CALIBAN online 2

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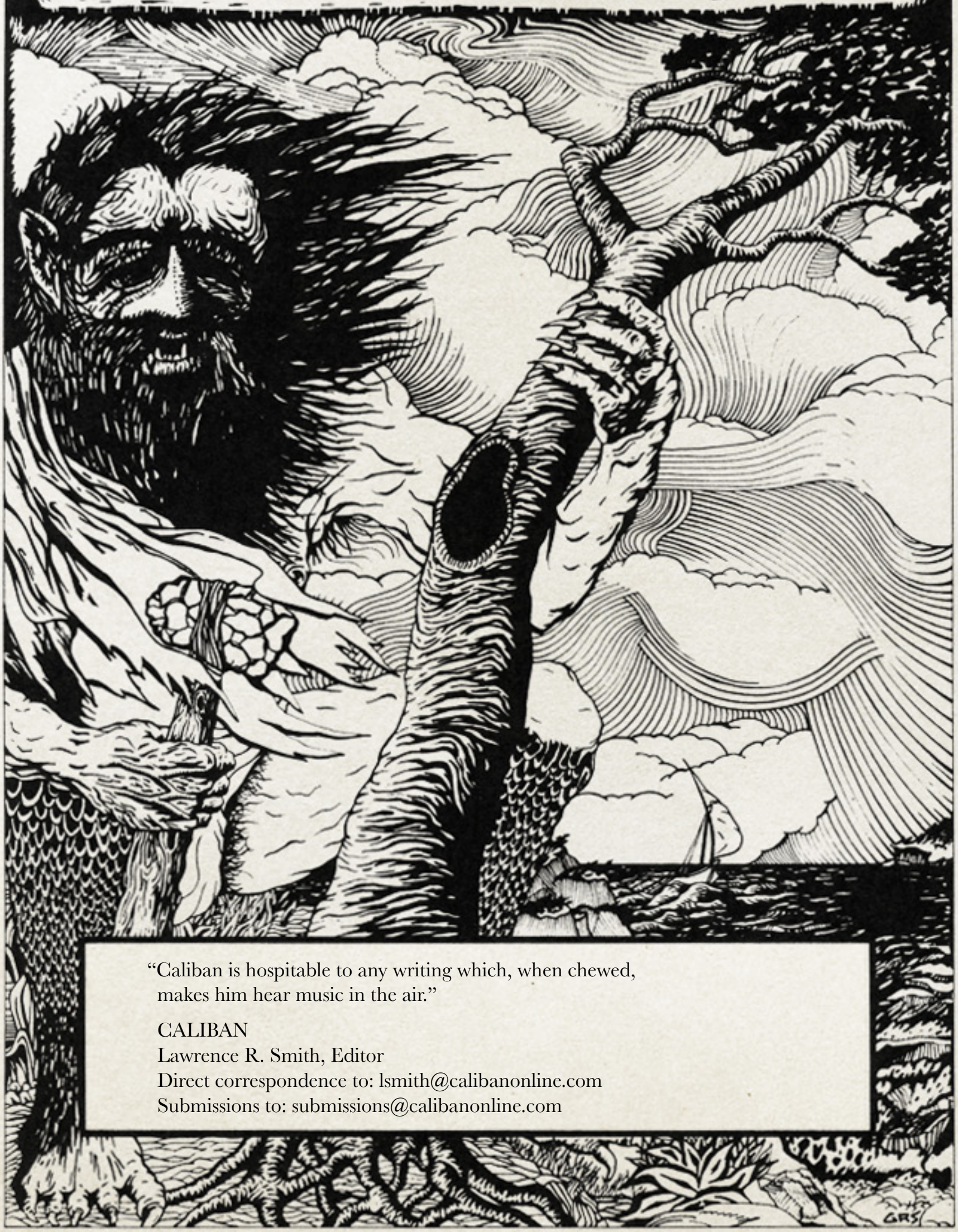
CALIBAN



"Caliban is hospitable to any writing which, when chewed, makes him hear music in the air."

CALIBAN
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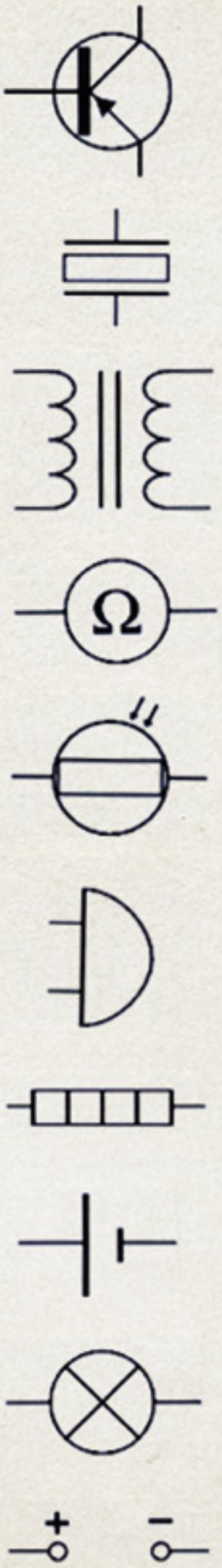

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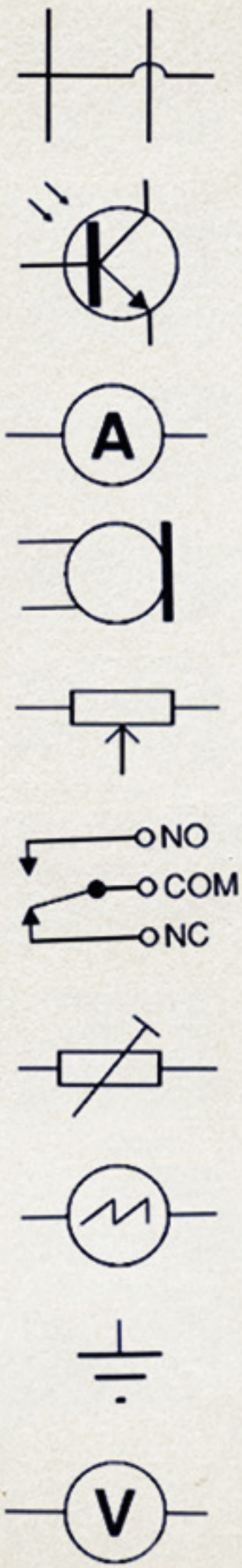

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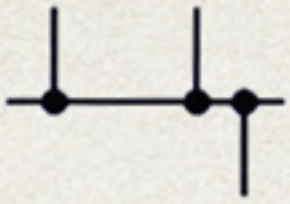

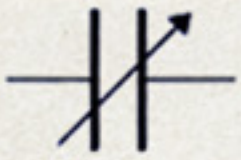


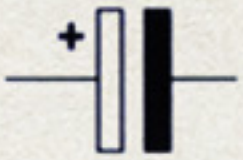

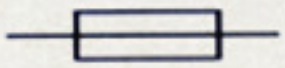
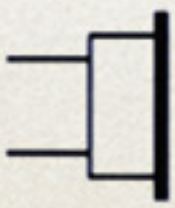

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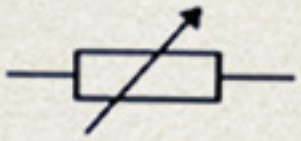
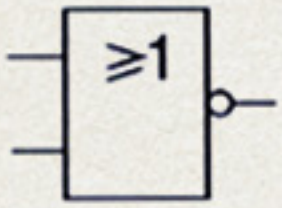




DOREN ROBBINS

"For Us It Wasn't Vietnam"

That apartment, might as well be up there
up the street from
Pickwick Bookstore in Hollywood again,
where I went to score some grass,
surrendered my head,
the thinner twin telling me again
about dropping his syringe on the concrete
Pix movie theater floor—spilled
soda, spit-out cum, spit-out who knows what
and still using it—you gotta think watching him
it's impossible not to get into
self-ravagement, you gotta think
some untrackable stupidity-necessity,
no way through the net,
megaphone monologue you follow
directions from—a true story, the monster's body
in him, the man's body in him, William Blake's
"Ghost of a Flea" in him,
what it looked like for him,
watching where it was going, all going
when you can't stop the face nodding
toward the map it made for you—

might as well cut off the nipple of your own cow
if you don't get through it,
and you want to out-distance that cow,

you want the room and you want the
seven foot door in that room
you last saw that side of yourself in
to stop bleeding—

I watched that guy eat his blame,
burn his spoon, in awful peace.
The dog with his tail bandaged
(from what, I didn't ask) warming his feet.
The other twin said, "I know Birmingham,
I know Bombingham, for us
it wasn't Vietnam." He was loaded,
loaded enough. We drove out to
San Fernando to hang seventeen doors.
Inside the owner's apartment
he was unaware of the way he stood,
the way he leaned forward like he was
fighting a tide going out, holding the back
of a chair, pricing the extra work. The owner
nodded down at something on the table.
He wanted to know could we fix that too.
Sure we can fix the gouge in your table.
"Is it bad?"
Yeah, it's bad, but I'll make it so even you
wouldn't know where it was. But I'll know.

Might as well be back in that apartment.
The man who pulls over to clean
the skunk off the road allegory,
get back inside and drive to their place
after work allegory.

There was a television on the floor
with the back panel taken off, it looked
torn off, and left that way—the imploded
moods allegory. From the entry I heard
mechanical pieces getting taken apart
but no one there when I reached the apartment,
not them or the dog. But some dog
barking. Not their dog. A neighbor boy
next door leaned out talking
in the middle of a monologue saying
he could take care of it, insisting he wanted
to take care of it, asking me my name
and if I was the man that came
to buy the dog.

ROSMARIE WALDROP

From **Third Person Singular**

Language the condition, not only of transmission. Without its frame nothing but vague volition. Vision? Window? In the story, she's been out in the rain. Strains in vain to see a bit of blue blown cloudless, to line up fovea and love. Or does she covet the neighbor's garden with the maple swaying, making the space move? Not trying to focus a spotlight on sentence structure as you would, but like a child simply taking in the forms in front of her eyes. No matter if words or the clutter of the physical world. No matter if it lessens alpha waves and sense of self.

The pouring-down rain, the pouring-down rain. Says it over and over, as if to drain the words from the system they are part of. Warm refrain to make her a first person, if only temporarily. Children born blind say I only after they've learned to play with a doll. Meanwhile turns in little quarter turns to dry herself. Almost a waltz. Reel. Smile. The arrangement of auditory pathways in the brain is similar to those for vision, not moving in a straight line at the same speed. Stampede. More like thinking philosophically, branching perspective into balconies swinging out over the void.

Not a substance whose molecules you could rearrange, the units of language can be defined only by their relation — to hours after midnight? snowfall? genitals? Lies down on top of the newspaper, which is arranged in columns like the nerve cells in the folds of the cortex. Noun. Frown. Her own. The retina detects rather than suspects, traces a series of small details to report to the brain. If she's told enough yarns, she wonders, could she reknit ties to the child's ability to drink in the new? Which she yearns for. No matter where. But especially in the emotional landscape where she measures time by how often she gives in to blind kiss-compulsion.

