or 2. He enjoys the warm border where her legs meet her buttocks.

Conscious of his role, Jack registers the second:

–And what is the problem? Perhaps no one has told you that the straightest line isn’t always the most convenient one. –he says while he starts to walk toward his own car.

–Hey, hey...wait –the girl runs after him–. You don’t have anything to help me with?

Jack Nicholson turns toward her.

–Listen honey... Even if I don’t have a boss, that doesn’t mean that I don’t have important meetings... And I’m not going to waste my only spare tire on a loudmouth like you... Are we clear? –he says already on his way back to his car.

–I can pay you –the girl proposes to Jack’s back.

–There’s nothing in those tight pants of yours that is of any use to me. And let it be clear I’m only talking about money.

The girl is about to cry.

–Come on Jack... Help me, take me with you.

–I already told you... I’m going to San Antonio.

–It doesn’t matter where you go as long as it’s in that damn direction –she says pointing toward the sun.

–If that’s how it is, you’re more than welcome –Jack recognizes with a bow.

–It smells like cologne –Trishia declares when she puts the seat belt on.

Squeezed by the shorts, her thighs acquire a pink varnish that the sun’s weight immediately cancels. Her soft hairs react to the contact from the light that falls directly

over her legs. Her skin seems to stand up in miniscule golden curves that metallize themselves under his eyes in a polished forest of yellow rainbows.

–It’s my cologne –Jack says, overwhelmed by amazement.

–Excuse me?

–I mean that what you smell is my cologne ... Do you like it?

And he offers her the bottle as if offering a swig of liquor. To his surprise, the girl opens it, pours a few drops on her palm and rubs the essence on her nape and throat. Afterwards, in a very maternal movement, she wets the driver’s temples and imprints the stamp of her buttoned index finger right on his forehead, like a rural school teacher that puts a star on her prize pupil.

The girl breathes deeply and sinks down into the seat covered by the fumes the windshield enlarges as if it were a magnifying glass. Her thighs are two hardened bumps under the weight of the day. Jack knows that he has achieved the promised time. That he has entered the highway estranged from clocks and laws of internal combustion that convert last week’s *never* into an endless *always* from now on. He thinks about Silvia, about the executives in San Antonio, about the music that has suddenly started to spill through the speakers with the gentleness of water through rocks, and loses himself in it, beyond memories and tomorrows, submerged in a filled pool of warm water, where nothing exists that is not the awareness of the trip, of the highway, and of the woman, Trishia, who is at his side.

–There...

–What?

–I’ll get out there.

Trishia points to the double arch of a McDonald’s. The yellow curves rise against the horizon like eyebrows arching in surprise.

–But that’s nowhere –he protests while he takes his foot off the accelerator.

–Enough for me, Jack.

He lets the Nissan go on its own impulse until it stops without the need to brake at the corner of that nowhere marked by yellow arches.

–Keep going with me, Trishia... I can take you to better places than this one.

–I can't, Jack... You're going too far.

–What time is it? –he asks in spite of not taking his eyes off of the shiny watch. –
Are you on time?

–Just in time to catch the 4:57 rainbow –Trishia affirms and with a nod of her chin she points to the arches that crumble, eaten by the light.

–Bye, Jack... *Bon voyage.*

And she throws him a kiss with her fingers before turning her back to head toward the sad adobe construction.

The Nissan spits out a whinny of burned oil. Its reddened hindquarters tighten against the pavement and its gallop leaves a black track. He pushes down on the gas with fury, with hate, as if he were trampling an enemy against the asphalt, as if he wished to erase as quickly as possible the image that little by little gets smaller in the mirror, sure that this time, in spite of the warnings, Trishia is as far away as she appears.

Punctilious and exact, the numbers fall on the face of the quartz clock. They shine a moment and switch to the next with a slight twinkle. It counts numbers as if it were counting sheep in a long insomnia. He feels sleepy. The grogginess of the trip allows him to breathe calmly. He imagines that Trishia was a vision similar to that of the sailors in open sea. He looks at the empty seat and places his hand on the plush material. He notes the consistency of a different heat. Something more than the sun was there.

