

# Press

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*Jordan Hartt*

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## **Leap**

the woman who jumped or fell from the bridge onto the rocky sandbar of the river

jumped or fell during the middle of the day      cold day      cold white sky  
feathered plumes of smoke rising through the forest      from hidden cabins  
mossy roofs thick as sponges      river shining like a handful of quarters      dull  
sun white as a peeled potato

the woman who jumped or fell from the bridge onto the rocky sandbar of the river  
still carried within herself the stillbirth of her daughter and the earthen cry of shovel  
blade as she buried the paleness of her daughter's body, more salmon than human,  
beneath the muddy soil, firs bending in the wind overhead

the woman who jumped or fell from the bridge onto the rocky sandbar of the river

climbed up over the restraining metal fence and leaned out holding the cable and  
then slipped or let go, still carrying within herself the memory of kenny and the way  
she'd thrown beer in his face, weeks earlier, still thinking about the way he'd punched  
her in the stomach, months earlier, still thinking about his sweater that smelled of  
salmon and tobacco, the way he'd duck under the firs in the backyard, bend his head  
into his hands and click his lighter until the puff of smoke exhaled into the cold  
air, releasing him, the rain falling on the plastic toys of her sister's children and the  
swingset and the mossy plastic pool with standing rainwater      pregnant, she jumps  
on the trampoline

the woman who jumped or fell from the bridge onto the rocky sandbar of the river

felt the cold cable in her hands thick as an alder slicker than she'd realized her weight pulling her hard toward the river, hard toward the earth she jumped or let go saw white sky mist moving through firs alders cottonwoods plumes of river rushing past the rocks and in that brief instant remembered fishing with kenny remembered the taut fishing line in that brief moment she remembered the rocking of the aluminum boat and the way kenny had stood up as if to steady it she remembered the strength of the salmon's tug against the nylon line she remembered the sky and the forest and the river shining like quarters

so let's remember the salmon, too the salmon hooked on the end of her nylon line let's remember the flashing lure that catches her eye the flashing lure that glints in the roof of the ocean like herring the miracle of salty flashing herring near the lid of the water where water gives way to emptiness and absent sun

yes, let's remember the salmon who emerged out of the egg the roots of cottonwoods grasping the slippery mud sun splintered in the shallow water the wide mouth of glaciers long-since melted murky rocks and stripes of watery sunlight gills let's remember her pilgrimage to the sea the headlong pour from the river into the ocean the continental shelf disappearing beneath her the bodies of the salmon slowly separating like spilled matchsticks in the great openness of the ocean

yes, let's remember the salmon and the fierce tribal march toward the aleutians let's remember salmon woman's periodic leaps from the ocean into the sky like the joy of a pregnant woman in a mobile-home park jumping on a trampoline let's remember that upward jump the quick paddle to the surface and the leap and whistle of air over gills

let's remember the curving hanging sky

let's remember the salmon woman and the human woman and the maturation of the salmon woman the sudden heat in her veins as she looks at a male who

knew those fierce tribal mouths could cause such storms in her cartilage      lust  
swelling of abdomen      the sudden urge to turn homeward for spray and spawn  
their very bodies changing      the mouths of the males curving deeper      the  
silver, the blue of their bodies growing deeper      let's not forget the hunger of the  
migration      the loss of food her body growing thinner let's remember hunger  
and lust and water and the turn homeward

and let's remember the lure      the bland rubber taste of the lure      the sudden  
hook in the roof of her mouth      the jerk upward toward the empty sky      she  
twists, turns, thrashes and longs for the ocean      she remembers the great pink  
migration and openness of the water and the coppery lust for men and the lust of  
men and she thinks of the slick roots of the cottonwoods and remembers the taste  
of freshwater and she fights and she's lifted into the pure air a squall of gray on the  
horizon      saltwater rains from her body down to the swells of ocean as she fights  
there's a sudden loosening      a tear in the roof of her mouth      the taste of her  
own blood and bone and metal and she falls free

yes, let's remember the salmon      remember her upstream fight into the freshwater

let's remember what it means to climb up pure rushing river      a fight for  
inches      the world a tear of bubbles of air and water      let's remember what  
nine hundred miles of struggle means to a salmon      let's remember rushing water  
and dams and hooks and the paws of bear      she fights for the final scrape of her  
fin on home gravel      for the sharp taste of blood in the water      for the ecstasy  
of reddish eggs the spray of watery milt over eggs      the muddy bare roots of the  
cottonwoods      the fading red sun the dimming of the earth the dimming of the  
water      the reach of the claws of bear

