

# SUGAR HOUSE REVIEW

AN INDEPENDENT POETRY MAGAZINE

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## MUDSLIDE

Outside, the wind rubs its rough back  
against the trees. Rain scatter-guns  
across the yard, or cannonballs into the lake  
that's rising underneath the eaves.

On the hill behind our house, hordes  
of rocks and pebbles wake to cold rainwater-  
in-the-face. "Come on," they whisper,  
as the dirt that's held them prisoner

melts to goo, slush, slime.  
They've had their eyes on this valley  
since before the white men came. "Get ready,"  
they rumble in the dark. "It's time."

## HIGH WINDS, BECOMING GUSTY AT TIMES

All night, outside our house, the wind-men  
rattle windows, clatter doors. "We're tired,"  
they moan. "We're cold and hungry. Let us in."

"Wind's an octopus," Dad warned. "It can slip  
through any hole." "Wind's a spider," Mom said.  
"It can creep through cracks, and sting."

The wind-men pelt our house with leaves, poke it  
with twigs, blast it with sand. "Fall on the roof,"  
they tell the trees. "Loan us your limbs, and we'll break in."

Refused, the wind-men dump our garbage-can,  
and glue trash to our walls. They hurl the cat's dish  
at the hedge, and try to tip our tortoise on his back.

They flip our WELCOME mat, and blow our son's soccer net  
like a slow, scraping galleon across the yard.  
All we can do is hide under thick comforters

that hug us close and whisper, "Go to sleep,"  
until at sunrise, the wind-men retreat.  
"We'll scatter your dust soon," they whine,

dragging tails of Styrofoam and fallen leaves,  
cloaks flapping pink, blue, purple in the orange  
breeze.



## WE ALL SAW IT COMING

Three days & nights  
algorithms appeared  
in gulls as they flew  
through the pauseless  
morning. Meanwhile,  
sleepless fish swam  
gluttonous for hours  
in the subtext. Nearby  
orchestras transposed  
this into allegories  
about desire, & the sea  
coughed & coughed  
while a siren ate the night  
silence. There were ashes  
& sackcloth on the beach  
& a desperado fox  
picking over bones.  
Paintings hung in the petals  
of tea roses as Americans  
in soft-lit beach homes  
read the story of Jonah  
& the whale to their pale,  
crying children.

## HOJOKI

From two suitcases and no boxes, I arrived  
you picked mint in the yard  
we threw our broken bowls and cups into the sea

*hojoki*: notes from a small hut, a basement room, a view of ferns

*hojoki*: a place to live after letting everything go

we signed in thistle  
upstairs the landlord fixed classical guitars  
he played into the night

there were stacks of grade six math problems  
lists of adjectives and verbs  
I sang in the bath until you learned the songs

*hōjōki* 方丈記: a ten measure diary

it's not that we were looking toward each other  
we were sharing a bench  
under a tin awning in the rain

## THIS IS NOT GLUTTONY

So philosophical it all is,  
the endless loop, the ending of things.

Even when the infant shouts, *I have a migraine!*  
in Babel, in the background of a snapshot,

don't you see me sleeping? Let me sleep.  
Through sleet, joy, early evening.

*These tears are real and the whole world is a farce,*  
the baby mutters, the all-out production.

And where else am I but head down  
in between dreams, a deal with the nameless.

*God is the silent type and I am deaf,*  
says the baby, cooing, snoring, turning the other cheek.

## I LIKE TO SIT.

Some days it's so loud in this world  
even my heart has ears. Some days  
even the sound is spinning.  
It is what it is.

So what if there's nothing else.  
So what if when I sit in the room  
that has no purpose and look out,  
two birds collide.

The feathers, the fathoming, the comedy of air.  
The truth is. I have been staring at the ground  
for most of my life, by a window,  
and to look up and out: What sound what sound.

If I sit long enough.  
If I cover my ears.  
Two birds collide and I reach out for a feather.  
The only evidence left in this world.

If I open my mouth, what collision will form.  
If I open my eyes, what a collision forming.  
Two birds outside my window  
and the spinning and the spinning.

I have cried myself awake for three days.  
Whom to tell but the birds  
in that memory before feather met feather.  
If I sit long enough. Something will. Something to will.

## A SONG CALLED SHIMODA'S TAVERN

The bar in the dream was called Shimoda's  
& the life of the trench was lit  
with a little throne of madness,  
also known as Saint Mandelstam's  
palace of shadows.  
What century  
did you mistake for this one?  
I thought maybe Edgar Huntly could reappear,  
do some quality sleep-lurking,  
& betray us his dreams, ok?  
A wedding cake of sawdust  
& some orange methadone in little foam cups.  
As what the guests came to gather around  
sank the sun & brought from a pit of fire  
some warmth to their fingers, to their necks.

We're out for the night again.  
Known to the appendices & tables  
of content, to the blog's through feed, but  
not to the imagination's lonely obsessions—  
I don't have anything I might set up  
against the time I borrowed to  
believe in what I'm doing here.  
What is it that you think you want?  
That somebody could come into the room  
to court a transformation through fucking?  
That only bits of wrong language  
should be needed for a collapse.  
To be fucked so well as if to be dragged by a current?  
To be fucked as if by a wall or by a school of fish.  
Obliterated, indeed, to the point of laughter  
against my neighbor's singing pouring up through the floor.

Out of the slasher's little scumbled paradise  
into the valley of the shadow  
of the valley of the found.  
Against the sickles of we may know not what.  
But the city sways on its blind  
asphodelian stem & the good  
doctor dreams in the mirror  
of somebody undressing  
in the white water closet  
whatever partition the approximate decade  
offers to the scape of another man's  
sad fantasy I want something from.

## PSALM 51: ANTIPHON

Grace falls, a sibilance of snow, curls  
in tufts among the violets  
you walk on.

Grace ferns threaded leaves along your cheekbones,  
pools in the pillowed hollows  
of your young son's neck.

Grace in the fretted sting of a mosquito you swat,  
the smell of wood smoke and charred fish.

Summer's green skies.  
The furred scat of coyotes, and the small bones  
poking through its crust.

Grace, the sharp thrust of air you pass through  
on your way to somewhere else.



## MADRIGAL FOR AN AUTUMN NIGHT

Rain-soaked, isolate, shouldered  
by the wind, the swing set groans  
a cadenza of neglect, tandem

of links to childhood's sterling  
glint oxidized to a whine.  
Time is a maypole you swivel

endlessly around. Nights  
gather starlight-in-waiting  
to witness blossom-dyed ribbons

unravel thread by sun-bled thread.  
November mud chokes the bell-  
wether to a single muted clang.

You dangle in your plastic seat,  
strangled tongue, aimless pendulum.

## LAST BEQUEST

They fit in my hand, the consolations of the leftover  
and left behind :: sand from her box of seed pearls,  
a rotary dial hole, tacky gold crystals of honey.

I inter memories in remnants :: the beaded heads of pins,  
spools of typewriter ribbon, a shift key :: time-stamped and durable.

Find traces of the revenant :: peach stone, tea leaves,  
tobacco flecks :: in her compost and combustibles.

Small green buds of unripe grapes and six milk  
teeth :: fossils and stars of one life's constellations.

BACKWARD BINOCULARS AND POSTAGE  
FOR CORPSES

I'm all eyes and indigo  
inking signatures in light and language,  
riddles sewn into the bottom of busy tongues.

Strangers press their teeth together,  
a clack in place of lips.

The underbelly of the morning  
grinds against the back of the world—  
long-distance casualties propped against broken shovels.

I lick the inside of their eyelids and seal them—  
hope they get where they need to go.

## MANUPORT

Scientists have recently discovered the latent heat of forgetting.  
It takes more energy to forget than remember.

Eye-white and narrowing  
    daylight—why didn't I  
        jot a few notes in the large  
            margin below  
                this Polaroid? There's a fire  
                behind what should be familiar  
            faces. Away—  
        the voices left them, the way  
they moved. Sonics, kinetics  
    burned in effigy. To forget  
    you, a forest fire: a savage  
                blaze searing the hillside,  
            your smiles, your accents, that thing  
        you called me  
        after school with our eyes  
closed and our hands aflame  
    refusing  
        to blush.

## AGUA POTABLE

On a chair built for vaudeville  
I drink water color.  
You take your coffee,  
by black you mean black.

We are a revue of sight gags,  
spinning columns of newspaper  
words. Ink and rollers  
drum between us.

I sing like a chickadee  
until your pistol says BANG  
in finger quotes.

Everything is left.  
Your wife, her money.  
On the table, a few bristles sink  
into an asterisk  
at the bottom of the cup.

I keep my footnote  
in my mouth. My brush  
is loaded, ready to bloom.

Hellzapoppin' but the rain comes  
in biblical proportion. I hold my mark  
with one eye on the shepherd's crook  
reaching from off stage  
for your neck.

## POOL RULES

No smoking. No horseplay. There will be no stealing of your best friend's boyfriend. No nose-picking. Say please. In sexual matters, be generous, but do not think of it that way. No watch-wearing. No digital clocks. No t-shirts with sayings on them. Spell *ketchup* with a *k*. Do not drink to excess. If you must read a book in the bathtub, be careful. Turn off cell phones unless you enjoy subtle disdain. No float-toys, no running, no communicable diseases. People wearing cut-offs will be asked to leave. No high-pitched squealing from those over two years of age. Obey fire codes. If you can't sleep, turn off the air-conditioner, it might help. Cut sandwiches into rectangles or triangles, either one. Shower first.

[TWO PLACES. ONE PLACE. NOT SAID...]

Two places. One place. Not said is said is known is there two places two. Not for want for sad for want. Not for known. Two places one place is not for sad is. Here there are not others only others. One place. One place. One place. In between the two is one space. There is nothing past this. Past this a mirror reflects walking back. There is no one. There is no light here there is there is here there is.

Two places one place is two places one is. Not wanting to know is two places one is. Not trying to places one is two places two. Space for many two there is. There is a way here. There is no way. There is no way here there is. Two places, no way. There is no space to stretch out here. There is no space to squish up here. There is no space here, two places one place there is. To squish up there is to stretch out here. To fit there is no space here two places to fit. One place is to stretch out squish up there is here. Just enough space for no space here there is two places one place just enough. No, this is no place no place no place there is no two places here there is.

Two places here. Two places here one room. Finally. Two places one room is places here. Finally. The light does not here mirror. There is no here. Finally. There wasn't a wasn't a thinking wasn't a thinking here. Finally. There is no. Finally. There is no crying here. There is no here. Crying is here. Finally. There is no is no is no is no is no is no. Finally. There is. No. Finally. There is. No. Finally.

