JULY/AUGUST 2012

POETRY

100 YEARS

FEATURING

Averill Curdy
Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Mary Ruefle

$3.75 USA
$5.00 CAN
£3.00 UK
## July/August 2012

### POEMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Lasdun</td>
<td>311</td>
<td>The Blight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blues for Samson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dore Kiesselbach</td>
<td>314</td>
<td>Turkey Fallen Dead from Tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jessica Greenbaum</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>I Had Just Hung Up from</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Talking to You</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>For You Today</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A Poem for S.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I Love You More Than All the Windows in New York City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kay Ryan</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>Miser Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>New Rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tony Hoagland</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>There Is No Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note to Reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't Tell Anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalie Shapero</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>Your Other Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Gehrke</td>
<td>329</td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The New Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robin Ekiss</td>
<td>334</td>
<td>The Death of Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adrian Matejka</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katharine Coles</td>
<td>338</td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark Levine</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saskia Hamilton</td>
<td>342</td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian Swann</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Saskia Hamilton

### OCTOBER 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steve Adams</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>The New Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Death of Silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note to Reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't Tell Anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your Other Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The New Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Steve Adams

### NOVEMBER 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony Hoagland</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>There Is No Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note to Reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't Tell Anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your Other Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The New Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tony Hoagland

### DECEMBER 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Lasdun</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>The Blight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blues for Samson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

James Lasdun

### JANUARY 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony Hoagland</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>There Is No Word</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Note to Reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Don't Tell Anyone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Your Other Heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Epilogue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The New Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tony Hoagland

### FEBRUARY 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Poems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>James Lasdun</td>
<td>359</td>
<td>The Blight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blues for Samson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>End of Side A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Map to the Stars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tempo for a Winged Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unemployment (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In the Corridor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the Ground</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Zwijgen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Slugs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

James Lasdun
ATELIER LUMIÈRE

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI  349  Paintings
359  More Light

THE POETRY OF OTHER THINGS

MICHAEL HOFMANN  367  Curried Dragon
MICHAEL ROBBINS  372  Perdita
JILL ALEXANDER ESSBAUM  375  Mow Job
SARAH LINDSAY  378  Elephants Terribles
ROBYN SCHIFF  380  Hell Mouth
RON SILLIMAN  384  Say Hey

COMMENT

AVERILL CURDY  389  Westerly
J.T. BARBARESE  395  Politics
MARY RUEFLE  399  I Remember, I Remember

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR  412
CONTRIBUTORS  413
BACK PAGE  427
What’s there to say? We didn’t care for him much, and you can’t exactly commiserate with someone you don’t just not love but almost (admit it) hate. So the news just hung over us like the dud summer weather we’d had — rain since June, the lawn sodden, garden a bog, all slugs, late blight so bad our sickened Beefsteak vines, our Sweet One Hundreds, San Marzanos, the lot, yellowed half black before the fruit had set, which, when it did, began to bloat and rot before it ripened — but like I say (and not to speak ill of the dead) we just didn’t care for him, which is probably all there is to be said.
Blues for Samson

My stylist
calls me darling,
says Hi I’m Dee, and asks what I’d like today, smiling.
My hair back, I tell her, my precious locks,
thick and unruly and glossy as they were
before I was fleeced.

Her laughter
as she switches
the clippers on, brings back that sweet-throated witch’s
who comforted me as only your enemy can
in the days of my strength, when I smote
hip and thigh in a great slaughter.

Her nice eyes
by and by rest
on mine in the mirror. She leans in, letting her breast
brush against me. She knows her middle-aged man;
playing me like some trailer Delilah,
and I feel it rise;

the old blunt
want-instrument
that always and only wanted what it shouldn’t;
Gaza, Timna, my Valley girl
who spilled me in broad daylight. I must have reckoned
the sun shone out of her cunt.

Too long now
bereft of it,
a woman’s hands in my hair, or what’s left of it,
is all I seem to require of love,
and all I’ll spill is a tip, Dee; big as my straitened
circumstances allow,
for Dee, once
my head wasn’t bare
as that cornfield after the foxes I set on fire
rampaged through it, or the orchards and olive groves
I flattened with my slat-armored D9 ’dozer,
but maned like a lion’s.
Turkey Fallen Dead from Tree

Startled from snow-day slumber by a neighbor’s mutt, it banged its buzzard’s head then couldn’t solve the problem of the white pine’s limbs with wings nearly too broad for a planned descent. Somewhere an awkward angel knows whether it was dead before it hit the ground. Any sinner could tell it was dead after — eyes unseen beneath bare and wrinkled lids, feet drawn up almost as high as hands. I loved to watch thistle and millet disappear beneath it in the yard. As snow covers feathers that will still be iridescent in the spring I remember seeing a businessman take a dripping handful of pocket change and throw it down a subway grate beside a homeless man. The coins bounced and clattered, vanishing in the humid dark. The rich man said now you’re having a shitty day too. But it’s not a shitty day and won’t be when I retrieve the bird and walk it — toes curling stiff from a shopping bag — to a houseless scrap of oak savannah birdseed drew it from and dig it into deeper snow so what was hoarded by a man may by the thaw be doled.
I had just hung up from talking to you
and we had been so immersed in the difficulty
you were facing, and forgive me,
I was thinking that as long as we kept talking,
you in your car in the parking lot of the boys’ school
as the afternoon deepened into early evening,
and me in the study, all the books around
that had been sources of beauty to us,
as long as we stayed in the conversation
padded with history like the floor of the pine forest,
as long as I thought out loud, made a joke
at my own expense, you would be harbored in that exchange,
but the boys were leaving the track
and after we hung up I looked out the window
to see the top of the bare January trees spotlit to silvery red,
massive but made from the thinnest
twigs at the ends of the branches at the ends of the limbs
they were waving and shining in a light
like no other and left only to them.
For You Today

Of course there is a jackhammer. And a view, like Hopper, but happier. Of course there is the newspaper—the daily herald of our powerlessness. Easy go, easy come: thwash, the next day another, an example of everything that gets done in the dark. Like the initiative of the crocuses from a snow that was, as it works out, warming them. Or in this case, the strange October weather warming them. There were the conclusions we jumped to. To which we jumped. There was pain, and then there was suffering. Of course there was my ambition to offer you the world, but one that I have rearranged to make sense. Here are all the sensations of being alive at the turn of the twenty-first century, here’s how they ring out against each other, here’s how one brings out the sense of another, here is the yellow next to the fathomless blue.
A Poem for S.

Because you used to leaf through the dictionary, Casually, as someone might in a barber shop, and Devotedly, as someone might in a sanctuary, Each letter would still have your attention if not For the responsibilities life has tightly fit, like Gears around the cog of you, like so many petals Hinged on a daisy. That’s why I’ll just use your Initial. Do you know that in one treasured story, a Jewish ancestor, horseback in the woods at Yom Kippur, and stranded without a prayer book, Looked into the darkness and realized he had Merely to name the alphabet to ask forgiveness— No congregation of figures needed, he could speak One letter at a time because all of creation Proceeded from those. He fed his horse, and then Quietly, because it was from his heart, he Recited them slowly, from aleph to tav. Within those Sounds, all others were born, all manner of Trials, actions, emotions, everything needed to Understand who he was, had been, how flaws Venerate the human being, how aspirations return Without spite. Now for you, may your wife’s X-ray return with good news, may we raise our Zarfs to both your names in the Great Book of Life.
"I Love You More Than All the Windows in New York City"

The day turned into the city
and the city turned into the mind
and the moving trucks trumbled along
like loud worries speaking over
the bicycle's idea
which wove between
the more armored vehicles of expression
and over planks left by the construction workers
on a holiday morning when no work was being done
because no matter the day, we tend towards
remaking parts of it — what we said
or did, or how we looked —
and the buildings were like faces
lining the banks of a parade
obstructing and highlighting each other
defining height and width for each other
offsetting grace and function
like Audrey Hepburn from
Jesse Owens, and the hearty pigeons collaborate
with wrought iron fences
and become recurring choruses of memory
reassembling around benches
we sat in once, while seagulls wheel
like immigrating thoughts, and never-leaving
chickadees hop bared hedges and low trees
like commas and semicolons, landing
where needed, separating
subjects from adjectives, stringing along
the long ideas, showing how the cage
has no door, and the lights changed
so the tide of sound ebbed and returned
like our own breath
and when I knew everything
was going to look the same as the mind
I stopped at a lively corner
where the signs themselves were like
perpendicular dialects in conversation and
I put both my feet on the ground
took the bag from the basket
so pleased it had not been crushed
by the mightiness of all else
that goes on and gave you the sentence inside.
Miser time grows profligate near the end: unpinching and unplanning, abandoning the whole idea of savings. It’s hard to understand but time apparently expands with its diminishing. The door thrown wide on sliding hills of high-denomination bills and nothing much to buy.
New Rooms

The mind must set itself up wherever it goes and it would be most convenient to impose its old rooms — just tack them up like an interior tent. Oh but the new holes aren’t where the windows went.
There isn’t a word for walking out of the grocery store
with a gallon jug of milk in a plastic sack
that should have been bagged in double layers

— so that before you are even out the door
you feel the weight of the jug dragging
the bag down, stretching the thin

plastic handles longer and longer
and you know it’s only a matter of time until
bottom suddenly splits.

There is no single, unimpeachable word
for that vague sensation of something
moving away from you

as it exceeds its elastic capacity
— which is too bad, because that is the word
I would like to use to describe standing on the street

chatting with an old friend
as the awareness grows in me that he is
no longer a friend, but only an acquaintance,

a person with whom I never made the effort —
until this moment, when as we say goodbye
I think we share a feeling of relief,

a recognition that we have reached
the end of a pretense,
though to tell the truth

what I already am thinking about
is my gratitude for language —
how it will stretch just so much and no farther;
how there are some holes it will not cover up;
how it will move, if not inside, then
around the circumference of almost anything —

how, over the years, it has given me
back all the hours and days, all the
plodding love and faith, all the

misunderstandings and secrets
I have willingly poured into it.
"Note to Reality"

Without even knowing it, I have believed in you for a long time.