but of the golden beer running down kenny's bearded face let us (or let us not) forget  
the way that he looks at her without talking and the way he wipes his face the rain  
slumping against the roof of the tavern      the pulse of the jukebox rattling the  
wooden floor

the bartenders polishing the smooth cedar flank of the bar with dirty rags  
their black hair draining all the way to the floor      all the way to the sea      let  
us or let us not forget the way that kenny wipes his face with a flannel sleeve and the

fierce way he looks at her and she stands yes she rises *yes* and she puts her purse over one shoulder and she walks out *yes* and he sits there and wipes his face with a flannel sleeve and then he feels something animal rise inside him

let's remember that some men only pretend to be men but are grizzly bears in the shape of men he runs after her, in his haste slipping down the rain-soaked steps he roars in the rain the tail-lights of her truck kick away from him like a salmon kicking upstream he screams like a bear he roars like the sound of a car crash

drunk he roars and no one in the bar bothers him because they know that bears roar because that's what bears do and as for the woman, well, they're just glad she got away

the woman who jumped or fell from the bridge onto the rocky sandbar of the river had jumped on the trampoline earlier that day under the black swaying telephone wires

the phone was ringing in the mobile home fallen alder leaves were rotting by the fence the whole earth was rusting in the rain she leaped and the sky was white and she opened her mouth to the rain she swallowed the metallic taste of the rain and she leaped and she held her outstretched arms to the sky and she held her arms to the rain and the mist and the rotting alder leaves and the long wet grass that grew up through the cracked plastic toys and the spokes in the rusted tricycle and she leaped in the air and came down hard on the wet grass and she lay crumpled in a pile of knees and elbows and laughter but let's not remember her fall and let's not remember her fall from the bridge either let's remember her leap suspended ecstatic a salmon, in the white smoky air

• • •

I have no idea where "Leap" came from. I was reading a lot of Ovid one winter, and also my grandfather was a fisheries biologist who tracked the migrations of salmon, and also oral Pacific Northwest storytellers in coffeehouses have certain cadences that they often use and those were in my head, and also the line "the woman who

jumped or fell from the bridge onto the rocky sandbar of the river” kept playing in my head, as well, over and over, even though I had no idea what it meant, or who the woman was.

I knew where the bridge was, though. And so I submerged one day and came up somehow with this piece on the end of my hook and then I cleared debris from the piece for years and this is the result.

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**Jordan Hartt** *is the director of programs for the Port Townsend Writers’ Conference. He is also the project director for the Conversations Across Borders Project, which pairs writers across borders to create new work. Previous creative work has appeared in such magazines as Another Chicago Magazine (ACM), Black Zinnias, The Crab Creek Review, and Prose Poem.*

*Elaine Johanson*

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## **The Subtenants**

THEY HAD REASON ENOUGH to be annoyed, or so he said. First, by the rusted bicycle rubbing up against the dining room table, and the poster of Picasso's sunflowers taped to the foyer wall. Then the granola bar wrapper stuffed behind the radiator, the cabinet handle that came off in his hand, the open bag of flour crusted with moth larvae casings. He catalogued his discoveries over dinner, how their home had been misused during their absence. He called them every word in the book, a new word for everything they did wrong, and banged around the house like an angry child.

Every day brought a new find: crushed graham crackers in the sofa, mud stains on the sheets given to them as a wedding gift, marbles rumbling back and forth in the kitchen drawer where they kept large utensils. She pulled out a wooden ladle one evening and a cat's eye hit her in the tooth. He wanted to send them the dentist bill; he spent an evening researching lawyers. He threw out the muddied sheets, punching them as they billowed into the trash cans. She fished them out in the morning, ran them through the wash three times, and folded them into the linen closet for guests.

Then came the afternoon she needed the number of a hair salon. Out of the phone book pages slid flattened violets and red leaves. She gathered them up from the floor, spread them on the kitchen table, then searched the book for more. He was there when she vacuumed up glitter from between the floorboards. He helped her unravel a bleached ribbon from the front yard pine with a patience that stayed intact even when it started to rain, straight down.

He was watching the football game when she found the post-it in her make-up bag. In his tall, blue print, it said, 'you don't need it.' She stood in the bathroom with the note stuck to her index finger, wondering if she should still put on make-up for their dinner out, or if she should go to him and show him the note and what kind

of expression he'd meet her with. She put the note back, like a fortune cookie slip tucked into a pocket.