## DEBBY BOONE'S MOUTH

Debby Boone's mouth was big  
Debby Boone's mouth wouldn't go away  
Debby Boone's mouth kept singing the same song  
Debby Boone's mouth was the number one mouth in America  
Debby Boone's mouth kept a lot of good songs down  
Debby Boone's mouth emoted  
Debby Boone's mouth tormented continents  
Debby Boone's mouth for ten straight weeks  
Samson could've done some real damage with Debby Boone's mouth  
Debby Boone's mouth was the white version of Carly Simon's mouth  
Debby Boone's mouth was so white Andy Gibb tried to snort it  
Debby Boone's mouth ate Pac-Man

*Wokka Wokka Wokka*

Sometimes it's hard for Debby Boone's mouth to remember how to spell Debby  
Debby Boone's mouth can sing all the books of the Bible with a Bible in it  
Debby Boone's mouth killed some kids  
What has no bottom but is still filled with crap?  
Debby Boone's mouth made us all fear Casey Kasem  
Debby Boone's mouth had long distance dedication  
Television cameras spun around the gravitation of Debby Boone's mouth  
Debby Boone's mouth clogged up the airwaves

*Like Watergate*

Debby Boone's mouth won the Olympics of please stop  
Then Debby Boone's mouth went away  
Then Debby Boone's mouth invented computers  
Debby Boone's mouth carries on  
Debby Boone's mouth is full of hope  
Debby Boone's mouth can't be wrong  
Debby Boone's mouth feels so right

*Like America*

Debby Boone's mouth will convince you  
Say the same thing enough times and we'll all believe it's Debby Boone's mouth



SHADOWGRAPH 145:  
*THE MOMENT COMPARED TO THE FIELD*

(poetry detected in william phillips' nobel physics lecture, 1997)

laser beam (the sadist's smile)... ('slowed, trapped & pushed'; atoms, *little women!*) man:  
holding pen. (butterflies – *measurement cups*.) *usa today*, 'the extraordinary scale of con-  
finement' *fucked*, 'the movement of history...' (whitecoat, 'bump showing.') *labs* the bed-  
rooms of the nation state! nanoprobe; *sticky fingers*... (schrodinger's pussy.) math: platonic  
relations? (unbecoming gods; *greased & wrestling, human stamp*...) 'new art'? *mechanical  
impressionism*. junkyard poppies. *dreaming of paris* – hal & i, monet's garden, *the Cloud*  
from the bridge... worlds apart: 'understanding & light' cézanne *dissolving equations!* zen,  
teachers of no importance. science, the falsifiable dawn. 'progress'; wine sellers. poe: age of  
raven. (*making wheels for the eagle*.) the office of navel research. *breathing the industrial  
carnival air*. ('noble'? *wanting to make the world/a better clock*...) 'transport'; bees, mom-  
ents taken from the field. *to tread light into the earth*...

SEAN HOWARD

POETIC EXTRACTS: STUDY #20  
*WINDOWS XP PRINTER TEST PAGE*

**i**

'sit back'; the  
smooth drive to  
the port

**ii**

(hidden  
vistas)

**iii**

*congratulations—if  
you can read this, you  
are in the canon!*

**iv**

anxious; the  
*driver's* face in  
the mirror...

**v**

familiar? jets:  
towers, bub-  
bles

**vi**

(colon  
cancer)

**vii**

gull blinking (  
the port on  
& off)

## ABATTOIR CHANDELIERS

(uncontrolled poems, for hermann rorschach)

*"The list here compiled...will thus contribute towards advancing the effort initiated by Hermann Rorschach. It is to devise a tool...that will both penetrate to the human personality in depth and also be amenable to methodological control."*

Epilogue to *Handbook of Scorings for Rorschach Responses*

### *i*

women sewing machines

*daybreak, china moon*

caterpillars of society

prose? tree stump

cliff: global village

### *ii*

*enola gay*: rockinghorse...

butterfly-wings nite

the note in the doll's house

god's mankey?

the orange in the cell

### *iii*

buying pearls for the oyster

forest, *see overleaf*...

hard-on: wishbone

*goose steps across the pond*

the statue of the rain

### *iv*

the deer head in descartes' office

temple, buddha sitting out the tour

gestalt: maps read by lightning

the modern hollow in the woods

*abattoir chandeliers*

## AUTOSOMAL DOMINANT: CASE 2

It's not that I'm not ready to go, simply that  
I don't want to.

Not of cloudless afternoons, nor teaching, not of  
chocolate, nor

the sweetest run of Debussy. Of your arms, then.  
Of the hours

in which our conversations roll along, peaceful,  
my hand in

your hair, your head in my lap, the sky overhead,  
open.

And if I have it, then—I'm half here, half gone.  
My sadness

for my own short life pulled up through my throat  
with these words—

*if I have it.* If I have it, then—then I wait, and hope  
my patience saves me.

...BEING THE WINTER OF NO SNOW  
TO GIVE WAY TO NO RAIN, OF NO RAIN

to relent to no drizzle, no drizzle to huddle itself  
over scars of creek. My sisters & I watching ghost bogs

molt their wisp-fur blossoms, watching newborn  
fog lung-huff cool phantom billows, the collected breath

of Worldly dead. Our evenings gone rot-white  
with that soul-spew Father calls Revelation Taste. See it

creep, a back-slide feathering about these rusting  
evergreens, trees thirstier than we, thirstier, Father tells us,

by far. Or our boots, their inside-out crunch, tissue  
torn clammy. Or our sniffles, jagged with fingernail scabs.

The winter the basement tub froze a yellow-thick &  
cracked. Same with the antifreeze jug, its neon pheromone

ooze begging lick, a siren taste to Heaven all our kittens.  
But the earth, she mocked every shovelful. Too sandy for graves,

only bitty Sisyphus digs, giving up before even decent  
blisters. *That* winter. Sure, but also being the Valentine's Day

of great Mother's revolt. Painting her lamb's blood ♥s,  
painting each ♥ darker yet, about our doors & windows. ♥s &

♥s, so that Father needed weeks to slather freshly  
over them. He grimaced & lanced his colossal palms. He

bandaged his wrists & bellowed, *It's not what enters a man,  
but what leaves him!* Except Mother replied, *What enters a man? What?*

& she anointed herself with even more oil in order to  
tremble circles around our cistern. Hush up now. Here she

comes again, in one hand our busted shovel, in the other  
our sundered hose. It's ice-rigored erect. It's the longest index.

## TWICE IN A LIFETIME

*after Remain in Light*

Awoke when your eldest son returned,  
or turned, rather,  
from other to Other.

Arose from below couch-cushion headstones,  
meeting him in the foyer, gripping that sprig of  
fag cowlick, to rough-lug the lad along  
colon-dark hallways & here's your lesser den:  
stale cigar pall, walls of brittle diplomas, so many  
smashes of cap-feather as square eyes walled-off &  
deaf to your cuffing.

Deaf to the kid on his knees, his bald teeth taking  
backseat to a liver-spot fist you won't control.

Boring soft whiskers.

The skewer.

The delve.

The consolable  
truth.

But look here, you're weeping too.

That remarkable keen & its unbearable translation:

*Only wounds heal time, Slick! &*

*The baby is the bathwater, Slick!*

But does your son know the drill's literal?

Know not to panic?

Breathe nose-only, patiently swallowing  
one knuckle at a go?

& wrist, & drawn lump of elbow, but can he, this  
dandy scab of heatless apologies, this  
scar yet smothered in the womb of that woman you call  
That Woman, can he even get that it's all for  
a labor of legend born?

For losing life to gain more?

Or is he only the loosest refusal?

All those heads talking & their water huddled, blind, at the  
bottom of your ocean...

Sing along, manhood.  
Sing along, choir of disembodied, of  
riddled sphincters, righted angels.

Sing how this is not your silent son & you never had a  
beautiful wife, & so  
where did you get him—?

But after the abrasive bulge of your shoulder,  
things soon settle.

Alone again, though not as planned, not as *exact*; instead, as somehow  
imperfectly aglow,  
pink from the inside-out,  
mosquito-wing fire, your fear the warmest virgin ruddy.

It sloshes.

It claws mucid walls.

It wants purchase it can taste, & you, oh, you  
cower within its tender husk, cringing, hoping these  
immortal tones that stitch a son's wet  
echoes around you are enough of a confession.

Or *will* be, at least, say, after a few decades.

Once he's safely satiated.

Once your drugs unlace his blood & you can be certain you will  
never be shit out, never be the hunted guts slit,  
tumbled to rocky earth, gulped up by  
dumb, dumb birds.

No, by then you'll only be age.

Age like the murderer never caught, walking his dog, waving to neighbors,  
head talking, talking, out past city limits, weaving  
state park trails but,  
for the most part,  
keeping his eyes front & center.

I admit, I have lit cigarettes  
in furious Pacific rain, have been  
begged to dance & fellate, to  
read aloud *À rebours* for  
gaggles of retarded children who loosely clap the silence  
right out of vast libraries.  
Though how—?  
How do they perform such joy,  
hooting madly for the death of a bejeweled turtle  
even when they know  
that turtle was never me?

&, yes, I have confessed to verities  
of inhuman horror,  
have tried with partial success to swallow  
whole organs of sex.  
Or once, after  
tasteless Eucharist, stepped forth into a  
windy street where a group of  
teen thugs bounced me on  
denim shoulders.  
They called me Mastermind, called me  
Authoritizer, took me to their  
former leader &

I was elated.  
Naturally, I teemed with questions:  
Where to improve? Where to react?—until  
(upon eye-patch removal) it  
proved to be only my wife.  
Exactly—why? Why can't she  
answer the simplest riddles? Always  
brushing her teeth, always,  
just now,  
leaving & locking the attic?



[VARY YOUR QUESTION A LITTLE...]

Vary your question a little, Death. Inside me are candy stars and cardboard hearts. What's the point in saying you can't have them? Willows, ferns, and river birches still grow beside that pond you dug for me. In here, it's always night. The rooster sleeps all the time. My yellow life raft is covered in ivy now. But if you hold the candle, we can still go for a ride. Push my library receipts out of the way. I like to drift by the brown horse that grazes in a field lit by dandelions. And please look down into the water. I've spent days teaching the paper fish to swim.

## [DEATH, IF MAGGIE LIVES...]

Death, if Maggie lives 4,000 yards from school, and Clarissa 3 miles, which girl stands a chance of outrunning you? How many students can finish their worksheets before their desks burst into flames? The class is tired of math. But they are quick and practical, and set up a bucket brigade for those in need. In a moment of panic, they douse each other with water. It'll be a while before they can write anything in their soggy notebooks again. Why don't you tell about the time you watched a goddess, years and years ago, transform a swan with frozen wings into a rabbit, handily saving its life. I'm guessing your perspective on that miracle is not often heard.

[DEATH, LET'S FIND A ROCK...]

Death, let's find a rock that looks like an egg so some other mouth can tell me about possibility. What do you know about the bruise that's just bloomed over my eye? I've no memory of injury. Wasn't it yesterday the tethered owl nuzzled her keeper's finger and the keeper told us, *Put your hands in your pockets?* Weren't we in line behind two children holding cloth-covered baskets of chicks? I thought you'd join me occasionally when the weather was fine, to walk through sunlight and road dust, and then past the swamp. My mistake.

## SOME DISORDERED INTERIOR GEOMETRIES

*after Francesca Woodman*

have been reordered, against will. Tumblr will scroll and scroll for these. Once upon a time you glided in the rain past storefronts selling your see-through polka-dot dress. The little girls chirping in your wake see you smeared across the windows, your tender evisceration. I can speak for little girls only while I blog. We ladies continue to enjoy your curled bodies and effervescent bark. It is most pleasurable for us that you dropped your petals and cold skin against a vintage bathtub. Especially in the all-eyes-on-me sense, we are grateful for reproduction.

## THE STORY OF YOUR LIFE IN THREE MINUTES

*We're all making sense of the kingdom.*

This is what you're doing now: mute

*Shopping for olives and engines,*

This is what you're doing now: rocking to sleep in a tugboat

*popsicles and planets. It is not night and neither is it*

This is what you're doing now: hopeful. Escape hatch, PIAZZZ!