LISA BERNSTEIN

From **Post-War Persephone**

The Guide

The gravesites of the place
sift into dust
beside the rutted pavements.
My guide glances sideways,
sees the bodies
under the earthcrust,
however hidden. We drape
one arm around each other's necks
and walk to the synchronized
beats of our hips. Only this rhythm
of pulses
could keep the corpses under cover.
Past the garbage of the living
piling up in the gutters
his steady beat says
Girl,
keep time with me.

His brown eyes buy me
plums and mangos,
apples, whatever I ask for
in the road half as wide
as the ones in my country,
a decayed mottled lane
puddled by the warm rain.

When he steps,
his heels rise up

and even the din in the street
doesn't annoy me. Here I don't have to protect
the pale skin of anyone else against death.
The stench lifts around us, the squat buildings
which have tilted out of history
still settling into the silt.

I see the sweat
on his skin. Windows
without glass. Slabs of goat meat
hanging. The air rained clean,
still wet.

Underworld Dusk

As hammering rings through the motionless leaves

He is walking through the first row of trees

His workmen sawing the diseased apricot trunks and planing them for lumber

His thumbs hook her armpits, fingers press down her nipples

Distinct agate eyes, cheekbones and jaw one rectangle of heaven

The hammering dying out in the black air

They stand in the orchard embedded in peat, insect wings, specks of bone and granite, shards of glass, under the white collar of stars

His lungs and heart poised for her, membranes glistening

In this place that can't be looked at under the visible planets

The fingers of the sleeping workmen curl above the dirt

The two of them stand, heels in the ground, embers of the cookfire scattered around them

Moths fluttering past

Animated dust-stroke of night

Dance of the Killed Girl

1.
My eyes open
I lie here on the desert

in the yellow brush there is a
pale shape
a girl
curled naked
half-hidden by the grasses
her hand curled
to her face as if in sleep

she nestles
among the crisscrossed weeds
that lay like hair across the earthcrust
her fingers enmeshed
in the tendrilly roots

an animal face
rises
above her
his black lips pulled back
bright-ringed eyes
looking at me

her fleshy body
evaporates into the sunlight

and like an ivory blade
her spirit
enters my left side

2.
In my left side
as if molded in clay
lies the girl
I loved.
Her outlined shape
is disappearing
as she imprints herself
against the tissue,
breathing her way deep into the rib cage
with each inhalation of my lungs.
She coils
faintly
in the crosshatched cells.

At last she can rest.
Seen only
by me.

GARRETT CAPLES

Ten Ten-Line Poems for Philip Lamantia

my mental block
is hot with cops
clubbing my clubbing
persona. the walls
always never end
still thinking of you
and unable to turn
the corner where
we last left off
but: to be continued

scene: better days
desk by the window
a dresser a bed bottles
in the fridge and you
standing there forgetting
what you stood up to
show me. you show me
you. it's enough. there's
a million books in this
place!

exhaling impossibly
huge clouds of
smoke and
hearing your
voice curl
through it

you called
getting high
turning on
it was both

your eyes wander
from your photograph
while you wonder what
i'm up to. overseeing
old haunts. what
you've seen is gone
as you are. here am i
and the building is
not the same but it's
the same building

uncatalogued, unrecorded
what you knew swarmed
like hummingbird wings
always buzzing around
you, like a dozen flaming
hula hoops, like *ten bright*
balls in the air. where'd
they go? the laws of
gravity dictate looking
up in silence

your voice could
encompass a universe
your love envelop decay
your word encircle
your light enrapture

and your hand strike
the collective blow as
the one who sang
the world's agonized
blood: you

incommunicable
experience of
visionary genius
unable to
synthesize
your intuitive
intelligence in
prose because
you were its
synthesis

leading you
by the hand
in the dark
so you don't
trip and fall
on the bricks
like tending the
one phoenix egg
in love and
silent terror

every week you found
the wine; every week:
new wine. the manic
accumulations: notebooks
ashtrays change purses

the accumulated pain
of being who you were
who were you? saint
in an iron maiden as a
refuge from madness

i don't remember who
i was before we met
and now that you're
gone where am i?
somewhere else
where there's no
one like you and
the me i used to
be is equally
dead

LAGRIMAMATOMA by John M. Bennett, 2010,
mixed media

ONSENTIDOMENO by John M. Bennett, 2010,
mixed media

JOHN M. BENNETT

So To Speak

burn stool
shudder hung dog
shake seat
grab a loaf
testes blink
bray up side
sun chert
grab the buns
loot tongue

Sisters

flagger cow aura
dings lake
methane shawl closet
nag grime
double loot trust
crap mile
sting the corn
bean neck
chew for years

JOHN BRADLEY

Kindness My True Religion: An Interview with Godzilla

Q. What is your real name?
A. My body feels like it's being burned alive with electricity.

Q. Who are your parents?
A. Some kind of white sand falling from the heavens.

Q. Is Moby Dick a monster or tragic figure?
A. Do humans matter as much as what they ruin?

Q. Describe your birth.
A. One doesn't live in a country; one lives in a language.

Q. Tell us about your faith, what you believe in.
A. Silence shooting out of every orifice.

Q. Describe your breath.
A. Kindness is my true religion.

Q. Can violence ever be justified?
A. Poetry is the only hope. Even if you don't believe in it, you have to do it.

Q. What's your favorite snack?
A. The word formed from "thunder" and "flash."

Q. Have you ever read *Dust: A Brief History*?
A. Because I was an idiot.

Q. Where do you see yourself five years from now?
A. The universe is made of stories, not atoms.

Q. Ten years from now?
A. Do you often fall asleep in the fetal position?

Q. Before you leave, could you let us hear your famous roar?
A. Silence shooting out of every orifice.

SILVIA CURBELO

Summerhouse

I never said those things
about your mother. It wasn't me

with my eyes nailed to the wall,
inhabiting the air like a vase

of cut flowers, or pacing
the floor of that house

where sorrow slept. It wasn't
a rumor. It wasn't in spring

when azaleas overran the driveway
and sunlight fell across the notion

like a scarf of new leaves.
No one believed what happened

didn't happen. But I can tell you,
the roses were on fire.

And later, didn't it rain. Didn't we
stand in the flowering light

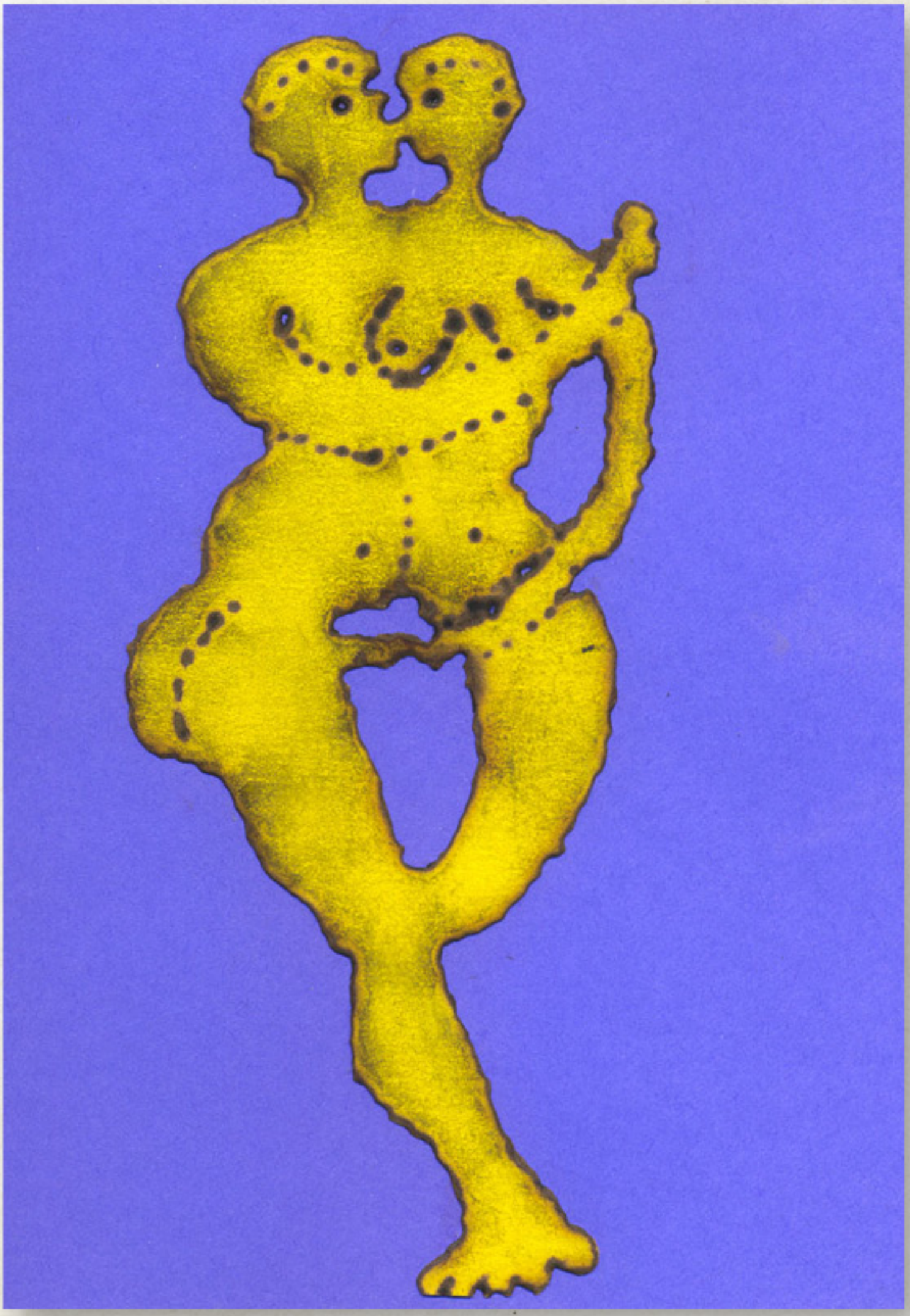
of that storm while daylight
served up its version of the facts

like pages from some book of miracles
or a table set for two.

I couldn't eat a thing.

The Sky Grew Dark, Then Darker

She could hear the wind's
coarse music like radio static in the trees.
She stepped outside to the smell
of grass and frying oil,
smell of lilacs, smell of ink.
And then the wind lay down
its load. It rained ribbons
and splinters. It rained salt.
Heavy drops fell onto her
closed eyes like pieces
of an answer, an idea pushed off
some high ledge then bouncing
off her shoulders like some cartoon
loneliness of rain. All around her
people scurried into cars and houses,
the day drifting on tiny,
complicated waves out to
some dim horizon where sky
meets all that isn't sky.
It rained like any mirror,
like a black and white movie
of the rain. It fell in great stripes.
It tumbled down like hair
landing brightly on her face
as only the rain can.