He was at work when she found the sapphire earrings in the hot cocoa mix. They were bigger than what she usually wore, and square. He smiled when he saw her wearing them, a night when they were meeting friends for a concert in the park.

"I thought you might try to eat them," he said, and then came close to smell her ear, putting his hand on her back to keep her from moving away. "Did you wash them? I don't smell the chocolate at all. No, there it is. No, maybe it's just you."

\* \* \*

This is the story she told her friend, when asked why she stayed with her husband so long.

'It was the sense that maybe I just wasn't seeing what I should have been seeing all along. It was like waking up in a new world, like when it snows, or at Christmas. I knew everything was the same, but still, I couldn't help myself. If I could make it Christmas every day, I could stay.'

• • •

I've lived in a lot of apartments since graduating from college, and have occasionally toyed with the idea of subletting my apartment out when I'm traveling. But my home has always felt like a private space, and allowing someone else to live there makes me anxious. Writing this story was my way of exploring that anxiety.

An earlier version of "The Subtenants" appeared as a prose poem in my graduate thesis, but in that version, there was very little difference in the experience of the man and woman. It felt incomplete. I decided to turn it into a story, with the subtenants' mess serving as a catalyst for a change in the couple's relationship. When I submitted it to Press One, there was a long middle section that described a period in the woman's childhood. Editor Beth Thorpe rightly pointed out that the middle section was actually just a distraction and that the story stood alone without it. I mourned that middle part for a short while, but with Beth's encouragement, have started to turn it into its own story.

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**Elaine Johanson** is a writer and teacher living in Philadelphia. She received a BA from Bowdoin College, and an MFA in poetry from Columbia University.

*Genevieve Betts*

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## **Yen**

1. Desire. A longing  
like a long string tugging  
at the inside of something,  
the body—  
friction pulling at the skin  
when removing a stitch.

2. Craving what I can't have—  
back home, the carnival fare  
of Navajo taco—  
    Indian fry bread  
    with refried beans,  
    salsa and cheese.

Once a landscape of cacti—  
    prickly pear and ocotillo,  
    a forest of saguaro.  
Thin trees of palo verde  
and the way the heat feels  
under their meager shade.

Giving into sweat. Shiny  
brown knees and multiple tan lines  
on top of feet—  
    overlapping lines of flesh,  
    ivory and beige and bronze

and the held pose of a lizard  
on a rock, uninterrupted  
except for the occasional  
set of push ups.

The smell of chlorine, a bleachy tin  
emanating from each pool, blue  
dotting every yard down the street.  
Third degree burns  
when toe overlaps flip-flop.

The clean line of the horizon.

3. Now, no horizon.

Instead, a back east formality—  
City Hall on Market Street,  
and the Broad Street Bullies,  
a new history for a transplantee  
unfamiliar with buildings  
built before 1950.

Alleys and nooks and crannies  
of buildings and basements,  
fire escape mazes,  
and tiny row homes sandwiched  
between sky scrapers.

On the street, the smell  
of fried Chinese food hangs heavy.  
A whiff of grainy mustard  
prickles the nostrils, bearable  
only with a freshly baked pretzel  
doughy in the center.

Four seasons. First fall—  
sweater weather and leaves

described with words  
usually reserved for horses:  
    dappled chestnut,  
roan or bay.  
Acorns that crunch under the feet,  
disturbing squirrels that pause,  
then shuttle up nearby trees.

Then snow and the scratch  
of unlined wool, static electricity,  
cable knit caps  
and hair fighting underneath.

Spring umbrellas, clear bubbles  
and shiny rain boots sidestepping  
sprouting bulbs, likely tulips.  
The first rogue warm day leading  
too slowly to a mild summer  
week of sunlight.

And trips to the shore—  
boardwalks, carnie rides,  
sideshow and popcorn.  
The carnival is familiar,  
but the fare foreign—  
    something called funnel cake,  
    a batter-fried web of dough  
dusted with powdered sugar—  
the taste of someone else's hunger.

*Genevieve Betts*

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## **Dream**

I only dream  
in the desert.

Each night, I cross  
borders in my mind,  
arrive in Arizona—

the evening heat,  
an invisible sweater  
I cannot remove.

It pushes against me  
riding down University Drive,  
my old turquoise bicycle  
underneath me again.