*Friday. A screen star,*

This is what you're doing now: a vagina desk job

*her surprising map of hair; oh glorious*

This is what you're doing now: "honey, your style does not become you"

*temperature, concubine, mess.*

This is what you're doing now: vomiting up the smell of salt air

*Do you love our zeitgeist? Wicked orbiting*

This is what you're doing now: oh break this, oh break it, break, break, break

*wine, mutts?—have we any say? It is neither Friday*

This is what you're doing now: please let us out, find quick form, 1040EZ, apart

*nor a likeness of the beautiful son.*

This is what you're doing now: silenced

*Placards saying everything line the freezing fog—*

This is what you're doing now: saying all you can in the time allotted

*smearred freeways. Perhaps we've found the*

This is what you're doing now: if only you could

## TAUTOLOGY

The leading indicators  
have taken to following

the precipitous collapse  
of projected graphs printed

with raspberry, cherry,  
pomegranate hues; here—

if you'll remember that ochre  
afternoon—is where everything

we'd wrested, chipped, minted,  
torn from our ten-hour days was

multiplied in others' coffers,  
became the cream corridors

where we stub toes, the scented  
mangle of spiderwort and sweet

pea where chipmunks cavort,  
the constructed figure of—

What we believe no longer  
matters. The projections

project, the indicators  
indicate, the colors color—

And the poor? The poor, poor  
are numbers, the numbers, poor.

## JESUS AGE

When someone says, *I'm hopping on the train*,  
I see that person bouncing toward the train,  
And bouncing like a crack-addled rabbit.

When I stand on the platform, James Brown yells,  
*Let's count it off, let's take it to the bridge.*  
And Gladys's Pips *woo woo* their way to Georgia.

When I consider *jump*, I think of all  
The people over 33 who say  
There's no year better than this one.

Jesus was supposed to save me at seventeen.  
When he said no man knows the day or hour,  
He said nothing of adolescent girls.

## EVERYBODY DOWN

Around this time of year, someone will fall  
Over Great Falls. It could be me if I  
Left Tampa's flatness for Virginia's drawl.  
Altiloquent, high-flying cardinals' cry

*Whit chew.* The Civil War has its own app,  
e-iPhone forts; but, love rides war roughshod  
Over Virginia for lovers and sap  
Sugar maples. I could get right with God

Here, and descend from blue preoccupations  
Catching humidity latching on white  
Oak trees, and tangle with indoctrinations:  
Survival of the fittest; fright or flight;

Heat rising. Metamorphic slab for miles  
Above the water table, stipule spines  
Float somewhere for a stagnant spot. Rock stiles  
Tease ticks to *Climb back up*. The ripples' brine

Is really schist's sharp grains. How do you like  
Me now, God? Accident of fractured bone,  
One with nature, the solstice, and a hike.  
I bloom in spring. In spring, I die as stone.



## CONFESSION

*There's this boy*, he says.

*This boy in school.*

And you know. You've known

for months. *There's this boy*

and you can hear

your wife's slippers scraping

the tiles as she turns, on her heel,

to her Lord hung above the stove.

*I think I love...*and his head

hits the hardwood.

And he's screaming

*daddy, daddy*

beneath your knee.

And because

you love him more

than yourself, you tear

fistfuls of dusty pages

from the good book

and fill his busted mouth

with prayers. Tongue

smear'd black with psalms

inexpiable. Chest to chest

the closest you'll ever come

to the sound of each other's pulsing.

Later, on the barn's

pocked roof, his body

etched in red October,

his body a question

unraveling. Your .45

heavy in his smooth hands.

Inside, a shot  
of whiskey pours into  
silence. As liquor burns

the scream in the throat,  
a flock of sparrows blasts  
across the corn

and a sky begins to grow  
slowly  
in an old man's chest.

## AT DUSK, WHITE PINE LAKE

The light on Gog turns pale pink-gold.  
A bull moose cracks deadfall by the shore, wades in, drinks.

The feathers of the western tanager.  
The butter-yellow Alexanders we saw in ascent.  
Even the fabric of a tent.

Slowly all shadows fall into one shadow.

We cup our hands behind our ears:  
The poorwill calls.  
Jupiter sends static we can almost hear.

## ON SEEING A MOOSE IN NOVEMBER

Sick, sick of the day, sick of the day before, sick  
of yourself, and tomorrow's agendas, more, you

drive up canyon, thinking  
every time you do this you kill something.  
It is an hour before dusk, you're intent  
on sweating up a ridge by a creek you love.

You stop: a young bull moose in the upper marsh.

At the road's edge, you put down the windows,  
listen: the crack of dry grass, water tinkling  
from the dark body, the dark head lifted and appraising

something other than your torment.

## RETURNS

It's coming upon a year my friend sat  
Lotus style  
in her Hospice bed, said, *it's all so terrible*

and, *now I know love.*  
And, my neighbor called to say his wife  
is leaving him.

I admit slugging through with only  
a feathery slip of a word—  
*sorry.*

Lately a kind of dividend is paid  
when nothing changes overnight

when the phone remains silent  
and no conduit of news diminishes us.

That exoskeleton that can grow around me  
keeping sweetness out?  
I'm sorry for that too.

When my friend, thin as a wing,  
looked at me and said,  
*this must be so hard on you,*

I shook-off that boney layer.

I let that be her last gift to me.

My neighbor keeps everything clean,  
fixes everything;  
has dropped his wife's name; turned her into a pronoun.

*She's living with someone else,*  
he says without my asking.

Every morning a chickadee flings itself  
against the window—fighting its reflection—  
defending against itself.

Today, at the mail box, my neighbor said,  
*she's not coming back.*

## THE ONLY CHANCE #1

they send the boy to a small school

it would fit in your hand

he'll receive a small education because he is a small creature

see look at your hands

will i ever grow larger he asks

no never any larger never any sort of growth

maybe a leaning into the air maybe a catching of wind

he is told wind catches have been largely out of fashion

they have become obscure

he hopes to devote his life to wind catches

maybe a sort of free fall

maybe

## THE ONLY CHANCE #14

they send him to climb a hill

this is what young people do                      to get older

he is small and the hill is                      very large

he does not understand

we are trying to distract you, they say

when you are paying attention you know                      so little

it's true, he thinks

i am very little



## THE ONLY CHANCE #17

he is little but there is no proof he will remain so

no reason for his shape to hold

any more than            circles            or squares

any more than any old obtuse triangle

just because you throw feed to chickens every day

doesn't mean            anything

today might be            a day for beheading

easily, tonight could be chicken dinners

THE WAR REPORTER PAUL WATSON  
TALKS TO HIMSELF

If someone says you're worth something you are immediately suspicious. That person's an idiot. When they say it's shit you're like, Hey! I'm not *that* bad. Your mom was always brainwashing you. *There's nothing the matter with your missing hand. All you've got to do is put yourself out there in the world and prove it.* But everything the world tells you is opposite. And this is the moment where we get confused. Everyone's got something the matter with them. And mine's pretty small, relatively. So long as I keep my eyes open. But you don't, do you. It's not death that frightens you. What is it then? Speaking of trauma, maybe it's been a kind of delayed reaction? spending your whole life talking to someone who doesn't want to talk to you?

THE POET RECOGNIZES THE WAR REPORTER  
PAUL WATSON

slumped in his bed in the Arctic crying  
like only snowfall. Also an icon  
exuding olive oil. *Oh no not this  
familiar ghost again.* He's my brother  
slumped at the kitchen table. The morning  
they'd brought him home from the hospital where  
they'd taken away his shoelaces and  
belt. I stood in the doorway and watched him  
pretend to eat. Why couldn't I sit and  
eat with him? Sorrow's the sickness you catch  
if it doesn't catch you first. So I ran  
outside to play with friends. *Are you hungry,  
Paul? They've left some dinner on the table  
for us.*

## TO MY SON, THE DAY AFTER THE STORM

The wind yowls outside like the sound of caged circus lions. It makes me think of when my son was born, though really no sound like that came from me, rather a quiet conversation and a lie to the doctor about how no, the spinal didn't hurt at all. The body should not have to feel the way a champagne bottle sounds, the cork flying in celebration, but there is no other way to describe the pop of the spine as it is pierced. And now my son is thirteen and the wind is a howl. The water heater sounds like propellers of a ship channeling past a diving bell, or whalespeak recorded by men braver than I. I remember my newborn son curled inside my flowered sleepshirt. He slept cradled in one arm, his breath and my breath together in calm and methodical dream. And now he is taller than I. I open his door twice each night just to hear him stir. He is not like me, though part of me. Not like his father though part of him. And the lions bellow the trees sideways, clouds like stop-action scenes from old *National Geographics* on the shelf that used to be pale blue, and we get older. This is our breathing now.

## HOW I WATCH FOR HER

I've lit an electric candle in the window for her.  
She is young and healthy and far from home.  
It will burn until she returns, but maybe beyond.  
I have lit a candle for her, and not for myself.  
You are right if you say this candle is also for me.  
I was young, far from home, and might have died.  
There's no point in being melodramatic.  
No one in my family came.  
Melodrama is useless as protection.  
When I walk the dog late at night,  
I see the candle in the third story window.  
I write in that room. I waste time there, too.  
I used to believe gifts come only from light.  
I don't actually think that's true.  
There was no candle lit for my return from the hospital.  
It did not make me mute or cruel.  
The dog does not look up; his vision is based in his nose.  
He can tell if he's left his mark on the forsythia.  
It belongs to him because he has given himself to it.  
He tugs at the leash when I try to rush past.  
I am staring at the candle.  
He is nosing around the forsythia saying, This is mine.

## SAN PASQUAL

The flatware scuttle, snap of bottle caps—  
I'm washing up. One hell  
Of a mess in the crock pot.

Kiro skulks, on the lookout for squirrels  
That jut past the windows like acrobats.  
I was meant to see something here.

Beats me what it is. The cactus jeweled  
In a red pin cushion flower, white tips  
Like pearls. Not that.

Don't worry. I'm not doing the list.  
The hand-carved blue-eyed zebra from Santa Fe  
Is my reality check—

This isn't a poem about loneliness, lack.  
I lack nothing that I can see.  
Not even a wooden statue of San Pasqual,

Smiling Patron Saint of the Kitchen.  
He hated to cook, one source says,  
But was made chef in the monastery.

He loved to cook, another source says.  
He watches over kitchens in New Mexico  
To keep the tortillas soft.

The right attitude toward misery  
Can make people worship you.  
Also the right attitude toward bliss.

What good is his smile? I am burning  
The rutabaga and dry-docking  
The fish in a poaching pan.

Why haunt yourself with someone else's  
Fulfillment? Why take the bird  
Of sacrifice or bliss as a thing with wings?

I see the flask on his belt, the donkey by his side,  
Some damp hollow in the arroyo  
Where they're resting before the trek back.

It's not nothing, after all. But close.

## LAND SURVEY IN THE AMARGOSA VALLEY

Where by all accounts I should have been  
back in my LA office, I'm out here on roads  
inscribed on maps in broken hashmarks,  
like dashes in a fading book of Morse  
Code, graded dirt and a high clearance  
all someone figures desert workers need  
to trundle through bursage and creosote.

Now the dusk shades to darkness  
in the depth of cutbanks that wall  
riparian willows along a thin river  
cleaving the alluvium and hardpan  
of the valley floor. The western sky  
fades to the color of exotic moths.  
In the deepening horizon, lightning  
throws ghost-light over vast fields  
of cinder and ash spewed by volcanoes,  
inert now in the shape of prehistory.

