Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness: Nine Poets Speak (full issue)

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Yolanda Franklin
Jean LeBlanc
Albert U. Turner Jr.
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Authors
Robin Linn, Yolanda Franklin, Jean LeBlanc, Albert U. Turner Jr., Steven Cramer, Natalie Young, Tom Daley, Elizabeth Gordon McKim, and Jamie Leighton

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Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness: Nine Poets Speak

Fall 2014 Special Issue of Lesley University's Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice

"The Lantern-Bearers" by Maxfield Parrish, 1908
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Introduction
Robin Linn

*Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness: Nine Poets Speak* is a special all-poetry issue of *The Journal of Pedagogy, Pluralism and Practice* that features the work of nine artists including me, the issue’s guest editor. While this collection, like all poetry, may sidestep attempts at classification, there are a number of schools of thought—i.e., psychoanalytic, sociocultural, Marxist, and/or feminist criticism—that the reader (or writer) might use toward contemplating the themes contained in the collection. Like poetry, a theme implies a way of looking, or, a lens one might use to further engage a subject. Broadly defined, this issue looks through poets’ eyes at aspects of the human condition.

As a kind of art-based researcher, I see the poet’s practice as observing, studying, translating, reporting on, and creating new forms from the data of personal, social and cultural experience. My subject matter often includes the self and its place in the world. Where, why, and how do we belong, for instance? The theme “Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness” stems from my burgeoning interest in the circus after seeing George Bellows’ painting, *The Circus* (1912), in the Addison Gallery at Andover’s Phillips Academy. Inspired by Bellows’ artistic interpretation, I saw the potential to understand more about our psychology by looking at circus performers, especially clowns. I was drawn to the spectacle of these performers’ personas—created from their costuming, dramatic play and unique environment; how they are viewed as outsiders to mainstream society because of their roles; and how they provide audiences—their spectators—a reprieve from reality through the roles they play.

The origins of the word spectacle are Latin, from spectaculum, meaning show, and, French, from spectare, meaning to look at. Our eyes are caught, as are our other senses, by that which stirs and stimulates. As archetypal entertainers, clowns and other circus performers evoke our passions as their play acts out life’s emotional spectrum, they catch our eyes and help make up a bigger world of illusion. Like medieval court jesters, circus performers exhibit exaggerated and melodramatic selves that engage imaginations and expectations, mixing comedic actions and social satire. Operating in the spotlight, perhaps under a big top, clowns are examples of commodity and spectacle common to Marxist theory. From an economic perspective, their performances resemble the majority of us in a capitalistic society: we trade products or services for the purpose of survival and to better circumstances. But circus players are people, too, and subject to things all humans might experience; they might be wealthy or survivors of trauma, dysfunctional family histories, physical and spiritual challenges, joys, disappointments, and the span of resulting feelings. They are both carnivalesque public figures and representatives of the human race.
Because of these concrete parallels, the spectacle of clowns and others within the circus’ milieu can be seen as a cultural microcosm of larger society. In fact, “mainstream” society is rich with everyday levels of spectacle, identity and otherness. Beyond the obvious professions of media and entertainment, public speakers, sales executives, teachers, coaches, lawyers, leaders, politicians, and ministers work to keep their audiences engaged. These “ordinary” people all embrace certain levels of show, rhetoric, and posturing, employing stances and techniques necessary for successful communication and transactions.

Overall, and somewhat like the circus’ big top, I think that the theme of “Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness” might also be viewed as a transparent, colorful umbrella housing notions of what it means to live within one’s unique background, environment, assets, vulnerabilities, experiences and coping mechanisms. I suggest the umbrella’s transparency because the theme frames a subset of ideas and perceptions but still allows for streams of light, darkness or precipitation to show through. Thus, our views can be colored by a day’s pace and tenor, priorities, feelings, and even the weather, while our larger notions of security, purpose, personal and interpersonal relationships can be illuminated and/or obscured by external events.

I am honored to be the guest editor of this special issue, and to be able to present, along with my own poems, the fine contributions of eight poet-colleagues. In order of appearance in this issue, we are: Yolanda Franklin, Jean LeBlanc, Albert U. Turner, Jr., myself—Robin Linn, Steven Cramer, Natalie Young, Tom Daley, Elizabeth Gordon McKim, and Jamie Leighton. Biographical information and personal statements by the poets can be found at the end of this issue. Below, I’ve briefly noted how some of our poems touch upon ideas of spectacle, identity, and otherness.

In Yolanda Franklin’s “Blurry Vision,” identity is affected by one-sided recognition, or the way that other people may not see us. Here the poem’s speaker has a chance encounter with an unnamed someone at “a makeshift produce stand” on “Orange Ave.” It seems an ordinary day “visiting mom with the kids” and “running errands,” and the speaker buys turnips, coincidentally, “right next to” a person who is not a stranger. This unnamed person, upon whose head “(t)ime shined a spotlight,” viewed (the speaker) “familiar,/the old/recall time” but did not recognize her. Thus thrown off balance, the speaker is left to conclude, “Now, I am the iris/out of focus.” In her “De Oppresso Liber,” Franklin addresses surreally ideas of patriotism, capitalism, commodity and horrors of war. The poem’s first stanza in Section III personifies the “dollar bill” which playfully and horribly “marches to taps, points/at fatigued soldiers & lulls the pin” from a grenade that “hopscotches/across the turbaned battlefield.” This exchange and its overlapping/blurring of entities and roles invite readers to a fresh consideration of, among other things, the power of money in our society.
Jean LeBlanc’s Emma Lazarus (“Emma Lazarus Visits the Studio of John Singer Sargent and Sees Portrait of Madame X”) compares herself, and her own struggles—“all the years/bound in corset and meter, the constant desire/for freedom, for being known”—to those of the unnamed woman portrayed on Sargent’s canvas. Like a mirror that challenges one to judge ideas of beauty, the self-reflection Lazarus endures upon viewing the portrait also begs her to question her sanity and how she feels about the world. As is the case with many artists, Lazarus wants the impossible: to be free but also recognized for her work. On the other hand, the innocence painted in LeBlanc’s “Liberation,” of five young girls “on the edge of sea past midnight” “bewitched by the tidal swell,” reminds the reader of simple, joyful moments that we live for. Dreamy, yes, complete with moon, dancing and laughter, and the poet imagining a grand belonging—via Homer’s profile of a woman in his Summer Night (“last figure on the left”). LeBlanc muses that it could be her grandmother in the painting, who uninhibited, dances alone and “concedes a flash of modest ankle” to the moon.

Albert U. Turner, Jr.’s sensually rich poems of historical allusion often take us behind the mask to the human emotions of famous entertainers. For instance, the speaker in “Ode to Ira Aldridge, ‘the Negro Tragedian’” asks [Ira] “what did you see after you eyeballed/the mirror, wiped away your greasepaint”; this is followed by the somber suggestion, and real possibility of the time, that it might be “elaborate escaping (a) noose.” Readers are allowed an off-stage glimpse into the actress in Turner’s persona poem, “Vivien Leigh Thinks of a Streetcar Named Desire, 1951”—in contrast to “Brandon’s bellowing Kowalski” is Leigh’s sweet-dripped vision of some strangers’ kindness: “peeked-through lace curtains monsooned by the scent of magnolia.” In his “A Photograph of Otis Redding Being Pulled from Lake Monona, Wisconsin—December 11, 1967,” the poet reveals the vulnerable side of musician Otis Redding, who “works the crowds like the miracle/of new boots and Woolworth’s perfume,” but also “cried ‘I live my life/in doubt, you see.’” The poem captures the perseverance and charm necessary to be a star, and the poignancy of Redding’s premature death.

Robin Linn’s poems often feature entities longing to belong, as in partnerships and/or community, and to ascend beyond mere existence to higher function and accomplishment. This longing is evidenced in her persona poem, “Embouchure,” written in the voice of a “glum trumpet.” It has known the thrill of active, ambitious nightlife—it is “[e]nthralled…in memories” and “invisibly dipped in the buzz of laughing breath.” It longs to escape its current “subdued” state of “rest in pale velvet,” predicting a synergistic partnership with “someone” who will “revive” it and “stir the hearts of listeners.” In “Please tint me,” the poem’s speaker wants “a twine to wave with me daily,” and affirms both the creative usefulness of such partnership—“Notions take cue to resurge”—and the “fine purpose” of “togetherness”; this contrasts with “Cruel heaps of debris” that “smoke and burn” and are “separate by their nature’s intention.” A hummingbird “seeks to meet its/object of affection” in Linn’s “The Hummingbird
Swoops,” which also refers to latent promise: “Potential caught mid-cycle…alert… for speechless kindling.”

Except for the Turner boy, responsible for the rather creepy deed of digging “rows of holes with a spade” in the “playground,” and a “someone” the speaker addresses, Steven Cramer’s “Untitled Events” is populated with unidentified figures that function within the small, anxious world set up in this poem. The strangeness and somewhat depressing nature our human relationships are capable of is captured in the lines, “Women lie awake/next to men who’ve shared their beds for years,” and, “Men cross the street to avoid scaring women.” Of little solace, the poem’s sky is “a blue/so dull it’s barely a color”; the implied danger of the sky’s transformation to “white/naked, veined” seems confirmed when the atmosphere is referred to by the unknown addressee as “poison.” Although the reader isn’t told what calamity might occur in the setting, fear and freezing temperatures are givens. Groups, gathered “on…porches” are referred to eerily as “[k]nots of people.” It doesn’t seem too much of a leap to see these people as representative of all humans in their vulnerable, hopeful states: they “nod” together and imagine “get[ting] through the night/without” becoming news themselves.