Muscle memory takes me  
to the university  
where I lock my bike  
and fall asleep working.

My mother says,

I thought I saw you last night  
in the bike lane

pedaling your beach cruiser  
in beaded flip-flops.

I don't tell her  
that it *was* me—

a vision,  
apparition,

a brief visit  
across state lines.

• • •

Until I was 28, I spent my entire life living in Arizona. Nothing about that seemed strange until I moved to Philadelphia and realized just how unique Arizona is after all. Although an entirely new landscape surrounds me now, Arizona provides the sole setting for all of my dreams. “Dream” deals with that odd connection my mind keeps making between my new home and my hometown, how real the heat feels against my shoulders. “Yen” reacts in a similar way, comparing both places. Now that I find myself moving once again, this time to Brooklyn, I cannot recall having dreamt once of Philadelphia.

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**Genevieve Betts'** *work has appeared in (or is forthcoming from) Conversations Across Borders, Rougarou, The Bakery, Cricket Online Review, Clockhouse Review, Poetry Quarterly, NANO Fiction, as well as other journals and anthologies. She received her MFA from Arizona State University and currently teaches creative writing for Arcadia University's low-residency MFA program in Philadelphia.*

*Jim Churchill-Dicks*

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## **Snoopyland**

### 1. I am the Fonz

It is the year my mother finds a new husband.  
They honeymoon in Monterey. All I get  
is a t-shirt- lettered in glitter blue marquee  
which reads, “The Fonz”. I am five, and still know

how to make the best of things, so with my hair slicked  
back, and mirrored sun glasses at the table,  
I exclaim “Sit on it!” when the new man  
of the house tells me to finish my mashed potatoes.

The Fonz does NOT! Dig. Spankings—  
“Heeeeeeyyyyyy,” I howl on the playground  
and strut around Snoopyland, the hippy name  
for my too cool for school kindergarten.

“Whoaa!” I growl to Bonnie, my classmate chum  
and teacher’s daughter, as she grabs my hand and pulls  
me under the rusted twirly slide. I hold my breath  
as she kisses me, our lips clamped shut as she hums,

“hmmmmmmmmmm” for as long as she can breathe,  
then seperates- a sloppy, dramatic, “muahhh!”  
Giggles and more giggles as she runs away.  
Twitterpated, love inflated- the Fonz. Digs. Chicks.

Bonnie's shoulder touches mine as we melt crayons  
on her hot, hot plate, and as we churn cream  
into cottage cheese, I lose my cool, my eyes dopey.  
The Fonz is dead. He's jumped the shark

and my heart wants to bust with music.  
I trade in the Fonz for a sea-blue  
suit. A leisure suit, but don't be fooled.  
Things are about to get serious.

## 2. I am Neil Diamond

It is Christmastime and on stage, I point  
the microphone and yell "Hit it!"  
to the pretty piano player with  
the long, long blonde hair, the 1970's  
brush fifty times on each side blonde hair,  
the pre-Farah Fawcett sexy cop blonde  
hair, with eyelashes out to Nebraska!  
Like a freckle-faced Neil Diamond, I sing

"All I want for Christmas is my two front  
teeth" and by two front teeth I mean Bonney's  
lips! I punctuate the song with rhinestone  
thrusts and microphone twirls,  
hooting "Whooooo-!"

and the house comes applauding down.

### 3. I am Charlie Brown

Spring comes too soon  
and Bonnie now loves  
David. As I Charlie  
Brown my way to  
my mother's car after school  
her AM radio croons Mathis.

Before we leave the lot I am bawling  
in snotty stutters, my mother asks,  
"What's the matter with you?"  
I point indignantly to the radio,  
and shout "Mo-om!" as if she were  
a four-letter word, "Feelings!"

### 4. I Write the Songs

I ain't been alive forever,  
but I know my first favorite song.  
The pretty piano player knows it too,  
'cause I sing it alone on the playground.

During nap time she places the tune  
on my chest. I'm wearing a Hulk t-shirt,  
though I try real hard not to smash things.

*I write the songs that make the whole world sing.*

"That will be you someday", she whispers.  
She musses my hair. "You'll make all the young girls cry."  
I don't remember her name, but let's call her April,

since that is the month I leave. My father  
is waiting in Florida. On the last day,  
April gives me her hippy guitar,

with the macramé strap, the hand-painted  
fretboard of peace signs and smiles. “Write  
those songs Jimmy Dicks,” she snuffles  
and hugs me. I nod, my face in  
her hair,

but I don’t wanna make no one cry.