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Five

He turned the radio on. Jesus loves you, a billboard shouted as he passed. Talk to him occasionally, another one advised soon after. But they had forgotten to give the phone number. He remembered the sticker on a bumper: "God is not my co-pilot. I am God's co-pilot", and at that moment he thought about Johnny Denver talking with George Burns about his existence and the consistency of dreams. "Have you ever dreamed in technicolor?", Burns asks in the role of God. "Never, Oh Lord, remember that you made me color blind", Jack Nicholson answers in a sudden cinematographic coup d'état while the music that spills through the speakers is a honey that lulls him again.

He stopped the car in front of a Denny's and went out into the drowsiness of the surroundings. The reverberations the asphalt pulsed reached his ankles and rose through his jeans like unexpected snakes. The air conditioning of the coffee shop encouraged him with its chilled, boreal breath.

He sat down at the bar and asked for a coffee. A ham and cheese sandwich. An old-fashioned donut. Behind him, the highway and its giddy inhabitants moved at light speed comically silenced by the thick crystal walls. Two worlds split by a wall of glass and conditioned by two different temperatures. All the same, the sensation that attacked him since he had put his feet on land could not be explained by anything as concrete as artificial climate or interior deodorization. Upon getting out of the car he had checked the time because he could not permit himself more than 15 minutes of immobility. The clock of the Nissan said 5:32 but the one that was hanging on the wall invalidated it. He noticed that he had reached Mountain Time, that those who had stayed behind inhabited a different time and that his was the non-time: the resilient time of the road. Immobility was his only enemy.

The vision of the highway flowing beyond the crystal walls like a river of liquid asphalt made clear to him the vulnerability of his situation. It was necessary to hurry up. He raised his cup to give a last hurried gulp and his elbow stumbled over an obstacle. The drops of coffee burned the back of his hand, but it heroically supported the handle to avoid a bigger spill. He turned around to see the cause of the accident and found a profile

of a black woman so close to him that her smell overpowered the penetrating fragrance that rose from his cup. The old woman smelled of coffee residue, and the density of her aroma could be agitated with a spoon.

With evident signs of disgust, she moved to the next bench to interpose at least one space between them. The old woman turned to look at him and smiled from far away with her toothless mouth. He returned the smile while he cleaned the burn with a paper napkin.

–Can you buy me a cup of coffee? –she asked with a voice that the cigarette had turned hearty and hoarse.

–Go ahead –he indicated.

–And a little donut?

And while she reproduced with two fingers the little size of the bread, her voice smoothed out in the juices of her saliva that the image of the sweet had unleashed. The old woman continued to smile at him with the flirtatiousness of a child, which was more grotesque than repugnant.

–As big as you’d like –he conceded.

–Then I’ll take two –she clucked conscious of her triumph.

The waitress slid the plate on the polished surface of the bar up to the cadaverous hands of the woman. The old woman clicked her tongue in a sign of complacency directed exclusively toward her benefactor. He forgot his hurry in order to contemplate her wet careful little crumbs of bread in the coffee suddenly whitened by cream, and suck them up with a slight snort of a cow.

He watched her finish what was left with a forceful slurp, not without first leaning over to touch the edge of the cup with her pursed lips. He saw her execute her act with the reserved repugnance of someone who has not suffered hunger. Astonishment remains closer to the condition of class than to the human condition, and that black woman amazed him through the insistence with which she clutched to an existence that rejected her at every step. What the hell was an old black woman doing, obviously urban, so far from her *Sweet Georgia? Alabama on my mind?*

He paid the bill and left without turning around to look at the woman. Nevertheless, he knew that she was following him. He opened the crystal door and the vapor of reality hit his entire body. He let go of the door knowing that the old woman was behind him. He imagined her being shot out of the window or leaving her outline in the glass like a comic strip. But nothing happened. The door returned controlled by a mechanism that cancelled another possibility for the cartoon.

While he walked toward the Nissan, he noticed the bumpy steps over the gravel pavement. Next to the door he could not control himself anymore; he raised his eyes and saw her come closer. A scarecrow would have accomplished its job with more elegance. The red felt coat left visible a pair of skinny legs covered in opaque nylons. Under her arm, the black woman clutched a blanket that wrapped around her possessions, ordered thanks to the ties of a cord. A yarn bonnet crowned part of a metallic head, eaten away by grey hairs and calm under the desert wind.