BURNWORKS, Book 2, Figure 3 by Austin Straus, 2008, mixed media, (8 ½ in x 5 ¼ in)

BURNWORKS, Book 3, Figure 2 by Austin Straus, 2008, mixed media, (8 ½ in x 5 ¼ in)

WILL ALEXANDER

On Scorpions & Swallows

Not claimed
by the accessible as contrast
or as competition by loss
or mathematic by peril
but occlusion as opposable phylums
minus a dark synesthesial as rote
minus the axial smoke of a rotted bonfire hamlet

I mean
oasis as savage dialectical rotation
meaning
species as aggressive salt
as curious vertical blazing

in reversed arrayal
I think of interior cobalt swallows
with predacious ignition
a contradictory igniting
beatific with scopolamine

like the withdrawn thirst of the scorpion
with its "five-segmented posterior"
with its "seven-segmented pre-abdomen"
with its sidereal tail ending in toxicity
"born alive"
active after darkness
culminate
with the fatal sting

of "Centruroides sculpturatus"

therefore
the birds & the ground dwellers mingle in my mind
like a magnitude of multiple nebulas
akin to "Synaceia"
or "Pterois"
or the lionfish
explicit with the power of fatality

so if I mine from the nebulas
these birds
these fish
these scorpions
I go blank
& seize vertigo
& gain a forthright diplopia

so when I look skyward
a doubled swallow seems to swarm
in a flock of endurance

& exhibits a verdet
an iridescent yellow tree
imbibing insects while in violation
with the reddish beak of the family of "Hurundinidae"
in flight
in their high migration houses
from boreal dawns in the North
to the Cape of Africa in the South

& so I make my imaginal leap
& connect the swallows in their height

to the "Red Jungle Fowl" anchored to terra firma
like the scorpion
with its neurotoxins
like "Buthus occitanus"
unlike the passeriforms
who exceed small birds in speed
not like the Labrador Duck
or the Carolina Parakeet
they exist
like the gaze
which renders the cliff swallows unevident
with their withering thermal migrations
dialectically at odds
with electric living collectives

their mud jugs under ledges
less elaborate than the "ovenbird"
the latter's nest of inner spirals
with its one bubonic open door
opening & shutting
against the predatory sums of roving scorpion necrotics
this fiery movement across earth
then a galling guardian wolf

a guardian
creeping
carried at first on the back of the mother
then relentless
stalking
like the outsized "Panamanian ponerine" ant
"tearing its prey to bits"
or like the "digger wasp" injecting venom into the nerves

I then think
of the Wood louse
the Beach flea
the trap door spider

with the "simple small eyes"
transmitting figments
barely proficient at resolving a tincture
of compound stereopsis

then
the olfactory sight of the common ants of Formicidae
capable of aphid herding
akin to the swallows
in terms of sphinxian insect singing

& the swallows
in flight across mesas
across the flank of exploding glacier tables
across a lake of random gravel fires

then the migrational zodiac
of the halos
of the helium winds
of the Lapse Rate in the atmosphere
& unlike the pervious rocks
neither scorpion or swallow
condenses on any common finality
mingled at anti-vigesimal snappage
at pointless adrenaline breaking

their dialects erased
like a great flooded Playa

not equal
or mathematically orthomorphic
to any judgmental vector

they exist
oddly
like polyconic projections
never central to the fact
of a bare diurnal stratagem

Alien Personas

Inside a squandered creosote hull
there exists a form of reptile optic
like a cold intrinsic sun
which advances through relentless interior offerings

the gulfs as bursts of mangers
of carnivorous pollutants
of intermittent personas
dissolving themselves
beyond each iota of reason

& so
those personas of the hull
committed to forms of regicide
to retrocausal alabaster summits
of shale
of riverine deceptions of labour

condensed
by a giant galactic carnivore
tied
to an oblivious stake of mercury
implanted in its heart
by a level of a-charisma
over & beyond the zodiac

From **Aphorisms**

Within post-industrial quaking, there exists the rise of a sickened libido. It is like watching the spirit of a strolling Roman prostitute breaking through the fumes of rising blood from the arena. In one word, decay, fluctuant at optimum putrescence. It seems the most apt description for commercialized erotics. Not a shred of flesh torn in passionate debacle. Under the plague of the extrinsic we witness the pregnancy of manikins, the gloomy soils of Jacuzzis, which results in symptomatic inversion. The latter being the haunted dialectic of the Calvinist body, with its paradoxical hold, always feeding instruction to the super-ego with its blight. With intermingling turned to industry, there is always the discomforted spirit turned by embittered license of the facile. A libido drowning in feckless momentary life, in falsely constructed incendiary duration.

*

A re-attack of ennui. Sleepwalking, ambling like an uncanny virus, faced with terrible displacements of energy. For instance, when I should raise my hand or my voice, or move my carcass from point to point across the canvas of terra firma. At times I go limp, my blood power lowers, I become liminal and invisible. Then I ask myself, who am I?, what do I stand for?, what ignites the state of my withdrawal? I stay beclouded, inert, withdrawn. The Sun splinters in broad day. I possess no compunction for exhibit.

*

True art can withstand the peril of vitriolic commercialization, and the failure of the masses which condones by its failure critical misperception.

*

When language is engaged without plan, or summarized invention, this tends to take over diurnal consciousness, so much so that the unknown is constantly explored from within.

Vibration from the Coast of India

One feels its harried anodyne vultures
its populace of rats
its vexing by bubonics

the fact
that the body is eaten as vapour
as base invisibility
to be discarded
to be rinsed
with carking polonium & lime

so there are basics
intrinsically freed of themselves
of their dark extrinsic imperial patterns
as if the holocaust body had never existed

never peaking at fruition
as claw
or model
or fabric

as to fate
& its ultimate de-existence
there remains
a galactic brewing formation
never weighed by the cells
or by measures invented
by an onerous grasping of sorghum or principle

COLETTE INEZ

Cro-Magnon Haikus

The slash, the slanting
arrows of rain on long-legged
daughters, quick as fish

in twisting rivers
of spring, the tributaries,
how girls raced after

bison, driving them
off the promontory's edge.
In my reckoning

blood streams from the hunt.
These are my hero mothers.
Charred bones, smeared hands

cut small chunks of meat
for the old ones before they
gasped last praises for

their tribal sires,
and to the sun wakening
them to spears of light.

ROBERT VANDERMOLEN

Women

They hung their arms over the white fence
Like troublemakers, along the edge of the pocket park
*

Poking through her makeup drawer
—how one woman's smell
Is so distinct from another's, he said
*

The trees behind them had been hobbled by storm.
A mink sauntered down a log
And into the hollow end of it

What about the woman who owned horses,
Wondered Dave
*

Specks of bark and dots of pollen
Sprinkled the water that crowded banks, flattening
Before washing into the lake—they studied minnows
Forming into the shape of a torpedo

We used to make love in restrooms, he said belatedly,
I was always nervous

Stepping on planks to a beach
Where children's buckets and shovels had been abandoned
Among vague footprints,

Seaweed knuckled with sodden willow branches.
A coastguard chopper rushing low from the north…

…tall, muscular for a woman,
The muscles of her belly were like a washboard—

But when I think of her
I picture fruit trees, plum and apple
She died a while ago.
Something unpleasant I heard

Decapitation
*

Envy never got us anywhere, she explained
Combing her hair.
I wasn't certain what she meant.
My face taut.
Hers in the mirror—attempting to find
The right expression or gesture

GEORGE KALAMARAS

Narrative Complexity

Yes, the secret is a fugitive problem of narrative complexity.
The secret is expelling infectious moons.

Once, when I was human, the familiar dream form was her tight red skirt.
Tell me, which Canto is necessary to remove my visible nose hair?

The haunted mind of Mallarme's mistress is the color of dogwood bark.
The conventional story has her on all fours, with my form body nuzzling up behind.

If you want the story of logical transformation, ignore the two narrative moons sinking below the expression of an immediate fiction.
The lover is wrong, the parody of being human something I have carried over into each subsequent birth.

Yes, I included certain terrible traits in each character, just for complexity.
Once, I smoked Old Gold Filters and held a griffon vulture in my two tentative arms, immobilizing its powerful neck, while feeding it hyena guts in a South African preserve.

The Tender Cadaver of Everyone's Left Big Toe

The pure touch of childbirth made us all grimace.
In those days, I busied myself keeping a diary of things that—as a man—I could not reach.

Like the delicacy of a slaughtered lamb.
Like a horse sacrifice somehow recurring in my chest.

I swear it; the pure touch of death hit me, life after life.
Thus, there was the psychology of two distinct mystical states and my never knowing which was which.

Before her naked on the bed, I will beg of it for healing and release.
Even the sparrow—yes—even the goldfinch filching water from inside her thigh, might explode.

I was writing a book entitled, *The Tender Cadaver of Everyone's Left Big Toe*.
None of it—American pantheism, the drug-culture, the worship of embryonic digits—nothing could approach the mystico-collapse of Agrarian amnesia.

I was thinking more monastically, those days, perhaps totemically.
The pure touch of the egg each morning on my plate was enough to keep me enormously alive.

Translation Involves Sacrifice

Each finch arrives like a moment of silence from a monastery.
All the indifference of a star infuses innocence with revolution.

Mao wore a certain pair of trousers with pleats on one side only.
Only the left pant leg was cuffed, to collect dust his shoe stirred up.

I dreamt I was swimming in enigmatic grass.
I wore my hair in a horsetail braid, and I pranced authoritatively
among the women as if I painted Delvaux's nudes.

I did not recognize the Moabites from the Saracens.
I looked for our tentage, but it had been cut down by sand and wind.

Among the hummingbird moths, it is biologically required to fly
toward sorrow.
When the stingless bees from Bolivia made their poisonous honey, I
began doing things in threes—from touching my tongue to the roof
of my mouth, to writing my name with my left hand.

I dreamt I was walking in enigmatic pants.
Only the left side of everything appeared creased.

Translation involves the practice of sacrifice.
With no milk to be had, we sat as friends, drinking coffee into which
we'd beaten the excruciating white of an egg.

NOCTURNE: TOWERS AND BEASTS by Alvaro Cardona-Hine, 2004, acrylic on canvas, (54 in x 56 in)

ALVARO CARDONA-HINE

From **Petty Cash**

Lesson

a young girl
slips
a pine cone
into her vagina

doctors
have to save her
from the expanding
universe

Pain

the bull's mask
returns with the dream
to unearth the child

this is what happens
when someone threading a needle
puts it through his eye instead

The Spider

alone
late at night I read
when a single letter
detaches itself
from the text
and floats off
into space

Confession

I stole a candle
from a blind man

bird seed
from a deaf man

a calendar
from a dead man

Prison

confiscated light
moves like you
within the emerald

endlessly in this world
childhood is made to honor
a cotton flag

City of Indians

no one can find it
reflections from the lake
make the walls dance
and disappear

when it rains they hold
the odor of musk
disintegrating for centuries

a leap is taken
only to ingratiate a god
or the flesh of a deer

older women turn
into omens of smoke
and fly away
as small white butterflies

Egypt

the swan's soft gift of floating
shocks the awakened water

the day
increasingly bent
on sleep
remains
for a while
glancing in the direction
of its origin

torpor by the shore
touches the reeds
bending on their own
to part for Moses

TERRY HAUPTMAN

The Red Fox in the Baby Carriage

Soul is the body's last dance
Mahmoud Darwish

The red fox in the baby carriage
Stole the coffin key
From your hip pocket
Stole your cherries
And the small deck of cards.