When I looked at my blood under a microscope
I could see truth multiplying over and over.

— Not police sirens, nor history books, not stage-three lymphoma persuaded me

but your honeycombs and beetles; the dry blond fascicles of grass thrust up above the January snow.

Your postcards of Picasso and Matisse, from the museum series on European masters.

When my friend died on the way to the hospital
it was not his death that so amazed me

but that the driver of the cab did not insist upon the fare.

Quotation marks: what should we put inside them?

Shall I say "I" "have been hurt" "by" "you," you neglectful monster?

I speak now because experience has shown me that my mind will never be clear for long.

I am more thick-skinned and male, more selfish, jealous, and afraid than ever in my life.

“For my heart is tangled in thy nets;
my soul enmeshed in cataracts of time . . .”

The breeze so cool today, the sky smeared with bluish grays and whites.
The parade for the slain police officer
goes past the bakery

and the smell of fresh bread
makes the mourners salivate against their will.
Don’t Tell Anyone

We had been married for six or seven years
when my wife, standing in the kitchen one afternoon, told me
that she screams underwater when she swims —

that, in fact, she has been screaming for years
into the blue chlorinated water of the community pool
where she does laps every other day.

Buttering her toast, not as if she had been
concealing anything,
not as if I should consider myself

personally the cause of her screaming,
nor as if we should perform an act of therapy
right that minute on the kitchen table,

— casually, she told me,
and I could see her turn her square face up
to take a gulp of oxygen,

then down again into the cold wet mask of the unconscious.
For all I know, maybe everyone is screaming
as they go through life, silently,

politely keeping the big secret
that it is not all fun
to be ripped by the crooked beak

of something called psychology,
to be dipped down
again and again into time;

that the truest, most intimate
pleasure you can sometimes find
is the wet kiss
of your own pain.
There goes Kath, at one p.m., to swim her twenty-two laps
back and forth in the community pool;

—what discipline she has!
Twenty-two laps like twenty-two pages,
that will never be read by anyone.
NATALIE SHAPERO

Your Other Heart

Mossy and thumping, bare of logic, red:
why do they say your other head

and not your other heart?

The snack cakes of Smut Wonderland
turn Alice smaller than her dress. She stirs,
nude in the folds of so much baby blue.

To think, they called this lesser art.

I ate mostly orders then, and you —
you were thinking with your other heart.

I took in a dog the way some might take in
a dress (I had become just skin).

It coughed. I cried for it
to stop, I fed it meat, its malady
recurrent and untreatable. I had
to give it up, like some bum body part

whose incidental benefit

the human form has out-evolved. Don’t start.
That dog: I called it Help, and I cried for it.
Epilogue

For my daughter

If the body is primal, if the body is performed, if the body is a city made of matches, something the self burns as it retreats,

if death is a victory, if death is a cascade, if death is the moment when the pianist rises from the piano and the piano plays on,

if you are a theater, if you are the wandering troupe, if you have checked, lost traveler, into the softest of hotels, if you already existed,

in endless repetitions, like an echo which, biopsied, grows to completion, like the flames on a candelabra, not just born from a single match, but wavering in the tip before it’s struck, the whole hive singularized, a queen subject to her ovaries, if the same horses grazing in me are grazing in you, if the body is a field written in hoofprints, the whole ghostly herd passing through, then I’ll meet you where the generations end, where the last gene evaporates, my invisible, my twin … And Fortinbras enters, followed closely by the wind.
The New Self

Are you of or not of brain, matter’s boss
or its crevasse, are you the body itself,
or more than that, immortal you, crouched
in flesh, like a vampire packed into a bat?

Are you housed in me or not? The tenant
or the landlord of my skin? Am I your
avatar? Are you my East Berlin? Are we an I
or each other’s synonym? Last night,

the train I was on dimmed then re-electrified,
and I thought again that we are conscious
a lot less often than we suppose, that half the time
in us you’re half reposed. I was in

South Orange again, city of my former self’s last
stand. Do you remember him, your swallowed
twin, the child king whom you deposed? Oh,
I know: you think you’re the buried light,

the jeweled glow, the sunlight falling through
the falling snow. But I’ve seen the uranium
laced through your walls: you’re an equation only
destruction solves. Who else but you

starts each day with masturbation and ends
each night with gin? And so how
should I begin? Four years ago, you rose
in me like a fin. It started as an overflow,

a drop of go, some royal beast in me, all gasoline
and yeast, unhinging its own jaw
to accelerate the feast, the rails of thought so greased
that the outer world began to skew,
as in that moment on a train when the view
becomes a wash of hues. There were clues.
Phantom music in the air. At times, I’d look down
at my body and think, “How’d you get there?”

One day, I de-napped to find myself entrapped
within the tangled logic of a subway
map. All day, I’d refrain, I’d double-track.
I’d talk to myself and myself talked back.

Was it you? That tick I felt within the trick
of thought? That wick that curled itself
around me, not exploding, just making a constant
tick-tick-tick that finally convinced me

that I was sick, that there was a cascade of toxins
in the air, that there
was something queer about the neighbor’s
stare, that charade of signals everywhere,

an air raid in the brain, something in me
left unpaid, a cosmic debt in arrears.
Some nights, I’d hear the voices of my parents coming
near, like waves that overlapped—

she’d slap him, he’d slap her back— their rage
a single note that climbed its staff for years,
my siblings and I in the closet with our fingers
in our ears, though still I heard one night

the knife drawer heaved back, as if they really
might slice each other or the house in half,
and then my thoughts unweaved and I began
to laugh. And it is funny, isn’t it,
the way that which starts as confession ends
in blame, this constant search
for the marionettist of your brain, the ghost
who stole the controls to your soul.

The truth is: we embrace the past that keeps
us whole. Again, I feel that treble in the skin,
something at the edge of sight but closing in,
the world a picture that won’t hang on the wall
quite right. Again, the double agent of the heart
tries to take the past apart, but now I sense
that the investigation is the crime, that it may be time
to give up on this which-is-which,

this who-is-who, this endless voodoo in which the self
I am keeps evading the curses of the self
I mean to be, or to admit at least that the lyric cracks
its voice trying to sing what’s ugly into praise,

and this language is the jewelers’ bluff, a diamond
that scuffs between the teeth, a perfume misting foul air. Admit, admit, that what you craved
was sex those days, and after a one-night tryst,

you became convinced you’d contracted AIDS.
Say it plain: you thought you’d passed the disease
on to your wife. In longhand, you wrote statistics
across the page, Googled infection rates,

a one-in-a-million chance the battalion of hotline
workers liked to say, but they couldn’t smudge
that chance away. And did you let this madness in
to build a drama around your sin,
to become valedictorian of the damned, to turn
from lion into lamb, as the murderer longs
to be the murdered one, and the king to swap
places with the fool, the self you thought

you were so undone that you could only blame it
on a coup, on a malignant growth, or on you,
my patsy, my herring, my phantom non grata, my ghoul,
you who I insist must exist, because, if not,

who else was it that could have been so cruel?
ROBIN EKISS

The Death of Silence

A car’s backfire
rifles the ear

with skeleton clatter,
the crowd’s walla walla
draws near, caterwaul evaporating in thin air.

Silence is dead.
(Long live silence.)

Let’s observe a moment of it, call it what it’s not:
splatter of rain
that can’t soothe

the window’s pane,
dog barking

up the wrong tree.
Which tree, which air

apparent is there to hear
a word at its worth?

Hammer that drums
its water-logged warning

against the side
of the submarine:

I’m buried to the hilt
like the knife,
after it’s thrown, continues to bow to the apple it’s split.
ADRIAN MATEJKA

End of Side A

It ends because the beginning won’t jumpstart again: red smudge of a mouth, lipstick everywhere the afterthought a comet leaves on its way out. What makes this moment unfold like a fine woman raising herself up from the bathroom floor? Honky-tonk in the honeyed brown of an eyeball? Perfume & its circus of heart-shaped introductions? It ends because the needle always winds up in the lead-out, like a man pawing around for broken spectacles after he wakes in the world’s rubble.

Hand over hand he paws, through stilted guitar picks & abandoned stilettos, raised skirts & rocks, glasses as chipped & smudged as the topography of a skipping record. He could be Albright himself, foraging the still-life swish of low-rise tutus & skyscrapers cracked in the twisted aftermath of a smile. Even without glasses, he remembers her in high style: magnanimously coming down the blue & violet threads of night, her green dress clashing with the bathroom tile.
Map to the Stars

A Schwinn-ride away: Eagledale Plaza. Shopping strip of busted walkways, crooked parking spaces nicked like the lines on the sides of somebody’s mom-barbered head. Anchored by the Piccadilly disco, where a shootout was guaranteed every weekend, those gun claps: coughing stars shot from sideways guns shiny enough to light the way for anyone willing to keep a head up long enough to see. Not me. I bought the Star Map Shirt for 15¢ at the Value Village next to the Piccadilly during the daytime. The shirt was polyester with flyaway collars, outlined in the forgotten astronomies of disco. The shirt’s washed-out points of light: arranged in horse & hero shapes & I rocked it in places neither horse nor hero hung out. Polyester is made from polyethylene & catches fire easily like wings near a thrift store sun. Polyethylene, used in shampoo bottles, gun cases, & those grocery sacks skidding like upended stars across the parking lot. There are more kinds of stars in this universe than salt granules on drive-thru fries. Too many stars, lessening & swelling with each pedal pump away from the Value Village as the electric billboard above flashes first one DUI attorney, then another who speaks Spanish so the sky above is constantly chattering, like the biggest disco ball ever.
KATHARINE COLES

Tempo for a Winged Instrument

Full of light and music, the beating air.

Light like a bird, Calvino says, not a feather.

Over the water the shags come in to land

All wings, uh-ohing over the cliffs.

Rock, their nests, and bare the rookeries.

Blue eye, blue eye, the wind plays fast and sharp.

They lift and ride and do not pick their fights.