“HonK’s $1 Store,” by Natalie Young, is reminiscent of a home for misfit toys with its aisle of “pastel porcelain animals” that are all slightly off. It features a pink puppy “with a droopy left eye,/a drop of red lacquer nuzzled in her/tear duct,” plus “an extra lump/of porcelain on [its] out-stretched paw.” It would be wrong to “take the puppy home,” the speaker muses, for s/he wouldn’t be able to “stop running…fingers over her/one-dollar defects.” In Young’s “What the Wild Animal Knows,” a polar bear, “Princess,” and “a lady in Berlin” illustrate ideas of identity, spectacle, and otherness. When the lady “climbed into the polar bear exhibit,” because she was suicidal and/or she “couldn’t stand change,” she traversed boundaries between safe/sane and dangerous/insane behavior, becoming both spectacle and an other. The lady enters the bear’s tank; prior to this, the bear had existed as a dangerous spectacle which humans observed from their controlled safety on the other side of the glass. As a spectator, “Princess” may identify with “glee in the polar bear’s eyes” at his unexpected treat; she doesn’t “believe in happily ever after”; and within the psychological struggle to understand her own changes, she “laugh[s] out loud” at the lady’s drastic action and consequences, which include surviving the attack.

In this collection, all of Tom Daley’s poems are written in the voice of his mother. Since persona poems speak to identity via roles that one plays and/or by which others perceive them, the poet’s mother/speaker can be identified as a real woman given the stage and green light to speak dramatically. The mother’s desire to mend her son’s gender-defiant behavior in Daley’s “My Mother Explains Why She Threw Away All My Dolls” begins as a concern to keep him from being tossed off the second grade kickball team: “I stashed your darlings/in the magical cache/of Junkfill Hill”; this after her son was found “clutching,/in each hand, a rag doll.” In “My Mother Tells Me She Saw a Man in a Coffee
Shop Who Looked Like My Father Might Have Forty Years Ago,” Daley’s mother/speaker revisits her memory of the poet’s father, repeatedly calling him “gaunt” and dramatically describing his face as a “sheepish net,” where “[o]ne might have caught the hectic calm/of a carnival about to close.” These poems remind the reader that a well-written script plus an actor’s ability to go beyond everyday constraints creates vibrant new versions of truth, fiction, or a combination thereof, suspending disbelief and captivating the audience in their look at human behavior, needs and emotions.

Elizabeth Gordon McKim’s series of poems revisit her love story with poet Etheridge Knight. In “Memphis Entry January 7, 1991,” the poet recalls a drive “in a rented silver caddy/to pay respects to E.K.’s daddy/Etheridge Bushie Knight.” In the cemetery, the two poets “cross the tracks/past the creek” to find the cemetery’s “part reserved for colored.” It is raining and Knight is sick, “his hand on his burning liver/and his mind on his daddy”; back “at the days inn,” the two “hold tight and shiver/watch the senate hearings/on the gulf war.” McKim’s “The Knife,” alludes to Knight’s state at the time through the poet’s description of a “beautiful enamel-handled…knife” that she got in San Francisco’s Chinatown: “the enamel handle painted with…curling red blossoms and smoking blue dragons and curving green vines.” When the knife went missing from where she had stashed it, she realized Knight had taken it, “for the forays/into the projects to get the rock/you were blowing your life away on.” In McKim’s “School Ties and Other Synchronicities,” the disparate backgrounds of the lovers are contrasted: “In the early fifties” she went to a girl’s school “wearing a grey flannel blazer/emboldened with…cheer”; “his streets were blazing/with fury and fear.” With these autobiographical love poems, McKim passionately speaks to identity and human vulnerability.

Jamie Leighton’s “Entangled” illustrates poetry’s power to attract and melodically delight with its economy of words that represent larger ideas, in this case, aspects of the human condition. Beginning with the lyrical “Strands of hair ensnared,” the poem employs like-sounding words—“strands,” “strung,” “swing,” and “sway”—as well as repetition, and multiple rhymes, including “hair,” “ensnared,” and “air.” Its simple accessible image of hair caught in a web prompts readers to notice the textural similarity of certain hair and the make-up of a spider’s web. Metaphorically, strands of hair “strung between the spider’s silky strands” suggests the complex delicacy of our human spectacle and identity: it is a “frail stringing” that includes remaining in certain situations, where “wishing to stray, we sway and stay.” Further, “Entangled” reminds the reader of an old adage about the tangled webs we weave. A romantic relationship is sketched in Leighton’s poem, “Rings,” in which both desire and a practical, self-preservationist attitude are entwined. “Should you leave,…[t]he nights will not/suddenly extend to fifty-five hours,” says the speaker, who doesn’t care for “a diamond ring/or chains,” wanting only “our arms around…each other.” Despite loving “opening up the doors/to find you there,” even if that love left, “the firm world would rotate around the sun/the moon would continue too.”
As a Southerner, I find myself drawn to write about difficult personal, cultural, social, and political aspects of the South. I frequently generate poems that capture the personas, landscapes, and facets of Southern living. I like to take the point of view of an ethnographer and historiographer in my work, so I often write about family. This point of view allows my poems to portray and highlight specific personal experiences—towards a universal experience, in a nuanced way. Like Confessional Poets and poets of the New York School, I also write about the quotidian, but I purposefully push cultural, social and political envelops by evoking the personal, which invites the reader into an inescapable space. One of the signatures of my poems—a “double-helix syntax”—is a technique that elicits readers to interrogate the multiple connotations of each line while simultaneously layering these connotations from line to line and stanza to stanza to create images that evoke visceral images. This vicissitudinous effect creates caesuras and deep breaths for the reader.
These lines read
  like a story I wish
  to tell, turned
  thirty-three this year.

Though dead now,
  even before death,
  all ability to talk or listen
  was lost.

I remember
  on Orange Ave.
  buying a fresh bunch of collards,
  green as usual.

Home, visiting mom
  with the kids that summer,
  running errands from
  my daughter's to-do-list,

Drove by,
  parked in front
  of a makeshift produce stand,
  squinting for a clearer image:

Time shined a spotlight
  on the center of your head.
  Baldly, I purchase turnips,
  green, right next to you.

Eyes squared towards me
  familiar,
  the way the old
  recall time.

(Now, I am the iris
  out of focus). Squinting:
  You don’t even notice who I am.
No One I Know Alive Today Was a Slave
--a response to a Facebook comment

If someone abducted your family,
affected your present
with an infectious amnesia,
then erased your past
for pure sport of profit,
then forced you to bend
like a scarlet ibis, slaved
to pick the South’s tropical snow—
the offspring
from Earth’s womb, begging
not to be orphaned, but to be
nursed, begging not to be
last on its crucifix,
a surrogate to history, whose
urgency profits only
white faces—I ask
what to tell a family
still forced to bow.
I tell them
to “cotton on.”
De Oppresso Liber

I.

Texan tycoons lure masses of American soldiers
into empty barrels & scope tunnels
of destruction as weaponry weeps
over deserts—booby-trapped Kleenexes.

Their jeweled skulls enter a darkroom, expose
black wash memory & discover
the dollar bill being raped well by oil wells:
thirst-fatigued fowl who bow, die
& disrupt this holy skyline.

II.

At dinner, Uncle Sam pitches a
fork to initiate the disruption
of American Gothic. It’s the fourth
Thanksgiving in three years

a soldier serves in The Kingdom’s blazing porridge:
a traditional murder-suicide
outlines a woman, infant, & child in arms
amputated by the refusal of change.

III.

A dollar bill marches to taps, points
at fatigued soldiers & lulls the pin
as the spitting grenade hopscotches
across the turbaned battlefield.

Where mirages melt under Allah’s sun, a soldier
daydreams, down the scope of his rifle: there
is something drier than my wife’s turkey & canned
cranberries are jellied homicides.

IV.

A news reporter ambushes a wad
of ones, the rubber band escapes,
a dollar bill interviews a camel spider
under a shaken quarter moon—
a grocery clerk palms convoys of dimes,
dishonorable pay scales of government issued poverty, an exchange for martyrs toting machine guns for W.I.C.—

stamps, checks, food. Hunger is a Blackhawk humming; a hero waits in line for change.
At dinner, lost time forms tears. It's my first holiday here as host in this small town that shares its traditions: Turducken, green beans & sweet potato casseroles, mac & cheese, dressing with all the fixings, here where I rent an original Florida home built when Zora wrote *How It Feels to Be Colored Me*, amidst astonishment of *how anyone could deny themselves her company.*  “Tur who?” I ask.  “Is that German?” My landlord brags about how Crackers laid those blonde hardwood floors, says they’re stripped now, rambles on about how a structure can withstand any storm. Over dinner, she shares with my family how difficult it is to bury a thirteen-year old lab, pipes up: “Good news is: we found a litter of beautiful black labs—their mother’s a blonde, their father, chocolate.” Another interjects, then passes the near burnt Turducken: a turkey stuffed with a chicken, that’s stuffed with a duck, initiates a sorority of laughter—“How could they litter *black* puppies?”
Jean LeBlanc

I find myself drawn to writing about art, sometimes in the form of a persona poem, sometimes as an outsider looking in, always wondering about different ways of seeing the world while creating other worlds. Creating other worlds—this is what artists do; this is what poets do. For me, writing a poem is a way to hold a moment and examine it from all angles, turning it so that new light reveals new facets and darkness too can be explored. Every poem is a spectacle, even quiet, reflective poems about quiet, ordinary things. And this is the best-kept secret: we are capable of time travel—it's called poetry.
JEAN LEBLANC

Head of Tutankhamun

He looks like a real boy here, a real boy being told he is a king, told by no less than the god Amun, who touches Tut on the head. He looks like a real boy who hears, in the distance, his mates playing soccer in the vacant lot, and he is grounded for failing math. A real boy, whose limestone cheeks give the impression of a tear or two. Bewildered by this whole king thing, the stern and easily-angered gods, his mates enjoying only the freedom of this fine, clear day. The first time, perhaps, an artist had the nerve to say, Revere the Gods, revere the King, but pity the boy, the real boy, pity us all.
"You'll be my King Minos, Judge of the Damned," Michelangelo says to a beggar in a Roman alley. It pays in hot meals, good wine. Perhaps he sneaks back late at night, just to see up close the master's work. Reaches out to touch his own face—accidentally smudges the image. O Dio, crosses himself, begs forgiveness. Next morning, Michelangelo curses the unknown vandali, apologizes that the sitting must be prolonged. Hot meals. Wine. Alas, there comes a day when it is finished. It—he—has become perfect, every sag, every crooked feature, hideous but true. I have become something, after all, he thinks, admiring even the ears, those of an ass. He touches the side of his own head, believing it must be so.
Carrington's Portrait of Lytton Strachey