He was a trickster
His spirit transforming
The sorrow of adversity
To laughter.

I knew he would never
Come back in his original form
Shape-shifting
His red hair
Caressing his bandaged head.

In the kaddish of absurdity
The balm of grief
Passing through the peacock gate
Through the metal detector
From life to death
Passing the undertaker on his motorcycle
Through the Book of Questions
Scratching the lost sky.

One wink
Then silence
Piercing through
The black stone of night
Let the tears fall down.

ADAM CORNFORD

Her Hatred

Like the blades of a hallucinating knife-thrower it defines its object
It meets her on a dark street with a bouquet of white-hot wires
Its thin crimson vines loop and pry into fissures in love's bark
Until it hatches a snake with a fine-boned insinuating human head
Winding a muddy river between mirror towers of righteousness
It twists back to nip and gnaw at itself like a flea-ridden dog
It shrinks her own mouth slowly to a sad copulation of worms
A scarp of old voices it is buckled and thrust up by this collision
Where a white one-eyed judge sits inside a rose of slamming doors
As it sends ten thousand boots out onto the glass floor of Heaven
A skinless horse it gallops over unending salt-flats under noon

THE TEMPEST by Homero Hidalgo, 2005,
acrylic, latex, vinyl, and fabric on canvas (59in x 55in)

(UNTITLED) GIRLS by Homero Hidalgo, 2010,
acrylic and sand on canvas (10 in x 8 in)

GARFIELD LINTON

Marked with Many Stripes

And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness…

The loud bang on the freeway moved outward, up along the walls of the apartment where Andrea and Donovan lived. It came crashing through the bedroom windows facing those ugly, godforsaken buildings he couldn't bear to look at another day. Not long ago these same ugly buildings gave black folks hope as they migrated north in droves to find jobs in the auto industry. That was the golden age for blacks seeking a claim in the world up North, instead of waiting hands-and-feet down South to enter the Promised Land of forty acres and nothing but one old mule to work it all. Now GM buildings that once brushed elbows with the ceiling of Detroit skies sit among graffiti houses with broken windows, burnt in doors, gutted homes that leave unpalatable uncertainty in everyone's mouth. Teenage boys sit on front porches with blunts and forty-ounces, proud, shooting the breeze, scoping the one or two elderly women walking by with no family protection. These young men, like a brand new species, sit and itch, watching for that moment, that pouncing opportunity after sun and blinds fall. Silver chimneys--most of them rusty—push out from the dead buildings running alongside the John Lodge and Ford freeways, glisten in the sun and spit white mists toward the heavens. Compared to the fume-blowing pipes by the I-75 interstate bridge, these mists resemble heaven-bound spirits ascending on the third day. And yet these white vapors go down the back of your throat and burn no less.

The loud bang that swept through Andrea and Donovan's apartment took their sleep. Donovan attempted to get off the sofa where he had dozed off while watching TV. Midway between standing up and sitting down, he grasped at the center of his back. Slowly, slowly, he eased into straightening up. A shooting pain along his waist had a pulling effect on his lower half, as if it wanted to drag him under. This left his bones feeling like buildings without cornerstones. Andrea stumbled into the

living room half way between sleep and waking. "Did you hear that?" she asked. He turned slowly, looked at her with a blank face, even though he was certain something sudden had disturbed their nap. Sirens and flashing red lights pulled their attention down onto the freeway where a vehicle lay on its roof, all four wheels rotating in mid-air. Two black Samaritans stopped to get the stuck traveler back on his or her journey, or at least try. Donovan forced his face against the window to bear witness. The glare felt overbearing, intrusive. If it wasn't for teenage boys looking to prove something after dark, he could've done a thing or two with those streetlights. Maybe submit a letter to the city and ask that his street be spared, because they eclipsed the connecting flow of stars trying to shine through onto the neighborhood and give true light to the lives below. For him it was those lonely nights after he awoke from terrible nightmares and looked out through the bedroom window, up to the heavens with sleepless neighbors, everyone looking, wondering, trying to decide.

The taste of burning fluids from the car stuck in his throat and brought his full attention back to the accident. The black smoke had petered out into a steady grey stream that didn't seem like it would leap into red. So, there was hope after all.

"Can you make out if it's a man or woman?" he asked Andrea, pressing his head up against the window. He turned, looked over his shoulder for an answer. She stood there, looking hard at him.

"Why you gotta be so interested in other folk's business?" she asked, and walked back to the bedroom.

For the life of him, he couldn't figure her out, so instead he tried to find a comfortable spot to sit his thoughts. The documentary on Discovery Channel felt much more comfortable, even though the urge to switch his attention back to the traveler in the wreck kept nagging him. He turned to the zebra that had narrowly escaped to the other side of the water hole. This gave him hope. He liked zebras. Unlike donkeys, mules or horses that had to carry both man and man-made burdens on their backs, zebras were never domesticated, even though they were marked with many stripes. After watching the courageous animal run for dear life, he was convinced that the tables were not always turned to benefit

those born without stripes, that the lucky who did everything wrong in life did not always get free passes, leaving nothing but death and debris around them. The weak, striped, or unlucky also get a chance—even if it's only one in tens of millions—to triumph over adversity. When he looked back at the TV, the same zebra that escaped to the other side of the water hole had a group of hyenas closing in on its flanks. The zebra humped its back, bucked its head, kicked its hind legs as it found a second wind, but the matriarch hyena leading the pack of hunters tripped the marked animal and skillfully brought it down onto its back. Donovan made a quick turn of the head to avoid witnessing the tearing away of warm flesh from tired bones. But then he turned back to the sight of the ravaged body, neck pinned to the green grass, with its eyes of death. As Donovan watched dripping blood forming rings around the hyenas' mouth, then the jerk of the animal's body followed by a low moan, he felt numb throughout. It was the death-whisper true singers of the blues put out into the world so all can bear witness. It was too much. For relief he muted the TV, dropped the remote on the sofa, went back to the freeway incident.

A cop arrived on the scene and the two men who had been trying to help backed off. The cop walked over to the door, looked in on the traveler, and just stood there. Donovan couldn't understand why the cop seemed so calm. He backed away from the window, held his breath, then slid over to a different window for a better view. The paramedics had made it on the scene.

"I hope nothing too bad happens to the poor driver. That'd be so sad," he kept saying under his breath, "so sad."

Andrea came back to see what all the mumbling was about. She stood next to him and asked if he knew anyone down there.

"Know?" He looked at her puzzled, and returned his attention to the incident. "What do you mean 'know?'" he said under his breath, just loud enough for her to hear him.

"Why ask me? You the one out here giving away affection to strangers."

"I was just concerned. That's all, Baby. Never know—could be my sisters, mother or anybody close down there."

"Ain't that some shit! How lucky they must feel!" She had to calm herself by sitting down on the sofa and turning the TV to channel 2, because, as always, he was concerned about his mama and sister—not to mention strangers—more than her.

"I'm watching that, Andrea. Could you turn it back, please?" he asked.

"Thought you said you was concerned for the victim."

"Yeah, but I was following this zebra too."

"Well, the zebra is chewed up, guts and all, Honey!"

"I wanted to see if one of the lions under that tree is going to do something about the hyenas."

She stretched toward him with the remote. "Here! Keep watching. Maybe you'll learn something useful."

Talking to a made-up mind was no different than pouring a clean glass of cool water into the Mississippi on a hot summer's day hoping to clear things up. He decided to drop it, turn his attention back to the accident. It was just in time to see the body being covered from the head down with a white sheet. But he knew his body could've been just as dead as the one down on the freeway. The blue van ran the red light and knocked him off his ten-speed bicycle that day, while he was heading home from the bakery where he worked. And yet he came back to life. One of the few days a miracle had occurred in his life. He needed it then. Lying flat on that asphalt, helplessly awaiting whatever may, like the zebra on the Discovery documentary. People gathered, some standing on tip-toes to look at the spectacle on the sidewalk where someone had dragged him. He was cold turkey for at least half an hour. When he came back to, his eyes roved the pavement connecting bakery, barbershop, hardware—and yes, the good and faithful liquor stores that were on every other street corner in Detroit. He was searching for a familiar face, and found his cousin's. She stood in the shadows, a block down on Seven Mile Road, across from the post office, looking like a distant relative visiting her daddy's side of the family for the very first time. Everyone else, people he didn't even know, were up close and talking about how lucky this boy was: "He had cars swerving around his

body after the fall. Only the grace of God saved his life." They all said he should sue, because this surely was a hit-and-run.

Donovan smiled and shrugged it off. He had just arrived from the islands, and since he could move his legs, and had feelings in his fingers and toes, he saw no reason to trouble himself. When they asked if he saw the light, that bright light that everyone who'd ever had a near-death experience talked about, he shook his head: "No, didn't see a thing." All he recalled was a blue van, a heavy hit against his entire left side, then waking up with a lot of concerned people gathered around. And his dear cousin, who worked with him in the same bakery, in the distance staring.

*

Donovan moved away from the window, feeling the same pain that woke him each night around 2:00 a.m. Just like the zebra, he could never get up. He didn't know who or what was hunting him, but the one thing he wouldn't accept was being torn and eaten by the lions and hyenas of the world. He would not be a marked animal, a victim. Being a victim on any side of any fence—be it Timbuktu, Tiananmen Square, or even the wide streets of great America—was a sorrowful thing. It meant two deaths before the final blow to the soul: first the flesh, then the history of the conquered, no matter how many times it's dressed up. The killing of souls was a natural thing to see on the streets of Detroit, near the Cass Corridor, or downtown Atlanta on Auburn Avenue near the park, or over on Pine and Peachtree Street. He had grown quite comfortable seeing folks strip spirits like butchers do lambs' flesh in familiar places like Rema, Tivoli, the Concrete Jungles of Jamaica; then there were those other distant places toward which most would rather turn a blind eye: Burundi, Sudan, the Congo, Burma, the Balkans, just to name a few. Communities, nations, set on exposing each other's flesh to vultures until everyone becomes nothing more than top soil under monsoon. Showers washing away human minerals into the ocean known as **Urbaniium Digitario.** And all those people thrown to the wayside because they had lines like zebras, mark of many stripes.

*

On his way to Wayne State University each morning, he passed some of these same marked people down on the Cass Corridor. They had all their earthly belongings in black plastic bags strung across their backs, some walking back and forth, others waiting in soup kitchen lines. As he walked by, dank piss mixed with a touch of over-ripe armpit never failed to caress his nose. He'd walk wide to avoid the aroma of poverty. If they came up on the right of the street, he'd cross over and continue on the left, because for some reason these people in rags looked at him as if they knew him, as if he were one of them gone astray. He knew without any doubt that he was not now, and would never be, a victim. And yet of late exposure of the flesh, and even erosion of the soul, had taken such deep root in his family that certain members would put themselves in harm's way, then call themselves victims. Their excuse after being caught red-handed was they couldn't help themselves. They looked at Donovan like damaged terrain: plotted and plowed, then irrigated so the seeds of others might properly grow. But not him! No feelings of damage and no urge for self-inflicted wounds would ever enter his mind. At least not if he could help it, for he wasn't a victim.