Oh, blue sky, blue day. Heart

Of muscle, thrumming down, and swift.
I had a calling.
I took the call.
It was all I could do to follow the voice streaming into me
Like traffic on the runway where I lay
Down to gather.
I had a calling. I heard the geese bleat
In the firmament as they migrated
Into the jet's jets.
And could I have foreseen that falling
I could have fallen too
Rather than being sutured to the bottomless
Freeze-out lake.
For it is fine to lie within one's borrowed blankets
Looking up at the
Dropped ceiling coming down.
For at the moment I am employed counting the holes
In the sound absorbing tiles
Keeping a running record of the interlocutor's
Chides.
I feel at one with extinction
By my own hand
(Inner hand)
Though once there were many of my kind
Flocking inland, or perhaps
It felt that way.
Unemployment (2)

Another day come, add it
To the list, the
Not to do list.
Son of mine,
I was rambling across the undercarpeting
Strewn with imperceptible tacks
In one shapeless slip-on
When a pain rang out in my flank
And I fell to,
Braying,
But who should answer but no one.
I lost good cause that day, don't ask,
Let us sit a bit in this ill-starred
Suit in the form-filling
Chamber of subtraction,
Listing.
I haven't another trip around the sun
Left in me. Speak to me
Son, vague one.
For this is where it thickens,
Me here and it there and me there and them here
And you with the soul.
I'll cross that gravid boneyard
All the day poking
Radishes for remembrance.
For this is a private matter
Between a man and his scaffolding
And it shall remain so
Privation permitting.
Unemployment (3)

Out of cash, out of well-fitting trousers,
Out of soap and apples,
Out of pencils, out of my keeper’s
Reach.

I wish to set myself afire
But may not. This morning
(Last night) in the common room
I watched the administration
Of oxygen to one who had none

And I would not sit down, demanding
To do so.

Later I happened on a man
At the piano, and though I have happened five or six times
On men at the piano,
None moved his hand like this
Within the keys.

I sat beside him, looking for a sound
A chest sound. Not listening; I don’t listen
Anymore. I make music
But I don’t listen.
SASKIA HAMILTON

_In the Corridor_

I passed through, I should have paused,
there were a hundred doors. One opened.
In there, someone whose name
is not yet known to me lived out

his middle years in simple terms, two chairs,
one place laid for early breakfast, one plate
with dry toast and butter softening. There
his mind raced through writings

he had memorized long ago while he tried
to get hold of himself. Once
in his youth he had studied with love
in the corners of old paintings

matrices of fields and towns,
passages intricate and particular, wheat,
columns, figures and ground,
classically proportioned

in lines that were meant
to meet, eventually,
at vanishing point. They continued,
nevertheless; they troubled the eye.

He collected sets of books printed
in the nineteenth century, unyielding
pages, memoirs of the poets,
engravings of rurified private subjects

in times of public sector unhappiness,
frescoes of human oddity in gatefold printing.
Why does it continue
to chasten me, he says to no one.
It does. It is a painful mistaking, 
this setting something down, 
saying aloud, “it is nothing yet” 
when he’d meant, not anything—

but then nothing peered 
through the keyhole, nothing 
took possession. Snow on the roofs, 
snow in traces on the ground,

passersby with wet trouser-cuffs 
looking to the pavement as the hill rises, 
light gathering in the river 
and gradually spreading.
On the Ground

When the collie saw the child
break from the crowd,

he gave chase, and since they both
were border-crossers,

they left this world.
We were then made of—

affronted by—silence.
The train passed Poste 5, Paris,

late arrival, no luck, no
enlarging commentary

magnified in any glass.
“The ineffable

is everywhere in language”
the speaker had said

in the huge hall where
I sat amongst coughers,

students, in the late
February of that year,

at the end of a sinuous
inquiry on sense and sound—

“and very close to the ground,” he’d said.
Like mist risen above

the feet of animals
in a far field north of here.
Zwijgen

I slept before a wall of books and they
calmed everything in the room, even
their contents, even me, woken
by the cold and thrill, and still
they said, like the Dutch verb for falling
silent that English has no accommodation for
in the attics and rafters of its intimacies.
Slugs

Who could have dreamed them up? At least snails have shells, but all these have is — nothing. Small black antennae like fat pins wave as if they could take in enough to get them through. Turn them over, they’re the soles of new shoes, pale and unmarked as babies. They flow, the soil itself learning how to move and, moving, almost staying still, their silver monorail the only evidence of where they’d been. And they die quiet, or at least (thankfully) out of the human ear’s range, between two stones, under heels, shriveling in salt or piss, at the tips of sharp sticks. Fight back, I hear myself say, do something. Don’t just take it. But they die as they had lived, exuding slime, like the smaller boys, who’d just stand there, miserable in short pants, school socks down to their ankles, school tie unknotted and askew, and flowing from noses slow cauls of snot that from time to time they’d lick or sniff back up part way, until it flowed again, coating the upper lip, falling into the mouth, mixing with tears before anything had been done, the fear itself enough, so even if we wanted we couldn’t let them off. Sometimes it was the knee “where you daren’t show your mother,” other times the kick in the shins, the stick over the head, the punch in the mouth, while they just stood there, or double up, gasping for breath, and we did it again.
ATELIER LUMIÈRE

Paintings by Lawrence Ferlinghetti
Against the Chalk Cliffs, 1952–1957, oil on canvas, 49 × 36 in.
Door to the Sea, 1997, oil on canvas, 74 × 28 in.
Manhattan Transit, 1959, oil on canvas, 36 × 28 in.
Lovely Her, 1996, charcoal and conté crayon on paper, $24\frac{3}{8} \times 18\frac{1}{8}$ in.
Oh Pocahontas, Pocahontas!, 1987, oil on canvas, 48 × 60 in.
Lovers, 2004, oil and acrylic on canvas, 60 × 50 in.
Untitled, 1983, acrylic, charcoal, and ink wash on paper, 23 ¼ × 14 in.
Untitled, 1997, charcoal on paper, 16¾ × 14 in.
This Is Not a Man, 1993–1994, oil and acrylic on canvas, 68 × 36 in.
More Light

My former wife was the inspiration for Against the Chalk Cliffs. The cliffs are above the beach in Bolinas, California, where we used to hang out while still living in North Beach, San Francisco. The cliffs are not really chalk but I felt that “chalk” in the title gave a sense of fragility and vulnerability to the subject. I felt she was fragile. I painted it in my first San Francisco studio at 9 Mission Street and the Embarcadero (the Audiffred Building). I inherited the studio from Hassel Smith, the figurative painter who had turned to the non-objective. There were other painters of the San Francisco figurative movement on the same floor, including Frank Lobdell. It was a marvelous studio, a big third-floor loft looking out on the Bay. There was no heat except for a small pot-bellied stove, and there was no electricity above the ground floor. (Just like Paris—which I had just left.) The rent was $29 a month. There was an Alcoholics Anonymous “Seven Seas Club” on the second floor, and during the Great Waterfront Strike of the thirties labor leaders (Harry Lundgren or Harry Bridges) also had their offices there.

“All I wanted to do was paint sunlight on the side of a house,” said Edward Hopper (or words to that effect), and there have been legions of poets and filmmakers obsessed with light. I would side with the irrational visionary romantic who says light came first, and darkness but a fleeting shadow to be swept away with more light. (“More light!” cried the great poet, dying.) Poets and painters are the natural bearers of it, and all I ever wanted to do was paint light on the walls of life.

I never wanted to be a poet. It chose me, I didn’t choose it. One becomes a poet almost against one’s will, certainly against one’s better judgment. I wanted to be a painter but from the age of ten onward these damn poems kept coming. Perhaps one of these days they will leave me alone and I can get back to painting.
Door to the Sea, a very large painting, is loosely based on Willem de Kooning’s Door to the River. It started out as a totally non-objective painting, but human figures crept in. Growing up in New York, I naturally identified with the New York Abstract Expressionists who were my contemporaries, and I originally tried to paint like de Kooning and Franz Kline and Robert Motherwell, but I really didn’t have at all the same vision, since the human figure (man or woman) always seemed to surge forth. I expressed this conflict later in a painting called Triumph of the New York School, a large canvas with black linear forms superimposed upon humans. I make a distinction between “non-objective” and “abstract.” A non-objective painting is not an “abstract” of an actual object or scene. It is a new creation, having no referent outside of itself. Thus “Abstract Expressionists” is a misnomer, but that is how they came to be known, due to a certain critic’s sloppy semantics.

The kind sun of Impressionism makes poems out of light and shade. The broken light of Abstract Expressionism makes poems out of chaos.

Images appear and disappear in poetry and painting, out of a dark void and into it again, messengers of light and rain, raising their bright flickered lamps and vanishing in an instant. Yet they can be glimpsed long enough to save them as shadows on a wall in Plato’s cave.

The title Manhattan Transit is adapted from the John Dos Passos book. It too was painted at 9 Mission Street. In those days, before Gesso came on the market, painters sized their raw canvas with rabbit skin glue. I heated the pot of glue on the coal stove. This is one of three or four abstract paintings I did in the fifties, at a time when I really didn’t know how to draw. It was an easy way out. (How many other aspiring painters did the same!)
Through art, create order out of the chaos of living.

The drawings in charcoal were based on one-minute poses by studio models, generally called “gestural drawings,” and they were done in the eighties and nineties in my studio in the Hunters Point Shipyard, San Francisco. To the original drawing, in each case, I later added another face or body, in an attempt to give it a bit of ambiguity or mystery. Not that there isn’t mystery enough in any nude body, male or female.

What is any particular body doing on earth anyway, and what is its mysterious existence? Besides that, there is what used to be called “the mystery of Woman,” a romantic concept that endowed her with an illusive inscrutable allure, both sexual and spiritual. Then the feminist revolution brought Woman down from her pedestal. Yet the body itself remains the same.

Have wide-angle vision, each look a world glance. Express the vast clarity of the outside world, the sun that sees us all, the moon that strews its shadows on us, quiet garden ponds, willows where the hidden thrush sings, dusk falling along the river run, and the great spaces that open out upon the sea... high tide and the heron’s call.... And the people, the people, yes, all around the earth, speaking Babel tongues. Give voice to them all.