Her attention to small surfaces—the lenses of his glasses, his fingernails, that perfect ear—her soft voice murmuring the parts as she sketched: helix, scapha, concha, tragus, antitragus. Perhaps they laughed when she named the intertragic notch,

—imagine one's poor ear, imbued with tragedy—perhaps she told him that all those hours spent drawing at the Slade were for this, precisely this: his long, long fingers, holding—caressing, really—that lucky, lucky book.
Emma Lazarus Visits the Studio of John Singer Sargent and Sees Portrait of Madame X

Is it truly canvas, or fevered hallucination—she has been ill, the poet—terrible and precise, incandescent? She considers all the years bound in corset and meter, the constant desire for freedom, for being known. Not too different, perhaps, from her. Elemental, shoulder and profile, woman and not woman, line, posture, flesh, and can one say beauty? No, one cannot, not quite. She asks for a chair, explains that it is too much, that Paris has half-destroyed her. Wonders if it is possible to comprehend, or even like, a world that offers, in one great generous moment, itself to us.
Passione, Collera, Furore

Puccini and Leoncavallo in a Milan cafe
arguing about who can proceed with La Boheme—
I started first—No, I have been at it two years,
two years!—and like that, the friendship is no more.
Mimi belongs to me—She is mine—
Passers-by shrug, hardly notice at all, two men
fighting over a woman, over the idea of a woman,
a sickly one at that, one who will break both
their hearts, and ours as well, though we would sell
our earrings to buy her one more earthly breath,
sell our only coat, despite winter upon us
once again, the stove greedy for fuel.
What If Your Dentist Were Zane Grey?

The real Zane Grey, you know, had a degree in dentistry, or what passed for dentistry in 1896, and he practiced for a while, until stories of the west began to fill his head and he had to travel out to those wild places, so next time your dentist's masked face is inches from your own vulnerable self, the little bib askew around your too-exposed throat, you may wonder, is he imagining some new Lassiter, driven by lost love and the ability to kill, is he creating in his head right now a world of heat and stone and sage, dusty hooves and brackish water, poisoned maybe, and when he tells you to rinse and spit, it sounds a lot like he's glad to see the last of you, and needs a whiskey, and as the metal tools clank in the metal tray, his fingers tremble just a little, just a very little bit.
Blake Teaches His Wife to Read

One thought fills immensity.
—William Blake

A is for Adam; this garden is ours:
B for the bee with silvery wings,
C for the catmint, a fragrant delight,
D is daffodil in spring, daisy in summer.

E, that's you, dear Eve, cleansed of sin,
F, forget-me-not, the mouse’s ear,
and G the gladiolus, sword unsheathed,
H for hollyhock, hydrangea, heaven, hell.

I is ivy twining up the wall,
J’s June, July, the joyful months,
K the graceful kestrel soaring high,
L, with love and lilies fill your arms.

M, the moths at night, those secret souls, N
the night itself, when most blooms fade,
O, open once again, and see the sun,
P—perfection; no commandments here.

Q, the quince our English clime dislikes,
but R, the rose a rainy day embraces.
S is for sweet William (ah! you smile!),
T, for tulips men have lost their minds.

U is understanding, in heart and mind,
V—let us have violets, violets everywhere!
W, most wonderful and wild,
X the criss-cross of the pruning shears.

Y is yarrow, nodding in field,
Z the zephyr, refreshing on the brow.
Let us peruse again our teeming world,
Where I can see because you have eyes.
Liberation

— after Winslow Homer's painting Summer Night

I like to pretend that's my grandmother as a young woman, that last figure on the left, silhouetted against the surf. Pearl—Miss Booth she was—is on vacation with her classmates from Fitchburg Normal School. The full moon that rose at sunset is overhead by now, but sleep is the last thing on their minds.

If dinner was at eight, perhaps this started as an after-dinner stroll. However they came to be on the edge of the sea past midnight, surely now they are bewitched by the tidal swell. Five sit on their rocky perch, while two free spirits, overcome by the uncanny blue, waltz to the rhythm of the breakers. The others see them, laugh, and join the dance. My grandmother lets the other girls partner up, while she enjoys a solo seaside swirl.

She was nine when Winslow Homer died, so she could not be that woman on the beach. It's the profile that makes me invent this truth, the same profile my father sketched of Pearl in her late sixties. And yet, you see her as clearly as I can: a young woman, about to stand and lift her arms above her head, quite pleased with a night so free that she concedes a flash of modest ankle to a magnanimous summer moon.
Albert Uriah Turner, Jr.

I find your proposed volume’s working title “Spectacle, Identity, and Otherness” to be intriguing. This is the case because negotiations of ‘otherness’ and ‘specularity’ through the contexts and contests of history provide a spiritual and theoretical grounding for my art. At base, this is seen in my submitted excerpts from The Burden of Being Seen, a manuscript which mines the territories of performance to examine and perhaps exhibit how self-conscious constructions of art can be used to reify categories such as the self, community, and identity in a globalized industrialized world that tends to invalidate or diminish these categories. Also, the concepts of longing and belonging have a distinct impact on my poetry. At times I engage the concreteness of personal, familial, and communal narrative and depend on the logical contradictions common to figurative language to explode limiting designations of ‘otherness’ and, with the perspective of a lyric poet, investigate territories of the ‘self’ to rediscover connections to others best rendered through thoughtful and artful discourse.
ALBERT U. TURNER, JR.

Ode to Ira Aldridge, “the Negro Tragedian”

Once in character, you knew of hue
the dark ruse-raised, the brooding
hero listing to bruise the craning neck,
lent to fragranced desire, refusing, at last,
the caress of Desdemona’s jeweled fingers,
another Iago promising satisfaction.

Rare for the London stage, “[o]wing
to the shape of [your] lips,” you gave
voice to the Globe’s strangers or, grotesque
in white-face, you made Richard (the) III
a restive monster of inclination, speaking
death into being with the bard’s breath.

But what did you see after you eyeballed
the mirror, wiped away your greasepaint,
waiting for flagon, flesh, an unstockinged leg?
Was it elaborate escaping the noose to be
cut down? Was a willow tree elsewhere
weeping at the weight of new fruit?
Robert Johnson Records “Hellhound on my Tail,” San Antonio, 1936

In the Gunter Hotel, room 414,
a votive brown bottle
slides rhythm down new steel strings
bent by workin’ man’s fingers

As his St. Peter in a wheat-straw hat
roams old Delta cobalt crossroads,
hell hounds leave blood lairs to lurk
where reel to reel sound is struck.

Moaning to know a kind heart,
he plays shyly in a corner
using the hoping of sadness to sing,
“I can tell the wind is rising.”

Old field-holler feuds move the cutting
head and stylus; Robert’s Legba walks
far away; in this absence devil-dark green
chinaberry leaves tremble on the trees.
Vivien Leigh Thinks of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1951

After the screening there was perfume on the proffered wrist for the leading man to kiss—of course, to err, it is divine.

Unlike Brando’s bellowing Kowalski, I heard some are strangers in kindness, their peeked-through lace curtains monsooned by the scent of magnolia.

(Devoted to ‘method acting’ by the terse tears of her Stella’s denial— the price of that Stanley’s yearning— I think that Kim Hunter cried for days.)

And if that scandal is not the tattletale of my lines, my swooning is someone directing traffic into on-coming traffic; the strong bare arms

—Marlon’s muscle-bound *pater familias*— carry me; my Blanche, brooding like the “to be or not to be” prince, is ‘soft-focus’ tragedy.

After the off-camera storm, what old roots could brave ground, gnarled as the promise of green stems pruned, of hot-house early flowers?
A Fragment -- Ralph Ellison Thinks of Minton's Playhouse While Writing “The Golden Age, Time Past,” 1964

“Time now, and not many remember how old days …

[N]ot really, not even
to see and hear [what] happened, and

who shared, night after night, the mysterious created

— all simmering, like… meaning

by talk,
grease paint, perfume,
alcohol, and food

— all simmering, like… meaning

by timbres and accents …

[A]nd the world was swinging with change… that which we hope to be.”¹
1. In a place once called “beautiful” in the old tongue of Chippewas who wait for walleyes to surface, fishers of men are caught fishing. From a dock listing on grey waves, bright flashbulbs light Lake Monona.

   This contrast is grainy; gloveless to fight smooth grip, the hands lift at a cowed strong arm weighted with rest. Right fist wrapped around a towline, a left hand lifts Otis, a body heavy with the cold wet of black leather.

2. Brother, sing now of dark’s lightness; there’s the cobalt cue of memory, the clay red bricks kilned in Georgia — The last “Soul Revue” resounding, what lover’s plea resurfaced, tuned to the repeat-blue of hoping?

   Otis, silk suit sweat-brocaded, works the crowds like the miracle of new boots and Woolworth’s perfume, of payday rye had at the end of set, encore downbeat dropping to his whisper of “I have everything.”
3.
The last loving plea to surface,
belief is your echo, attuned
to the repeat-blues of hoping.
After crying “I live my life
in doubt, you see,” you sang “I’ve been
loving you” near Sausalito’s shore.

Wide collar open for relief,
Otis works in rare miracles
of throat shouts beyond the Bar-Kays brass.
And if the yawning sea reshapesa blue,
sounds homesick whistles for red clay,
a dock is the soul call of return.

4.
Sing as you will; sing so above
the call of Ole Man Trouble, we
can hear the rumor from the place
we called soundless— Lake Monona
is still— again called beautiful,
mist gently lifts to shift the view.
Street Scene: San Juan, Puerto Rico 22 March 1978

Karl, poised, pole cutting the air, 
walks to the gravity of gravity, 
untethered to any cable above. 
No net below, the shoes steady, 
resting on the effrontery of inches, 
it’s one footfall in front of next.

It takes practice to be perfect, 
to be almost a wren on a wire, 
not falling from but embracing 
the fluttering, the teeter-tottering, 
the unsteadiness, the imbalance 
of balance, the what of the not is.

The ‘Flying Wallendas’ practiced 
being, the guy-wired dry run, 
Icarus missteps not of matter 
as their grayed ballerina slippers 
touched sawdust to broad guffaws, 
stumbles not yet counted for keeps.