---

**Jim Churchill-Dicks** received his M.F.A. in Creative Writing at Goddard College in January of 2005, and now teaches both High School and College Level English Literature and Writing for the Crook County School District. His work has appeared in *The Other Journal*, *Kairos* (*Mars Hill Fellowship*), *Kaleidoscope*: a yearly anthology of Montana Writers, *Fire Magazine*, and *Vain Magazine*. Additionally, his book length poetry collection *Jacob Wrestling* was a semifinalist for the 2005 Dorset Prize from Tupelo Press. He is also the founder and editor of *Torches n’ Pitchforks*, a teen online literary journal.

*Paul Siegell*

**\*04.18.09 – the Disco Biscuits – E-Factory, PA\***

—for Marc Brownstein

eVERYONe.

for the moment feels smooth.

in the foreflow, the silhouette of  
up goes both arms

when no one else has lifted theirs:

in his right he's gotta clear plastic  
water bottle just about kick'd,

just enough left that, as his burst of

that felt “YES!”

surges its attack, effecstasy, the ounces  
he's yet to down

join the night: *whirls to witness—rides  
from Mirror to River—Tunnel, Abyss—*

*back-lit by electric stage-shot orange  
and blue—all ablaze in some fun fan's*

*elevated heartbeat dance leap.*

for the ventriloquist in the vortex tours,

“BISCO!”

*Paul Siegell*

## \*WE'VE COME FOR YOUR HULLABALOO IN KALAMAZOO\*

On the jukebox, Doc Spock's "the blueb error-erry ferry blues" is akin to the collapse of calm: Floor space for typos to boogie. In a beer-soakt slog, I'm dancing on a wet dollar bill—Another coming stomachache for ginger ale. Then, just as Steven Cleveland slurred "Crazinezz," the B-52s lobster-popped the juke. It's like getting the hiccups while walking a tightrope—About as cockamamie as Cheney Dick, it's some serious wilderwildness. "—Please!" the V.P. shriekt, "Someone's gotta know—At least once in her life, did Farrah Fawcett ever sing 'Frère Jacques'!?" [Holy moly. Everything's weird; let's act normal & get noticed.]

• • •

"HULLABALOO" comes from farming phrases collected over time, then finding space for them. The Bisco poem came from just what it says: Show > Water Whirl > Poem. Why not? For the setlist that night, a quick Google shows they played "Mirrors," "Rivers," "The Tunnel," and "The Great Abyss."

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**Paul Siegell** is the author of three books of poetry: *wild life rifle fire* (Otoliths Books), *jambandbootleg* (A-Head Publishing) and *Poemergency Room* (Otoliths Books). Born on Long Island, educated in Pittsburgh, employed in Orlando, Atlanta and now Philadelphia, Paul is a marketing copywriter and a senior editor at Painted Bride Quarterly. He has contributed to *Apiary*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Rattle*, and many other fine journals. Kindly find more of Paul's work at *ReVeLeR @ eYeLeVeL*.

*Raphael Cutrufello*

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## **What's the Point of Fooling?**

Burt Bacharach's got nothing on you, kid  
Heard about the cameos and the work you did  
Don't get so absorbed in things that you claim are dead  
Everything that's gone must be put to bed

Kirk Cameron is a hack compared to you  
If you don't get the part then you're getting screwed  
I'd sell your pictures at the beach in a booth  
I believe your brother is a pillar of the truth

You can only turn a handle on an unlocked door  
Your misremembered lines make your delivery a bore  
is that you laughing or the way you choke  
What's the point of fooling if you ain't in on the joke

Your concourse ripples like a bright red train  
Under swollen sun in the steaming rain  
In a desperate cold kicking of a turkey heading south  
Silence is the treatment for your mouth

Everything about you is just screaming chairs  
On with music off the lights we'll just stand and stare  
If I remind you of a son you never had  
I hope that doesn't leave you feeling bad

*Raphael Cutrufello*

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## **Hildebrand**

how long can we not say what we're thinking?  
how long can we not say what we're thinking?

white walls and cherry soda  
I've never been to North Dakota  
wood floors and spray paint  
thought I was bored but I guess I ain't

accordions and picture frames  
to get in the way of all my aims and  
how long can we not say what we're thinking?  
how long can we not say what we're thinking?