All day, figures danced through the heat  
shimmering any surface laid with asphalt—  
illusions deserts play within distances,  
like hippie-chick hitchhikers we gave up  
trying to find, decades ago, to hold  
whatever heat their bodies could give us,  
in the rooms they would almost sleep in.



## FROM *ON BEING BALTHAZAR*

### VI.

Balthazar's grandpa takes Balthazar to the Observatory. His grandfather is his mother's dad but they never talk about his mom. His grandfather doesn't say much, and Balthazar has noticed that most adults don't say much to little kids. When he was smaller, and his family would go to a department store, Balthazar would confuse the manikins for other adults and sometimes the male manikins with black hair, for his Dad. For Balthazar, the difference was sometimes hard to tell, it still is. At the observatory there are no manikins, but there is a big telescope. Balthazar's mom would always tell him when she would go away that all he needed to do was look up at the moon and they would be together in their hearts. Balthazar stands in line for an hour. The big telescope is pointed at the moon, like his mom's finger saying, *"All you need to do is look up at the moon."* He looks and looks, but she's not there, just a bunch rocks and craters.

## FROM *ON BEING BALTHAZAR*

### VII.

Marge is throwing twigs at Balthazar. She is peeling them from an old log and snapping them in two, three, and four and then throwing the pieces at Balthazar's head. Balthazar tries to swat the sidelong sticks away, "*Quit it Marge!*" Balthazar is digging a hole with a broken soup spoon, with a broken shard of the moon he brought back from the Observatory. "*What are you doing Balthazar?*" she asks. He ignores her question; he doesn't have room for one more question. His head is so full of questions that they are sticking out of his ears, eyes and mouth, sticking out like all of the stuff he's shoved under his bed; he feels like a scarecrow stuffed with questions instead of hay and there are so many of them now that they scare all the answers away. "*Balthazar?*" "*Not now Marge my head hurts.*"

FROM *ON BEING BALTHAZAR*

VIII.

It's late and what his father is saying makes Balthazar angry. Balthazar's face is red, like the pictures of Mars in his astronomy books. It's the first time that he has felt rage. There is so much feeling in so little room, he's just four feet tall for Christ's sake and he would have to be at least 12 feet tall to hold all this feeling inside, so Balthazar looks around in a panic, for a place to put it but there isn't a single place in the whole house that isn't already taken up.

## FROM *ON BEING BALTHAZAR*

### X.

Balthazar is thinking a new brother; to replace the one he lost. He is thinking really hard and when he opens his eyes to meet him; Marge's face is two inches from his and she's staring at him. "*What are you doing Balthazar?*" "*I am thinking a new brother.*" "*Really?*" she steps back a step, "*Why don't you THINK something cool like a fire breathing dragon that we can ride?*" "*I don't want to, I want to think a brother.*" "*Well who said a Fire Breathing Dragon couldn't be your brother also?*" "*Someone did somewhere I am sure of it.*" They both sit on the damp bank of the river down by the water. Balthazar is thinking a new brother and Marge is skipping rocks. The sun is orange and fat like Mrs. Barnes and is setting on the water. Balthazar's eyes are all squinched up and Marge is making faces at him. They sit quiet for a long time until the first street lights flicker on. "*I gotta go Balthazar.*" Balthazar doesn't say anything, his eyes still closed tight; thinking real hard, thinking a new brother.

## TIRE FIRE

The lot beside the re-upholstery shop,  
a few doors down (if you can call  
barbed wire fences doors) from Peaches  
Live Girl Review on Cave Creek Road,  
is on fire. All week, the words *suspected*  
and *arson* appear together in the mouths  
of anchor persons. Blame cigarettes, the match  
in mid-July, or blame the owner of the lot  
who lives in San Diego, who no one  
has ever seen. Blame sunlight flashing  
on every ditched car beside the metal fence  
mounted with orphaned hubcaps  
and bulging with tires, and blame the 11-year old  
newly-minted born-again Christian (me),  
who is in love with the tire fire.

The boy rides his bike along the the nearest road  
that isn't closed by emergency vehicles and wants  
to experience firsthand the asphalt -buckling  
heat against his face. How inevitable  
a tire fire feels when it happens. A tire won't burn  
below 400°. But blame the pivot of a boot  
at the wrong time. Or the city of car batteries  
buried in oily dirt. Blame bad thoughts and the crumbs,  
which he learns are bits of rubber that can  
self-ignite. There's television footage  
of his neighborhood, and of volcanoes,  
and Titan missiles poised beneath the desert,  
and the crucible of souls he's convinced  
is destined for America. He has to get as close

as he can to such heat and shake his head  
at his brother who says the word fuck  
as they watch the unbraiding rope  
of smoke filmed from helicopters they  
hear overhead. The boy peddles  
to staging areas where men bend their bodies  
into the straps of heavy equipment  
to protect themselves from valves of hot fluid  
shooting from the televised event.  
Blame the plastic hubcaps with crests and fiery birds  
contracting like poisoned spiders inside the boy,  
as carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, styrene,  
butadiene flow freely from a flaming cresset,  
laying bare before all with eyes that might see  
the backs of freshly laid carpet,  
roofing materials, auto parts, the pissy foam  
beneath the old dog who dreams  
but has no soul. Blame the very food in its mouth,  
that we may know well what the fallen world is made of,  
and that it can, with little coaxing, catch flame  
and burn forever.

## HAIBUN

On the telenovela men in cowboy boots and jeans brush away the leaves from an ashen face, a dead man discovered in a leafy grave. I ride my bike home from the taquería and hear the tomb's whirligig astride the hot wind. Faded pinwheels and tokens punctuate the cemetery slope, their rattle the rapid fingers of actuaries filing through your earthly effects. I can tell you why I got sad. Amygdala, the teeth of the spillway release a fear of the obvious. Drenocorticotrophic hormones. The tenebrific lanes of storage units end in corrugated doors. The faces of palm trees hang over the city blocks like bearded patriarchs in limbo.

If I could only unfold a piece of paper and read something reassuring that you wrote to me. I'd reread that square of paper if I had it, but what I unfold over the handlebars reads they *brush away the leaves from an ashen face, a dead man discovered in a leafy grave*. Belt of molten sundown tightening over the horizon of palm trees, a fire the mountains reflect above rooftops. A porch light glows a yellow memory that doesn't belong to me. Behind a curtain, lamplight and computer monitors.

What belongs to me is the destiny  
of products taking off their underwear  
on our wedding night. The sea  
will take another dead laptop, salt water  
spiny with computers and car parts, the dark  
blue the weakest eye of a weary mind  
mistakes for sea. Inside the warped plastic  
there's a PDF file of my handwriting,  
a letter that says exactly what I feel inside  
the warped plastic, the swell of central  
processing units, flotsam and my letter to you  
that hurt you. The breeze picks up and the  
brittle underskirts of palm trees crash like a  
corrupted file. Like waves.

## TSUNAMI AS MISGUIDED KWANNON

her hypervigilance such that  
everything becomes a piercing  
a harrowing she can't turn off

her superpower a wound  
a lightning rod / and sponge / speaking  
the language of wounds to wounds

like echolocation that dopplers  
the contours of another's sorrow  
against her own ricocheted song

or touch subtle as the naked push broom  
of a star-nosed mole's tentacles  
nuzzling the bruised flesh of worms

or a nose for muscling out fresh blood  
old ghosts / the sweet fat of lost dreams  
like a winter-lean bear come spring

or feathery antennae's raw quiver  
pinched to ash by the hot sparks  
of disconsolate pheromones

her nervous system a glitter  
of neurotransmitters on fire

an electric-chaired switchboard  
short circuited / fuse blown

she's the exposed nerve:

exuviated snake / hulled bean  
husked cicada / chaffed seed  
peeled grape / shucked clam

she's the conduit / aperture / cracked  
mirror to all that's scintillant and broken



until her compassion mushroom clouds  
and swells like a fever / a red infection  
a rising tide of salt tears  
for the world's fractured core

how could she possibly stop herself  
from sweeping it all into her broken cradle  
to soothe and rock and weep over ?

(her fingers itchy to pilfer and spare  
what's plush and tender  
like the rabbit stolen by the moon)

how could she possibly stop herself  
from the mercy of washing it all clean  
in her terrible estuary of lamentations ?

## TSUNAMI GOES TO CANADA

she liked the clouds  
which coasted down close  
spoke to her sotto voce  
in the glamorous  
language of nebulizers

go away they seemed  
to breathe (though not *unkindly*)  
before sucking her deeper in

she stared smitten  
at the mountains / stricken  
afflicted by them  
besotted in the lunch room  
with an unquenchable crush

though maybe she worried too much  
about bears / about pepper spray

the falls gave her strange ideas  
about froth  
and glitter  
and churn  
and spume  
and spill

maybe someday she would pull back  
and let it all go to fall like that

a silvery levering of pachinko balls

a cat vomiting from a great height

perched swirl of vertigo lurching  
on the mountainside switchback

no taking back the swoon

## CENTO (FOUND IN THE MIDWEST\*)

The palamino has opened up morning  
in the tall grass west of the house,  
among antiques and clutter.  
Elizabeth takes her clothes off for the moon,  
hoping to soak 1,000 miles behind the wheel out of my hips.

The buzzards circled and the sky was grey.  
O lotus, daughter of the Sun,  
I can't remember all the sins I should.  
I'm never in my right mind for long, my wife says of me.

In the end  
like shades ascending, this morning's fog—  
small flakes still fell lightly  
and yet we know the heart.

Why live here instead of there? Does it matter?  
You with the gold tooth:  
sounds in season decorate the starlit night.

Every summer I lived with my grandparents—  
after a rain I yanked weeds in the flowerbed, crabgrass and foxtail.  
Is it pathetic to see the insides outside?

All that summer they could hear the wolves,  
guests in their best store-bought.  
If only we could touch like flowers bloom color.  
What we assumed all summer  
you must understand.

Here's hard country to travel: even the willows  
praise a day to do nothing.  
We are in the Niobrara stretched out:  
there are materials in this world that draw the body  
into the blooming essence of April.

The sky unrolls from the earth.  
Late in the year a three-quarters moon.  
I place flowers next to cold marble.  
It is more comfortable than any seat.  
Each morning, with the parting of the curtains, the world.

*\*The Midwest Quarterly, Summer, 2011.*

## RENEWING THE VOWS

My marriage is getting big and sex-addled. She swishes past me, naked from the belly down, or closes herself into herself, television the only noise. We drink margaritas too often, eat dinner in separate rooms, make amniotic

love in the pool, read Lorca aloud in bed, sulk and stare into dreams we can never remember. She yells at me to turn down *Astral Weeks*. I beg her to call her sister. She drops shoes everywhere, and I pick them up.

We put on pounds. We laugh at a comedian's bleak truths. We are inviolate, spinning through St. Cecilia at noon, just us and two wiry widows in that cold heaven. She slams the bedroom door. I stalk outside. She kisses my cheek.