In San Juan, someone drinks rum. 
No one is forever in the moment. 
And someone in the crowd below 
samples street sold pork pasteles, 
someone cranes an arthritic neck, 
buoyed by the burden of being seen
Confederate Memorial Carving, Stone Mountain Park, Georgia, 2009

Discards of the eye, blossoms lie fallow,
crushed underfoot, color no longer
regard of custom or crenel of mien,
redoubts known to illumine the sky.

Here is monument, birthright cut into
coarse granite monadnock raised by rupture,
the mass rewarding bird's-eye scrutiny.
Impermanence is the only lost cause.

Gravity of weight recalled, gray homespun
or flesh tinged with rust, heritage is wish
not quite gleaming like pyrite, flint, and fire;
burnished oak stock, oiled steel, dream of good.

Here Lee the gentle horseman and Stonewall
loom to cast anti-shadows, blinding glint
of shuddering wish, that cherry blossoms
will lean to whispers that allege advent.
Looking at Flowers, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, 2012

This faith in form is felt, is seen, is
chosen like the result of seeds sown.

Moist earth of dreams retouched,
trickle of labor down the neck,

packets of color, the trowel upturned
by rest – if in hope I scatter

handfuls on blue-veined marble floors,
a tour-guide will amble to the command

of a walkie-talkie while weighted petals
still survive each mistimed ice storm

by design, yellow daffodils reprised by
new flowerings on a canvas of white
Riding with the Old

Billie’s scent of gardenia
mixed with late-night tobacco
makes someone’s hit parade;
a stereophonic trademark tuned up
to move wavelength to foment,
Caddy backseat bass is
the first-love yes of offer, is
healing made from old gifts.

No need to rehearse
past-named love songs for feeling,
this ride glides with rising
Muscle Shoals-made whispers
of heart-knotted things;
the ride glides to the rising
ruby voice of midnight pleas
for empty-arms Stax/Volt solace.

Somewhere a lover’s ear knows
of a Motown of motion unloosed
by broke-beat harmony;
somewhere a lover’s ear
hears Philly soul before the fire.
“Ain’t no stopping us…” Catgut
cut fingers ready, set
to the timing of the freed thing.
Robin Linn

I see poetry as an art of ideas, and as a visual person, I like to use colorful details in my work. I’m quite interested in playfulness, layers of meaning and intentionality in poetry. Probably because of music’s importance to me, I’m intrigued by poetic sound play (i.e., Gerard Manley Hopkins, Harryette Mullen, and Atsuro Riley). I’ve always written with some internal rhythm, whether or not I’m employing a rhyme scheme or strict meter.

I frequently write abstractly, favoring process or journey over concern for concrete destination, but I also enjoy researching for subject-specific works. In this collection, the persona poem, “Embouchure,” required my understanding of the trumpet’s basic anatomy and being able to imagine its point of view as having been played and part of a glamorous scene, and then being idle and hoping to be utilized again. I believe that poetry can’t help but be somewhat autobiographical. While I don’t aim to write confessional or even overtly narrative poems, my work is full of clues about my own identity—such as passion and attempts to balance realism with idealism. Regarding artistic identity, I think the practice of poetry, like other fine arts, requires us to bridge and weave some of our obvious reality with a more fantastical reality. In one respect, poetry writing incorporates much subconscious data; in another, the act of creating itself is an escape from the everyday world.

I love poetry’s seeming infinity, its multi-dimensionality and how it can elasticize language, as well as its power to engage and transform its readers. When some inspiration takes me into the imaginative world, I love following that, knowing that I don’t know where I’ll end up or what space might be encountered. It can be perspective changing to go through that process of being open to what internal or external stimuli or awareness might happen to influence my work at the time.
ROBIN LINN

Embouchure

for Pam & Charlie

A glum trumpet I’ve become,
post-glam, unmissed.
I long for studied lips to ply my mouthpiece,
play the go-between
for impelled gusts of air that funnel
rapt through my chambers
and for long supple fingers to grill
my valve pistons.

Though I’ve been subdued
in a scuffed wooden case, lackluster-laid down
to rest in pale velvet, I’m still
a brass dream. Enthralled at least in memories
indelibly coated,
invisibly dipped in the buzz of laughing breath
strewn with sweat drops, cigarette ash,
dim corners, spotlight-stoked
pulse of the crowd.

Ice clinks in glasses shone round
my doing it up with dreamers like me, the great ones
and those emulating the great,
sassy, ageless, horn gods of swelter.

My hopes of being revolve around being (as earth
around sun) possessed, and revived by
that someone: I’m dizzy
dreaming of repeat.
I can feel future rumbling,
a thunder of sweet notes sent through me,
cascading to stir listeners’ ears, flutter hearts
in their throats (bring their feet to the floor).

This time, it’s by my request:
More, more, of the using, the hallowed breath, thing Supreme.
The Hummingbird Swoops

Oh! To feel a swoosh
of pulse, giddy and faster
(are you near?),
not unlike extending strongly one and then the other leg to skate
forward to momentum (lunge deep),
head happily into a flourished swirl:
exhilaration, cheeks flushed iridescent
in certain light, as the gorget
of the ruby-throated hummingbird.

Backwards-capable and even upside down,
emerald-vested avian evades
North America’s first frost. In early fall
logs flight miles in the thousands, crossing Gulf of Mexico
to winter havens like Brazil and then returns
to a spring-thawed New York country lodge,
where hosts anticipate its glittery but winded arrival
with feeders hung outside their parlor window.

Self-piloted and yearly undeterred, merely thumb-sized
bird pumps air, its tiny heart fully engaged,
delicately made and beating (seeming
to us humans) wound-up wings.

In summertime it seeks to meet its
object of affection, red-throat’s
minute flappers flutter-draw a giant U,
loop vertical, drop, and then rise up again,
mechanics visible whirr air;
rapidly U-ing to entice
white-throated female—

reminding us of hidden things.
Potential caught mid-cycle, locked away
yet alert, somehow, still, for speechless kindling:
soft spots within our future-fevered flesh
this long-building, harbored
wishes for direction; travelling from glance to rhythmic regions,
the glow and fast and slow,
intractable connection.
Non-Flight Poem

My poem’s dented by numbers.
The debt of being alive and anxious
eats moth-holes in the silk of my cocoon.

Just when I get the urge to lift,
feel my ability swell, and think I
really will flap my wings large this time,
I feel the glass parameters of a jar.

Clover fragrant grasses are my fantasy;
amidst my possession by earthly
consumption, I fantasize

about cohabiting with my kind:
flutterers in various stages
of rich succinctness, pale grey lavender
fluorescent-tube pink to thunder sky violet.

My container’s unmoved by fringy edges,
however, and, tauntingly see-through too,

much like this conscious state of knowing
I have wings at all but can’t see yet
how to break out and loop the trees.
Theatrical, this sentence to a corridor trod up or down, feet motion, body-weight, stir-sprayed dust.

Light circles as a fitful moth (bright tunnel mostly legend):

everyday faith is by feel and fine dust ingested, labor of lungs and limbic system.

God is love, we read, unconvinced and jaundiced, tossed by winds…

6:07, the town church bell has already sounded its Pavlovian clang cueing arise.

From wrinkled sheets lonely bodies unfold, creased as flowers in a Bible by pluck and capture,

palmed sediment of parents’, lovers’, children’s sorrows; their own hope stirred and salted, tried, Job-like–

revived somehow by spring’s delivery, brazen green, each lot’s painful squeeze anesthetized, sweet stirred by half-emerged rosebuds. Then…

God is Love.

4:18, a porch breeze cool and personal reminds my skin of touch. Hidden birds chitter-caw, chitter-caw, gossiping.

Another disgruntled believer has fallen prey to Bitterness:

his wide-jawed wolf, winsome pin-striped suit…ensuing shreds.

All would-be repairmen: we nurses, poets, father figures, teachers, handfuls of cotton, ether, pencils, blueprints, hooks and eyes…

We/they take turns resuscitating Innocence, salvage what’s left of days, chase fervently the sight-smell-taste of blood away,

flood sickrooms with lavender,

pantomime Hope in relay.
Horse Catching (for the New Year)

Is it possible to know
when you’ve fallen off the horse
though you didn’t understand yourself
to be horseback to begin with?

Is lackluster a valley one never lows
for, but falls off their horse there,

wonders why the smell of earth
suddenly has gotten that much closer?

Space

appears to have closed in, here,
on the ground, body huddled or splayed
as something rejected, chucked from the ring.

Is pluck what rouses all pummeled fighters
back to dance-jab-sweat, rodeo clowns
back to thwart bulls, working stiffs
back to the sketches of their own agendas?

Perhaps the question’s bruised, blood red,
some might add “herring”—look
here—not there—grapple with Newton’s laws,

avoid issue of headway, that motion’s ceased.
Cold rain froze overnight, beaded into ice glaze

on the car windows. Off the slippery horse
someone, at least one, has slid or been
unwittingly bucked into sand, or better yet
cactus—
each keen spine a wake-up.
If you’re asking my advice,

Get up, relish the taste of grass and gravel
in your teeth, lick your scratches and scheme.

The horse, you can hear him snorting, smart-ass,
teeth-bared, whinnying in glee at your comedic
delicacy; he’ll be by again soon…daring you
to mount him.
From the Latin *Retrogradus*

A path runs through the watchful crowd,
Upon it, fearless, struts tall thin girl

Decked in retro 2010--
She shoulders a chained and quilted Chanel,

Ladylike purse atop military over-
shirt That wraps and ties;

Art-deco sequins swirl a tank
In deep-veed vintage silk beneath.

High-heeled combat boots on tights
Allure in leather buckles above the ankles

Over laced-up leather shaft…
Lace up, they say, and buckle in, for glam,
Flirt coyly, the idea: pin-ups and soldiers all-in-one….

Tall thin girl two on the runway swaggers
Cocky, her khaki hunting vest shiny with buttons

Nods to metal flak jackets,
While her tweed wool full-leg trousers

Might well salute more than roomy hemlines,
Sassy yes, and states of some legs that didn’t make it home the same...