Hildebrand makes pots and pans  
she even presses her own tin cans  
she sews coats and makes boats and ropes  
I even hear she makes all her own soap

accordions and picture frames  
to get in the way of all my aims and  
how long can we not say what we're thinking?

---

*Hezekiah Jones is a collection of Philadelphia-area artists orbiting around the songwriting of **Raphael Cutrufello**. They have released two full-length albums, Hezekiah Says You're A-Ok (2006), and Have You Seen Our New Fort? (2011), and two EPs, Come to Our Pool Party (2007), and Bread of Teeth (2009), all on Yer Bird Records. Also a split 7-inch, The Asheville Squints (2008), released on Quite Scientific.*

*Don Riggs*

## **Making Things out of Words**

**“As Below, so Above”**

I have been using my daily sonnet activity to explore areas of my consciousness that my other quotidian activities—work, saying hi to people as we pass in town, writing letters of recommendation and the like—don’t allow to emerge. This may be because these areas of my life are irrelevant to those activities, and to other people, but in writing a poem, an unremarkable action or observation can become saturated with significance—see Sandra Gilbert’s fine sonnet “Outside Saratoga Springs,” in which Gilbert observes her shadow stretching out along the ground in front of her, and it becomes the “dark drift of” herself that she will walk along—and I am, in this aleatory morning activity, fishing for images that have some resonance for my larger self.

### **Subterranean to Surface Missive**

My daily sonnet can be about things  
that have happened to me recently, dreams  
that I can remember upon waking,  
whatever I perceive in the bathroom  
at the time I am writing, memories  
that spontaneously emerge from deep  
in my past—like when I was in high school  
and would wake gradually each morning

to the music of my clock radio,  
set to the classical station, until  
after 20 minutes, the buzzer jerked  
me out of my classical reveries  
and I had to become conscious enough  
to turn off the alarm and start the day.

Does anyone care about how my high school alarm clock, set to WGMS, the Good Music Station broadcasting from Washington, D.C. in the late 1960s, woke me with 20 minutes of music followed by the buzzer daily? Probably not, but there is an element of the liminal state of consciousness between dream and waking that, I imagine, most of us experience. Then there is the recalled image that summed up an entire course in college, emerging some forty years later, after the professor had died:

### **Ancient and Medieval**

*in memoriam Cyril Dwiggin*

The *telos* of an acorn is an oak,  
said the philosopher, exemplifying  
his point with a hard nut that would remain  
for years in the attentive student's mind.  
That student was no good at taking notes,  
and somehow never made it beyond those  
ancient philosophers, first in the course,  
eccentrics who left only anecdotes

about them—*move over a bit, to shade  
me from the sun*, lying like an old dog—  
or Sentences, obscure, that said it All.  
Then the One who bound them all together,  
and nothing after I really noticed.  
It didn't matter. The acorn had dropped.

An image, whether the supercharged mysterious surrealist image like that of the chance encounter of an umbrella and a sewing-machine on the operating table evoked by André Breton or the more commonly conceived image that is a simple visual or tactile mental reproduction of an object, can carry so much more than it literally contains. I have discussed the relationship between the poetic line and the line of the draughtsman in a drawing, as drawing is the visual art form I engage in—I used to paint watercolors for a while, but I have receded back to the more elementary school notebook doodle of my earlier days, although I do use “art paper” for my ballpoint pen drawings after photographs. I did try, for a while, to fuse the two lines in one calligrammatical work, as in my very first appearance in Press 1—if you wish to refresh your memory, <http://www.leafscape.org/press1/v2n3/riggs.html>

is the link—but now the two activities are only partly fused when I reflect on my drawing in one of my poems. For example:

### **Pose**

The woman in this photo takes the pose  
of the modern dancer. Her arms are raised  
straight up, though inflected by the torso's  
cant, hips torqued atop the scissored legs prized  
apart as if to make a cartwheel forward.

Only her body, without any clothes,  
is directly itself, without one word  
or image tattooed on her to diffuse  
her unadulterated self in view.

We don't meet her eyes, which are looking down  
or closed; her mouth, which is slightly open,  
is set in neither a smile nor a frown.  
Only her hair, permed artfully askew,  
expresses something akin to emotion.

Well, all right, the poem is about the photo that I copied in pen and ink, but the text and the drawing are two parallel approaches to the same visual image. I am trying to both be objective in my description of the thing in itself and at the same time infuse it with significance beyond itself, much as many great poems have done in the past—Frost's "Mending Wall," Reed's "Naming of Parts" are examples.