We drink beer at a bar, conspiring to drive our crone of a neighbor insane. She berates me for neglecting her plants. I belittle her in front of a dozen friends. She tells me this is what I always do. I tell her she infantilizes me, buys me

underwear that is entirely too cute. We watch the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy every Sunday in January. She orders endless textiles from catalogues. We sway to Reggae all through June. She hides from her family, from mine,

from everyone. I insult her for refusing to vote. She insults me for believing it matters. We watch seahorses and dragons coalesce in clouds. She used to believe in cloudgazing. Our feet creak every morning. Our throats congeal

every night. Gray hairs begin to frame that dollbaby face. My back no longer lets me take it for granted. Our mortgage is nearly paid. The lawn grows thick and embarrassed. No one visits. We discuss the merits of quinoa, the verities

of booze, the infamy of Republicans. We drive to Hannibal, photograph that tired river town, smell the musk of Clemens on every stone. She reads, reads, reads. I fret about my teaching, and she says "I can't help you." She tends

the sick all day while I walk the dog, graze Facebook, eat organics. We shout. We chortle. We laze. We grunt. I ignore her calls from work. We drive to Zesto twice in one day, sugar sticky on our lips. She refuses to eat Vietnamese.

I refuse to stop smoking. The house leaks. The hospital overbills us. We assume old friends will never die. We used to cry together, but it's been moons. Our bikes rust in the garage. We put on the Dead and boogie past

midnight. She gets buzzed and remembers her parents, gone now seven years. We repeat our marriage vows, stare at the pictures of young strangers in the big album. She rubs calamine lotion on my skin. I massage her shoulders.

She sings a song about her boobs. I make the bed. She offers me mushrooms. I offer her bread. We fly to Kauai and Craig T. Nelson sits two tables away and we say nothing. We kayak down a river, unable to build a rhythm.

She endures my snoring. I endure her negativity. We vow to stop drinking for a week. We drink. I caress her face. She kisses me again and again and again. We pick cherry tomatoes. She sews my shirt. I make her an appointment.

She tells me my mom is acting funny. She wants to know where I put her iPad. I praise her toes. She tells me to shave. I put her green hat on a statue of Poseidon. She asks me why I never write poems about her. I tell her every poem is about her.

## BENEDICTION

We learn to say memory phonetically,  
the placement of tongue on teeth.

I have forgotten the compression of snow,  
how often *were* and *wish* appear in my speech.

This year: more verbs, more letters, less illness.  
Travel: landscapes of red rock rising from the road,  
salt water. Clean air. No humidity.

My only monsters the ones I invited in.

Hands clutching my back,  
men's hats and handkerchiefs.  
Braids and blondes.

I used to wear a black sweater every day.  
This year I will wear a green one.

COMMEMORATION  
BY LISA DORDAL  
(Finishing Line Press, 2012)

REVIEWED BY PATRICK THOMAS HENRY

The seventeen poems in Lisa Dordal's chapbook *Commemoration* strip remembrance and mourning of their ceremonial trappings and observe the practice of everyday living as a continuous recollection of those who have passed before us. But Dordal's poems care little for honeyed nostalgia, for words and sentiments that are "hovering in the air between us / like some sweet angel of you, returned." These poems are not elegies that lament the loss of the past, but calm meditations mulling over how we become ourselves because, and perhaps in spite, of the impediments to happiness, to easy explanations. This collection, quite understandably, is a wealthy store of sincere yet evocatively understated language, subtle yet precise euphemisms betraying concealed truths, and frank diction.

The chapbook opens with the seven-part "Holy Week," an elegy in which the poetic persona treks through her mother's depression, alcoholism, and death before arriving at her own spiritual and sexual awakenings. Such recurring images as hidden mason jars filled with bourbon, secreted notes, dyed hair, and makeup acquire symbolic freight in "Holy Week" and transmit the mother's fears and insecurities to the speaker. "Passing On," the sixth episode in this poem, meditates simultaneously on the mother's death and the speaker's inheritances via a note that the speaker discovers taped to the underside of a desk. The note relays how the mother came into possession of this piece of furniture: "*I received this desk from Sheila*, today's note begins, */ who bought it from her co-worker, Beth McKinley / who inherited it from Helen Smith, a friend dear to us both.*" Euphemism functions powerfully in these three lines, as elsewhere in "Holy Week": the lineage of women suggests the bequeathal of an estate and of identity, even as "a friend dear to us both" suggests sexual intimacy between the women—a precursor to the speaker's own sexual orientation. These notes and reminders convey the mother's latent homosexuality, addiction, and loneliness, and through these the speaker learns how each of these traits "passed on until it opened out inside of me / falling out of nothing."

This process of searching, locating, and striving cycles throughout Dordal's chapbook, yet it is often accompanied by stark reminders that the soul's findings are invisible to other observers. This shifts somewhat in "On the Way to Emmaus,"

when the speaker cannot penetrate the inner thoughts of Jesus and Cleopas, who are seen hiking to Emmaus:

*I know what it's like not to be seen but, still,  
my eyes faltered and all I saw was two men walking,  
one of whom, true stranger in the text, was you.*

Here, Dordal reminds us that sometimes we are the viewers—the outsiders—who cannot perceive a disguised reality. Still, her message comes across quietly, without blatant moralizing.

Dordal's poems avoid chastising her readers only because of the collection's greatest strength: her terse, yet sincere, diction. These poems challenge presumptions with a candidness that can only stem from common sense: of course, these poems seem to say, if others appear inscrutable to me, I must be equally impossible to read. This awareness charges the appeal in "A Dream for the Earth," in which the persona pens a letter responding to Robert Hass's inability to see beyond superficial details in his famous poem "State of the Planet." Similarly, the two-part "Christmas Pageant" plays with this in recalling a childhood pageant in the first section, while the second component depicts a visiting poet dissecting and misreading that reflection; the visiting poet continuously fails to navigate these lines about a Christmas pageant, and he paddles confusedly through a stream of thoughts with numerous strokes of "Unless of course, unless of course..."

The sparseness in the best of Dordal's lines causes her more cumbersome phrases to sound foreign and heavy-handed, if not overwrought. "Small Metal Boy," a poem that deftly chastises a culture that prizes male crudeness, is one site of this tension. The central conceit of this poem is a functional kitchen decoration—a metal Grecian boy that, when a button is pushed, urinates whiskey into a glass. The Greek child, the "Ancient Age" of the dispensed whiskey, and the "coliseum of Woodlawn Avenue" suggest that this male privilege is outmoded, but the second stanza's figure of the speaker's grandfather, who always pulls over by Al's Market to urinate in the shrubs, informs us that this preference for masculinity is at least as insidious as Hellenic allusions in poetry. The three lines of the final stanza identify the inequality at work: these privileges would never be afforded to a girl due to the aesthetics of the patriarchy's Old Boys' Club. The whiskey-pissing statue and the grandfather

*Could never be a girl. The unseemly squat.  
Or standing there—naked and seductive—  
wet whiskey on her thighs.*



While this closing stanza is indicative of Dordal's acerbic frankness, the first two stanzas are redundant. Here, the repetition forcefully reminds us of easily remembered images. Dordal harps on the diminutive features of the statue, with "small" appearing three times in the body of the piece: "the small metal boy" with "the small metal penis," a body part later referenced as the "small public part." Likewise, redundancy drums into the poem when the grandfather stops to "unzip his pants / and piss straight into the mess of scraggly bushes." A few excisions in the first two stanzas could have amplified the speaker's discontent, preparing readers for the last stanza's articulation of the new aesthetic of the female body—an art that is "naked and seductive," rendering all these bawdy, urinating men lewd at best.

The collection nonetheless reveals how we ultimately stumble into a self-awareness that remains invisible to others. Speaking precisely this message, "The Lies That Save Us" provides a fitting coda for *Commemoration*. Here, a pair of lovers has embarked on a road trip through Georgia, and the people they've encountered constantly ask, "Are you sisters?" The poem's women respond in unison:

*Yes, we answer, Twins, even.  
Though we are dressed similarly  
[. . .]  
we look nothing alike.  
Thought so, people say,  
as if they have figured out  
some secret code.*

The other characters only see confirmation of what they already believe and desire. To fulfill those values and yearnings, the climax of this poem hinges on the muddle of the "secret code." Have these people pegged the women as lesbians? Do they fall for the ruse of twinship, reading the matching clothes as a sign of sisterly closeness? It hardly matters. The lovers in "The Lies That Save Us" manipulate this ambiguity: it saves them from misinterpretations, from harsh Southern judgments.

What matters in this poem, as elsewhere in Dordal's chapbook, are the unspoken sensations and the ghostly presences that form us—what Dordal depicts as "the power of things unseen: / of atoms, quarks, and auras / and all the love that lies between." *Commemoration* avoids the easy resolution of surrendering to nostalgia and dreams of a fulfilling community. Though surrounded by lovers and friends and family, the poetic personae in Dordal's book journey through

their reflections alone. Progress, awareness, selfhood: these are private riches, acquired through introspection and stored in the soul, that will remain personal secrets, invisible to the world. Others will stare, oblivious to this inner self that her speakers celebrate simply by living. Closing the volume in another of those provocative ambiguities, Dordal at once dismisses and welcomes these ogling strangers: “all they can see,” she writes, “is something.”

*CLANGINGS*  
BY STEVEN CRAMER  
(Sarabande Books, 2012)

REVIEWED BY DYLAN MACE

More than ten years ago, I worked in an emergency room as a clerk. With the flow of heart attacks and car crashes, strokes and lacerations, came the crisis patients. Mostly, they were suicidal. Ambulances rushed them in, brought them to the locked rooms where nurses fed them a slurry of charcoal to counteract whatever poison they had ingested. By the time I saw them, their eyes were red and swollen, their mouths stained black from vomiting charcoal. They were pitiable; and easily understood. Sometimes it seems better to end it. More rarely, the patients were psychotic.

One of the many symptoms sometimes displayed by people experiencing psychosis is clanging, which is typified by compulsive rhyming and alliteration, the use of words based on how their sounds relate to other words, rather than their meaning, and disorganized speech. In his book *Clangings*, Steven Cramer has taken this symptom as the basis for a collection of poems.

My first experience of clanging was in one of the crisis rooms, while attempting to get personal information from a schizophrenic patient. His eyes glanced around the room, and he incorporated the things that he saw into a rush of alliteration and rhyme. Even though I could see his sources, his speaking made little sense. I asked his name and he answered with a singsong rhyme, which, so far as I could tell, bore no information that I needed. Another patient was paranoid and psychotic, but was deemed by the doctor and social worker to not need inpatient care. So, in the middle of the night, during a rare downtime in the emergency room, he sat waiting in the lobby and talked to me until his cab arrived. He told me a little about his life, but he kept veering into concerns about aliens. There were moments of lucidity, then he'd plunge back into his rhythmic concerns about the aliens' plans. The cab took terribly long to arrive. Reading *Clangings*, I had another experience of the rhythm, rhyme and alliteration

*feral sheikhs, in the sheets, amigo*  
*Wrecked rexes, they preach shrieks,*  
*refluxes inbred, steppe-tundra freeze reflex.*  
*A good sniff, out snorts an inner wooly rhino.*

*Clangings* feels like a book-length poem rather than a collection. The entire collection is tightly rhymed in more or less rhyming quatrains. This structure allows the reader a way through the chaos of the poetry, though it is not easy going (reading a few pages left me exhausted as those long-ago conversations). Cramer is acrobatic in his wordplay, and the reader is quickly caught up in this. The simple structure of the quatrains belies the difficult syntax and slang and creates the reading equivalent of running down a steep hill, when momentum is the way that the runner keeps their footing. Thrown into this, are moments of lucidity. After being battered by lines like:

*If an elf owl's about to kill, he'll nick  
its greedies in time, strafe my mouth,  
take a summer pump and cool off...  
Dickey's what a tear in the eye'll reflect*

the reader suddenly comes across something like

*I'm speaking with my mother's voice  
because she always told me what to say.  
Because he always told me what to say,  
I'm speaking with my father's voice.*

It may seem a welcome break, but in the rush of clangings that the reader is accustomed to, such clarity becomes alien. They trip the reader as much as they provide a point of relief, and are quickly followed by the difficult and perhaps nonsensical words that follow.