Looking at her was already a concession, but he could not stop doing it. The spectacle was a gift for that wonder of class in danger of extinction.

–What is a black woman like you doing so far from her *Sweet Georgia*?

–No one finds rainbows in their own land, child.

With his right hand on the handle of the Nissan and his left on the top of it, he looked all around in search of the proverbial yellow arches. Later he remembered Paul Newman escaping through the swamps of Louisiana, chased by dogs and rednecks, hiding in the goodwill of the black women, less extravagant and definitely more beautiful. The skin of the Nissan burned under his hand with a red fire lit by the sun; nevertheless, he held it there not only as proof that he could do it, but because something told him that he should not lift it without first reaching a decision.

–Get in –he invited, with his throbbing hand.

–Where are you going?

–I already said... I'm going to San Antonio –said the untamable Paul.

–Well, you're going in the wrong direction, child –the old woman decreed–. But that doesn't matter as long as it's mine.

The smell of coffee that emanated from the clothed body of the old woman accommodated itself in the car as if it had arrived home and knew it. The heavy darkness got into his eyes and made him squint as if he were trying to protect them from drunkenness. He lifted the bottle of cologne squeezed between the seats and with his finger controlling the opening, sprayed the liquid everywhere. The cologne swelled in a sudden oceanic tide that drowned the density of the coffee. The black woman did not seem to notice the insinuation but approved of the measure.

–You do well, child... The world stinks to its roots.

Instead of answering, Paul opened the window and poured spurts of cologne over the skin of the earth. The black woman celebrated his occurrence with a powerful and hoarse chuckle that lead into a prolonged melody, unending, that obliterated him from the map. She submerged herself into a chant that separated her from everything and converted the grayness of the desert, the relentless drumming of the sun, into the breath of an irascible but human god.

Suddenly, just as it had started, the melody stopped and the black woman turned to him.

–Do you like to sing, child?

–No.

The black woman pointed at the digital clock.

–Yet, you're an hour ahead.

And she gave a little push on the miniscule hour button with a bony, black finger. The number fell in the dark well of the face of the clock like a coin in a puddle; however, the waves only reverberated in the liquid of his brain. He imagined the planet stumbling and all of its inhabitants lurching out beyond the car as if someone, very big and powerful, had tripped them.

–Now you're an hour younger.

–Even better –he pontificated–. I gained an hour like Phileas Fog... And you, where are you headed?–, he asked her so he could be in charge of the conversation.

–I already told you, I'm going to San Antonio –she imitated him.

And she again spit out a chuckle and he joined in until they both ended up chanting the words that came out of the speakers, as high as their voices would go.

The car turned into a knife that sliced the dusty light of the desert with a deep cut. Drunk from the velocity, the music up high and the arduous construction of odors that the old woman heated in the ramshackle coffee pot of her body, they followed the blue strip of pavement for a stretch of time that got lost in the obstinate drip of the quartz clock.

When he dared to look at her he discovered that, in fact, the black woman held in her hands the bony Colt 44. He had not seen her open the glove compartment and was surprised to see the weapon between her fingers, delicate and calm as if it lacked weight. Under the sun that illuminated it, he saw it shine just like an ember that would not be able to torment the calloused, whitish palms. He hid the fear that his own useless hands on the wheel were giving him and also the certainty that the woman could shoot him down when she judged it opportune. He pressed down on the gas until the needle passed 100, conscious that the old woman would not risk shooting while the car moved at such a speed, and betting on the hope that Clint Eastwood and his patrol lights would validate his promise of vigilance. Yet suddenly the certainty that the woman did not have bad intentions bewildered him.

–Do you know the way to San Jose? –she asked him.

He thought that she was referring to the song and shook his head. The Nissan hissed under the granular clarity of the afternoon.

–I know the tune but not the words –he told her so she would forget about the gun.

–Then it doesn't matter because I'm only going to San Antonio.

But this time no one laughed. From the side he saw the Colt resting between the bones of her fingers as if between the bones of the amulet.

–I'm staying here –the black woman said and pointed to an imprecise point along the way.

–This isn't San Antonio, –he responded to wipe out the uncertainty. However, he repented instantly, fearful that the black woman would take his words as an invitation to go on with him.