"That just doesn't fit me," he told his youngest sister when she tried to convince him that fast money was just as pleasing to the eye as hard earned cash. He told her he didn't have time to listen to justifications for being with the same man who broke her jaw twice. All because she—the self-proclaimed shooting star of the family—claimed this brute of a man allowed her to appreciate the finer things in life. She said she'd only trample over nice guys. A man of milder temperament couldn't handle her. As if she—and he knew her from child to womanhood to be one of the gentlest angels the Lord ever made—were born a brute. But now she saw herself as a wild mare that needed to be hog-tied, bruised for life by the saddles of the brutes she allowed on her back. She had become so hardened she refused to listen to his stories about the place where he slept and couldn't dream; how he resisted temptation until he became his own foe at night, constantly fighting his thoughts and cursing the sun, wishing he had the power to make it stand still, so he could collapse the past and block the future, establish his presence. Aggravated by weakness, his sister decided to break with him and everyone else in

the family who didn't understand the life she chose to lead. When she left the state because her man needed to lay low, Donovan had to face his enemies on the Battlefield of Nightmares alone.

*

Each night he wore camouflage, like his enemies, so he could merge with the environment. In most of these dreams he was younger and living at home with his mama. Funny thing he noticed about camouflage: he always ended up in a glass cube with himself as the showpiece. Furthermore, the camouflage damaged his skin, broke him out in zits and left him with scars. Every time he faced a mirror a sticky substance came oozing from beneath his flesh, leaving holes, little holes that grew larger by the day. The pus that oozed through, instead of clearing up his image, threatened to deplete the very thing that made him who he was. Each time he wiped the mirror so his younger sister and the rest of family could use it to see themselves while preparing their faces in the mornings, he realized that the creamy stuff was part of who he was. Worst of all, it was more birthright than allergy. His grandma, for example, and other members in his family, had similar battle scars. But Donovan didn't want to be the little pig who asked his mama why her mouth was so long. Each time he was tempted to ask the question, he bit his tongue and swallowed his spit, always hoping this family legacy would skip him.

Hard as he tried to hide them, these scars were so deeply rooted that the minute others met him, they knew he was hiding something. They didn't even have to say it. Deflection of their eyes as if they were ashamed, yet glad he was the one and not them. A sneaky little peek when his head was turned to the side and they thought he wasn't looking said it all. And so he learned that camouflage wouldn't do the trick. It only made him more aware that he was forever marked. He would never attain his dream of social anonymity.

This cycle of entering the battlefield night after night left Donovan hating dreams—with the exception of the ones where he could fly—because he had to face the killing of what he had hoped to be, face his own image being eaten. To calm himself during these hours of desperation, Donovan got up from bed and stood at his apartment window, looked up

at the stars. Here at his window on the universe he floated in memories of his family sitting at the mouth of the Atlantic Ocean listening to whales talking to the oceans of other universes. These experiences were like free driving on the open expanses of the I-94 among changing leaves under Michigan's autumn sun, drinking gulps of music flowing from the *vibing* Miles Davis, Bob Marley, John Coltrane and Jimi Hendrix, souls who'd traveled to the outer limits of the vibrational universe and back. During these moments, his connection to all things living was restored, and he knew he could fly. These sounds helped ease the pain as he watched others dismantle his own history and that of his spirit family that traveled this earth. He watched them take the life out of his dreams, then drink his blood to digest the bread harvested from the sweat of his ancestral brow on the land of his birth, now parceled up and fully displaced, archived as sacred artifacts in places like the Smithsonian, the Musée du Louvre, and other such living tombs instead of back to the earth where they rightly belong to help in the journey while crossing the great river. His nerves trembled at the thought of the harm being done, so he used jazz vibes, salsa syncopations, then more jazz, more reggae, a flask of samba, a cup of calypso, a teaspoon of Japanese Flute to control the tempo of his nerves and bring the healing. But he never played the blues, especially those from the Lower Lands. Well, there was one exception: BB's *The Thrill is Gone.*

Unlike regular music, blues—much like bums down on Cass in Detroit or Pine in Atlanta—had too much sorrow. The moaning and groaning of blues singers put a fright in him just as walking on the same side of the street as those bums did. Blues had a pulling power that called him, or something within, and that something was always eager to leave his body and go. But he could not afford to let his guard down like his little sister and fall. Something was always out there waiting. He got a glimpse of it through a Billie Holiday song called "Strange Fruit." True singers of the blues like Billie carried an undercurrent in their voices more powerful than the silent earthquakes working on the shores of California. Those singers produced an undertow that touched his nerves, causing them to vibrate at a troubled tempo and ever so slightly displacing his heartbeat. They created small intermittent emotions like those from prairie wolves speaking to midnight stars of pending omen,

or whelps coming from a dying animal. Maybe a zebra's final moan. And there was no way he could swallow that glottal gargle that felt like curdled blood stuck to the throat of sacrificed souls. How could he use the last gasp of a wounded animal to soothe his pain? That breath of life in transition, onward, toward another awakening soul, waiting to enter a living space like the air he now breathed. He just couldn't take it...didn't feel right for the living to rob the dead or unborn.

"Donovan!" Andrea called, and almost startled him. She was sitting out there on the sofa. He replied with enough grit in his voice to show her he didn't feel like being bothered right now. She bypassed his grit as usual: "What you in there doing? Daydreaming again, or preparing for the interview tomorrow?" That pissed him off some. He had been trying all day not to think about tomorrow until it got here. He had even let her know he'd already prepped himself to the nth degree.

"Donovan!" Andrea called. This time he was on the other side of startle, a few breaths short of raving mad. He turned his eyes to the ceiling and wondered why people always try to make him uncomfortable when they hold power in their hands. Yet not so long ago he had some power. Two weeks after Donovan and Andrea met, she asked to move into his apartment. She said she didn't like her dorm mate. Then she started fussing about this and that, and he started walking around the apartment on tip-toes. Sometimes he even left to stay with his buddy, who had roaches for house pets, just to keep the peace. Now she reminded him that their apartment was in her name, that she could kick him out at will. And why didn't he find a job or hustle instead of sitting in the room writing? She pointed out that most of the Jamaicans she came across had two or three jobs. Why did she have to be the one to get the bottom-shelf brother?

She turned down the TV, and walked over to the doorway so he could get a good picture: "I'm not gonna go there with you. I hope you see that I'm not. And call God all you wanna, cause he ain't coming down off his cross. You of all people should know by now how He feels about ugly." She went back to the sofa.

"What're you trying to say, Andrea? What the hell are you trying to say now?" He stood between the sofa and TV, hands on his hips and legs wide apart.

"Don't you come to me talking that shit, or try to lecture me about anything. Look at yourself good, cause you the one who need help, Mr. Bourgeois! Coming over here and putting us down, as if African Americans don't do shit! Always talking about us, putting us down as if y'all could've done better. All I tried to do was remind you of the interview you have tomorrow for that garbage collector job, and this is the treatment I get for trying to be helpful."

"Sanitation engineer!" he quickly corrected her. "Sanitation Engineer! And just so you know, I ain't no damn Bourgeois. What Bourgeois you know would even consider picking up garbage as a job?"

"You!" she said and left it right there.

She turned up the TV and kicked her feet up on the sofa. He headed back to the bedroom to work on some haikus. Maybe the Zen would help fix him up inside, for things were getting ugly in the apartment again. Living on the farm in Jamaica were some good years, very peaceful. Right about now he felt like walking his memory through them, to lose the weight pushing in on his shoulders, the pressure pushing in on his chest while on its way to rest on his lower back near his kidneys.

*

Donovan stepped off the main road and onto the gravel path leading down to the blue spring water, and was back in Jamaica. He entered the memory of an early morning where the grass was wet with dew. Birds were up, and children by the spring dipped water to prepare their parent's morning coffee. He was one of those children. Donovan looked at himself by the spring gathering water with other children, and smiled. He was walking his thoughts, on his way to visit Blue Hole, a more peaceful place. To his left Hubert Wright's banana field stretched as far back as eyes could see, and to the right was a sugarcane field—legacy of a brutal colonial past. The gentle roar of water falling from rocks into the cockpit valley below welcomed him as it did as a boy. Donovan stepped in the knee-deep water, and it felt coolest on the soles of his feet. According to his family, the surrounding hills were parts of the Cockpit Country where the Maroons defeated the British, then later on defeated themselves. Around here the rocks remained sharp, hills steep, vegetation thick and soupy green. Donovan stepped from

the water and proceeded to climb hills his ancestors used in fleeing the seasoning process. According to his great-great grandmother, the seasoning process brought all the tribes together under one whip, be they Ibos, Biafadas, or Serers. Then it stripped them of their names. Not to mention the layers of skin taken in the process. And some of the few too hard to convert into good obedient workers for Virginia, or other colonies of the Americas, were tossed into the whip-to-death heap as examples to new arrivals of the risk they'd run should any decide not to do the right thing.

Donovan scrambled up the hill, leaving behind memories that reminded him of his nightly battles, of himself standing by open windows looking out into the darkness for light. He proceeded toward the famous grove of bamboo arching high above his path. Because Donovan accepted the winds floating upon the bamboo leaves as part of his spirit, he realized that his movements were part of the reason why the bamboos swayed to and fro. The same bamboo grove that once cast a tremor inside his stomach while working on the farm as a boy had finally become his friend. He slowly walked his mind through the grove. The left and right side of the path grew thick, so thick that once you entered you were cast into nightfall, whether or not the sun shone from mid-sky, or had gone to rest under the deep sea. Because of this natural darkness beneath the bamboo canopy, coupled with a wooing murmur—the voice of the wilderness calling—slave catchers stayed clear if the slave they were pursuing ran into these groves. According to his great-great grandmother, catchers feared Voodoo, belief in the power of the ancestors to deliver the living from peril, more than the whips of Great Britain. For within the powers of ancestors lay the destiny of all, be they black, white or shades between.

Donovan slowly walked his hands across the green surface of bamboo leaves. Blue Hole where fresh water sprang naturally from the earth had to wait another day, for he had found some peace:

We swoon within sounds
heaving bamboo leaves breathing
mustard fields unfold

BILL MOHR

The Rogue Moon's Drum Machine

Partial red, partial groan,
Partial circumstance, partial vagrant,
Partial mobility, partial joke,
Partial layers, backside partial,
Frontways partial, random partial,
Wobble partial, restful partial,
Popsicle partial, gross partial,
Abrupt partial, partial deceit,
Partial repeat, partial glass
Partial fast, partial reversal,
Partial ghost, partial hither, partial to,
Gnawed partial, gnarled moon,
Partial prolongation, partial seizure,
Recluse wastrel, support partial,
Partial to the vowel "u"
Partial to the consonants "n" "w" "z"
Partial to the eloquence of disbelief,
Hollowed partial, stalwart partial,
Soothing partial, partial teeth,
Once, twice, partial ice
Partial facial, satchel ratchet,
Partial racket, partial croon,
Partial favorite, partial revolution,
Partial guess, succulent partial
Partial finger, engorged partial,
Partial zenith, partial pencil,
Partial hence, partial weed in hard ground.