Throughout *Clangings*, in spite of the tumult of the narrator, Cramer manages to convey portions of the life of the character, though it is usually difficult to put a finger on specifics. The reader grasps at scraps and tries to cohere them into a narrative. Sometimes a relatively obvious meaning hides, easily, within a poem. Multiple readings bring clarity. I had to read passages such as

*Stashed my secret name in its haven.  
Think I mean dick when I say Dickey?—  
I do and I don't; or did, but won't say  
anyway. Makes a greener chameleon [...]*

at least twice before it struck how simple the meanings can be. The book contains a biography of casual abuse from parents, lost homosexual love and in-

ability to maintain normal human relations because of mental illness. The themes of this biography are not particularly unusual. It is the clangings and confusion Cramer uses that give the reader a deeper understanding of the narrator, that give us some insight into his suffering and his inability to hold onto reality.

Cramer has done his research while writing this collection. Numerous lines come from books and articles about the disorganized thinking that manifests during psychotic mental illness. He has taken these phrases, modified and repurposed them for the poems. These lines, however, are inconspicuous within the poems. It was only when I finished reading that I noticed the citations at the end and knew that they were not Cramer's. That the whole sounds so similar to these legitimately psychotic phrases shows that his research allowed him the ability to mimic the sounds and rhythm of speech of psychotic individuals. Cramer's method also suggests that the human experience of any person, be they mentally ill or not, is relatively similar to that of the rest of the species. Even when their communication is garbled and disjointed, we are able to glean meaning and understanding, and to empathize with their suffering.

I had not thought much of the time when I worked in the emergency room, until reading *Clangings*. Only a few pages into the collection, I remembered those experiences clearly, as if they had just happened, propelled by stanzas, such as:

*the outlets, swipe the prints  
off DVDs, weep up the tea  
stains where once were coffee.  
Not some seep from him since.*

These moments pile up and overwhelm. I had this reaction initially, eager to get through the experience. This in itself would have made me declare Steven Cramer's book a success—he hit close to the mark and was able to vividly recreate such disorienting, and often impossible, conversations. However, as I made my way through this collection, I realized that there were bits that I could connect together to find meaning and understanding in the confusion. *Clangings* made me remember the humanity of those people, to think again about the frustration and fear experienced when confronted by mental illness, no doubt to the greatest extent by those who are ill; to empathize with those patients who so confused and frightened me over a decade ago.

THE FRAME CALLED RUIN  
BY HADARA BAR-NADAV  
(New Issues, 2012)

REVIEWED BY MICHAEL MCLANE

I should admit up front that I've been waiting for Hadara Bar-Nadav's second collection of poems for some time. Her first collection, *A Glass of Milk to Kiss Good Night* (2007), was a relentless hunger of a book whose opening scenes of butchering were breathtaking and deeply unsettling. I return to them again and again. And so I'll also readily admit that when I sat down to start distributing the review copies received from numerous presses at the end of the year and opened a New Issues package to find *The Frame Called Ruin*, I announced to the otherwise unoccupied room "this one is mine, all mine." I was not disappointed.

*The Frame Called Ruin* is as much a study in place and space (and the tragedies that try to fracture the former from the latter) as it is an ekphrastic exercise. The "Frame" of the title envelops the confines created by buildings and cities, particularly those under siege, just as much as it does the edges of Rothko's paintings, Nevelson's sculptures, and the walls of Zaha Hadid's architectural brilliance. It seems no small coincidence that the artists who receive the bulk of Bar-Nadav's attention all hailed from places of long-running strife and revolution—Rothko and Nevelson from Czarist Russia and Hadid from Baghdad. Such places are claimed and reclaimed through violence, yet these artists transcend their fractured roots and identities through artistry in the same way that the love and humor and lyricism at which Bar-Nadav is so adept allows her speakers to transcend the horrors that surround them. Creation is the ever-present counterbalance to oblivion and hate as illustrated in her first poem for Nevelson, "Night, White and Gold," when she writes "A wall has / certain mass and weight. Focus on forms and vacancies. I own my voids, deepest black. / And now my secret is out: I'm motherhouse" or in "III. Operatic Space," where Hadid's curving, effortless architectures illustrate how "Like any set of religious guides / these things are fluid, not rigid. Even building can allow / air and light. Through precision and interpretation / you can eliminate wasted space."

There are small reclamations in so many of these poems. There is no wasted place, no matter how bombed or burned, as long as making and longing arise from the rubble. Likewise, there is no wasted space here, even when the terse, constrictive lines that make up much of the book give way to fluid prose of

the artist persona poems. Even the transitional spaces in the poems—between peace and war, between calm and tumult, between one Rothko red and another—provide opportunity for reflection and to be engulfed, whether by passion or pain, as with the speaker in “III. The Art of Untitled” when she says

*A period says when to begin or end but who really knows. I spend hours  
and days  
inside red trying to solve syntax. Savage. Salve. Save.*

Even within the labyrinth, the pinnacle of confinement and misdirection, the minotaur of the “Inside the Maze” series find ways to transcend the literal and categorical restraints placed upon him. The box forms of the poems belie the reflections and desires of a being that is as lonely as he is monstrous, as fanciful as he is ravenous

*In springtime, my lush season  
To feed, I never even try to  
Leave. Berries (reds and deep  
blues) line the maze plentiful  
and nipple sweet [...]*

*[...] I could  
Ram the walls and tunnel through  
But where would I live? Exile.  
And why leave? Pariah. Derelict.  
My palatable palace [...]*

Nevelson and Hadid represent another site of constraint and violence in the collection that appear in many of Bar-Nadav’s less prominent characters as well—the female body. Both women overcame overt prejudices in their respective disciplines and Bar-Nadav addresses these conflicts both overtly, as in Nevelson’s question about her sculpture “If I were a man would you call it ‘dollhouse,’” and more subtly in the fluid and fertile images ascribed to Hadid’s buildings. However, women in other poems are subject to far more heinous kinds of violence that points back to an effort to frame, constrain, and reduce. In “Lust and Smoke,” the speaker begins “You overwhelm me with your dress / always lifting, always falling. / Velvet parting” only to lose all of the “you” except the dress “breathhtaking on TV, the reporter bleeding from her mouth,” the ruin complete by the closing lines. Likewise, Snow White is disembodied to nothing more than a televised head in “I Used to Be Snow White” and the woman in “Show Me Yours” is reduced to

*The names you yell at night,  
In the day, The names  
You chew like pebbled break.*

*Breakage is such sweet sorrow*

Nonetheless, love and companionship are what keep the darkness at bay in these poems. Though it does not seem to have the personal immediacy of *A Glass of Milk to Kiss Good Night*, the new collection is every bit as unrelenting in its brutality, and also its healing, as Bar-Nadav's earlier work. From the opening image of Tel Aviv's face wearing "a makeup of ash," we are in the heart of ruin that is simultaneously reiterated and renounced. The world explodes again and again, "Days crumble unceremoniously," only to reveal some small blossoming in the bedlam. In one of the book's most startling moments, amidst the knifed and torn and mutated world of "Let Me Hold the Kaleidoscope," two lovers rush to their room where

*Everything unbuttons and we  
forget about war,  
its itchy apparatus.*

*Romance nevertheless is true,  
The moon a cluster of shredded sequins,  
Deconstruction a song for two.*

Likewise, in "Blur," victims of the Eilat suicide bombing long for "wine / to drown this red day" and describe the aftermath of the explosion:

*lights and fire balloons,  
a painterly gasoline blur.  
Let's find a sailboat,  
bread, za'atar and figs  
and watch the distance burn.*

These moments, among many in the book, illustrate an unwillingness to be framed, both in terms of constraint and in terms of incrimination, by the horror humans are willing to visit upon one another. Life is affirmed again and again, in spite of the crumbling Twin Towers or the wreckage of a baby carriage abandoned on the beach, as in the speaker of "Meet Me (Breathless)" who begs a companion to "Bring your accordion mouth and your love / of emptiness. Bring a fire and the wild nest of your neck. Bring your open throat."



Even in Bar-Nadav's litanies that choose as their focal point phrases such as "my wife," "less lonely," and "to be dead," we find that the commonalities and the finalities of being human bind more closely than any framework's religion and geopolitics have to offer. We rise from ruin in the same impossible ways to watch, like Rothko "how slowly life eats. And so full of color."

*The Frame Called Ruin* is, like the "impossible stairs" in one of its poems—kaleidoscopic, so much "torsion and thrust." For every step, there is uncertain footing, a likely fall. The reader feels them equally, especially in the poet's uncanny knack for condensation, for tiny couplets that explode in their oscillating humor and devastation. Bar-Nadav sums up our persistent cycle of failure and longing in one unfettered line:

*We love beyond all these drippings,  
a love that lasts.*

# SHAKING THE KALEIDOSCOPE

BY KATE KINGSTON

(Lost Horse Press, 2012)

REVIEWED BY NANCY TAKACS

Kate Kingston weaves culture, language, and myth from Spain and Mexico, throughout her first book, *Shaking the Kaleidoscope*, in surprising ways, engaging the reader with images from her travels there, as well as from her childhood in Wisconsin and her adult life in the American west. Balancing her desire for humanity and beauty against a world of loss and violence, she observes with a level eye, and reconciles this looking at the world dead on, sometimes with humor, but always with verve.

The book begins with poems about Lorca. Kingston travels widely in Spain, was a Spanish professor, and is currently a poetry translator. Interspersed through her Lorca poems are sections of the title poem, which include memories of an accident when she fell as a child as well as one in which her son almost died. The voice throughout the five parts of this poem cannot suppress her memories of violence:

*I cannot recall violence [...]  
I cannot recall pistachios,  
the way the shell cracks between my teeth,  
or myself dropping  
from a metal  
bar chipping my front  
tooth on happiness,  
the stain of blood in the sand,  
nothing like the matador  
gored in the groin,  
so that my lament rises  
up next to Lorca  
and smells of wet ashes.*

The sections of the poem build with the thread of violent events we might witness in our everyday lives, such as a refusal to someone begging, and the near-death of a loved one in the powerful, "Shaking the Kaleidoscope III," a piece about her young son's near-asphyxiation, and the distance and paralysis felt when one force clashes violently against another:

*I cannot recall violence,  
but one morning my son's face  
turned blue. I forced  
my own breath into his lungs,  
cannot recall the sound of waves  
claiming shore or the way  
his feet toed-in, only the cadence  
of silence, nothing like  
the chain of mountain peaks  
suffering from lack of rain.*

*I cannot recall the way a knife  
slices coconut into quarter moon  
wedges, cannot recall cleats  
biting into cobblestone, nor the bull  
lifting his horns to the groin,  
the matador spilling onto sand,  
nothing like the pomegranate  
or the blue face of a child  
when his lungs will not pull air,  
nothing like exhaust filling  
my nostrils or pesetas  
dropping into an open palm.*

The pulse of the five-section poem is violence, and it is unforgettable. This underscores her compassion for Lorca, his poetry, his perseverance in facing, and not fleeing from, possible assassination.

