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## 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



**Spectacle, Identity,  
and Otherness:  
Nine Poets Speak**

"The Lantern-Bearers" by  
Maxfield Parrish,  
1908

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

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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 way 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 "cr[ie]d '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.”

## **Yolanda Franklin**

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 envelopes 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.

**YOLANDA FRANKLIN**

**Blurry Vision**

*Tallahassee, FL Summer 2002*

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.

## American Kennel Club

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.*

## In the Sistine Chapel

"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

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."<sup>1</sup>

**A Photograph of Otis Redding Being Pulled from Lake Monona, Wisconsin –  
December 11, 1967**

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 yawing sea reshapes 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.

## Ring (for 4:18)

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  
scotch-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 / 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.

## Tom Daley

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.

**ELIZABETH GORDON MCKIM**

**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 calms  
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 Elizabethridge

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, Ether-  
idge, 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 Elizabethridge

## 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 Aristototele’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.

Created by AM General, a subsidiary  
of American Motors Corporation

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  
sun. 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

crouched 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**

Received 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, *Fairytales-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.”