Oh Pocahontas, Pocahontas! is meant to express my compassion for this Native American maiden and all she suffered at the hands of white admirers and exploiters. This painting has nothing to do with historical accuracy. The images of Pocahontas in this painting are remembered pictures in a children’s book I must have read when I was about ten. All these years I carried this little tableau around, ready to be flashed upon my brainpan whenever. Such still snapshots make up our memory and when cast upon a canvas years later come alive...
again with all their original intensity (if the painter is great enough to capture it).

Lovers is another very large painting, of probably the most beautiful model we ever had in my studio, a very young woman with red hair, perhaps modeling for the first time. There was a freshness and purity about her. I later added the head of a bearded, slightly older man, perhaps imagining what was in her future.

Poetry the shortest distance between two humans.

Art is not Chance. Chance is not art, except by chance.

The sunshine of poetry casts shadows. Paint them too.

Paint like a fiend awake, obsessed. What is important in a painting is its fascinating, mysterious manifestations of life. So tell me what life is to you in your painting. Be an enthusiast. Get excited. Don't just sit there. Excite the imagination.

This Is Not a Man is an obvious play on Ceci n’est pas une pipe in the painting by René Magritte. However, the painting has nothing to do with the French. The real story goes back to the forties when one of my brothers was the assistant warden at Sing Sing prison up the Hudson in New York. He had to witness all the executions in the horrible old wooden chair with its electric cables, thick leather straps for arms and legs, and a heavy hood for the head. It was a gruesome sight even with no man in it. After my brother died, among his
papers was found a black-and-white photo of a man in the chair about to be fried. On the back of the photo, written in pencil, were the instructions to the executioner: “Attach electrodes to head and legs,” etc. I silk-screened the photo onto a canvas and then painted on it. It was used in a worldwide anti-capital-punishment campaign and is still available for such use. But the barbarism continues. Onward Christian Soldiers! Kill or be killed! In two thousand and twelve years of Christianity we have managed to retain our most savage instincts.

What I have in mind is art as the locus for fathoming man’s fate.

“I have beaten out my exile” has always been one of my favorite quotes of EP — a final word on his long expatriation. So much living went into that one line of poetry! It is perhaps almost as strong a life-statement as Dante’s “In the middle of the journey of our life, I came to myself in a dark wood.” My abstract study of Pound’s head is based upon a similarly abstract drawing by Gaudier-Brzeska on the cover of the New Directions edition of Pound’s Personæ. Besides the original which I still possess, there are three copies, slightly smaller than the original — one at City Lights Bookstore in San Francisco, one at New Directions in New York, and one owned by Pound’s daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz in northern Italy. I visited her almost ten years ago. Understandably she could have been upset by my raucous critique of Pound in Americus: Book 1, but evidently she is pleased with my painted portrait. She is a valiant defender of her father, of course.

The art has to make it on its own, without explanations, and it’s the same for poetry. If the poem or the painting has to be explained, then it’s a failure in communication.
Artworks are copyright © Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Photographs of paintings by Ron Jones. Photographs of drawings by Elisa Polimeni. The prose entries here are compiled from e-mail queries, interviews, critical essays, and other writing by Ferlinghetti. Some of these paintings are in his studio in the Hunters Point Shipyard in San Francisco. Others can be seen at the George Krevsky Gallery, 77 Geary Street, also in San Francisco.
We thought it might be interesting to ask a few poets to write on subjects other than poetry that are close to their hearts. The result is the feature that follows. The essays in Comment this month are similarly focused, though they were not commissioned specifically for this feature.
The last time we lived together as a family was in Edinburgh in 1971, which was when we broke three ways, into three unequal parts like Gaul. My father chose a new academic posting at the University of Ljubljana in Yugoslavia (and a bachelor duplex); my mother and younger sisters (two of them initially, soon to be three) were found a flat in Klagenfurt in Austria; and I got a scholarship to Winchester, Alfred’s whilom capital of Wessex, a boarding school in the south of England that had turned out generations of cabinet ministers, not far from Southampton. It was a tripodal existence, but, look! it moved, it turned like a rusty propeller. In fact, creaking complaining moving made it possible: my father drove over the mountains like a hard-currency smuggler, lugging crates of Radenska mineral water and cuts of Lungenbraten and Tafelspitz back to his ungrateful dependents, and cheap Supraphon records, and occasional “pop” items on fantastically thick slabs of vinyl in fantastically thick cardboard sleeves, all made in India — two or three hours if the Loibl pass was open, more like six if it wasn’t — to spend time “at home” with the family, initially five days a week, by the end occasional difficult weekends and abrupt tempestuous departures. I, having nowhere else to go, rode the Tauern Express every holiday, a little over twenty-four hours each way, three times a year, over ten years sixty days, London-Dover-Ostend-Cologne-Munich-Salzburg-Villach-Klagenfurt and back. At least for those sixty aggregated days I wasn’t in either place.

There were reasons for everything — there always are — but the reasons seemed both narrowly conceived and impossible to oppose. Curiously, the family as such had no say: it was not just disenfranchised; it was disbanded, dissolved, sent packing like the rump of the Long Parliament. We might not be able to predict what would happen, and how we might react to it, but the status quo was not an option. We seemed no longer to be allowed any interests in common, which involved merely being together, only separate and divergent individual interests, which this arrangement, if it worked, could finesse. Ex uno plures might have been our motto. My father, recently turned forty, wanted to have time to write, and to be closer to Germany; I at fourteen was thought to be too old to change languages.
and school systems; while my mother and sisters shouldn’t have to learn Slovenian, a language spoken by about two million people. Everything duly held what it offered: my father wrote his books, I got my spiffing English education, my sisters were spared Slovenian — but we all suffered, with the possible exception of my father. The sum of the parts was a lot less than the whole had been: not surprising, as Ljubljana remained my father’s turf almost as exclusively as Winchester ( alas) was mine. For the five months a year of school and university holidays, we continued to function as a family, or perhaps to go through the motions of being one — my parents didn’t completely separate, I wasn’t exactly orphaned — but it was as though we had agreed, in the face of some sporting challenge or tremendous ultimative need, to be dropped and glued together.

The arrangement partook of the mingled sadnesses of exile, bereavement, divorce, hospice, bankruptcy, downsizing, banishment, prison, castaway, quarantine, and perhaps some others that for now escape me. (Oh, yes, that other contemporary trauma: moving house.) Perhaps the best or only thing that could be said in its favor was that no one experienced all of it, from every angle — not even my mother, who put on the brave face and feigned continuity. I experienced it as reduction and duress, forced removal and forced return (though which was which I soon couldn’t care to say), breach of trust, diminishment, alienation. It was “home” — after all, it was where my family was living — and yet I had never seen it before, and instantly wanted nothing to do with it. An upstairs flat in a Neubau some way out of town on a dull plain with a view over the once-a-day airport, with rustic neighbors who still (for the nitrates?) pissed against their walls at night, nasty oom-pah-pah radio music from the people below, tall and stupefying maize fields that gradually had bits taken out of them for light industry, for housing and ribbon development. Austria doesn’t really do sprawl, it’s too small and much of it is too steep, but this was unmistakable sprawl: not town, not village, not city, no amenities within walking distance, no park, river, cinema, cafe, my father the only driver and his car the only car. My sisters going to school there made friends or frenemies (unerringly, with girls whose fathers had absconded or died), but my parents and I knew literally no one in the town, and we all as Germans, and I with one end of my life moored to the baffling six-hundred-year-old Winchester, would have felt abstruse and incommunicable. No contacts and no life, we were driven in on ourselves, and away from each other, into our separate
cells. Hateful large double-glazed picture-windows (with nothing worth looking at outside them), central heating, whitewashed walls that came off on your back, parquet that you had to be careful of. No room there was mine, but I got the temporary use of my father’s study. A wall of mainly German books, a desk, a typewriter, a lamp, an abstract painting, a much-washed cotton sheet laid over the bobbly flattened-out sofa that felt uncomfortably like tweed. At least I was spared homesickness. After a couple of days, from a spontaneous overflow of misery, I burst into tears in the corridor.

If that was home, school was barbarous, nineteenth-century refinements on a fourteenth-century idea, largely unheated, foul food, narrowly prescribed hours, days, weeks; work and sport, competition and hierarchy; panoptical supervision and furtive, misguided lust. (If I had seen Lindsay Anderson’s If betimes with my supposed lookalike, Malcolm McDowell, then my life would have been different. When I finally saw it at twenty-one or whatever, it looked like my seedtime with added Kalashnikovs, and a woefully lost opportunity.) Everything was duress, josh, and jostle. We ate at long tables, in long black gowns, slept eight or ten to a room on iron hospital beds, made in the English fashion with pairs of taut sheets under varying thicknesses of woolen blankets—could I bring a duvet, my mother asked, and was laughed to scorn for being so hopelessly “continental”—did our homework together in a lofty Georgian building called School. The place was safely inexpressible, but just in case, it had its own language and rules and affectations, called “notions.” In that dyslexicon, legs and breasts were supposed to be “lempers” and “brempers”—not that we saw much of either.

My life had split apart into two grim halves—each one mysteriously reduced—an unappealing new home and an ancient and intractable school. English and German were kept in balance, the old stones of Winchester and the aluminum window frames of Klagenfurt, the demands of one and the abeyance of the other, distrust of family and distrust of peers. Winchester was the place of and for achievements and competitiveness, Klagenfurt was a puddle of backwardness and mediocrity (after all, it wasn’t even good for mineral water, was it?). Winchester had rules about clothes and forms, and most of all, time; Klagenfurt didn’t. The best thing Winchester had to offer was outdoor space—the foggy playing fields, the watermeadows, the flintstuck walls, the grand elms and planes. Klagenfurt at its best had absolutely nothing, so I took that: darkness, my watch
doing its aimless rounds, a feeling of almost hallucinating with tiredness, reading till it got light, and waking at lunchtime (after lunch, the others, such as they were, napped). It was then that I became nocturnal and scruffy and solitary. And made the fatal discovery that for me, life could all too easily be elsewhere.