But there is another element in my writing practice, which is not only to reflect but to seek out, to prime the pump by writing out a wish to my subconscious, my Higher Self, to my Muse, to some discarnate spirit ready to pounce on this opportunity, as they apparently have done on Ouija boards.

### **Invisible Hand**

Sometimes I pretend that some other hand  
reaches into my own and uses it  
like a glove, perhaps to throw off some

karmic police, leaving my fingerprints  
on the pen, having left words not my own,  
an alien creature's pawprints in the snow,  
or even a drawing the stylistic  
traits of which diverge from my own manner.

I *pretend*; sometimes I so much as wish  
that what we back in the 'seventies called  
*The Higher Self* would squeeze through the chakra  
at the fontanelle and fill my wet flesh  
with its fiery lines to my fingertips  
and leave me a message for when I wake.

My therapist will sometimes end a session by suggesting that I meditate on a certain issue that has come up during our conversation that day, and while I will carry that with me and consciously think about the issue over the ensuing week, it is often more likely to pop up in one of those morning exercises, when I deliberately focus on the purely formal aspect of the writing—10 syllables a line for fourteen lines, no words hyphenated from one line to the next—so the issue arises spontaneously, under its own volition:

### **Anger**

Anger is the fire along the coal seam  
that has burned for decades underground, slow,  
flameless, unquenchable, creeping along  
parallel to the ground like strawberries  
and poison ivy, roses entwining  
subterranean trellises of wood  
blackened, condensed with ages of pressure,

the infrared glow insatiable heat  
radiates, lightless as far as we know,  
for to see it exposes our fragile  
warm-blooded mammal fleshy soft bodies  
to excoriating instantaneous  
combustion, reducing us to ashes.

The underground fire in and around Centralia, Pennsylvania is the initial source of the image, but it has fused in my imagination with that magnificent ending of James Joyce's story "Araby" which reads, "my eyes burned with anguish and anger." I have pointed out to several cohorts of freshman English students that Joyce undoubtedly associated the two emotions not only through their sound similarity but through the underlying etymological root in the Latin *angustia*, or narrowness, anguish and anger being two responses to being narrowly confined in a provincial worldview and set of social conventions.

Not long ago, when I was reflecting, during this morning writing exercise, on the process of writing itself—I like to think of this as realism, because the act of writing is what I am engaged in when I am trying to describe that very act, much like M.C. Escher's etching of the two hands drawing each other—and I accidentally evoked a memory of something that had occurred over forty years previously:

### **Inkpen Improvs**

The blankness of the page can be replaced  
by anything proceeding from the pen  
with which I skate across it, like the iced-  
over creek I'd always hiked along, one  
winter when it froze solid. Suddenly  
where it was wider, massed behind the dam,  
no trees on either side, the packed snow lay  
beneath those folks who, marveling, had come

to build small fires and skate upon that pond.  
No one but me went up the creek beyond  
where woods came down in crowds on either shore.  
I skated between narrow, twisted banks  
on smooth ice and, where turbulences were  
most days, with rougher pleasure than in rinks.

I don't skate now in any literal sense, and haven't done so for decades, but that hour or so of a delightfully cold solitude skating upstream, ducking beneath the occasional tree trunk fallen across the frozen creek, had not emerged in my awareness for years, and for just a few moments I was back there again. The Currier-and-Ives quality of the collective festivity on the open area of the frozen pond was in itself

charming, and to a certain extent warming, but my own private subsequent exploration was much more prominent for me.

One other incident that gave rise to a reflection that transcended itself—that is, went beyond the literal act and image into something more archetypal—I recorded in a poem I wrote some years ago, after trying to trim a tree that had grown up right along the fence separating my back yard from a neighbor's:

### **Pruning**

In spring, the lithe slim green smooth limbs like vines  
subtly slip from the amputated trunk  
with roots so thick under the cracked cement  
and husk so gnarled and meshed with the chain-link fence  
that I have never known how to extirpate  
the wizened leprous stump from its border sconce,  
liminal space between the two back yards,  
so as the weather warms I nip off the new,

rubbery and supple, with an inner sheen,  
a whiff of my Dad's witch hazel aftershave.  
I fight this holding action against change  
– the crumble and decay impelled by life  
holding onto earth, intransigent fat tick –  
crazy old man devouring his children raw.