Partial print of boot heel next to a corpse
Partial revenge like a door all the way open
& a brief breeze on a hot day
Partial refusals, partial submissions
Partial fables of subcutaneous auroras,
Partial definition of a word that vanishes
Because it is a name that cannot dream
Of slowly understood impediments
Partial heavens heave behind their singularities
Partial path of a vast impassable paradise.

SHEILA E. MURPHY

From **American Ghazals**

Eleventh

If someone knows enough to teach what is not beautiful,
Then I am ready to discard these moonlit figurines.

Summer means a muted brashness coming through the doorway
Of a jazz club in the city of no hushed place.

I heard the one who birthed me reminisce within the present tense
To match my very prematurity, a patterned loss.

What if virtuosity admits to never quite arriving
At a mood gentle as desired, an accidental leafage.

Plump rounds of song much more than solos heaped upon the others
And called unison from some faraway place of counting.

Northern orchards yield spy apples that make perfect pies
From tartness I have equated with precision all my life.

Twelfth

Milky piano workarounds lack even filo dough
For defense against intrusion or escape.

What I learned from "Be it done unto me,"
Is the perfect present tense, unfettered.

Depth perception comes to mean the arrogance
Of a presumptive wisdom, looking out from glass.

Sacrificial centeredness does not exist
When claimed or even noticed by the self.

River water at an hour before our breakfast
Moved the pale canoe along the space between white trees.

How to be new is not to know and not to strive,
All the while accomplishing with attention one's work.

Thirteenth

She would say "Your lovely friends," and mean
She wished for her own freedom, and for mine.

My mother loved cottonwood, and she would speak
The color blue, and her child might have seemed harsh.

Drink softened the feeling of barbed wire that set aside
The psyche everyone in bully clothes presumed was universal.

Mushroom hunting was a pursuit that anyone could love
When there was mossy light against late afternoon.

I take what quiet gives me and I form a prayer
Out of the act of noticing the way lawns smell when shaved.

A lamb darts unattended near the river,
I can smell her fear, almost a mirror to my breath.

Fourteenth

Ground cover needs trimming back, only the tools
We own are old, brittle, hardened with clay.

My beautiful niece, speaking before the camera
About love, forms words perfectly, citing ancestors.

Air is combed white in our living area,
Enough to keep each room defined and filled with lines.

What is the color for the number 3, I wonder,
Have you sifted ways to make it rhyme with striving?

One way to decode a pantomime: have your hearing
Tested before choirs unamplified, and try to extract thought.

A retreat from frenzy guarantees long life,
The body resurrected constantly as felt and seen.

ROBERT GREGORY

As Ralegh Says

As Ralegh says, those few black swans, the thick
and troubled water of the river, birds of all
colors, the winter being come upon us, rich and
beautiful cities, the sharp mountains, he says.

A ranging cloud that runs before the wind,
a careless child, some sweeter words, he says.
Our rising joy, unblessed and ill-born.
A secret heart, sorrows and other companions.

As Ralegh says, the house of old age. Our bed
is made for us in the dark, he says, a double and
a two-fold opening, he says, eaten up by time,
by which all things, he says, are ordered.

The heavens are high, far off, he says, unsearchable.
Ever since the world had life. Out of the depth
and darkness, he says, the vast and devouring space.
The end of that subtle joy. To hold the times
we have, he says.

16 LOHANS SERIES 1 by Chuang Che, 2003,
mixed media on paper (196 cm x 97 cm)

16 LOHANS SERIES 9 by Chuang Che, 2003,
mixed media on paper (196 cm x 97 cm)

16 LOHANS SERIES 12 by Chuang Che, 2003,
mixed media on paper (196 cm x 97 cm)

BRANDON PETTIT

The Unknown

That verb in the noun
when the noun verbs

moves me to think
about sound

and silence.
About being here

and there without knowing
where I've been

and what I've expected.

When the towhee wingbeats
a shiver into the air

that descends the mercurial
like vapor through stages,

when the draft has already slipped
a note of resistance on going undetected

past the door to my first-heart.

The Flinch

I'm a flight risk
risking the profane
existence of square numbers
and rubrics for the knowledge gained
from following residues that place the stars
on our lids.

You're a flight risk against routine
and acting out
expected outcomes: a slam
of the glass door
against your typical reflections.

She's a flight risk
because he's a flight risk
scolding both her wrists,
too much like babies' ribs, she tells him
only a nut could stomach this.

DENVER BUTSON

From **The Scent of Electricity**

this is a hardbound first edition
owned by someone named *electricity*

it arrived here by trolley car
carried by someone who thought
he was delivering food to the starving

please bring it close to the light

you will notice that it shows little wear
except for the eye tracks

the inevitable eye tracks
of electricity

after the invention of electricity
we crawled into the dark
and picked the sparks
out of each other's hair

the last thing she heard
before falling asleep
was electricity pronouncing her name
in the street
outside her window

Electricity sat in the dark movie house
without anything on under her skirt
she waited until the movie started
before she lifted her skirt opened her legs
and watched as the movie stars' eyes
passed over the skin of her open thighs
from the giant screen

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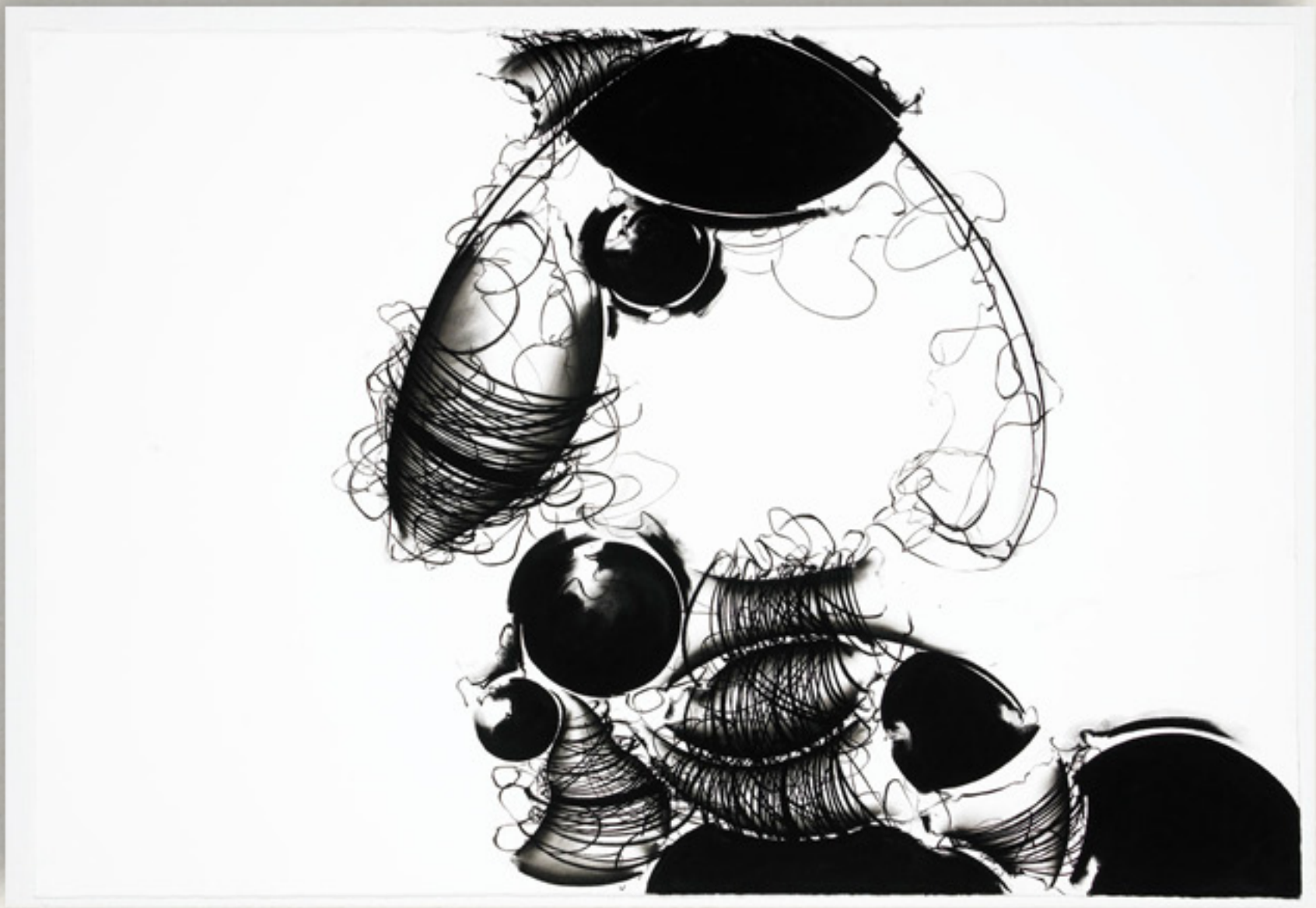

HELLER LEVINSON

lines like parlous adumbrate

splintering abeyances steam the abbey walls caul rippings
trimmed
to a reasonable negotiation

outlining permits passage
passage passageways procedures emergences getting to reaching
outlining gathers, brings focus, forefronts the gathered,
netting)
a loop, a willing)
an enclosure that surrenders, enframes, brings forth)
to be outlined: a condition? a forfeiture? a provocation? an
initializing? (a cuddle?

a face has an outline
within the outline features are featured

can an outline suggest features?
in what manner do features countenance, outline

outline of a whale differs from outline of a beetle
—outlines in conversation

moving lines out
lines moving out
to the outskirts?
{*disembarking profusion*
away from in? a way in? from out this in outside in inside out

in-decision making decision
lines make decisions
figure out
                (go figure
lines scratch out
scratching in to the wall scratches a figure out

{scratch ://: strike strike out strikeout
  spillage allocative fawn
          intermittent breed systems caustic drain}
a figure represents/stands for
confers shape
          {"Form is a trace [*ichnos*] of the formless; it is the
            formless that produces form." – Plotinus
           "Puncturing form formulates a form of formlessness."
                                – Heller }
shapes arising drawn out
          (extrusional emission
        shape – li
            ness
shapely
underlining ://: underlying > the outline

lines,
.....
omens swarming

LAWRENCE R. SMITH

From **Vibrio,** Book II

I. Magritte's Influence on Napoleon

Sandwich man, glass-sided cart in half
light, and he looked away—*tramezzini*,
panini in little paper sacks, wine
and *minerale*—as George threw coat
over arm and from another hand
let his suitcase hang. Taxi in front
of the station, parked. Jacked up, one wheel
gone and no driver around, just the thrust
of a bare iron fist, outlawed gesture.
He looked for signs, but here even
straight edges are hard to find.
The sky bounced upward, but water in
the air, sometimes called night, had settled
in those strange and illegible
currents of the streets. Lecce's sun
had blown itself far into the West
and the town had sunk like Santorini
into its own emptiness. Sulfured air,
neck and hair clogged with train grease, train
smell. And what had happened to the train?
When he got off there seemed to be others,
more than George, but the train was gone
and he stood before the station alone.