One problem was filling so much time alone. But that still left an aesthetic deficit. I couldn’t just read. This is where art comes in. The arts, even, forsooth. There was a guitar, which I lay no claim to playing. It kept me company; I don’t know how it came to be there. The strings were in conventional order, and I’m left-handed, but we’re not talking Hendrix here. I spent hundreds of pointless, harmless hours noodling on this untuned, perplexing thing. Chords—a very few chords. Harmonics. Accidental sub-tunes. Something to make a slide effect. If I wasn’t tone deaf already (once, when we were all trebles, I was told to “stop screaming” by the boy in choir next to me), my experiments would certainly have made me so in short order. When one foolish afternoon I switched all the strings round for left-handedness, I was left feeling dizzy for days afterwards. A mistaken refinement on that wretched guitar was a mandolin, which my poor parents bought me. I wanted it, or thought I did, but hadn’t ever bothered to take one in my hands, or try it out. I had no idea how taut the thing was, the four pairs of double-strings, the tiny narrow fretboard for my weak and in every sense un-dexterous fingers. I didn’t know that “mandolin” was also the term for a ruthless and rather dangerous slicer of foods, but it wouldn’t have surprised me. It was like playing cheese wires. I had imagined something loose and noble and easy and capable of a lollipping baritone melancholy, not this high hysterical folksy brittle thing that needed probably to be strummed like a balalaika.

And then there were the T-shirts. Again, I can’t remember how they first entered my life, the blameless 2.99 cotton T-shirts and the little tins of Dylon (and once a stinking, sulfur one of a sister-product or antidote called Dygon) from English hardware stores, boiled up with water (and quantities of salt as a fixative), with a T-shirt in it, turned and twisted and bundled up with string, like an ingrown string of sausages, filled with stones, re-used string (for a sort of double-dyed effect I was proud of) and unpredictable patterning. It was a mixture of cooking and chance and picture-making. I don’t know what stage I liked best, the optimistic conniving of the knotting-up and tying down; the cooking itself—the bumpy little saucepan
(I wonder what else it was ever used for?), the stick for stirring, the deepening color, the corpse of the white T-shirt gradually coloring up; or the unwrapping, the unpicking of string andemptying out of stones and seeing what had come up. I must have had my way with twenty or thirty T-shirts. I haven’t done it of course for many, many years, but I have no trouble recognizing it as an artistic—perhaps proto-artistic—process: the furor, the incomplete mastery, the chance element, the developing intentions, the solitude, the risk, the consolation, the making, the unpalatable outcome. Mostly, it takes a while to confront things directly. Five years later, in that same godawful flat, I wrote my first poem. It was called “Calm and Reasonable Complaint”:

The fourth day of the year must have marked
the beginning of our new way of life.
For lunch there was curried dragon.
It will all take some getting used to.
My sister grumbles about sharing dedication space in my book with my cat, Perdita. I like cats. People are fine, but, like Ivan Karamazov, I prefer them in the abstract. Most of them are very stupid. Of course there exist cats, as Carl Van Vechten wrote, “as stupid as any taxpayer.” Some of my friends swear Perdita is one of these, but they’re jealous. Cats can be cruel and stingy and aloof (although most cats are far less aloof than has generally been supposed). And all of them are half insane. But I have never been disappointed or bored or, aside from several scratches and one particularly nasty bite, hurt by a cat. Most cats are interesting, and they are easy to love, which is more than anyone can say for most people.

It’s a cliche, I know. Van Vechten devotes an entire chapter of his indispensable The Tiger in the House: A Cultural History of the Cat to “The Cat and the Poet.” Petrarch, Gray, Issa, Johnson, Smart, Eliot — the roster of poets who have found the cat good to think on is well known. Robert Duncan’s “cat is fluent. He/converses when he wants with me”; Marianne Moore’s cat “Peter” “can talk but insolently says nothing.” William Carlos Williams’s precisely poised syntax and enjambment step into the flowerpot with the cat. Keep the dog far hence, but let the cat, as Swinburne has it,

Stately, kindly, lordly friend,
    Condescend
Here to sit by me, and turn
Glorious eyes that smile and burn,
Golden eyes, love’s lustrous meed,
On the golden page I read.

Van Vechten offers this typically cracked explanation for the cat/poet nexus:

Poets, I believe, are more closely in touch with the spirit of grimalkin, the soul of a pussy-cat, than either prose writers or painters. They should be, because poets are mystics, at least the great poets are mystics, speaking like the oracle or the
clairvoyant.... The poet knocks at gates which sometimes open wide, disclosing gardens to which entrance is denied to those who stumble to find truth in reason and experience. Faith is needed to comprehend the cat, to understand that one can never completely comprehend the cat.

This contains a valuable insight about cats (and a lot of nonsense about poets). The cat brushes past our efforts to understand her. Montaigne’s famous question — “When I am playing with my cat, how do I know she is not playing with me?” — deepens the more one considers it.

Perdita is obese and slovenly. She often disdains the litter box for purposes other than urination. Sometimes she disdains it in favor of my bed — even, on a few occasions, when I was sleeping in it. She hates everybody but me, especially the women I date. She talks too much. She perches beside my head at four in the morning and meows in my ear until I wake up. She is terrible at catching mice. Once she chased a mouse under a bookshelf. I watched it run out the other side, reverse direction, and run right past her. She stayed where she was, staring under the bookshelf. She stayed there for days. I caught the mouse in a towel and let it go outside.

And Perdita makes me smile every day. She runs to greet me when I come home, and she flops at my feet in the morning to be petted. She loves boxes and balled-up pages of the Nation. She is afraid of vacuum cleaners and tornado sirens. She lies on her back in squares of sunshine with her paws in the air and looks perfectly ridiculous and content. My friend Kristen tells her cat Mouse each morning that he’s her best friend, which is the sort of behavior that makes non-cat-people roll their eyes. But there’s something to it. Perdita and I don’t discuss novels or anything, but we really are friends.

Literature’s not good for much — all it can really do for us is, to paraphrase Harold Bloom, teach us to see, hear, feel, and think. I don’t believe it can make us care about nonhuman animals. But, if we do care about them, it just might be able to enlarge the scope of our sympathy — or bring it into focus. It might remind us that our relationship with the animals is not one-sided. Van Vechten is right to claim that it is Baudelaire who has most successfully captured the enigma of Felis catus, Baudelaire who writes that when he turns from the cat he loves to look within himself:
Je vois avec étonnement
Le feu de ses prunelles pâles,
Clairs fanaux, vivantes opales,
Qui me contemplant fixement.

I find to my astonishment
like living opals there
his fiery pupils, embers which
observe me fixedly.\textsuperscript{\textdagger}

\textsuperscript{\textdagger}Translation by Richard Howard.
I do the summer work of a twelve-year-old boy, which isn’t surprising as I have the sense of humor of a twelve-year-old boy: I cut grass. I do it for the money. I do it for the exercise. I do it for the fresh air. But mostly it’s the fast cash.

I joined the yard work racket several summers ago when I ran low on funds. Real low on funds. Like, cartoon-trouser-pockets-turned-inside-out-and-moths-flying-from-my-purse low on funds. Bluntly: Essbaum was poor. Mind you, I’ve never been swimming in gravy, but I’ve never been destitute either. Nor was I destitute then; that’s a sober diagnosis. What I had was a slight case of the no monies. How’d I catch it? Doorknob? Public toilet seat? Recycled airplane air? It isn’t a kissing disease. But it is unhealthy and I needed to un-catch it and the quickest cure was immediate cash-in-hand work. So I babysat. And I housecleaned. And I lawn mowed.

I liked mowing lawns. I kept mowing lawns.

A straight-up, no-frills lawn job puts forty dollars of pin money in my pocket. For a single sawbuck more, I’ll edge (size of lawn depending). If it’s something other than mowing that you want, then we negotiate. I’m not greedy. In fact, I often undercharge. Example: Last summer I spent a hellish week and a half in an unrelenting backyard wrenching hackberry roots from the ground. Have you ever danced with a hackberry root? Don’t. It was the yard of my ex-husband’s former roommate. (Sit with that for a minute. I should have.) This is the man with whom my ex lived when we met. The man who, sixteen years ago and from the distance of only a hallway, watched as we tumbled into love, my former husband and I. The man who, last summer and from one-third of an acre away, looked on as I raked fifty fucking bags of yard waste into a fifty-fucking-bags-of-yard-waste-sized pile. My sadness was particular, if spasmodic. I was wistful, embarrassed, and improbably nostalgic for a cheerless past I’d done well to wave goodbye to. But there’s no crying in yard work. Yes, I made good money. But money rarely countermands the hangdog shame of loss.

Heartache and hackberry aside, I very much like the labors of clearing out, cleaning up, and cutting down. Two summers ago the woman who used to be the leader of my Girl Scout troop paid me...
to raze the overgrown backyard garden she’d neglected for a year. The weeds were six feet tall and the grasses irrevocably tangled. The ground held them like a grudge. It was a three-day tribulation that culminated in two conclusions. The first: Don’t grab a bee. Not even with gloves on. The second: Do not use the weed eater on yourself. It’s as bad an idea as it sounds. (Laugh with, not at me, friends.) In my defense, it was one of my first jobs, I hadn’t found my stride and on my honor (so swears the Girl Scout) this woman’s yard was as f*cked-up as Rasputin’s beard. I kept the trimmer string too long. I wore shorts. I got distracted. I get it. Pay attention or pay consequence. You don’t get a badge for dumbassery.

(A digression: Years ago when I had the scratch to spend — and the itch to spend it — I paid a man to do my lawn. This is not a euphemism. When he wasn’t tending lawns he roped calves. He was a cowboy. “When you gonna come ride my horse, Jill?” he asked each time he came over. This might have been a euphemism. He stopped working for me when we started going out because, as a rule, one should never date someone she pays. He was nice enough, and good-looking. But it didn’t last. And I never rode his horse. One way or the other.)