Announcement! Trending now:
Skinny sweaters reminiscent of Hepburn,

Satchels, cross-body and ox-blood accents—
Please note not only costly militaristic interventions of the world,

But also competing turfs, inner-city neighborhoods, art made of rebellion
As next tall thin girl floats in graffiti-covered pants
And a patchwork cape in shades of camel, her hair a long bob,

Late 60s style, with fringe, and her lush-lashed eyes,
Uniform like each tall thin before her,

Determined, straight ahead, beautiful.
They mean business.
Fruit

I am screaming, and wonder who can taste the avocado anymore at the outdoor Mexican café when lusty revved engines hustle by, and the smoke of last year’s love affair still cloaks the post-intermingled sullen air. Salt melts farther down Margarita’s glass to oblivion. Seems we’re less fond of our Ps and Qs:

the need for control plus calm fake smiles, the known comfort, conspiracy-of-silence outgrown. Ripe words dangle, daring lips to open. Deep in her purse, the mirror waits to breathe.

Sliced avocado’s lush green so pretty a contrast to ceramic plate’s sun-dressed cobalt, it attracts yet another summer fly… Here we are again, the same but not the same at all, hearts juiced like citrus by means of our world—train wrecks or snipers, unrequited valentine teeters on the doorstep, a toddler impatient in its crib screams. For hours we soap and twist our hands at the sink, hoping we’ll best only bad germs, attract more hardy love, feel good about our deeds, find a place to be upright and too, in good conscience,

lay down our heads. I am the someone, like you, who still licks the salt, tastes the sweet tang and feels the citrus burn into my fine-cracked fingers when I squeeze the limes.
Please tint me

On high, light-edged clustered heart
joined to others (stemmed in agape)—

yet a petal alone... and longing for
a twine to wave with me daily.

Please God in the midst of necessity
and inspiration, please tint me

rouge-sappy in love all together.
Motion in sweetness, slow ease,

wise and kind, as sprouts a leaf—
photosynthesized to ardent see-thru;

dense-webbed and life-forced rich
from center through veins sustaining us...

Fragrant the leaf of such love,
cup running over, streamed goodness—

wet erases complications, renews
ideas of fresh building, fills creases in palms.

Notions take cue to resurge.
Cruel heaps of debris smoke and burn

separate by their nature's intention.
Togetherness, meanwhile, other's fine purpose.
Poem After a Line From Jon Anderson’s
“Quentin Boyar’s Grand Canyon Decision”

In the consequences of your longing,
ticked-off minutes slouch to fritter, days catch
flame and fade to ash—for instance
you blow off the reading of a poet from DC
at the hip semi-local bookstore due to what you call
exhaustion, egged on by your shadow, inadequacy.
Tuesdays into the next, like bananas bought slight
green ripen, sport brown specks spreading
into eventual rot. You fancy a new watch,
like the ones that divers wear, rubber
strap and rotating bezel, water resistant
to meters of sea you’ll never be found in
unless you’re suddenly swept into wealth or win a cruise.
In the aftermath of sweaty dreams,
where you keep almost hooking up
or you never can quite make out the face—
groggy frustration settles on your Cheerios,
which you try to ignore as you gobble
quickly to avoid the sog. Your boots
are thick and practical, they keep you
planted like a tree that doesn’t Ka-Ching in coin,
but leaves high interest plastic, your shrink bills,
your wishes, truly, to light up, burrow in and down
cotch-like each milligram of the moon’s radiation
so you might shine or just rest, somehow, satiated.
Steven Cramer

These poems represent three tendencies in my writing. "First Snow" strives to be naturalistic, to describe something that happened as clearly as possible and state for the record as honestly as possible how I (the speaker) reacted. If the speaker (me) comes off as a bit of a jerk, so be it. "I Wanted to Write a Poem . . ." at first tried, and failed, to behave like "First Snow"; that is, I labored to describe what I saw at the Tate. Early drafts lay inert on the page, needing some other dimension. Two things happened that allowed me to complete the poem: first, I owned up to my struggle to write it, which gave the description an emotional impulse; second, I found myself swerving into the Paolo and Francesca story. It's not for me to judge whether these elements—especially the reflexivity of a poem "about" itself—succeed, but I will say that I've never understood the taboo against "poems about poetry"; writing poems is something poets do often (or should). How can it help but form a crucial subject for them? "Untitled Events," I hope, creates a mood—paranoia, mainly—while leaving the narrative context for that mood up for grabs.
STEVEN CRAMER

Untitled Events

The river iced over to a black stripe overnight. A half-mile off, shouts from the hospital: people hurrying across the frozen park, the sky a blue so dull it’s barely a color. Women lie awake next to men who’ve shared their beds for years. Before the playground’s dirt hardened, the Turner boy dug rows of holes with a spade. Men cross the street to avoid scaring women. Some keep notes. Some write letters and numbers in sequences. The sky turns white, naked, veined. You described the atmosphere as poison taken in with every breath. Knots of people, nodding, on each other’s porches—everyone expecting to get through the night without waking up as news.
First Snow

If he’d killed her, it would’ve been her fault
was my first thought the night Hilary stepped backward into the path of a passing van.
Outside Peking Garden, Charlotte straddled

a stone lion’s neck, ordering me to watch, Daddy, watch, as Hilary locked our car, then dangled then troubled then jammed her keys into her bag—a fiddling diffidence with life’s kid-proof caps,

its Allen wrenches versus Stillson wrenches, its menus, its remotes, that drives me wild, finds me hectoring her, joylessly, to look, will you? Look. . .
The lion’s mane glared with ice. Thus,

I stood in a half-turn on the curb, swerving van, its horn blasting, about a forearm’s length outside the future Hilary had nearly turned to fate, threads of breath rising over her face—

beautiful at this stage in her aging—the driver possibly cursing stupid bitch, low beams peering askew into the warp of white flakes, first snow to accumulate this winter, with more predicted.
I Wanted To Write A Poem About The Blind Group Permitted To Touch The Kiss.

I started writing the poem by trying to get right how their practiced hands branched, like ivy, along the calves, knees, thighs. Her breasts, his trunk.

And because the lovers are both lovers and lovers embracing sin—Paolo’s right palm on Francesca’s hip, the curve of their spines exposed—I tried to fit in my dream of Hell, sweating wind buffeting Satan’s leaves from his yard into mine; my penalty to rake eternally. It didn’t fit. Then I wanted to add what some say we do the moment we first see The Kiss: a fast glance over our shoulders, thinking: anybody watching me? The Book of Lancelot and Guinevere drops from Paolo’s fingertips: a romance Francesca calls a pimp. I wanted my poem to end with the scrabbling hands that found the book, felt it, then tried to reach the kiss. But The Kiss isn’t a kiss. It’s the instant her husband, his brother, interrupts, just as their lips don’t touch.
Natalie Young

Each of these poems focuses, more or less, on everyday life, attempting to pull out the universal through the individual. I am fascinated and frustrated by the day-to-day, how we navigate the big and small, and how the big and the small affect each other—I'm tempted to call it a ripple effect, but it's also a weaving, how this adds to that and makes a life.

My poetry tends to be very character driven, no matter if the speaker is me or if it's a persona. I like certain things in the scenery of my poems to be very specific (sometimes brand names of products, items the character(s) holds, etc.), while at the same time allowing the reader the ambiguity to insert their own details and make it unique to their experiences and/or imagination.
NATALIE YOUNG

After Years

of laws
and belonging
tending
and keeping
hands in proper places
in seconds
a nudge
it’s done
would never
is now
a Bad Person
doesn’t apply
not like the movie
or book
no
it’s more like
the small dog
outside
the back door
who cries
as though nothing cries
will ever
be the same
cry
it cries
again
not ever
Dirty Yellow Blanket

The reason she cuddles up the unseemly is: comfortable
a familiarity with a nothing-new-here

Browned lint balls around the corners of her mouth her crotch
raw, bumpy from the blankie

She moves faster through folds yellow fuzz under fingernails other places
Saliva looking for the wooly strings covered in tongue
not even the dog will lick Wants doesn’t want it but it’s here

She polishes with Desitin dabs dry skin with dots of aloe
still cheeking the comfy mucky sunshine A heart beats quick
wanders clumped fabric

ends up the same mangy it began palm sweaty
can't peel the sticky corner from her
HonK’s $1 Store

Aisle 2B: shelf upon shelf of pastel porcelain animals. Lavender hippos with polka-dots and a slight peach-like fuzz. A kitten in a sweater that spells L U V E in fake stitches. Two pink puppies play patty cake. I pick up one with a droopy left eye, a drop of red lacquer nuzzled in her tear duct, an extra lump of porcelain on the out-stretched paw scratches my pinkie. Back on the shelf, she resumes the game. I mustn’t take the puppy home; I could never stop running my fingers over her one-dollar defects.
What the Wild Animal Knows: Maybe that lady who climbed into the polar bear exhibit wasn’t crazy—simply couldn’t stand change. Or the changing man beside her. His small mouth. Dull teeth. Big eyes. Bad thoughts. Your own bad thoughts bob in time, but Princess, no one asks, so forget guilt. Unlike your rivals, you don’t believe in happily ever after, so it’s not that. It’s strange after years to feel you could leave and neither of the two would melt, beds continue to unmake, bugs web and sting. Princess, you’re laughing out loud at the picture of a white bear biting the lady—probably because she jumped into a bear tank in Berlin at feeding time and didn’t die. But maybe you saw glee in the polar bear’s eyes and knew those shoulder blades felt high-quality. Knew he felt wilderness, felt reckless to chomp into one of the watchers, the commoners.
Sorting Bulk

Buying blueberries and spinach at the warehouse where all that’s sold is bulk means commitment.

For a household of two it’s at least a week of daily blues and greens: whole, chopped, boil, blend.

On day six, the berries come out of the fridge, I pluck through, remove the rot, store the less sad in a plastic bag.

A miniature caterpillar crawls on the counter, before I think I smash.

Thumb to speck. His guts a patch of midnight blue inking a fingerprint. Evidence of his commitment.
Teddy Thompson Croons Leonard Cohen

…tonight will be fine, will be fine, will be fine…
It’s not even a love song,
it’s the last drop of milk on dry cereal: the I that knows,
small windows, a finale of soft naked lady, a sighing
soft naked lady.