–San Antonio's everywhere, child...

He stopped the car on the curb. He imagined the Nissan as a petrified fossil on the dried out line of the pavement.

–But the Lord prefers the road –he said lively.

–And because of that the road belongs to everyone, child... But you're going either too fast or too far.

She left the revolver in his hands and said goodbye to him with two pats on the cheek.

–Do what you have to, child... 'Cause I'm going to do my thing.

He put the pistol back in the glove compartment and sped up, leaving behind him an impulsive burning on the pavement. He saw her fade away through the rear-view mirror consoled by the certainty that objects in the mirror are closer than they may appear. The old woman disappeared between the waves of heat. The mirror blinded any reference and opened a curved emptiness through the fumes from the road. He was alone again and the awareness that his own time was measured against the space covered came back to him in the immense panel of the horizon. The reddened level of the sun that was setting with heavy parsimony over the desert plain obligated him to glance again at the gas needle. On the other side, the digital clock pulsated mercury numbers.

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Six

The Nissan gasped the last fume of hydrocarbon right at 6:53. He had traveled from F to E on the gas tank like others do from Alfa to Omega on their respective alphabets. The car stood beside the bluish line of the highway like a reddened beetle that would have confused it with water. 150 meters in the distance, the asphalt disappeared in a ford of clarity. Definitely, a depression was coming up in front of him that would give him some seconds, perhaps minutes, of additional travel. But as much as he pumped on the gas in search of the last leftovers of fuel, the car reached the limbo of absolute immobility and settled on the stretch of highway like one of those drops of water that declare the perfect balance on the levelers used by carpenters.

He got out of the car and he looked into the distance. He climbed onto to the top of the Nissan and cast a glance in search of something that could stop it. At his back, the coarse, dark glove of the night wiped out the last possibilities of light; ahead, the straight line got lost in the dusk's hazy consistency and rushed into that depression that prevented him from seeing what was further on. And if he were to find the sea? A maddened marine wave lost in the unclaimed time of the desert. A siren singing shipwreck melodies. A city destroyed by the Apaches.

It was worth it to betray chance. He got down from the top of the car, closed the door, and started to push the car toward the depression. He felt like a horseman tugging at the reins of his dying horse. The dusk emitted tired waves of light worn out by sand. The depression might be as far away as the ocean or closer than it looked, just like what happens with the objects that are reflected in the rear-view mirrors.

The car started to slide with the parsimony of a pregnant woman with flat feet; but it moved with enough speed to keep them both on the road. Perhaps, and this would have to be decided very soon, it would be more worth it to take out the pistol and shoot the car between the headlights like the cowboys used to do with their mounts. Nevertheless, the possibility that one more effort would get it closer to the hill that would help him with meters, kilometers, perhaps, of additional road, obligated him to keep pushing.

Then he saw him. Crouched at the edge of the asphalt, he watched him push the car with the indifference of someone who witnesses an absurd act. He stood up, put a hand in his pocket, and drew back a step so as not to be in the way of the dying car. And when the trunk of the car was five meters away, he saw him raise his right hand up to his waist and extend his thumb in a petition that, though so extravagant, was unable to crack the dry angularity of his face.

The petitioner, hair limp and long, an unbuttoned shirt open to the wind, and bone necklaces on his neck, held the position that the light petrified against the afternoon. His appearance rose in the desert's orange solitariness, the perfect monument to insanity.

Without stopping his pushing he asked him where he was going.

–In your same direction –he responded without changing his position.

–Get in –he told him only to regret it instantly.

The guest opened the door and made himself comfortable in the co-pilot's seat. Rigid and silent, he let himself be driven as if the highway had become a slow and thick tropical river that would take him drifting through the ample channels of the planet.

He could not believe what was happening. Unexpectedly, the face of reality grimaced at him and everything was complicated so much so that whatever his reaction, it would be absurd in advance.

–I'm going to San Antonio –he informed him in an attempt to recuperate some sense of things.

The traveler nodded his head without dignifying him with a look.

Nevertheless, the situation matched that slender and bony body, from God knows what hole in the desert. He continued to push while he shared his attention between that profile blotted by the half-light of the Nissan's interior, and the bluish line where the warm emanations of seven in the afternoon broke out.