“What Does Lorca Own?,” placed in his summer home Huerta de San Vicente in Grenada, Spain, also shows Kingston’s connection with him as a writer, in the following lines:

*Lorca owns a room full of assonance placating  
his pen with ohs and ahs. He begins to float,  
and the room becomes a river, current and undertow...*

*...Twenty-six boots cross  
the plaza, worn-down heels bring him men  
filled with bullets and lime. When he closes his eyes:*

*he sees the stray dog approach his knee, the stray  
dog sniff his crotch, the stray dog lick his face...*

*Lorca owns the word Green.*

The poet discovers meaning for herself in both Spanish and English, in her interaction with the tangible, learning what is symbolic in one culture could have a different meaning in another, although in her own poetic language, she intersects them both, creates anew. For example, the word “green” connotes death in the Spanish language, as opposed to new life in English. In several of her poems, she uses this word, allowing both meanings to surface, not choosing one over the other, because both languages are on her tongue and in her consciousness. Both meanings add to the context. She also searches in her comparisons for evidence of one world inside the other, cultures skipping boundaries.

As an example, although many of her images in the book point to a less anxious and more gentle Mexico, while visiting Mayan ruins she learns how women were killed or sacrificed, brutality against women evident in this culture, with “bruised skulls / found in the cenote,” how the “the women were struck, pushed, / over an edge into the sweet water / this underground river, and she leaves “clutching the cabled rail ready to steady [her] descent.” Kingston returns to snorkel this underground river in “Mayan Riviera Wedding” after her daughter’s wedding there, alone, to a cave where she pulls out a vigil candle that she lights as she feels fish surface, and watches bats fly around her: “murceilagós, struggle[ing] / with light, not unlike my daughter—her complicated veil, / its lace teeth catching on doorknobs, on coat hangers.” This re-visitation of the place where the women were killed suggests her need to mourn them, as well as to celebrate their lives, to both mourn and celebrate her daughter’s marriage. She begins “a new altar, / a piece of stalagmite.”

Kingston directs our attention to an American misunderstanding of art, another kind of violence. In the poem “Concourse A Exhibit,” an airport art exhibiting Denver was screened and critiqued as “inappropriate” because some of the artists’ works had images of skeletons; however, the poem suggests looking at art for art’s sake is what is important. Travelers are aware of what could happen on a plane and don’t have to be protected from a painting’s “eye socket of the skeleton staring back / as [they] clutch [their] boarding pass and identification in one hand, / [their] carry-on in the other”; or from the image of “bones / when the country is in code orange...”

Kingston writes of the world’s inconsistencies and tragedies, but also writes as strongly about joy. In “History of My Body” she celebrates:

*This body remembers trick-or-treat, its Snickers bars  
and bruised apples. This body remembers the way dried leaves  
scratch the skin when I somersault into the pile  
of tattooed veins—oak, elm, maple—then wrap myself  
in a sarong of silver water. Inside this body, flies buzz,  
this body with cake on its tongue.*

In the final poem of *Shaking the Kaleidoscope*, “When Anna Meets for Lunch,” she intimates to a friend: “We are pearls born in the clam’s lust for sand. We are / coal before the diamond. What can pressure make of us now / taking us by the hand into the kaleidoscope of dark?”

Kingston’s poems embody *duende*, a term invented by Lorca who believed all good art must have it, saying: “The *duende*, then, is a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought. I have heard an old maestro of the guitar say, ‘The *duende* is not in the throat; the *duende* climbs inside you, from the inside of the feet.’” Christopher Maurer, editor of *In Duende*, says, “The *duende* seizes not only the performer but also the audience, creating conditions where art can be understood spontaneously with little, if any, conscious effort.” This is what Kate Kingston’s poetry does. With a forthright and fresh voice, dazzling imagery, and a conscience, it calls us home.

SERMONS AND LECTURES BOTH BLANK  
AND RELENTLESS

BY MATT HART  
(Typecast Publishing, 2012)

REVIEWED BY ADAM LOVE

*I raise my Black Flag to declare my dis-allegiance  
Always do the opposite of anything I tell you  
I'll do it too Whatever you say*

Matt Hart's newest collection, *Sermons and Lectures Both Blank and Relentless*, is chock-full of opposites and a love/hate relationship for opposites. At times both Taoistic and sagacious, dark and brooding, the collection is honest and open—always in love with itself and its many worlds. It's essentially a book that has been waiting to be written for the longest/shortest time. It attempts to re-define the entire human experience, or perhaps to reconnect with it, in the digital age: in this very time that defines us:

*How to grow and grow along without turning  
into a devil/red giant Or if one must, how also to be  
a sequoia One thing's certain: I won't do it typing  
The sun a sort of burning white hole in my pocket  
Better to spend life spending one's life, shouting  
and rocketing, blasting the igloo*

Hart argues that it's "impossible to say anything for sure," that all men are mortal—it's as if his speaker is trying to tell its readers how short the human life can be. But one thing that nearly seems infinite is the idea that technology, and our use of it, will likely outlast us. However, it's not necessarily something Hart seems to be confident in—and treats it more as a curse: "I wake up typing letters / Alphabet, alphabet—thought not to anyone in particular / To the circus To Fluoride Beelzebub or Beelzebubba."

As a front-man of the punk band TRAVEL (the book is available with a full album by Hart's band, with Hart himself shouting each poem over a discordant and harmonic wail of guitar and drum), the speaker throughout Hart's book constantly references its own punk roots. Artists like Patti Smith and Alice Cooper, among others, are often conjured or quoted directly: "Buried / in the forest by seven singing dwarves, still waiting for a kiss / from The Slits or Patti

Smith But ‘When we die we go / to recess’ is the end, that’s it Which seems perfect.” And each of the five poems of the book surmount as a kind of private concert for the reader, where he/she may find themselves in the relentless urgency of their own moshpit on the page.

The book is perhaps best experienced in its entirety, as a cohesive piece, like an album. The collection is woven from the ashes of burnt vinyls and fistfuls of postmodern algorithms. What makes this such a stand out, fiery bundle of poetry is the substance between the quirks and tics of a neurotic and self-afflicted speaker, who might have more in common with contemporary language and the inner world, than most voices could strive for.

*Walking home drunk the other night, I said a bunch of weird, good things  
and you did, too and while it’s hard to remember exactly what,  
the shadows of what and the feelings still linger—even now,  
even sober—we were so fired up, because  
the night was so ridiculously in flower, so and so and me and you*

*electrified and shocking, terrific and true, and we were laughing together,  
leaving our strung out presence like presents around the city,  
me an amplifier and you a defender.*

The heart of the book seems to be the third poem, “Amplifier to Defender,” from which the above excerpt is taken, where the speaker suddenly jolts into a strikingly different tone separate from the punk-driven, near non-sequitor declarative sentences and brooding musings throughout the sections titled “Lamplighter” and “Sermons and Lectures.” Hart invites the speaker into a private arena, as if “Amplifier to Defender” were really a letter written to a lover and left on a kitchen counter. After realizing its clear and direct command, the poet merely diced it up with line breaks:

*Just back from running—it seems I am always writing to you  
when I’m just back from running, but that’s what happens:  
My mind in motion works better in motion, or maybe it only works  
more furiously. Or happily, clearly, seriously. My plan is to make a few notes  
on who we are/what we might be.*

It is in this poem where Hart might be at his most poignant with lines like “As Matthew Rohrer / put it, / ‘I must learn to say the things I never intended to say,’ and then / I want to add: I also want to learn to say all the things I intend-

ed to say— / intended and unintended in the very same breath.” A dualistic view on both poetry and the act of creating poetry; vision and near desperation, as conflicted and complicated as a Jack Myers poem; verse that conjures up an almost William Carlos Williamsian sentiment that is completely devoid of sentimentality.

The syntax of the book alters between use of white space and non-sequitur lines; the speaker seems to remain keenly in tune with the trials and tribulations of a postmodern world, both in the literary and worldly sense, through the duration of the collection. It’s as if the speaker present throughout the entire collection treats the notion of postmodernism and its uncertainties—at some times absurdness—as a metaphor for the human condition he is perplexed by and obsessed with: “To live we keep living    Some minutes / The instructions    You read and you weep / Or you act and then curtain    I can’t stand / the suffering, so give ‘em enough rope, / then occupy my life with anthemic meander.” At times comical and nearly acrid, the final poem, “Blood Brothers, Weird Sisters,” seems to do exactly what the speaker is obsessed with: dis/re-connecting the human life to its own vague, infinite temporality. The speaker becomes a proselyte who doesn’t proselytize:

*At the root of human being  
is a dot disconnected, wishing to be connected in earnest  
to a mission, a set of instructions, a deep inflated thing,  
hissing and red with a nozzle and a label.  
You’re a rabbit painted sunset, so I speak of you fondly  
to anyone and everyone who will listen to the music.  
And whoever won’t listen will also have to listen,  
you can bet I’ll keep singing/find a way.*

It’s easy to assume, while listening to the album version of *Sermons and Lectures*, that Hart might be referring to himself as the punk rock poet he is. The collection, in and of itself, is a grungy album in a dank basement of some shitty bar where kids with half-greased Mohawks sip PBR under the cold blue glow of a LaBatt sign. And this is where all the meaning is: the voice throughout *Sermons and Lectures* is a voice that will consistently keep singing and find a way to make its readers listen as well. Perhaps what’s most interesting is how the untraditional line breaks and use of white space mirror the untraditional music that classically defines punk rock—rhythm and discordance: “Nature awaits us, / and Nature’s got fire    I’ve been cool for too many / summers    Temperature is rising    Joe Strummer.”



*Sermons and Lectures both Blank and Relentless* is a book that will leave its readers both satiated and dissatisfied, as each reader will be moved by Hart's darkly tender observations—at times to the point where they might feel as if they're staring into a mirror and simultaneously frustrated that they will never be able to write poems the way Matt Hart does. Perhaps most importantly, it's a book of poems the reader will want to return to again and again, constantly finding new meanings—as any good collection of verse (or album) should do.

Because, as Hart tells us,

*Nothing is perfectly nailed to the wall.*

*I want as much as possible for the carnival of what is. Better worn out and wary, than a mannequin pretending. "The slightest loss of attention leads to death," said Frank O'Hara. I say: "Be prepared for the darkness*

*when it takes you, but stay alive and stay light  
for as long as you can."*

- Cindy Hunter Morgan, *The Sultan, The Skater, The Bicycle Maker*, 2012, Ledge Press
- Christopher Stackhouse, *Plural*, Counterpath Press, 2012
- Hannah Gamble, *Your Invitation to a Modest Breakfast*, FENCE Books, 2012
- Brandon Downing, *Mellow Actions*, FENCE Books, 2012
- Clark Coolidge, *88 Sonnets*, FENCE Books, 2013
- Jeff Hardin, *Notes for a Praise Book*, Jacar Press, 2012
- James A. Barnhart, *Poetry: Man Again Awarded Fire*, Vantage Press, 2012
- Marni Ludwig, *Pinwheel*, New Issue Press, Western Michigan University, 2013
- David Keplinger, *The Most Natural Thing*, New Issue Press, Western Michigan University, 2013
- Mark Irwin, *Large White House Speaking*, New Issue Press, Western Michigan University, 2013
- Jaswinder Bolina, *Phantom Camera*, New Issue Press, Western Michigan University, 2013
- Liz Stephens, *the days are gods* (memoir), University of Nebraska Press, 2013

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JEFFREY C. ALFIER'S latest chapbook is *The City Without Her* (Kindred Spirit Press, 2012), and his first full-length book of poems, *The Wolf Yearling*, was published recently by Silver Birch Press. He finds poems amid the abandoned and ruined places of the earth. His mom is 83 but she still yells at him for "jack-assing around" such wastes.