(Remember that first side sway, first spinning hug
with someone of possibility? A lot of sweaty skins ago.)

Not just ooh-la-la slow stuff, also others
with beats, their powwow on feet, hips
who must swing, must knock the head back
in time—not century time, music time—4:4, two-step, whatever.

(Try not to remember. You still feel
a grapefruit clenched in your chest.)

Maybe it’s a room of ladies in coordinated sigh.
…I know from your eyes, and I know from your smile…
reminds me of lace, which is a poor representation
of us all, all the sighing ladies.

(A lot of things conjure craving,
but he’s only a man, a man who is too thin, singing sweetly.)

In place of explanation I put Teddy on repeat.
In turn, he repeats Leonard; someone hums along,
even after 20 plays. The lyrics not memorized,
the pounding harder, less bright, less brave

…for a while.
You Call Me Howie

And I should be offended, because it’s not the pseudo-cool Howie Mandel with a bald head and a deal or no deal, it’s the lunatic-in-hair-and-eye Howie. Instead of insult I am thankful to still feel lucky. That’s the best I can do as far as love letters go.

Don’t take that wrong. I’m still glad it’s you looking at me, coffee cup after salsa bowl; it’s nice to wake up to your Breathe Right strips and Alka-Seltzer wrappers, to have your itchy back, trips for soy, cheap cheeseburgers—in need of me. To know that we are both good and bad at this, but leaning good and that’s more than most expected.
Any persona poem is a kind of talking back, a switching of the mouthpiece we place over our own delicious and terrifying impulses at civilization's behest for the controlled scream of another. This act is a species of permission, even of licentiousness—we can say, on behalf of someone else, “[W]hat the most extravagant might possibly think without saying,” as Thomas Wentworth Higginson characterized the very forthright Emily Dickinson in their first encounter. The nasty, curmudgeonly, hateful stance of the monk-narrator towards the prissy gardener-monk with whom he shares a table in Robert Browning’s “Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister” may have nothing to do with Robert Browning’s personality or character, but Browning certainly had the imagination to reach for the vehemence of forbidden impulses and give them a kind of temporary lease in that poem.

Writing these poems in the voice of my mother enabled me to talk back, not just to her (and certainly some of this group of poems do that), but to have her persona give vent to my own grievances, wishes, disappointments. But the poems are not a mere fusion of my impulses and my idea of her character. The voice is one neither she nor I would recognize (“Mom didn’t talk like that!” was the only response my siblings gave me when I read them a poem from this series). It is a voice suffused with an archness that my mother could adopt when it served her, but which she generally eschewed; with a vocabulary that she would have understood but rarely used; and with an agenda she wouldn’t necessarily have consciously endorsed. The tone is the tone poetic license permits. The stance is a fiction that finds its facts in the bit of unbridling of the unconscious which writing often provokes.

My mother suffered, but bore her suffering largely in silence. In these poems, her persona gives vent to its anger and sadness but takes no responsibility for its own complicity. Revenge is rarely equitable.
TOM DALEY

What My Mother Forgot to Tell My Only Living Brother on His Birthday

Goodbye my boy Rooster
whittling at your phantom perch
inside the barn the last tenant torched

before we came spry and easy
to that kind, prickly kingdom
of the raspberry cane.

Goodbye mean thicket.
Goodbye shuttered well. Goodbye
you old gray tongue of tainted groundwater.

Son, we will you a tree house
to howl from or scan all creation—
boy in your chokehold colic, sporting

the jam-stained jersey of a denatured soul,
the blazon of not enough and not enough.
You wept us baffling

out of your live traps and trials,
your cruelties consumed
and revived. We recall your inaccurate pitch,

your sorrow and rough,
your conjuring strange without willing it,
your small fires in the rage,

your garbage cans too zinc to blaze,
your always smelling
of my sour breasts and tick repellent.

Discard your guitar picks,
son of my Rayon Age,
and tell me why moths

scorch their pioneer shapes
in the lining of your pockets,
why you clambered up the rainspout,

then drizzled from the gutter, then collected
your wrists into cherrybomb boasts, into
spikes in the spokes of far better.
My Mother Explains Why She Threw Away All My Dolls

The kickball pitcher in second grade
warned your captain
would see you canned

when, to my dismay,
he found you, clutching,
in each hand, a rag doll

sprouting mopstring hair. So,
I stashed your darlings
in the magical cache

of Junkfill Hill and The Land
of Ash—grey rabbit,
that brown-with-Brahms-for-a-heart bear.

I know I pledged my
word they’d be bustling
at your headboard again soon.

But you were turning scabbard
from sword and all the elixirs
in my spoon mean to soothe

you away from that feverish maze
you still stagger towards
in your girlish haze, my boy

with your dowsing stick bent
in the wrongest ways.
I was the Angel

poxing your mitten thumb
Andys and Raggedy Anns,
your orange-furred puppet foxes

and pimple fleece lambs.
Son, if you cannot speak
to sorrow in the full skin

of a man,
I will not hedge tomorrow
just to lose it in your hands.
My Mother Tells Me She Saw a Man in a Coffee Shop Who Looked Like My Father Might Have Forty Years Ago

From the back, I could see that the reddish tinge had all gone, That one’s head was shaved. What’s left

of his scalp that might sprout—who can tell?
I wanted him to turn, and he did, and of course it wasn’t him.

That man was dour, deep into indifference. Sober. Your father would be much gaunter now— he was already somewhat gaunt

last time I saw him, but that brightness in his eye gave his gauntness the lie, that shine cooked from silky longing.

One might have caught the hectic calm of a carnival about to close in his sheepish net of a face

engrossed in a washed-out grin that asks, most sincerely, and with a flickering sigh, How do you do? Not a question,

but an insinuation. Not an invitation, but a maneuver, a query, brittle but sincere, falling in an arc like a scimitar

and slashing to small pieces the clumsy links of anyone’s resistance, trumping any threat of rebuff

with his honest promise of hope for the delight of some unscheduled dalliance, some rendezvous with his disasters.

His was the come hither that pressed prospect to satisfaction, but distilled nothing

like contentment from beholding those things which incited delight but only lit a slow wick to where wicks find their expansive root.
My Mother Tries to Explain the Position of the Trotskyists vis-à-vis the Election and Her Candidate, October 2008

They say it is all wound down and already over. They say Wall Street incisors will nibble to moot all the precinct levers primed in the neighborhood polling booths. That my erstwhile community organizer now spoons soup to golden parachutes. They say his demand for ten thousand more commandos to Afghanistan trips a poppy-red hot wire to Armageddon. They say hot cargo and sit-down strikes might just flatiron the fat cats mewling and tug-of-warring over his capacious shirt cuffs.

When I talk of my man’s bright-All advisor, Mrs. Madeline, they say every pearl on her necklace grew from the gritted heckles of half a million Iraqis snuffed out in her sanction. When I say my man’s historical, they say that’s mostly metaphorical. So, he didn’t scoff over the scandal of post-Katrina—that would have unpolished his classy demeanor! When he rails against the court for their death penalty retort, they put him rightside of Bush père et fils. What’s their answer? Restitution of the impulse
revolution. These Trotsky folk theorize
that to sermonize with the tease
of the logic of the lesser evil
only postpones a hoped-for
upheaval. That election for the presidency
merely reshuffles
the residencies of chief who slash
for chief who burn.
My Mother Contemplates a Clothespin Salvaged from the Sale of My Father’s House in Gloucester

Mousetrap of a sun-bleached cuff.
Cinch-clamp of a wind-wrung hem.
Loaded spring ripened in salt air.
At the business end,
two pairs of concave notches
and a convexed edge.
Legs gouged, to better fix. Ridged
for fierce attachments.
Dulled prongs of a virgin
squeezed apart by a husband’s finger and thumb.
How a modern Thetis
might have clipped, but missed
most of the heel of Achilles.
How Archimedes’s
levers might have lifted
the whole world of sodden things.
Disused relic revived
by worry-wart climate-change warriors.
Celibate Shakers pryed them out of maple and ash.
What gypsies carved and bartered.
Eyed by their father,
in her white bobby socks the children’s babysitter
is pinning washcloths and baby underpants
emblazoned with “Spank Me!” rants.
On hot and less modest days, he fidgets,
stretches brine-and-cum-soaked trunks
with these graying gadgets
to the parallel strings of a spinnable rack.
There, clothespins peg towel tents,
anchor fleets flying the snap
of her D-cup bra and his medium jockstrap
hoisted to taunt.
In her careless hands, the pins fall to be found
with bits of glass and gravel on the ground.
Stashed properly, packed,
they are inert yet restless soldiers
almost spilling from the sack.
Clothespin, where are the clean diapers
whiter than salt and warmer
than August? We sued to say who wins
the right to change them, but he never hung
a washed one on a line.
Clothespin, pinch and leash
his scorches, his stains.
Fasten and fly his greasy transgression
to the flagged-out wind and the dried-out sun.
Elizabeth Gordon McKim

These poems will be included in McKim's new manuscript entitled: ELIZABETHERIDGE and the Necessity of Motion. The poems are inspired by her relationship with African American poet Etheridge Knight, from the time she met him in Memphis in 1978 until his death in Indianapolis in 1991, when he died in her arms.
Memphis
Entry January 7, 1991

Yesterday we drove from Memphis
to Raimer Tennessee on the Mississippi line
in a rented silver caddy
to pay respects to E.K.'s daddy

Etheridge Bushie Knight
1905-1950

We stop at the general store for directions
deer up to two hundred pounds weighed here
irs refunds paid here
chaw/tobacco/beef jerky
double/bubble/whisky

We find the cemetery
cross the tracks
past the creek
up the hill
to the part reserved
for colored
(white folks portion
of the boneyard
distracted
and closer to the traffic)
This the quiet place
which looks out on
a pond in slumber.

Cows graze here in summer.
The stone is large and dignified.