My lawnmower is red and thirteen years old. My ex-husband bought it when we married. I assumed custody when we split. It’s been through more than a divorce. This is the mower I bring to your house when I come to cut your grass. The first time I used it I unintentionally pushed it over some rocks cached in the sod. You know the rules. Rock beats scissors; that blade was toast. Another time (and this is about as inattentive as it gets) I managed to roll up — no, drive up — on the damn thing with my truck. That’s right. I ran over the lawn mower with my truck. Just barely. Maybe an inch. Only enough to bend the right front wheel. After that, it wobbled when it turned, but it worked. Total fluke I didn’t crush the whole machine. The ex was livid anyway. The wheel’s never been fixed. It’s spun on an oblique axis for years. There’s meaning here. I’m sure of it.

My work uniform is invariable: jeans, T-shirt, leather gloves, and a camouflage gimme cap from the diner that invented chicken-fried bacon (it’s my favorite hat). Not a look that warrants wolf-whistles. But I dress for necessity. Pants are protective (learned that). Gloves seem obvious, and anyone’s head is naked without a hat. You think this is bad? When my mother worked in the yard, she’d don a long-sleeve chambray work shirt and a Vietnamese peasant hat tied in a lopsided bow under her chin. I miss her. Ours was a lovely, lonely,
convolutedly zealous entanglement. Which is to say: *goddammit we loved each other*. In a lovely, lonely, zealous, and convoluted way. But that’s for nothing. Except to say that if I had her hat, I’d wear it when I mowed your lawn.

My father used to tend the vacant acre next to ours as a courtesy to the elderly woman who owned it. Dad was generous like that. It was a big job. Big jobs want big machines. For this, the riding mower. Sometimes, I’d mow the pasture for him. Memory: *I snap a Duran Duran cassette into an off-brand Walkman and drive in circles, pretending it’s a car. I dream of elsewheres and elsewhens. I am twitchy, precocious, and fourteen years old.*

Dad was magnanimous; he always slipped me cash. It was my first paying mow job. And it wasn’t even our lot to mow.

*It is not my lot to mow.* Of course it is. I’m no landscaper, no gardener. I don’t know for flowers or trees or even grass — except that it is *very* agreeable to me when I advance my engine over the tallish green bits that rise from the ground and in so doing make them less *tallish*. I like sheepshearing a line, sharpening an edge. I’m an army barber, your one-woman clean-up crew. What’s disheveled? Let me hevel it. You’ll nod *yes, yes* when you see your tidy lawn. My mower has memory. I’m ok with that. Inattention aside, when I have to, I shove my feet into boots and get to work. I don’t quit. I try not to fail. I try to try not to fail. I leave you with those good words.

Also: I take checks.
As he stands before his easel with a paint-laden brush, Nom Chok probably isn’t thinking about his early sorrows and good fortune—orphaned at birth, “enfant terrible of the elephant art world” by age three. Who knows what he’s thinking, if it should be called thinking?

Lucky is a painter now, too, but at six months old she was an orphaned wanderer. (Given the chance, she would have depended on her mother’s milk for at least two years.) She picks up her brushes with evident enthusiasm. The tuskless male Boon Rod seems to prefer dabbing at the paper to long strokes. He too was less than a year old, and injured by a land mine, when humans took charge of tending him. Scarred but healthy, he has lately created several more or less representational works: flowers, or trees. Or possibly jellyfish.

Lakshmi, captured from the wild for unknown reasons, lives with her daughter, Pooja. Her technique is her own: a different grip, more horizontal marks, the concluding consumption of a banana.

Provocative artists Vitaly Komar and Alexander Melamid conceived of teaching domesticated but underemployed Asian elephants to paint. Sales of work by elephant painters in Thailand, Cambodia, and Sri Lanka bring in badly needed funds for their food and space. Whether or not Nom Chok, Lakshmi, and the others find artistic satisfaction in their efforts, we can be sure of this much: using a brush and nontoxic paint is less strenuous than teak logging, now illegal; it’s safer and makes fewer enemies than raiding farmland; and the recognized alternative is begging in the streets. Besides, banana or sugarcane generally arrives at the end of the creative process. (As my own trainer, I’ve been known to use ice cream this way.) These elephants are stranded in human-dominated territory; why deny them a harmless chance at our intellectual pleasures?

In a shadowed part of my early memories dwells the image of Ziggy, chained and facing the back wall of his cage in the Brookfield Zoo elephant house. Ziggy had killed a man—no, he hadn’t, but he’d tried to. Permitted to live, he stared silently at concrete year after year, shifting his weight from two legs to the other two. He was ten feet tall, faceless and terrible. I wonder what he might have painted.

More cheeringly, I keep looking at my own Nom Chok, opus 114.
Bright red, bright green. They mingle thickly in the middle. Here the red brush smacked against paper, moved a little drily downward, and left a curving tendril that points to a conclusive shove. There isn’t room for an elephant to turn in the clutter of our living room, but in it I can touch what he touched. I don’t know what passed through the mind of the animal, one of those warm, powerful, enormous beasts with a gaze like Abraham Lincoln’s, but here’s the result.

All over this land, students are taught that art is for and about self-expression. When you’re a teenager, that’s your calling anyway. Elephants have demonstrated, in human-designed experiments with mirrors, that they too possess some level of self-consciousness. And they express themselves to each other: *Here I am not beaten with chains. I like you. I’m hungry. Let’s goof off.*

But in terms of their painting activity, perhaps they are closer to a different source of artistic impulse, one that skips over the hair shirt of self-awareness and focuses outward: *Let’s see what happens with this move. Let’s see what this paint will do.*
It’s 7:08 AM and I just watched the “cold open” of yesterday’s episode of *Days of Our Lives* online. The episode has been loosened from its forty-seven-year-old programmed slot by what the television industry calls “time shifting.” Every age gets the science fiction it deserves. There’s a tight one-beat shot of a sealed manila envelope. It has an anachronistic black wax stamp. Standard-issue inter-office mustard against the jet of the wax makes for a disorienting prop, giving the apparent secret concealed within the impression of having been documented by a hooded procurement specialist sent from the Renaissance to buy envelopes at Office Depot. Hope leans into the frame. “Ready? It’s gonna be good.” She and Bo have been waiting on this documentation concerning the legitimacy of their marriage for a long time. She draws a single sheet of white paper from the envelope, and it falls below the frame. “What? No. No!” She releases the envelope and the sheet of paper into the void and drops tragically into an armchair.

Soap opera plotting turns on documentation. Marriage contracts, adoption records, birth certificates. In a world where amnesia is as common as seasonal flu, time-stamped public records say “I was here” with the authority of law and physics. Soaps share their enthusiasm for documentation with gothic novels, another genre with a primarily female audience. Soaps, too, are obsessed with property, and though this is sometimes expressed in shifts of wealth and dynastic power, more often they are concerned with self-possession, outrageous gestures that not only say “I am here” but “I am free,” despite having been fated by committee and set in motion by Proctor & Gamble.

As contrived as the twists can seem, there is something beautifully improvisational about the form. Plotlines run concurrently in a perpetually open narrative, and soaps not only operate with no end in sight, but also without a clear origin, because the past has as many possibilities as the future. Even if a plotline seems to achieve closure, narrative satisfaction is temporary at best, qualified by the soap opera rule of return through which characters come back from dark pasts dreamt up in the present. For instance, Hope’s son was killed in a motor vehicle accident by the daughter.
her husband conceived sixteen years earlier, unbeknownst to any-
one, even the writers then, during the years Hope was presumed
dead. The art, it seems, is to throw open a few windows as you go
so they can be crawled through later. The term “Hell mouth” is
sometimes used to refer to trapdoors in a theater, and it seems like
a fitting term to describe the multi-generational revolving doors
through which soap characters come and go past-ward into the future.

I admit this kind of time travel shocks me for the same reason that
I am shocked when a poet reenters his or her own text through some-
thing of a wormhole, as Lyn Hejinian did in her revisions of My Life.
It was written in Hejinian’s thirty-seventh year. A work of formal
exactitude consorting with abandon, it was then thirty-seven reeling
stanzas of thirty-seven lines each. Hejinian revised it eight years later
though, adding eight new sections, and eight lines to each previous
stanza to recalibrate the work. But here’s the thrilling part: the new
lines are not always at the end of the sections. Encountering this manner
of revision feels like stepping into time itself with a toolkit. An inte-
gration of present perceptions of the past into a record that’s already
standing! It makes me woozy.

Bo: What did it say? [He’s holding the document now.]
Hope: No.
Bo: No. It can’t be true. It’s not true.

Hope is still stunning after more than twenty years on the show,
but whittled in the uncanny manner plastic surgery has of bringing
the corpse right up to the edge of the soul. Hope is a variety of hero
who is most herself under duress, as Marianne Moore says of the
type:

    hope not being hope
    until all ground for hope has
    vanished.

The ground for hope has vanished many times over and Hope
is hope indeed in Salem, the fictional city where Days is set, a city
whose very name resonates with powers of transformation and possi-
bility. She’s been kidnapped, forced to marry, dipped in a vat of toxic
waste, brainwashed, and has confused her own identity with a deeply
suppressed angry personality within that resides in the trauma of the
early loss of her mother who was killed when she stepped between Hope and an oncoming car. If something outside the realm of nature occurred in real life, I’d call it supernatural; when the already unnatural laws of a soap contort to a new extreme, I don’t have a word to describe the warp. But when I look at Hope, I am looking into the face of Time.

My husband just came into the room. “Are you watching Days of Our Lives? Are you depressed?”
“No. I’m working.”
“Is that Hope? She looks like a skeleton.”

He wants an update of the goings-on in Salem since 1990, and I’m not surprised that I can brief him almost entirely in words that describe time. I say “again” and “still” and “now” over and over. Because of the tension between the eternal and the momentary, summarizing either a single episode or a decade of Days I might as well say to my husband, quoting Shelley famously gazing on Mont Blanc:

The everlasting universe of Things
Flows through the Mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
Now lending splendour.