Odd, how the simple whiff of the Witch Hazel that Dad used recalled that whole complex of emotions. Sharon Olds' poem "Saturn" is parallel, in some sense, I suppose. However, another image of my relationship to my father—who, 40 years old at my birth, died 20 years ago at the age of 79, giving me now a possible 20 more years to go, if you follow the math [I did get a D in freshman calculus, to my father's chagrin]—came from another self-reflexive incident of my writing:

### **Reflexive**

It all comes down to this: pen and fingers  
focused on a single point with the weight  
of my entire being behind it

jiggling across the stretch of yellow paper  
channeled between parallel blue lines

like a ping-pong ball that father and son  
hit at each other, each one wanting to  
catch the other unaware, get a point,  
yet neither really wanting to cut off

the volley that is the closest they have  
to a meaningful conversation, thoughts  
limited to considerations of  
force, spin, and trajectory, and the kind  
of beauty that comes from keeping the ball moving.

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**Don Riggs** *has been writing 140 syllables each morning for the past decade, approximately. Sometimes he writes 280 syllables, and sometimes that turns into 420. All the prose that he sticks in between each clump of 120 syllables in his column is filler, what they call a “vamp” in the music biz, to let the reader relax and recuperate energy for the next onslaught of concentrated energy. He also teaches writing at Drexel University.*

*Elizabeth Thorpe*

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## **Loving the Haters and Converting the Doubters**

### **A Review of Lynn Levin's *Miss Plastique***

*Miss Plastique*, Lynn Levin, Ragged Sky Press (2013)

LYNN LEVIN'S NEW FULL-LENGTH poetry collection, *Miss Plastique*, might be the collection that will convert your poetry-hating friends. Its accessibility lies in its humanity and humor and toughness. *Miss Plastique* herself is an action figure in fashion doll form, lovingly crafted from plastic explosive. She joins a cast of characters that includes an Elvis impersonator (the Faux King), Eve and Lilith (roaming through modern settings), Eddie Pratt, crazy hitchhiker-collector Tom Wise (or Wyse, or Weiss), and memorable facts-of-life teacher Mrs. Hay. Also covered: The Incredible Hulk, the Man from U.N.C.L.E., the cast of *Leave it to Beaver*, Janis Joplin, and Waylon Jennings. Levin is comfortable everywhere in the world of pop culture, and she understands the way it creates a backdrop that connects almost all of us.

With this book, Levin continues to develop her already considerable skills as a storyteller and observer of human nature. It's a brutal history of the doomed, as in "Action Hero". It's a meditation on what it means to be a woman in America today, as in "Vacation" or "Yes No Maybe", and what it meant to be that same woman in the 1950s or 60s, as in "Dippity-Do". It's a look at what brings men and women together, and what keeps them together for an evening or a lifetime. And as always, Levin's cleverness shines through, as in "Some First Thoughts", her tribute to the letter A, which fittingly begins the book.

This book is also about love in all its forms: courtly, forbidden, past its prime. It explores the boredom and balance of long-term marriage just as well as the split-second risk/benefit calculations before a parking lot hookup.

But most interesting to me is the "I" speaker of these poems, who seems like one evolving person. This Wild "I" takes us behind the scenes of TV Land, into the untamed sections of tightly ordered suburbia, the mini-jungle behind the 7-11, the

darker parts of a teenager's mind, the tricky balancing act that is a couple's vacation in an unfamiliar home.

From "Faux King in the Parking Lot":

"Ah, to be taken without being adored.  
Though to be adored without being taken  
is also a wonder."

This "I", though Levin controls her tightly, is just as volatile as the flashy Miss Plastique, who wants to "wrap some [plastic explosive] up like bubble gum/ and give it to [her] enemy". For example, in "Being Me," the Wild "I" says:

"Remembering my childhood  
  
is like putting my hand down  
the garbage disposal  
And hoping no one will turn it on."

\* \* \*

My only criticism is that the book is so full of characters, styles, and eras that it's hard to get a handle on it as a coherent whole. The character poems (including those about the Wild "I") are so compelling that some others pale a bit in comparison. But this is a book by a poet with many powers, and it's hard to fault her for using them all.

Recommend this book to your suburban mom (who may or may not have her own wild side). Hand it out to the hipsters in the coolest coffee shop in town. It's for your rock star boyfriend, your seventh-grade math teacher, and that friend of a friend who just sailed alone to Fiji. It's poetry for people who don't love poetry, and for people who love it too much, and for everyone in between.