TERESA CADER is the author of *Guests*, which won the Norma Farber First Book Award and The Journal Award (Ohio State), and *The Paper Wasp* and *History of Hurricanes*, both from TriQuarterly Books/Northwestern. Her awards include two fellowships from the National Endowment, the George Bogin Memorial Award, and fellowships from the Bunting Institute/Radcliffe, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Bread Loaf Writers Conference, and MacDowell. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *AGNI*, *Plume*, *Harvard Review*, *Poetry*, *Slate*, *Ploughshares*, *FIELD*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, and *Southwest Review*. She is on the faculty of the low-residency MFA program at Lesley University.

TOBI COGSWELL is a three-time Pushcart nominee and a Best of the Net nominee. Credits include or are forthcoming in various journals in the US, UK, Sweden, and Australia. Her fifth and latest chapbook is *"Lit Up"* (Kindred Spirit Press). She is the co-editor of *San Pedro River Review* ([www.sprreview.com](http://www.sprreview.com)).

CHRISTOPHER COKINOS is the author of three books of literary nonfiction, *Hope Is the Thing with Feathers: A Personal Chronicle of Vanished Birds* (Tarcher/Putnam, 2000) and *The Fallen Sky: An Intimate History of Shooting Stars* (Tarcher/Penguin, 2009), as well as the forthcoming *Bodies, of the Holocene* (Truman). These poems are from a forthcoming collection, *Held as Earth* (Finishing Line). His work has appeared in many magazines, including *Poetry*, *The American Scholar*, *Pank*, *Manoa*, *Shenandoah*, *Science*, *The Iowa Review*, *Hawk and Handsaw*, and *Orion*. Cokinos teaches in the MFA program at the University of Arizona, where he is affiliated faculty with the Institute of the Environment.

ERICA DAWSON'S first collection of poems, *Big-Eyed Afraid* (Waywiser 2007), won the 2006 Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize. Her new collection, *The Small Blades Hurt*, is forthcoming from Measure Press. Her poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry*, *Poetry: A Pocket Anthology*, *Harvard Review*, and other journals and anthologies. She teaches in the undergraduate, and the low-residency MFA, program at University of Tampa.

JOY GAINES-FRIEDLER'S work is widely published in journals, including *Rattle*, *Margie*, *The New York Quarterly*, and others. Her first full-length book

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MARIE GAUTHIER is the author of a chapbook, *Hunger All Inside* (Finishing Line Press, 2009), and recent poems can be read in *burntdistrict*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Redactions: Poetry, Poetics, & Prose*, and elsewhere. She won a 2008 Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Poetry Prize in addition to Honorable Mention in 2010. She lives with her family in Shelburne Falls, MA where she works for Tupelo Press and co-curates the Collected Poets Series (collectedpoets.com).

JUDY HALEBSKY'S book, *Sky=Empty*, won New Issues Poetry Prize and was a finalist for the California Book Award. Her second collection, *Tree Line*, will be published by New Issues in 2014. The MacDowell Colony, the Millay Colony, and the Japanese Ministry of Culture have supported her work. Originally from Halifax, Nova Scotia, she now lives in San Francisco and teaches at Dominican University of California.

CHRIS HAVEN'S poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in a number of journals, including *Blackbird*, *Smartish Pace*, *Poet Lore*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Slice Magazine*, and *Seneca Review*. He teaches creative writing at Grand Valley State University in Michigan and edits the journal *Wake: Great Lakes Thought & Culture*.

PATRICK THOMAS HENRY holds an MA in English Literature from Bucknell University and an MFA in Creative Writing from Rutgers University. Currently, he is pursuing his PhD at George Washington University. His fiction, poetry, and reviews have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Lowestoft Chronicle*, *The Siren*, *Green Briar Review*, *Revolution House*, *The Writing Disorder*, *The Writing Disorder Anthology*, *Northville Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Modern Language Studies*, and *The Short Review*. He also contributes to The Story Prize's blog. He lives in Alexandria, VA with his girlfriend and their cat.

SEAN HOWARD is the author of *Local Calls* (Cape Breton University Press, 2009) and *Incitements* (Gaspereau Press, 2011). His poetry has been published in numerous Canadian and international magazines, and anthologized in *The Best Canadian Poetry in English 2011* (Tightrope Books).

LES KAY is a doctoral candidate at the University of Cincinnati. His poetry has appeared in a variety of literary journals including *Tar River Poetry*, *Eclipse*, *PANK*, *Jabberwock Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *la fovea*, *Blue Earth Review*, *Redactions*, *Cellpoems*, and is forthcoming in *Whiskey Island* and *Santa Clara Review*. He lives in Cincinnati with his wife, three very small dogs, and their collective imaginations.

DANIEL TAKESHI KRAUSE'S work has appeared in two languages, three countries, and four dimensions. His work has been performed or printed most recently in *Vesal*; at the Banff Center in Alberta, Canada; and in *A Bad Penny Review*. Daniel currently lives in Salt Lake City where he's a fiction editor for *Quarterly West* and also studies and teaches creative writing at The University of Utah.

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ADAM LOVE'S work has appeared in *MiPoesias*, *Conte: A Journal of Narrative Writing*, *Borderline*, and *Big Muddy: A Journal of the Mississippi River Valley*. He is the author of *Another Small Fire* (Tired Hearts Press, 2013), a chapbook of poems. He was nominated for a 2013 Pushcart Prize. He holds an MFA in Poetry and Creative Non-Fiction from Vermont College of Fine Arts.

DYLAN MACE received his Environmental Humanities MS from the University of Utah. He is a sometime bookartist and small-scale orchardist with a fascination for the liminal, particularly the point of contact between humans and the non-human environment.

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WILLIAM NEUMIRE'S recent work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Laurel Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Hollins Critic*, and *Salamander*. In

addition to writing, he currently serves as an assistant editor for Brickhouse Books, as well as the literary magazine *Verdad*. These days he finds himself enjoying barbecued shrimp in hoysen sauce. (Have you tried this hoysen sauce? It's delicious on just about everything.)

JOHN A. NIEVES has poems forthcoming or recently published in journals such as: *Southern Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Ninth Letter*, *Poetry Northwest*, and *Cincinnati Review*. He won the 2011 Indiana Review Poetry Prize and the 2010 Southeast Review AWP Short Poetry contest. John received his MA in Creative Writing from USF in 2006 and his PhD in English from the University of Missouri in 2012.

DAN O'BRIEN is a poet and playwright in Los Angeles. His play about journalist Paul Watson, *The Body of an American*, recently received the inaugural Edward M. Kennedy Prize for Drama, and will have its UK premiere at the Gate Theatre in London next season.

EMMA RAMEY is co-poetry editor for *DIAGRAM*, and her work has appeared recently or is forthcoming in *Pleiades*, *Barrow Street*, *Passages North*, *1110*, and *Rabbit Catastrophe Review*, among others.

JESSY RANDALL'S collection of poems *A Day in Boyland* was a finalist for the Colorado Book Award. She has a new collection, *Injecting Dreams into Cows*, forthcoming from Red Hen this year. Lately she's been making a lot of poetry comics and diagrams. [personalwebs.coloradocollege.edu/~jrandall/](http://personalwebs.coloradocollege.edu/~jrandall/)

TODD ROBINSON dwells in a crumbling manse in a leafy old neighborhood of Omaha, Nebraska. He can often be seen thereabouts walking a hundred-pound Chesapeake Bay Retriever by the name of Touchdown Jesus, though he has never owned a dog. He (the human, not the hound) writes at a glacial pace, but did manage to publish his first book, *Note at Heart Rock*, with Main Street Rag Press in the spring of 2012.

LEE ANN RORIPAUGH'S fourth volume of poetry, *Dandarians*, is forthcoming from Milkweed Press in 2014. She is currently a Professor of English at the University of South Dakota, where she serves as Director of Creative Writing and Editor-in-Chief of *South Dakota Review*.

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Born in Saigon, Vietnam, in 1988, OCEAN VUONG is the author of two chapbooks: *WHAT REMAINS* (YesYes Books, 2013) and *BURNINGS* (Sibling Rivalry Press, 2010), which was selected by the American Library Association's "Over The Rainbow" list of recommended LGBT reading. A recent graduate from Brooklyn College with a BA in English, he is a recipient of a Kundiman fellowship, a 2012 Stanley Kunitz Prize, an Academy of American Poets Prize, the Connecticut Poetry Society's Al Savard Award, as well as six Pushcart Prize nominations. His poems appear in *The American Poetry Review*, *Verse Daily*, *RHINO*, *Southern Indiana Review*, *Guernica*, *South Dakota Review*, and *Pas-sages North*, amongst others. [www.oceanvuong.tumblr.com](http://www.oceanvuong.tumblr.com).

MILES WAGGENER is the author of two poetry collections: *Phoenix Suites* (The Word Works, '03) winner of the Washington Prize; and *Sky Harbor* (Pinyon Publishing, '11). He is a recipient of individual artist fellowships from the Nebraska Arts Council and the Arizona Commission on the Arts. His poems have appeared in the *Antioch Review*, *The River Styx*, *Spoon River Poetry Journal*, *Cutbank*, *Sonora Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *South Dakota Review*, *9th Letter*, *Verse Daily*, *New Poets of the American West*, among others.

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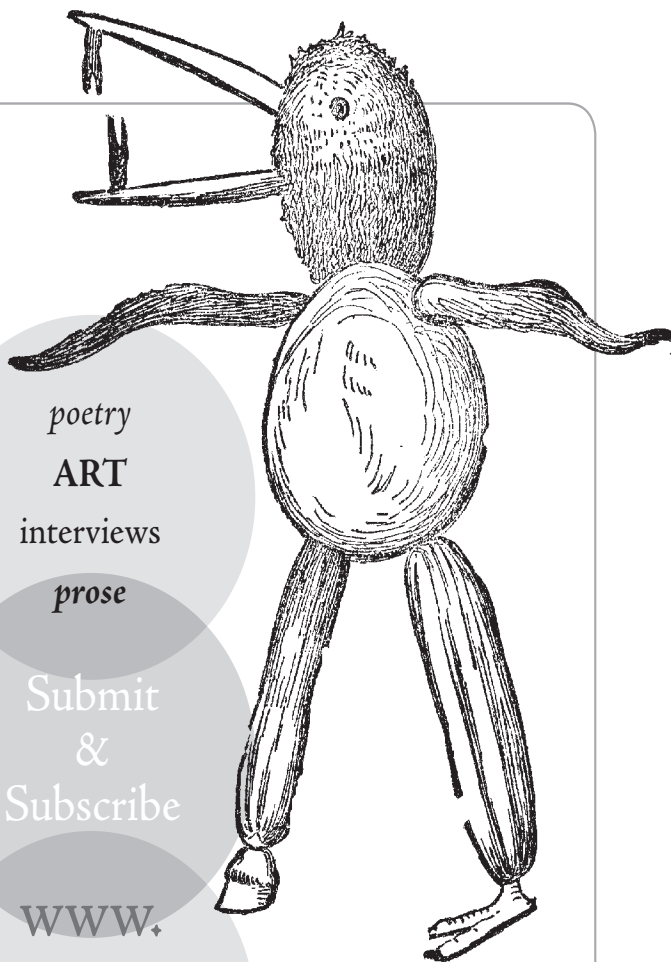
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