–The descent is starting already –the passenger told him at the same time that he felt the laws of inertia resuscitate the car.

The car slipped away from his hands and started to gain speed. He opened the door and got in just as it started down the hill that was steeper than he had imagined it

could be. Suddenly, the toboggan of the highway submerged them in the well of orange light that illuminated them. The evening sun already inundated the hill on its fold toward the sea. The sudden clarity dampened them with an overwhelming blindness that lit their eyelids with the colors of the rainbow. The night reached them at a gallop hung right on that hill they rolled down, silent and energetic, and down which, it seemed, they slid during kilometers unconnected to order and to the internal fuel.

The needle had gotten stuck on a shore of the fuel indicator and the digital clock announced 7:02. In front of them, a knot of lights contracted in a nervous tic against the convulsed face of the horizon.

The Nissan galloped at free rein. They galloped the ghost of inertia down a yellow highway under the clarity of dusk. It would not surprise him if suddenly a herd of buffalo crossed the arid leather of the meadow.

–This is the only thing left of them –his companion said.

And he shook the cluster of bones that rested on his dried out chest.

–Mine are in the glove compartment –he indicated, as if the conversation had started in another time and place.

The Colt rested over the necklace like a rattlesnake sitting on its own eggs. His companion took out a tangle of steel and bone and entertained himself by separating the threads of metal. He placed the Colt between his legs and turned to hang the string of bones on his neck. He watched him unscrew the bottle of cologne and wet his index and middle fingers. He slid them over his cheeks and forehead with a rapid movement. He felt the other's hard and warm hands when he repeated the unusual ceremony on his own face.

In front of them, ever closer, the artificial lights separated, delineating defined forms. Suddenly, behind the mist of light and dust, two yellow curves raised their petulant rainbow. At its side, the establishment's adjoined marquee drew the letters of its name with lights.

–The rainbow at seven eleven –his companion points out.

He did not have to look at the clock. The trip had concluded at the precise hour. Next to him, his companion checked the pistol's load with professional care while, beyond the illuminated settlement, he noticed the sun's face lit up by the red fanning of the endless wind.

The sun went down, and darkness fell over the earth, as it had been before. This was the end of the first day.

THE HOHOKAN CHRONICLES

LYNN STRONGIN

The Six-sided Snowflake

the brown dog trotting out of Painswick
paws sinking into snow which will
erase him, pale as water
& us drifting in our pasts as though we wore our parent's clothing,
faded, out of fashion.

Elated by cold
I unbolt the door with both hands.
Grateful for the freeze & a cinnamon drink inside me. Painstaking,
exhausting my mission.

I move forward my shadow taupe dog, Depression, in tow.
Six-sided
flakes
of the
lace curtains billowing
sugar-dusting streetlamps:
The empty beauty of snow-covered streets reminds me
of Tallin, Estonia
St Petersburg's White Nights.

My mood soars. Something will come along to nip it.
My girl was calm as I was excited. Now no sign.
A single glass of raku in yet one more empty teahouse.
I pin the organdy curtains where they tore like a bride's tattered gown
in Mexico or some dusty land
where it has miraculously begun snowing.

Let Down, Back home

Table of contents have come:
I had expected this
pronto
on our return.

Instead,
things seem to be imploding
a snowball caving in.

Magda is marked like a Chinese ideogram
for radiation
each afternoon (she warns them she's a writer, mornings.)

Another poet
has liver cancer
blooming.

What if she could walk off a plank
into another country blue as
eternity.

I knock back "Red Bull."
Thrust the manuscript into the mails for the gods to handle
white kindling:
 What a fire they will light!
 You, long-waisted, tall brown-eyedheight to die for
photograph roses from the living room:
 57 looking 25 lower lip thrust out classical bee-stung.

Caged Pear-tree

Locked up gnarly as wisteria, or else grapevines in Greece
but this is merely a British Columbia pear tree by
ocean:

Looked down at from a wooden sidewalk: giving vertigo a run for its money
dizziness wins.

Its copious flavor locked in a wood lattice of tree roots
up from earth
a basket: the pear tree's a basket-case:

hundreds of immature pears
resembling miniature celli.
Then back home, there's morphine
against terminal pain.