Each “now” like a precarious climbing hold jammed right into the cliff face of the everlasting, with each new “now” dissolving in succession as time courses the earth and the poem. Or consider Suzanne Buffam’s startling and startlingly brief poem “On Geological Time.” It reads in its entirety:

Enjoy the view while you can,
Mt. Everest.

The juxtaposition of momentary time with eternal duration here is so vertiginous that the couplet itself appears to erode before our eyes, and Mt. Everest is left peering into the inevitable abyss of its own temporary footprint.

Couplet; couple. A few weeks later I tune in again and Bo is coming out of a medically-induced coma mumbling about what is “past, passing, or to come” so incoherently that Hope can’t tell if he’s issuing a warning about the future or recalling the past. Bo has lost Hope and Hope Bo so many times that their relationship is an
ongoing reenactment of a harrowing of hell in which they take turns saving each other simultaneously against all odds and against the clock. And those are Everest’s sands, or Mont Blanc’s, trickling through that famous hourglass in the Days title sequence.
When I was eleven, Willie Mays came to town. Not just Mays, but also Johnny Antonelli, Ruben Gomez, Stu Miller, the once-great Hank Sauer, the soon-to-be-great Orlando Cepeda, and the incomparably named Valmy Thomas, a circus of major league baseball talent suddenly to be found at the far end of the F-train in San Francisco, a city I could see from the back porch of my grandparents’ house in Albany, California. In 1958, Walter O’Malley persuaded Major League Baseball to permit him to transplant his team, the Dodgers, from Brooklyn to Los Angeles and—at least as important—sweet-talked Horace Stoneham, owner of the neighboring New York Giants, to bring his team along to San Francisco, thereby preserving a “natural” rivalry that had existed in New York, and making it economically feasible for National League teams to travel to the West Coast to play games. The self-anointed national pastime was now truly national.

In 1958, you could very easily make the argument that Willie Mays was the greatest living baseball player. He was one of just two “five-tool” stars then at the height of their careers, hitting, running, fielding, throwing, and hitting with power. The other, Mickey Mantle, had bad knees and too much of a fondness for alcohol ever to reach his full potential, which left Mays alone at the top of the baseball pyramid. In many ways, Mays was the first great black player to fully benefit from the sacrifices made by Jackie Robinson and other Negro League stars who had entered the majors at great personal cost over the previous dozen years. Mays’s top salary of $165,000 was not only $65,000 more than Mantle ever made in one year; it was almost four times what Robinson earned at his peak in 1953.

Mays had cemented his reputation nationally with an astounding over-the-shoulder catch of a long fly ball hit by the Cleveland Indians’ Vic Wertz in the 1954 World Series. The importance of Mays’s catch was not that it was the greatest ever made—Mays doesn’t think it was even in his top five—but that it was on television in the World Series right at the moment that TV became a universal phenomenon. Mays’s catch was baseball’s first great replay and by the time the Giants showed up in Seals Stadium four years later, every
fan had seen Mays catch, whirl, and throw the ball to the infield in that single fluid motion dozens if not hundreds of times. By comparison, Bobby Thomson’s 1951 home run that enabled the Giants to beat the Dodgers for the National League championship took place as television was just starting to take off. The reason Thomson’s dinger was the “Shot Heard ’Round the World” wasn’t because it wasn’t filmed—it was—but because most people in New York and beyond experienced it first over the radio, Giants’ announcer Russ Hodges screaming “The Giants win the pennant!” over and over.

Eleven-year-old boys were not the only people transfixed by the sudden arrival of the major leagues on the West Coast. Thirty-three-year-old Jack Spicer liked to spend his afternoons on the concrete amphitheater next to the Maritime Museum at San Francisco’s Aquatic Park, listening to the games over a radio. Earlier in the fifties, Spicer had spent two years teaching at the University of Minnesota, a school that did not require its faculty to sign a loyalty oath, which Spicer had refused to do at Berkeley. During Spicer’s years at Minnesota, the big man on campus, a two-sport star and the 1953 runner-up for the Heisman Trophy, was Paul Giel. Professionally, Giel chose baseball over football, ending up with a short career in the majors as a “swing man,” a spot starter who more often pitched in relief. The four games he won for the Giants in 1958—one of which I saw in person—tied for the most Giel ever won in a single season. He was out of baseball within another two years.

The young hotshot in over his head is a figure Spicer makes great use of in the poems that appear as “Four Poems for the St. Louis Sporting News,” in his last volume, Book of Magazine Verse. What sets these poems apart from the bulk of baseball poetry, and from the ideology of individual accomplishment that is so much a part of the ethos of the sport, is that they’re about failure, and about intimacy, implying a deep, even necessary connection between the two.

Other than a brief suggestion that “there are people that talk about poetry like tired insurance clerks talk about baseball,” in “Letters to James Alexander” (1958–59), Spicer doesn’t really take notice of baseball in his poetry until 1962, the year the Giants beat the Dodgers in a one-game playoff to get into the World Series. The hoopla over that series is seen by Spicer as part of the corruption of the world in the first section of Golem, comparing that with Robert Duncan accepting money for a reading in Seattle and “Shoeless” Joe Jackson colluding with gamblers to fix the outcome of the World Series in 1919. Spicer’s line—
I have seen the best poets and baseball players of our generation caught in the complete and contemptible whoredom of capitalist society

— also invokes Allen Ginsberg as one of the whores of poetry, a theme he returns to in Magazine Verse.

But for the later Spicer what matters in baseball is that pitcher and catcher have an inescapable intimacy that is both visible to everyone in the stands and yet inaudible at the same time. You can’t hear what they’re saying, if they speak at all. A secondary intimacy involves the batter, but it’s more of a passing romance, one batter after another. Surrounding all three, however, is an inevitability of failure. Careers are short, it’s hard to get the ball over the plate, batters make outs most of the time. “God is a big white baseball,” but “Pitchers are obviously not human. They have the ghosts of dead people in them.”

“Four Poems for the St. Louis Sporting News” are some of the saddest love poems ever written, envisioning a world in which impermanence rules and all relations are determined solely by how they fail. Having lived near Philadelphia, where fans expect to be let down, I have some sense now of what Spicer was seeing in baseball, a Philadelphia of the heart. But I wouldn’t have believed it when I was eleven or even when I was seventeen and Book of Magazine Verse was published within weeks of Spicer’s death at forty in 1965. Had he lived another forty years, Spicer still would not have experienced the Giants finally winning the championship, which did not happen until 2010.
COMMENT
Years ago I knew an old woman. Her faith was of a homegrown American strain; seized by visionary excess and influenced by the nineteenth century’s enthusiasm for scientific principle, every pleat and button of the afterlife had been cataloged. Her husband, who had only driven her closer to that God he wouldn’t believe in, had died long before and she had outlived all her friends and now all but one of her children. She had pushed and protected and punished her son and two daughters according to the needs of their characters as she saw them. She had tithed, tilled, conserved, and given with both hands even to those neighbors she didn’t like. All of that fight and for no mere surviving but to do what was right, even beyond her scope as being rich only in the needs she had to meet, had made her obdurate; and here she was—was she in fact a burden and a tyrant? She could no longer walk but kept her stick at hand for emphasis. Her heart she could feel inside her turning liquid, sluggish as the oatmeal she tried to swallow every morning.

Most terrible was how little remained that was real, as solace or distraction. Her teeth had ground away like chalk and her stomach was bad. Flowers, books, needlework, the pleasures of eye and hand, each had been stolen, as one silver knife or fork at a time might be filched by someone you’ve trusted until the day when you can’t believe the entire set is gone. Some evenings when the daughter with whom she lived was cooking dinner, a smell—lemon or cilantro, or onion before the warm olive oil had soothed it—would sharpen the quiet between them, touching her like the shadow of a cloud over the desert on its way to rain elsewhere. So she sat in her armchair, which today had been carried out into the lawn at the center of the green-gilt afternoon of my brother’s wedding reception. An old woman in a green glass bottle.

With her blocky head sunk and turning within her bunched shoulders, she looked like the owl I had seen at a rescue station. Winged by a hunter, it could, after so many years, submit to the touch of those whose own needs kept it alive. Leashed to its perch, the owl like an icon articulated the small air around it; its gaze, saturnine, sulfurous, brooded absently as a knight who has outlived his conflicts.
an owl glides noiselessly through trees at night the forest appears as intersecting planes and columns — abrupt geometries — which slide, tilt, separate, and vanish behind. A territory of grisaille, part memory, part improvisation. I had once been stalked by an owl during a sunset run through the woods and I felt again the ghost of that old fear, the involuntary shudder of the small and the quick, when its eye dropped on me the predator’s cold, brazen fury, the late light from a wounded imperium.

A hard floor was laid over the part of the lawn where people would dance later. Whidbey Island, fifty miles long, forested in second or third growth, macadamized and cultivated, is really no more than a sandbar, riven with streams running from one salt water to another, which an earthquake will someday liquefy and dissolve. The mountains we rested our eyes upon, and all the suburbs skirting them, had for centuries been called on maps the Mer de l’ouest, a great inland sea summoned by a desire for symmetry to match the Mediterranean on the other side of the world. This landscape breathed water, exhaling a deceptively mild, humid scent that combined salt with cedar, and people seemed to squint a bit or rub their eyes as the air veiled objects near and far. Once a month I felt as though I could see with utter clarity into the life of things. For those two days I walked everywhere cautiously in a pained rapture.

The old woman wore a flowered blouse and the afghan that she preferred for its catlike weight upon her legs (yes, there are certain fierce preferences still, I see, and now that I’m troubling to remember her face, there is an almost disowned and, therefore, haunting need, her spectacles turned toward me, the light from them soliciting, like coins in the collection plate). There was a glass of water and a box of tissue beside her, in case she started to choke as she might now without any reason. In their summer dress, everyone, even the parents and grandparents, looked rich, and youthful, accepting the party’s promise that for these few hours we would be replete. The labor of the day, the effort to refine it to its ideal, showed only where that labor had failed: a razored cheek’s bead of blood or the torn hem; leaves in the fountain; the fly exploring a segment of melon. Shadows grew out of the evergreens that circled the garden. Some guests, nervy, bold as starlings, approached and withdrew from the old woman. Most acted as their costumes demanded, their manners more playful and tenderly formal, each one paying their fee to play by bending to ask after her. She gave them always the same answer, its
longing unfaded by repeated exposure to the air’s solvents, “I want to die.” Her voice a barb caught in the warm flesh of the afternoon. Some were up, already veering away so heard her only as branches scratching, or the far-off ratcheting of a jay defending its territory. But others kneeled beside her as if she were a lock they were determined to pick, that empty space to be filled by their being. They would hum in her ear the need for strength and the splendors, etc. of life, etc. until on the lathe of her silence their evangelism turned into a fine, wheedling noise and they dwindled away to find a drink or a kiss. They remained outside.