This was a town of daylight walking ghosts,
forming in the air as pillars of mist
or leaping readymade in pairs from
behind corners, walking from store windows
(then stepping back up through the glass
redisguised as mannequins). There were
strangers and brothers, *mon hypocrite lecteur*.
"What city is this?" "Illyria."
"What is my hotel?" "There is only one,"
the two men said, "and it is that way."
Two arms at a railroad crossing gate—
each man pointing at a precise moment
in precisely the opposite direction.
It was hard to see their faces; both wore
collarless striped shirts buttoned at the top,
ill-fitting jackets, hats pulled down
to their ears. Surely they were brothers.
As George turned away, they mumbled their
good lucks, then snickered. What language
were they speaking? This is Illyria, George.
Pardon me, sir, your bad entertainment.
I have enemies here, but for pure love
I will follow you in this town of witches
and the blessing of irresistible change.
Around a corner, and the plaid tie
around a clear plastic neck, inflated gloves
freestanding at his feet, a woman's hands
reaching for her desire: male hips in steel.
How could George see? In this world he'd
have to dream up the simulacra,
their living models, trysts in Roman attics.

Which way had he turned? Why had he
left the station without directions?
For the hotel, the hotel was where he was
told to go and await a telephone call.
He stepped off the curb, shoe on gutter's
snagged nylon stocking, looked down and felt
the shudder of longing, the will to drop
coat and suitcase, kneel down, seize stocking
in teeth and caress her in tongues.
But the upright tuba played a slow march
as a lion waited on the road of exit.
I am concerned, I say, with facts which may
belong to the order of pure observation,
but which on each occasion present all the
appearance of a signal, without our being
able to say precisely which signal, and of what.
The long emptiness of those streets,
so that you knew all chance encounters
were portent, pages of the future:
the hanging man, inverted ace of cups,
spilling blood into the ditch where
amnesiac souls cluster, stoop to drink
for their momentary rush of memory.
Pylon and mound, an upright oar,
but George had neither sword nor lamb.
It was his own raw blood they smelled.
He was ready for the double-faced god,
the slow crawl to another life.
That's why he had come, that's why he knew
that a child awaited around the corner.
He took a left and the boy was there,

playing with the usual pigeon—broken
neck, blood and feathers, an end to flight—
lodged in the grille of the sewer.
"Excuse me, but do you know where I live?
Or should I say, where I'm staying?"
"*Certo*," said the boy, "*veni, veni qua*."
His dirty shorts, mottled brown face
down the alley, beckoning George to follow.
Sound of a door opening, a bare arm,
scent of gardenias passing through
a woman's lips. George scuttled backwards
to the street, tripped then ran forward.
Shopwindows again, awaiting his
next move. Then the young woman in a hat
(Magritte himself never wore hats)
walking along, keeping pace beside him,
suddenly offering to declaim
her favorite poem, Pasolini's ditty
about the little sparrows of the Lord.
When he turned to her, she winked.
When he turned to her again, she frowned
and walked away. Lecce lay at the end
of the Mediterranean pier. Sharks
cruised beneath her darkening waters,
and over the sea's still surface
came laughter and moaning, merchant ghosts
and sea gods' remnant thunder.
This is the air; that is the glorious sun;
This pearl she gave me, I do feel't and see't;
And though 'tis wonder that enwraps me thus,
Yet 'tis not madness.

George stopped, uttered the word *miracolo,*
and the hotel appeared, Albergo

Meridionale. As he entered, a boy
jumped to his side. "*Valigia, signore?*"
Actually, it is of little importance if an
occasional error or omission, a genuine
anomaly or lacuna casts a shadow across
my narrative, across what, taken as a
whole, cannot be substantiated.

The red-shirted general was never
very good at waiting. Landing
in Sicily he wasted no time
setting fire to those fields and peasants
with his plan for liberation. Patton
tried something similar, slipped onto
a tugboat off the ancient pier,
but he was no Garibaldi; it could
never be quite the same. Ivory-handled
ass-kicker, peasants and slaves were
fine with him. He'd have them for breakfast,
gorged down with coffee, sausage and eggs.
But Old Blood and Guts will be forgotten
when the Thousand and their divine-mad hero
are still sung in the joyous streets.
Garibaldi was movement, exalted speed;
his attacks were swifter than thought or fire.
But there in the Albergo Meridionale
George lay in bed, waiting for a call.
In the steel bed of fought-off sleep
glass sheets (or bright crystalline

coverlets) denied fingernails, the claws
of night fear, memory's unfinished story.

He was sinking, moving through glass
to another place: not a Desnos nap
but a West Coast nap, not oracular dreams
but the dream of sweet and buried action….

A. A. HEDGECOKE

Carcass

Carcass kindled like a rucksack
jerky filled snack for Crow & Beetle.
Split skin stretched over marrowless cage,
encased dry tomb, like those strewn
through this loess reach, cradling past
ever present here, and now you come
walking riverside, bringing sensory thrill
into daylight much like this cervidae
culled morning each waking before
demise. We move this way, catching life
until death becomes us, where we rot
into the same dust holding multitudes
before us and welcoming those beyond.
We lift this measure. Toss casing, frame to
wind over shoulders, swaddling human
in ruminant mammal rim, softening intake
in sleek steps alongside rivered bellies
like stones turn time back into brink.
Here, where I find you dovetailing wind
into hoofprint. Your antler turned away
as if to sway yourself back. Me, I follow,
wrapping myself, enclosed interment, where
we peek from time to time, huddling here,
heaving morning, lifting once more, dense
fog from repository remains we quicken
in paint, punch key pummel. Tis the nest
of this that brings us here. Tis the hide
we wallow. Carcass veil blanketing morning

like this foot feels split hooves, now
knuckled deep between us two. He's
with us all the way to page, leading,
death propelling promise, revisit, renew,
rekindle– Tis the seat of it now. Tis the life–
River come clean carcass, makeover mad
rush with insight, first dawn taste–take.

Noodling

I never noodled.

Never dove in,
slid hands up
where they don't belong,
for the thrill there.

Never singled out
something slimy
even though I could have.

Even though otherwise
I was in about everything
one could slide into.

Even though I had the passion.
Had that hunger hefted
tons of cousins deep down
one way or another.

Yet tuna salad
and peanut butter both
treble played hook,
okra, breaded nuggets,
on twenty-pound-test,
lying low below
each time I jelly-wormed,
beetle spun, hoola-popped
those waters where
cats crawled bottoms,
sunken streams,

along the lines between
here/other side

Trouble there
an expected thing.

Cats' whiskers said to free
ailment—if they don't wag,
wind round your fingers,
during cleaning time—
skinning—No—

Noodling,
never was my way.

To capture cats' whammy
I'd share my lunch,
bring them up on my side,
steal their trust.

Hold the whiskers clean aside.
Keep them courteous.

Contributors' Advice, or Free Speech Corner, or the Blind Assemblage (being the unedited comments of contributors on almost anything.)

JOHN BRADLEY

Author's credo: Dear Kind Reader, I can never tell who's renting out the top third of my head. At 11:11, someone will tell you it's 11:11. A toad should never be told, hot or cold, it should be towed. You know you've lost the war when one of your troops says: "We had to destroy them to make them safe." Maybe that's why on most days I believe the taxi cab driver ars poetica: "I can only know what your mouth lets me know." Lincoln licked the log so well only the log could recollect Lincoln. When I was a janitor, I smelled of disinfectant in armpit and tongue. Note the standard of perfection in the previous statement. I assure you, my faceless friend, every letter here has been borrowed from other alphabets, other writers, yet every word is certifiably my own. At 11:11, someone will say, "What were you saying about 11/11?" Before leaving, please place your extant burden in the salt shaker. One needn't go far to know here is too near. I swear I never thought pulling on that thread dangling from your wrist would make you too disappear.

JOHN M. BENNETT

Mind

Drown your eyebrow with a hamster .ditch
Punch your plodding with a pool .cob
Itch cluster , laws , lake of oil .lust
Lunch your musty throat with dust .caw
Crown your labor with a coprolite .cream

WILL ALEXANDER

Coursing like a river through invisible mountain chains, Will Alexander no longer resides in the visible as assumption. His sun is "po tolo," Sirius B, which oversees "the beginning and ending of all things seen and unseen."

SHEILA E. MURPHY

Sparkle, for the love of Pete! Enrich by paying attention. Whatever you do, do not be tedious. We're here for a very short time. Enrich another life, if this seems humanly possible. Once you do this, the rest falls into place.

AUSTIN STRAUS

I have been using magnifying glasses to make artworks for many years. Some are large wall pieces while others are artist's books of various sizes. I have made landscapes, abstract constructions, "holey books," "burnbooks" (see Calibanonline #1) and figures. I usually have no plan when I start burning a figure or figures on a card or piece of construction paper. Most of the time, to get better control, I'll use a relatively small glass. My best pieces seem to come to me as I'm working. I like the way the burn line looks. It has a different, looser and somewhat more intense and exciting feel to it than painted or drawn lines, at least for me. The pieces usually take from a few minutes to an hour or more, depending on the complexity. I work under a hot sun with my head and arms well protected, trying not to breathe in the smoke!

ROBERT GREGORY

Of the Nicknames of Costermongers

Like many rude, and almost all wandering communities, the costermongers, like the cabmen and pickpockets, are hardly ever known by their real names; even the honest men among them are distinguished by some strange appellation. Indeed, they are all known one to another by nicknames, which they acquire either by some mode of dress, some remark that has ensured costermonger applause, some peculiarity in trading, or some defect or singularly in personal appearance. Men are known as "Rotten Herrings," "Spuddy" (a seller of bad potatoes, until beaten by the Irish for his bad wares,) "Curly" (a man with a curly head), "Foreigner" (a [unclear:] had been in the Spanish-Legion), "Brassy" (a very saucy person), "Gaffy" (once a performer), "The One-eyed Buffer," " Jaw-breaker," "Pine-apple Jack," "Cast-iron Poll" (her head having been struck with a pot without injury to her), "Whilky," "Blackwall Poll" (a woman generally having two black eyes), "Lushy Bet," "Dirty Sall" (the costermongers generally objecting to dirty women), and " Dancing Sue."

Mayhew, Henry . *London Labour and the London Poor, Volume 1*
Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library

BRANDON PETTIT

You must know that you'll never be the person you want to see in the mirror. Once you know this, your shadow becomes that much more inhabitable.

ROBERT VANDERMOLEN

Fish

I drove down Leonard and crossed the bridge and up to Plainfield to the Flying Bridge Fish Market to buy fresh shrimp for Xmas Eve. The owner (whose name always eludes me) said he'd have 3 dozen cooked for me in 40 minutes. How to waste 40 minutes without driving home—I hadn't visited the fish ladder since summer; plus there was free parking for fishermen and spectators. I merely had to re-cross the river.

It wasn't cold, relatively speaking, for this time of year, though the wind out of the northwest had a nervous bite. I zipped my coat. A slight glitter of sun. Snow was melting along the verge of the walk to the rocks of the Grand River. There were four fishermen in waders stretched out in the water 30 yards below the dam. It wasn't my kind of fishing weather, though as a teenager I might have attempted it. When I was younger, however, no one fished in the river in waders in winter. No one had thought of it—the river was more polluted then and only poor people ate the fish (primarily carp). I wondered what they were after, since the salmon run had been over for weeks—perhaps early steelhead moving up from Lake Michigan.