For a thing laborious as birth,
worth suffering. For the burst door. But this?
You had taken off your oxblood stockings
for liver cancer
hands red as murder
full-well knowing
that halfway round the globe it was snowing.

Cool snow!
White thorns!
You lifted your palms.

Love made manifest you leant over the pear trees
you who had learned suffering with your mother's milk:
flax:
A mother tongue.

Writing Feverishly

Like my parents' clothing,
life in this body
is shrunk. Out of favor & fashion.

Free rein I let emotion
run.
One who waits in a cell for news that never comes
feels brine tears
like the snow leopard's, salt, pale green.

White Curls

The women in our family have white curls eyes brown:
not the rain—green of the snow leopard's
dozens of small spun-gold pears glow on a spiral wire up from ocean
in Egypt-red sun.

That dust so shine—

keep yourself away from open flame.

Sky in small mahogany moons is reflected in a tabletop
polished to a mirror from Umbria, O my Sabine.

CONTRIBUTORS

Robyn Art's recent poems have appeared in *Slope, The Hat, Conduit, Slipstream, Gulf Coast, The New Delta Review, Rhino, The Cream City Review,* and *canwehaveourballback?*. She's the author of the poetry manuscript, *The Stunt Double In Winter*, which was selected as a Finalist for the 2004 Kore Press First Book Award and the 2005 Sawtooth Poetry Prize. Her chapbook, *Degrees of Being There*, was released by Boneworld Press in May 2003. A second chapbook, *No Longer A Blonde*, is forthcoming from Boneworld Press in 2005.

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search for new and deeper relations between different cultures. (e-mail: guidomu2001@yahoo.it)

Steve Mueske holds an MFA in Writing from Hamline University and has published poems recently in *The Massachusetts Review*, *Water-Stone*, *The American Poetry Journal*, *Northeast Review*, 88, *Fulcrum* and others, and in the anthologies *Alsop Review: Anthology One*, *Hymns to the Outrageous*, and *Best New Poets 2005*. The author of the chapbook *Whatever the Story Requires*, his first full-length collection, *A Mnemonic For Desire*, will be released in April 2006 by Ghost Road Press. He lives in the Midwest, where he edits three candles journal and manages three candles press. He can be reached at Steve.Mueske@gmail.com

Eve Rifkahn is the co-founder and artistic director of Poetry Oasis, Inc., a 501 (c) (3) non-profit poetry organization and editor of *Diner: a journal of poetry*. Poems and/or essays have appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *5 AM*, *Chaffin Journal*, *Porcupine Press*, *The Worcester Review*, *California Quarterly*, *ReDactions*, *Jabberwock Review*, *Southern New Hampshire Literary Journal* and translated into Braille. Her chapbook *At the Leprosarium* won the 2003 Revelever chapbook contest. She received her MFA in Writing from Vermont College and lives with her husband, poet Michael Milligan.

Maurice Oliver spent almost a decade working as a freelance photographer in Europe. Then, in 1995, he made a lifelong dream reality by traveling around the world for eight months, recording his experiences in a journal instead of pictures. And so began his desire to be a poet. His poetry has appeared in *The Potomac Journal*, *Circle Magazine*, *Bullfight Review*, *Tryst3 Journal*, *The MAG*, *Eye-Shot*, *The Surface*, *Wicked Alice*, *WordRiot*, *Taj Mahal Review* (India), *Stride Magazine* (UK), *Retort Magazine* (Australia), & online at *SubtleTea*, *Underground Voices Magazine*, *Frigg*, *Tamafyhr Mountain Poetry*, *zafusy*, *Girls With Insurance*, and *Interpoetry* (UK). He lives in Portland, Oregon where he is a tutor.

A former Russian linguist and interrogator during the Cold War, **Martin Ott** currently works as a writer and editor in Los Angeles. He has option several screenplays and has had more than a dozen stories published in literary magazines. His poetry has been published in over fifty magazines and anthologies, including *The Anthology of Monterey Poets*, *Cimarron Review*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Hotel Amerika*, *New Letters*, *Poetry East*, *Tampa Review*, *Third Coast*, and *XConnect*. He has been a finalist for the Bluestem Poetry Award, the Agha Shahid Ali Prize in Poetry and the Carnegie Mellon University Press (Open Reading). His chapbook *Misery Loves* was published on Red Dancefloor Press.