Etheridge Bushie Knight
1905-1950
Eth moves near  
but not too near  
bows his head / slant  
feels what he comes to feel  
does what he comes to do  
then we get back  
in the silver caddy  
and drive back to Memphis  
in the bitter rain  
Eth now in deep  
and unremitting pain  
his hand on his burning liver  
and his mind on his daddy

gotta watchout/gotta watchout  
gotta watchout/ for the ol' liver

We crawl into bed  
at the days inn  
hold tight and shiver  
watch the senate hearings  
on the gulf war  
press on and on  
we finally drop to sleep  
close to the Mississippi  
in Memphis Tennessee  
where the thin light screams  
and dread is in the air we breathe  
We breathe we breathe each other into dream

*Bushie crossed the Tennessee/Mississippi line he crossed it on a mule to court Belzora*

*Bake a lil' bread/tote a lil' water  
Mama Mama can I marry your daughter*
Sampson Snake Root

“I’m gonna take you out to lunch
where you ain’t never been before—“ you said
“And make it good—“ I said
You took me down beside the Frosty Tap
where weary men and women wait
for Meals on Wheels and a prayer
for precious lord and we got lunch

and now you're on the way
to some place far away
so when you get there
find a place for me
and make it good.

Today is Monday
the day I was supposed to go
to Puerto Rico
to visit my Jenny girl
and here i am
in Indy town
the war still
raging.

Yesterday we went to Miss Belzora's for lunch
I took a long walk down North Dexter and Harding and beyond
in the surprising February thaw.
People out washing cars. Kids on bikes.
Guys calling out from street corners.
People sitting on wide front Indiana porches.
Etheridge is sleeping almost full time now
except for meals.
I talk a long time to his mama.
She tells me of auntie and her medicines

tansey root/ peach leaves
cherry bark/palm lilies
sampson snake root
from the tree's north side
and the special dark mixture
for the bad disease
a man gets from a woman
or a woman from a man
We come home to the nickel
watch custer's
last stand on tv
fall asleep early
while the war still rages

*sampson snake root
*sampson snake root

*My daughter Jenifer McKim lives in Puerto Rico and works as a journalist for The San Juan Star.

*We called the Housing Project 555 Massachusetts Avenue where we lived the triple nickel or sometimes just 'the nickel.'
Shoot Ten Times

In the Triple Nickel
555 Massachusetts Avenue
Indianapolis
Indiana
Parker your ol' buddy
always greets you the same way
and you always greet him the same way:
“ Shoot ten times 'fore you cock it
Shoot ten times 'fore you stop it
Hold it level /you can shoot the devil”
Then you both take aim at each other
and pull the trigger.

You are falling away
falling away from me now
The sun shutting down Indy town
We /free/ peoples be
the ice so thin and precarious
precious/ days/ daze
the ice skidding into my dreams
we do not scramble for
time we have had a whole
amazement
in time
a placement test
a packet
a pocket full of rhyme
some things done
some things not done
we turn and tremble
we ramble
we stumble
we give ourselves over to the rumble
the long journey home we began
we begin again
over and over
full circle
eth looks young
his eyes bright not
vodka dark eyes
and morphine- delaudid
dull eyes
but clear across and
over and dark so dark
in the middle black and
baby - blue milk rings
around the black and
the scar on his leg
the one from being run over in philly
after he left the homeless shelter in ny
the one
which was ropey and mottled
and looked like the carapace of a rhino
is now smooth and flat
completely different than it looked
a few weeks ago

*and what is unfinished
is always unfinished
and what is finished
begins again*
The Knife

Once I bought a knife
a beautiful enamel-handled razor-sharp paring knife
Bought it in Chinatown in San Francisco at a poetry gig
( the one you missed 'cause you were too messed up to come
/ down/ and over and across )
the enamel handle painted with delicate embellishment:
curling red blossoms and smoking blue dragons and curving green vines
I put it in my blanket drawer for safe keeping

Then I noticed it was missing I
knew you had taken the knife
to arm yourself for the forays
into the projects to get the rock
you were blowing your life away on

blow / blow/ all the way
to crownhill/ cemetery/ in napland
blow away boston blow away philly
blow away new york memphis toledo minneapolis chicago
blow away mississippi
blow away baby

"I aint one of them suicide poets “
poetry is about revolution
and celebration
and freedom seeking

truth is
you is
truth is
you
aint
Old School Ties And Other Synchronicities

In the early fifties she was going to the oxford school for girls
and her daddy's rule was golden in hartford connecticut
under the sign of eisenhower and the travellers umbrella
and she was wearing a grey flannel blazer
emboldened with a school insignia
and optimistic cheer
while his streets were blazing
with fury and fear
when she was memorizing edgar allen poe
he was in big windy chi/ca/go
staring at the world from a flophouse
or an abandoned car
or living at the taft hotel
with a big blues woman big may-belle
and may was singing at the crown propellar
and may was hooked and so was he
while she was being permed and girdled tamed and taught
to do the waltz to sing false notes he was already
displaced and dancing to another drummer learning the ropes of penal farms and county jails and copping dope, while she was babysitting little blond kids through hot new england summers and filling dance cards with serious pale boys weighting to fill full their father's shoes, he was runnin' round town forging checks and dodging more dangerous news more serious blues ricocheting off staccato bebop sound while she was jitterbugging and conjugating french verbs and she didn't like elvis on account of his pelvis and she was bringing in tollhouse cookies for the over sixties club downtown and she was readying for college

oh she was earnest and longing for love
oh he was earnest and reaching for life
he ran with a knife upheld to keep the heroes back
he was gaining on some sharper knowledge
in the joint his old school and when graduation came round she wore a white organza gown and carried twelve blood- red roses while his black blood was flowing underground with no guardian angel to respond
to his black sound
comin' round.
say no guardian angel
to respond to his black sound
comin' round.
Pop of Blossom
February 2, 1991

pink buds and gardenias
i want the pop of blossom
eth's hands mesmer-
mesmerize/rise
sculpt the air
in no despair
a wisdom we can
trust
lies and mis/demeanors
violations and manipulations
minor and major thefts
curl and uncurl
in the tidal times
and the winds pick them up
and blow them out to sea

a long time ago
after the first time
we made love you
said to me
i could ride the river with you lady
all the way to the sea
and you are a man who knows the river
and I am a woman who knows the sea
I grew with it
it taught me when I was a little girl
it rose and fell with me
I know its storms and calms
its grey days its clams
its bright sun penny mornings
i know ancient tide pools
little wonder/worlds
where chinaman caps/ barnicles/periwinkles
sea urchins/mussels/kelp
sleep in a strange realm
i study the granite rocks
their steadfast postures
their scars and creasings
their warnings
their strange earth alphabet
I watch wordlessly
the tides pull in/ and out
as you walk
beside the old river
mississippi
you learn the streets
and small towns and backwoods
and the highways
the corners
where you shine shoes
and shake off insults
and grin into the blank
sun you tell the tallest tales
of running and ambling
milling
I leap over the shadows
between the rocks

the space between
Unfinished Sestina For Elizabetheridge

We're off to Minneapolis
and I'm scared, Eth,
Look, I'm taking the air
in great gulps, I'm tasting fire,
I'm lifting off from earth,
I'm not wasting a single breath

and for me everything is breath
because we're going to Minneapolis
(in my mind it's India or the end of earth)
Let's hope you'll be there to meet me, Eth,
Don't fuck up or I'll snuff the fire
and forget about taking the air

Though you know I love this fair,
this festival between us, this magic breath,
or I wouldn't be enroute to the fire
in our room at the Holiday Inn, Minneapolis,
and to you, K, tracer of lost persons, Eth, Etheridge, nudging me back to the black belly of earth

The deep rich return to earth
(forget about air)
Now it's in the flesh of me Elizabeth
and you Etheridge in our breath
that's why we're off to Minneapolis
that's why we have chosen fire

which makes and breathes more fire
which can not always warm the earth
which is why I have flown to Minneapolis
which is why we have to take care
of what we make, which is ours, elizabeth-eridge, this wise and excellent Elizabetheridge
Jamie Leighton

My poems included in this issue all deal with themes of the “other.” “Entangled” deals with the image of a piece of hair caught in a spider’s web, but also with the paradox of wanting to stray from the other, even while wanting to remain. “Rings” is simply a love poem, acknowledging the other as non-essential to the world at large no matter how essential to the speaker. “Apologia” is both an apology for breaking a sculpture and also explores “her” search for her significant other, and the need we have for our brokenness to be, if not repaired, embraced.

In “On Choosing Your Topic,” the “other” is one’s own topic. The poem originated from my niece’s search for a topic for her college application essay. The Loren Eiseley epigraph came by way of Mark Salzman’s True Notebooks: A Writer’s Year at Juvenile Hall, an extraordinary book about teaching writing to youth charged with serious crimes and being held for trial. I highly recommend it. Salzman quotes Eiseley that we fall into error if we don’t keep our own true notebook “of the way we came, how the sleet stung, or how a wandering bird cried at the window.” In a world of standardized testing, where students are taught to write the formulaic five paragraph essay in blue examination style notebooks for assessments, students are not asked to write their own true notebook. The use of standardized tests in the United States originated with The Alpha and Beta Tests used in World War I to assist the army in placing a large number of recruits into the “right” job within the military, to place young people into the proper slot for training and deployment. The poem’s speaker seeks to let the students out of their classrooms, away from the blue examination books, and into a stormy day. Unfortunately, the students are still stuck with writing open responses in Massachusetts’ standardized assessments.

It gives me hope to learn that the editor of Loren Eiseley’s Lost Notebooks, Kenneth Heuer, found among Eiseley’s personal papers “blue-covered booklets used for writing examinations in certain colleges” in which Eiseley wrote early stories, rather than boring five paragraph essays. And also, my niece is currently studying biology and education at Harvard. She did find the topic of her college essay; it was about her family, and especially about her brother with Asperger Syndrome (or according to the current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th ed. Autism Spectrum Disorder).
JAMIE LEIGHTON

Entangled

Strands of hair ensnared
suspended there in air,
strung between the spider’s silky strands.
They swing within the wind.

So we too swing and sway,
in this frail stringing, this staying tangle,
like strands of hair ensnared;
wishing to stray, we sway and stay.
On Choosing Your Topic

“. . . But now I think
the purpose lives in us and that we fall
into an error if we do not keep
our own true notebook . . . “
-Loren Eiseley

Sometimes it squeezes your ass and says
“This ass is mine, baby.”