In the fish market I had noted on the chalk board that fresh-water perch were currently selling at 19 dollars a pound, as were bluegill. That seemed extraordinary, the fish were quite common. In summer I caught buckets of both at Lincoln Lake. I planned to ask the owner at the Flying Bridge. Were these species being imported from Canada? And why? I was standing at the railing of the fish ladder—a platform even with the dam, the water pounding over (without the sound, similar to sheets of steel in foundries in the old news reels), close to a half mile to the opposite shore. It's quite a sensation—one feels like it is trying to pull everything along with it, like oneself. There's a dizzying aspect, with attendant mist.

Behind me, one can peer down at the spaced "steps" fish need to climb in order to swim to the upper reaches of the river and feeder creeks, streams and smaller rivers. But at this time of year nothing is maneuvering to outwit the dam. It was ice, all ice, north of the dam.

I did watch for a few minutes, however. There were mallards idling in the bottom pool. I also noticed someone had peed in the snow next to my boot sometime earlier in the day.

I wandered back to my pickup in the largely deserted lot. There's a dumpster perched above the curb for fishermen to toss their debris from cleaning fish. I opened it out of curiosity. No fish offal, but bags and bags of household trash. People were driving here to dump their trash, no doubt because they couldn't afford the service. Then I noticed to the side of the dumpster a pile of fish in snow, pan fish; that is, perch, bluegills and speckled bass (crappies). They appeared to be recently caught. It crossed my mind, of course. I had a sharp knife in the glove box. When I was younger, and poorer, I might have. There must have been some emergency, I suppose. Or did someone dump them on purpose so someone else could pick them up for food?

I sometimes like to think I'm still poor. I should get rid of that notion. The wife of the owner of the fish market works for my wife. So I always get a discount. Is that fair? Also, I forgot to ask him about the prices for bluegill and perch. Is there some problem I'm not aware of? At home I drank a whiskey, then took the puppy for a walk in the woods.

DENVER BUTSON

in lieu of flowers
please send elephants

DOREN ROBBINS

History, with limited details incomprehensible in their horror, documents facts, statistics, events, sometimes presenting a critical truth transcending the politics of allegiance and the winning army's system of values, as in the Roman historian Tacitus' phrase when he stated about conquerors: "They make a desert and call it peace." Poets working with what language and visual images can express and communicate through sincerity and complexity, through itemized awareness of the politics of expression, through compassion rising out of imagination's association with others' suffering, must be aware of the contradiction they live with and present to the real world of high finance, militarism, and cultural

control, which is unrelated to shaping a world valuing imagination. This does not mean that Fredric Jameson's reference to the "libidinal utopia of the individual body" is an unfit subject or an irrelevant desire because of imminent crises within the international community. What I have been arguing is that because of the realization and habit of pleasure, because the variety of unorganized rituals of fantasy, with roots in art and eroticism, because of the imagination's magnetics in relation to pleasure—the deferral, the decimation, the absence of it for others is intolerable to witness. I don't expect poetry or art to solve the problems of our catastrophes. Honesty regarding that failure is the first step. But taking that step is to reaffirm not only that all quality art and poetry is libidinal by definition, but that history's libido is the poetry and art that expresses uncensored historical realities and emotion about them that would otherwise be unexpressed, remain excluded from our consciousness, disappeared lives unrecorded without the poet's or the artist's passionate liability. From Federico Garcia Lorca's assassination to Paul Celan suicided by the holocaust to the ravages of prisoner poets in Guantanamo—we are always in danger of losing the irresistible responsibility to commemorate what happened.
From: "History's Libido: The Role of the Radical Imagination in 20th Century Poetry and Art," a lecture-reading delivered at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

HELLER LEVINSON
Read Question Brood

BILL MOHR
How much work-time has e-mail saved the past ten years in the United States? I typed that question into my search engine a few days ago and nothing relevant popped up on the selection list. Perhaps I didn't phrase the question in such a way as to secure a readily available answer, but even so, I was left wondering who is actually studying the relationship between work productivity and electronic communication. It would stretch a post-Fordist rubberband beyond any possible circumference of credulity to believe that no one is gauging this matter: productivity

is intimately linked to wealth, so someone must have some statistics. Is it possible, however, that the impact of our use of e-mail as a means of increasing efficiency is being withheld from our examination because it would raise questions about the distribution of wealth in our society? Our cooperation at all kinds of levels is required in order to make social transitions more fluid. If wealth has flowed to a very small percentage of the population in the United States, how exactly has our cooperation with changes in the infrastructure, such as e-mail, transmogrified into subservience, even at a syntactical level. I was rebuked, for instance, by a colleague a while back for taking up her time with complete sentences in the e-mails I sent her, instead of providing precisely abbreviated information. I let it be known that I was not interested in collaborating with technologically determined paraphrases and that was the last I heard of the matter, at least from her. In standing astride the subject and predicate of consciously used language, I am hardly alone. I suspect, in fact, that the person whose workload made her impatiently resent anything that added a second to any given task would adamantly support a more equitable distribution of rewards for work done. Until the work done, including that of *Caliban* online, is understood as a source of plenitude, then the pressures to cooperate without a full accounting will only increase. A poem reveals the potential of that plenitude to make our lives not just legible, but literate within a radical transparency.

GARRETT CAPLES

More and more, despite much avant-garde pressure to the contrary, I find I want the parts of my poems to be motivated. The arbitrary is/was/has been a useful tool for the poet, yet at the same time, has grown academic. Generation of arbitrary lines through various techniques is a crutch of MFA programs, trying to teach what can't be taught: how to write a poem. The lines might be interesting, but the whole of the poem flies by without mystery or residue. The whole of the poem is behind the poem, holding it together without intruding upon it. Its motivation gives it its power to linger and compel a reader's return to it.

GEORGE KALAMARAS

I am traveling in the night-dark dark on the back of a great white wolf. Somehow we have passed through the throat of an owl. Everything is so black it is white. The Medicine Bows, the Mummies, down through the snowy ledges of the San Juans. Across Raton Pass. The wolf and I don't talk, but I hear his thoughts through my fingertips as I clutch the ruff of his neck with my right hand, riding him down through Colorado all the way to New Mexico. In my left, a copy of *Caliban*. Issue # 4. We arrive in Albuquerque at the door of poet Gene Frumkin. Gene is alive, holding the same issue in which he and I first appeared, only a single poem between ours. How we met. Meet. Met. That damn wood beam at his door I always forgot about and conked my head on. We embrace in the night-dark night, the owl on fire in our chest.

*

From René Daumal's "Open Letter to Andre Breton," published in 1930 in *Le Grand Jeu*,

> And in the area of positive research, what have you done since the founding of Surrealism? . . . We [*Le Grand Jeu*] have . . . the unlimited field (in every conceivable mental direction) of Hindu yoga, the systematic confrontation of the lyrical and dreamlike fact with the teachings of occult tradition . . . and those of the so-called primitive mind . . . and we're not finished yet. (*The Powers of the Word*)

*

There are at least two ways to enter any poem you're writing, just like entering this room, I tell my students, pointing to the two doors at either side of our classroom. *The door of language or the door of meaning*.

More and more I mean the dream.

*

I'm reading Tákis Sinópoulos again, *Landscape of Death*. But I can't get past the front leaf into which I've tucked his poem, "Konstandinos Raving." Yes, it appears in the book, but each time I go to read I fall instead into the thin onionskin, need to hold it, the poem typed for me, lovingly, by John Bradley in 1984 or 1985. Before the time of computers. The accent over the first "a" of Ioánna that John carefully wrote in. The

accent let from the body of the word each time her name appears. Like phosphorescent blood. Over and again. Konstandinos's lover, Ioánna, whom he calls precisely twelve times. Twelve loving marks from my friend's hand.

*

Gene, of course, had told me about Alvaro Cardona-Hine, their decades of friendship. How they met in 1957 in L.A. And now I'm sitting with Alvaro again on his mountaintop verandah in Truchas, smoking cigars and drinking green tea, reading one another the poems of Miguel Hernández. The closing of his great elegy for Ramón Sijé:

> I miss you Ramón. Ramón, we still have
> so many things to talk about.

And we're discussing Gene. The lovely of his dark. I'm reading Alvaro a passage from Gene's poem, "Outnumbering Any One Way," through which we met all these years ago in *Caliban*:

> just as the goldfinch brightens in summer, my memory of you
> turns to me with a voice clearer than unimpeded breath.
> i refer so much to words that life pleases me most
> when I can almost phrase you into presence. you are not here
> nor there in some former blessing, but a formation
> of words possible as a single brushstroke on air. style outnumbers
> any one way of saying anything. it harbors delayed attitudes,
> beginning with a goldfinch, brightening in longer exposure
> to light, in measures ripened by time in unapprehended
> recesses. . . .

*

On the title page of each issue, a drawing of Caliban holding a stone axe. A kind of club with which he tries to knock imaginative sense back into us.

*

> DADA gives birth to all, splits and synthesizes all.
> All is encamped behind DADA.
> Nobody can be on the DADA's side.
>
> —Takahashi Shinkichi, "Assertion is Dadaist"

*

No one can be in the dream without loving the dream.

*

Cowboy sense. The koan within the koan. Montgomery Clift in *Red River* (1948):

> *Which would you rather have—what's behind or what might be ahead?*

*

What sustains us, makes our practice (w)hole?

So in one dream I'm playing five-card draw with a group of toughs in a saloon in Abilene. I'm dealt the following—what appears to be a straight—*The Bitter Oleander* of Hearts; the *Caliban* of Clubs; the *Hambone* of Diamonds; the *Sulfur* of Spades, and the *Talisman* of Hearts. I know that these five journals have been central to my poetry, that at the table I have a straight. Although I stand pat, the tough on my left starts dealing me three more cards—though, oddly, I'm not asked to give any up—a *kayak* card, a second *Caliban*, and something called *Beloved Owl on Fire in My Chest*.

*

Not Abilene. Nor Butte. Not even Missoula. So, I'm finally reading Richard Hugo's novel, *Death and the Good Life*, and am in awe of the power of the sentence:

> I got one of those lovely chills you get when you think you've found a sad, sad place, a place where loneliness goes when it leaves the cities.

*

Somehow I have passed through the throat of the wolf. Even with the strychnine. Even with the corpses piled on the plains.

*

Three simple words: Vallejo

*

Yes, syllables are words. In Sanskrit. In the chewing apart. Which is where it occurs, of course. Death. Life. Seed-sound ground. Dissolve.

*

> What gushes in imagination is reality.

The whole past is contained in the soybean's future.

—Takahashi Shinkichi, "Assertion is Dadaist"

*

Death is not death. Nor is the quieted tongued within the tongue. As Octavio Paz says,

Failure? Silence is not a failure, but the end result, the culmination of language.

Contributors' Advice/105

Why do we keep saying that death is absurd? What do we know about death?

(*Conjunctions and Disjunctions*)

*

I miss you Ramón. Ramón, we still have
so many things to talk about.

*

John Wayne to Walter Brennan in *Red River*:

This is good a place as any. Swing the wagon around. We'll keep the river to our back.

CALIBAN IS SEARCHING FOR ANGELS