Luis Arturo Ramos was born in Minatitlán, Veracruz, Mexico in 1947. He has published four books of short stories: *Del tiempo y otros lugares*, *Los viejos asesinos* (translated as *The Old Assassins*), *Domingo junto al paisaje* and *La señora de la Fuente y otras parábolas de fin de siglo* ("Rainbows at Seven Eleven" is included in this volume). He has

also published five novels: *Violeta-Perú* (1980 Colima Literature Prize), *Intramuros* (translated as *Between These Walls*), *Este era un gato* (1989 Latin American Colima Prize), *La casa del ahorcado* and *La mujer que quiso ser Dios*. With his book *Melomanías: la ritualización del universo, una lectura de la obra de Juan Vicente Melo* he won the José Revueltas Essay Prize. He is currently a Professor of the Bilingual Creative Writing Program at the University of Texas at El Paso.

Poet **Hélène Sanguinetti** was born in Marseille in 1951. Author of *De la main gauche, exploratrice* (Flammarion, 1999), *D'ici, de ce berceau* (Flammarion, 2003) and *Alparegho, Pareil-à-rien* (Comp'Act, 2005), she also appears in *49 Poets : A Collective* (Flammarion, 2004) and in the forthcoming *20 Contemporary French Women Poets* by Canadian scholar John Stout. Hélène lives and works in Arles, where she takes much of her poetic imagery from the stark landscape, sky and nearby Mediterranean.

Lynn Strongin was born (1939) New York City, and raised in New York and parts of the rural South during WWII when her father was a re-stationed Army psychologist. Early studies in musical composition branched out into writing poetry. During the sixties in Berkeley, she worked for Denise Levertov. Poems in thirty anthologies, fifty-five journals (print & on-line) and seven published books. Two PEN grants, one NEA Creative Writing Grant. Her anthology *The Sorrow Psalms: A Book of Twentieth Century Elegy*, will be published June, 2006 by the University of Iowa Press. She currently makes Canada her home, her second land.

Terese Svoboda's honors include a nonfiction Pushcart, an O'Henry for the short story, a translation NEH, three NYFAs in poetry and fiction, a NYSCA and a Jerome Foundation grant in video, the John Golden Award in playwriting, the Bobst Prize in fiction and the Iowa Prize in poetry. A UBC and Columbia University graduate, she has taught poetry and fiction at Sarah Lawrence, Williams, the College of William and Mary, the Universities of Hawaii and Miami, Wichita State, San Francisco State, New School and St. Petersburg, Russia. She published four books of poetry, three novels and a book of translations from the Nuer. Her writing has been featured in the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Slate*, *Bomb*, *Lit*, *Columbia*, *Yale Review* and the *Paris Review*. Her first novel, *Cannibal*, was named one of the best books in print by critic Geoffrey O'Brien. She has also written WET, an opera premiering at Disney Hall in 2005, following a residency at the Rockefeller Foundation's retreat in Bellagio, Italy. *Tin God*, her fourth novel, will be published next spring. She is also the co-curator of "Between Word and Image" for the Museum of Modern Art. Her videos have been shown at MoMA, MoCA, Ars Electronica, American Film Institute, Cal Arts, the Getty and PBS, and distributed by Women Make Movies and the MacArthur Foundation.

Bradley D. Woods lives outside of Madison, WI where he works as a Consulting Software Architect and semi-professional Artist. His art work has appeared in national advertising, numerous web sites, web site designs and a variety of public displays including a touring

exhibit with the Lollapalooza musical festival. More work by the artist and additional information can be viewed at: www.bradleyDwoods.com

Segue 4.2

featuring

Terese Svoboda

and

Sheila Black

Kenneth Carroll

Ann Cefola

Corey Green

Andy Jackson

Prakash Reddy Kona

Alyce Miller

Guido Monte

[translated by Liliana Lo Giudice]

Steve Mueske

Eve Rifkah

Maurice Oliver

Martin Ott

Luis Arturo Ramos

[translated by Martin and Traci Camps]

Hélène Sanguinetti

[translated by Ann Cefola]

Lynn Strongin