You laugh nervously, move away,
then fall to its mastery, its sexy cockiness.
Try to get to the root of it, dig.

“Confidence” roots in “trust” which roots in “protection.”

Sometimes it flirts with you online
and never touches you,
inducts you into its umbrella protection.

“Online” roots in “directly connected to a peripheral device.”

But we are wireless.
Sometimes by unearthing roots
we find only lies.

“Ducere” means “to lead.”

Sometimes you are led,
and the leading and the being led
out of bed gets you someplace

and induces you to write,
introduces you to Fresh and New, and you
produce paragraphs for shaping,

then smite black metal, hammer away,
near the forge that holds your fire
and a source of air bellowing.

“Ex” means “out” and so “leading out” is “to educate.”

Let them out
from the dry water-tight buildings
where they rub their eyes
after boring passages
with number two pencils
and those damn blue examination books
into a stormy day.

But I digress.

_For the standardized examinations, you must write a topic sentence and three details and then the sentence of conclusion. Two is not enough, and you want the score of four. This is the way to write your personal response._

Can you remember eight facts about the octopus?

Two eyes, four pairs of arms, one beak, three hearts, intelligent—its primary defense is hiding but also a crawling arm may detach and scuttle across the sea floor in arm autonomy. Some have ink sacs to eject black ink and become lost in its cloud; some were videoed using coconut tools.

Octopi, all the males die shortly after mating.

And isn’t it fine it wasn’t eight or nine facts, but more, the number, ten,
use suction cups
to taste and touch
brings us to eleven then.

A “drill,” “an instrument for boring holes” from “to bore a hole”
but also roots in “turn around and whirl.”

Also consider
the soldiers lined in drills
preparing for battle after
they have graduated
having conquered
“Topic Sentences and
Open Responses”

marching into
dry deserts of
resource-rich lands
and the children again
being drilled in poor writing
again and again, and

its pouring outside.

“Forget everything they taught you about writing”
the college professor says
as he begins
the unteaching.

He says “First you must choose your topic.”

“Topic” roots in Aristotle’s “argument suitable for debate”
and in “matters concerning commonplaces” or “places.”

Vehicles transport them back home
in airplanes and caskets--
the humming hymn of youth
stirring up hot dust
on foreign roads in Humvees.

Humvee, High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle.

Primarily used by the United States military.
but also by other countries.
The armoring of hillbillies and farmers-
or up armored- sides protected,
but not from the acronyms of death:

IEDs, intermittent explosive devices,
EFPs, explosively formed penetrators,
attacked from beneath, and fueled

explosive energy, but
the doors jammed
on American ingenuity.

Sentences of conclusion,
flags waving like dangling participles,
military shots at the military procession,

the march, the March of Dimes,
the million man march,
the million more movement.

You could be building,
but instead, you ask me
how to choose your topic.

You might start with

“etymology” from “true sense” and “word.”

And see where it leads you.
You are the sounding board
for what is not boring,
for your own true notebook
of places where placed
you march in a time
not of your own choosing
you turn around and whirl
you flirt and shimmy

until you squeeze it by the ass and say
“This ass is mine, baby.”
Rings

Should you leave, the whole world will not cave in. The nights will not suddenly extend to fifty-five hours. The days will not put a sign on the door saying, “We refuse to open.”

It is just that, should you leave, I would miss the exactness of you—your straw-colored hair and sea blue eyes with golden rings, smoke rings from your gentle cheeks and tongue, the ring of the phone, and it answering.

I could care less for a diamond ring or chains to put around my neck or yours. I just want our arms around, mornings and nights, each other. It is the interlocking of desire—hand in hand, arm in arm, the key in the keyhole, opening up the doors to find you there, open-armed, naked, real. I love the complete nakedness of you—next to me—our privacy, shutting the door sometimes, phone off the hook.

Still if you left, I would find another. the firm world would rotate around the son. the moon would continue too—like me, and you. Love me. Love you.
Apologia

I

I’m sorry.
I did not mean
to break your clay figure

of the wrestlers
struggling
with the Tibetan bell.

I couldn’t help,
but play the bell,
with its strange hieroglyphics

and chime it to
its long tinging tone,
like a wailing mother

couched outside
a wall, the long trailing
away to silence,

or test it percussion-like
to stop the tone
in an abrupt end.

To end it you
just put them down,
and the sound ends.

II

I’m sorry.
I did not mean
to break the clay figure.

The bell knocked
the limbs
of your man off.

The parts took off,
arm toward cheese,
hand toward wine,
but foot still arched
to ground as if
he was about to run,
until the motion stopped,
in stuck restraint
within the cooked clay.

It looked like Achilles' heel,
but he was over her,
straining muscles to restrain
the one who might escape
but chances were looking grim
not one bit of wind.

The vessels were now
more than three quarters
empty I would say,
and in the bottle's sway
the edge of night began
softening to putty.

Still he pinned her
wholeness there,
Her strength strained.

He lost his right arm,
his left hand,
but she had stiffened
stuck in the same position,
and didn't sense
his weakness, or

her lucky break;
now it was conceivable
she could escape.

III

I'm sorry
I released your figure
with the Tibetan bell.
She could escape except for the apparition of nails;

perhaps she fell in love with the steel's rails.

She needs another element to transform. She stayed pinned

like a butterfly stuck beneath the broken thing.

IV

The night, I broke your clay figure with a Tibetan bell.

you placed the hand on his strong back, placed the arm

like a wing grown off the leg. It did not work for us,

too crusty and surreal, without the torch of spark, without

the spiritual shivering, the God-like power to heal whole.

V

Not broken clay but a she wholly complete

she still seeks the diamond ring
in its spectacular cut.

The diamond cuts
soft surfaces,
scratches hard,

but when held down,
by a cutter it breaks into sparkles
into diamonds of Hope.

She too mourns broken shells,
-speaking into crevices
with cracked lips.

VI

We just sat there
with our wine,
and they,

well they,
had already been
to the kiln that way,

and they
were insentient matter,
fragments anyway,

unaware as we
owners of clay
who may be

brokenness embraced.
About the Contributors

Yolanda J. Franklin
She is a graduate of Lesley University's MFA Writing Program and is a PhD student at Florida State University. She has appeared in African American Review, Kweli, PMS:poemmemoirstory, Burntdistrict, Sugar House Review, and many more. Her awards include a 2012 and 2014 Cave Canem fellowship, the 2013 Kingsbury Award, and several scholarships. Her poem, “Manual for Still Hunting White-tailed Deer in a Gated Community” was chosen by Harryette Mullen for the College Language Association (CLA) Creative Writing Award.

Jean LeBlanc
Teaches writing and literature at Sussex County Community College in Newton, New Jersey. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals, including the Lullwater Review, Bellevue Literary Review, and the Journal of New Jersey Poets. She is an executive editor for the Paulinskill Poetry Project in Andover, New Jersey, also does editorial work for Cyberwit.net, including editing the anthology A World Rediscovered (2012).

Dr. Albert Uriah Turner, Jr.
Poet who is influenced by the sounds of community – be they the rhythms and existential arguments of jazz, R&B, and reggae or the people and stories to which he was exposed growing up in the Mattapan of the 1970s. His poetry is also influenced by 19th century romantic poets such as Wordsworth and Whitman, writers of the “beat generation,” post-World War II American “confessional” poets, and Black Arts Movement writers such as the late Amiri Baraka.

Robin Linn
Recieved her MFA from Lesley University. Her poetry can be found in the anthology “A World Rediscovered” and in literary journals such as Saranac Review, SPECS, Redactions and Amethyst Arsenic. Her collection, Fairytale-Ending Machine, was published by FootHills Publishing. Robin’s critical work and poetry have also been featured in Sugar House Review. A facilitator of local poetry workshops, Robin also volunteered for a number of years with PEN New England's Freedom to Write prison writing program.

Steven Cramer
Recipient of two fellowships from the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and from the National Endowment for the Arts, he has taught literature and writing at Bennington College, Boston University, M.I.T., and Tufts University. He currently directs the Low-Residency MFA Program in Creative Writing at Lesley University in Cambridge, named by Poets & Writers as one of the top ten low-residency MFA programs in the country. His poems and reviews have appeared in numerous literary journals and his work has been represented in anthologies such as The Autumn House Anthology of Contemporary
American Poetry, Villanelles (Everyman’s Library Pocket Poets series), and The POETRY Anthology, 1912-2002 (Ivan R. Dee).

**Natalie Young**
Founding editor and graphic designer for the poetry magazine Sugar House Review, based out of Salt Lake City. Her recent publications include Green Mountains Review, Tar River Poetry, Tampa Review, Rattle, South Dakota Review, terrain.org, and others. She is a fan of green olives and Jim Henson.

**Tom Daley**
Serves on the faculty of the Online School of Poetry and leads writing workshops at the Boston Center for Adult Education and Lexington Community Education. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in a number of journals including The Boston Globe, Witness, Crazyhorse, Massachusetts Review, and 32 Poems. He is a recipient of 2012 Dana Award in Poetry and the Charles and Fanny Fay Wood Poetry Prize from the Academy of American Poets. He is the author of two plays, Every Broom and Bridget—Emily Dickinson and Her Irish Servants and In His Ecstasy—The Passion of Gerard Manley Hopkins, both of which he performs as a one-man show.

**Elizabeth Gordon McKim**
Published five books of poetry, the latest being The Red Thread (Leapfrog Press). She is a teacher, performance poet, spoken word artist, and has been an adjunct professor for forty years in the department of Creative Arts in Learning at Lesley University. McKim is the poet laureate of the European Graduate School, and the Jazz Poet of Lynn where she lives, in a renovated shoe factory. She is included with four others in the new anthology, Wild Women of Lynn, published by Blaine Hebbel and The Ring of Bone Press.

**Jamie Leighton**
Has a Bachelor of Arts in English from Yale University and a law degree from New England School of Law. She was a Presidential Scholar in the ARTS. Her work has been published in literary magazines and journals including Poetry Now, Emerson Review, Newport Review, Magnolia: A Journal of Socially Engaged Literature, Calliope and others. For the past two years, her Saturdays have included assisting low-income freshmen students who have failed one or more classes. Her artistic concerns are writing and collaborating with others to create “true notebooks.”