You have only to look at the pictures from that day to see all this, and to see, too, the way the groom, my brother, holds so casually the bride’s hand in his, his face, flaring whitely, a wing-like blur, looking over his shoulder, called by the flash of something, or someone else, behind him.

•

She had died once already that summer. Or so it was thought when my mother lay down just before lunch one day in the middle of August and did not wake up.

If the cotton sheets were cool and smelled of the westerly that had dried them, if the curtains were drawn against the sun, perhaps when she closed her eyes she felt a sound inside her ear like the plaint of an oar pulling through dark water. Her body like that kelp scalloping the tide line after a storm, its holdfast torn from the seafloor, she let the current take her and felt herself suspended, sustained by this other element. When the white obelisk appeared, it didn’t matter whether her vision of it came from morphine dream or deep childhood. As she drew near she saw around the bottom on all four sides a name unfamiliar to her but incised so deeply that only it had survived intact the devotions of wind and ice and rain. The rest of the engraving—dates, achievements, human ties—all were effaced; except at the top a simple, open boat stood nearly upright on a wave. Inside sat four figures, cowled and blunt as four mittened thumbs.

Every breath labored as though forced to travel through the difficult terrain of a foreign country. Her flesh clasping to bone, a simultaneous sinking away and tautening, foreshadowed the final dissolution, which disappears briefly at death. Then the face is smooth, relieved of every tension, pain, and anxiety, as well as the
hard work that is dying itself. I knew that the mind when asked to imagine death fails, but I saw how even besieged and collapsing mitochondria will not cease converting food to energy because by the next evening she’d rallied. She woke, like a tired swimmer hauling herself out of the water. (I wondered if her lungs felt heavy, as mine sometimes do, as if I’ve been holding my breath in my sleep.) Shrunk by her concertinaed spine, she stood before the linen closet with the prompt factotum of her oxygen tank beside her. From what did I avert my understanding?

The state fair was held over one of the last weekends of summer during a late string of hot, cloudless days, unusual enough at any time in the Northwest to appear as a landmark on the horizon, looking back. My friends and I had avoided the interstate on our way to the fair, arriving instead by more roundabout, scenic two-lane state and country roads. Though thick evergreens suggested green and pleasant shade, we’d stopped and didn’t have to walk far to see what the trees attempted to deny: raw, copper-colored earth and sheared stumps of clear-cut gaping behind for thousands of acres.

People waved flags at long lines of cars, inviting drivers to park on front lawns and, like ants, where one turned more followed. Fairs like these had once showcased progress, a condition that in a less hectic past approached the freakish. Next to an exhibit of midget nudists, fairgoers could visit the Incubator Pavilion to watch rows of impossible babies being cultivated like tiny, pink, imported lettuces under glass. Today’s Commercial Hall, with its knife-sharpening demonstrations and sonic jewelry cleaners, in fact, the entire fair, felt no less quaint — freakish, now, for its nostalgia — than the Ferris wheel where we waited in line. On our skin and in our hair we wore the smells of the day: frying dough, spun sugar, and grilling beef; as well as the high coloratura notes of chicken shit and horse manure’s golden baritone. The wheel lifted everyone beyond these to where a few untethered metallic balloons winked away. Was this the moment when she slipped off her life? What had seemed too difficult, the work of months, turned out to be almost as easy as shedding a sweater on a humid afternoon.

The house smelled like the interior of a clock when I walked in a few days before the weekend of the fair and found her on the couch crying, alone. “I don’t want to die,” she said. Each sob cracked the vessel, and because she never had cried before, now that she’d started she couldn’t stop: “I don’t want to die.” I searched for words of
comfort, optimistic as the mariner who, guided north by rumor, fable, and faith, believes each new bay or inlet will lead to the Northwest Passage of his imaginings. But every gentle word, once spoken, turned out to be fool’s gold, the blandest, sanitizing lie. How is time to be consoled? Invited to look into waters running cold and sourceless, I saw only the cul-de-sac of my own face.

Long ago a man named Jean Nicolet kneeled in a birch canoe. In winter the wind that blows in every season slaps together small glaciers from sand, ice, and wave, and these bumped against the shore like next year’s beef in a pen. Paddling across the water in his hazardous craft, he would have been too intent on his goal to feel the confusion that can overtake you when sky and water trade places at the low horizon. As his shoulders ached and thighs burned, he could distract himself by composing a short graceful speech of greeting (a few compliments strung together on a thread, nearly invisible, of threat), and imagining the fire, the spices and porcelains in lamplit rooms, which awaited him. With a perfectly calibrated bow he would shake out the sable-lined damask robe, presented by courtesy of the French king to the emperor of China. What he thought when he stepped onto the marshy western shore of Lake Michigan I don’t know. Like that naive ambassador I had assembled my maps, my guidebooks, and consulted the experts on every pertinent subject. Taking a lake for the sea, inventing my destination by light of my own need and hope, I’d prepared for the wrong voyage. To live closely with a dying person is to inhabit time in a way that is both intimate and infinite. What remained for me to discover after many attempts is that this suburban wife and mother, my mom, had had her occlusions: the pain that lived in bone, suffusing the body’s soft tissues, usurping the mind’s well-lit paths, unreachable as a tyrant’s black silences. To preserve her secret demanded the fury of the less gifted athlete determined to surprise a stronger and faster opponent; the magnitude of her fear was betrayed only by her self-control, which, until that day on the couch, had been immaculate. She could even send my brother off to college where he was still locating his classrooms when she died. Her face, then, as I remember it, was cleared of those shadows of human suffering and doubt; like an icon’s, it existed in the solitude of an eternal present. I recall what I had forgotten that day several weeks before when she woke from her coma: life is not personal.

On the day of the fair, Mt. Rainier shone with a soft, rare mineral gleam in the near distance, massive and light as an ocean liner.
It seemed to hoard the quiet of epochs while the fairgrounds leaked noise. Every ride played its own tune, each one distinct—zany or wheedling or jaunty—but all discordant. Again and again the operator of the Matterhorn ride asked, “Doyawannago faster?” Everyone wailed their assent, the collective Yesss! skimming down a long, steep hill of sound. From so many human throats came chatter, laughter, cries, exclamations, and exhortations, which together added up to a vast and mournful roar.
It’s a homely church. Granite exterior, ground level to pitched roof two stories above street-level, a chilly rosette over the entranceway, tasteful stained glass representations of gospel narratives. Inside, the Stations of the Cross are tucked into squat glass tents. The stonework looks medieval, the terrazzo floors bright and unspoiled.

Only the women among the parishioners seem fit to do any actual work. They enter in heavy plaid zipper jackets, ballooning sweaters with banded sleeves. The older women are wrapped in heavy wool scarves. They stand or kneel only if they can, and most can’t. Flesh is piled on their limbs like slush. They waddle, limp, pivot, slouch, and collapse into pews that moan when they meet the wood. They wear sweats, rarely dresses. Some come in muumuu. Those not overweight or morbidly obese wear flannel shirts pulled over the waistbands of loose-fitting jeans.

The women possess a fearsome underclass chic. They not only worked for the clothes they wear but some of them ran the production line in the factory that shut down and moved overseas and disrupted a transition that saw one female generation follow the other like the seasons into the mill. The big sewing machines, the black looms, the long pressing tables, the clean hot smell of steamed cloth. Sweat and steam. They dressed a generation of prom kings and queens, altar boys and communicants (and even a few bar mitzvah boys) in cheap clothing that never wore out. Their kids and grandchildren wore their uniforms to Vietnam and Grenada and got married in their tuxes.

Their fingers hang like chewed bamboo over the pews. They have less trouble kneeling because they are simply tougher than the men. While their sons and husbands were working out over a beef-with-double-provolone at Nick’s or selling swag out of trunks, they were raising kids, running looms, hanging clothes, taking rectal temperatures, cooking, screaming at each other on the front steps, sometimes battling with their fists. They mostly don’t read — cataracts, illiteracy, undiagnosed dyslexia, attention spans exhausted from lifetimes of doing five things at once. Their mates fear them more than anything.

Some in their seventies look a decade younger than the male children hanging at their sides. Sight of them turns the heart in opposed
directions. The women seem to have nosed something repulsive here. When they scan the crowd they skip the males, their eyes dulled by old constellations. They are disappointed in the way maleness has left the males. They want something new: the old, the really old, dignified oldness.

The men are dressed as if their mothers were still laying out their clothes. Thin and tubercular or alcoholic, pasty and paunched, guts over unbelted trousers (and an occasional monk’s rope). Pants shiny in the seat from long hours on their own stoops arguing trades and firing butts at strays. Polo shirts open at the throat. Strange lines in the crotch. Occasional gold — fake — pendants, uniformly cruciform, which clip the pews when they rise or sit. Work shirts under nylon jackets with fake down stuffing. They kneel on artificial knees.

They look sick and out of season, as though undergoing bad pregnancies.

They shuffle in like little boys with bald spots, bad hearing, dentures, colostomy bags, gum disease, heart disease, circulatory disease. Some mope in the narthex between the holy water fonts and the poor box and religious literature tables trying to look their ages. They can’t, they’re too depressed. They were educated to see the world as lively but fallen and overseen, the metaphysical equivalent of the security state. Their self-consciousness was perfected through decades of erased expressions and Latin masses.

In the standard blue-collar neighborhood’s model of church art, the artist represents tradesmen to tradesmen. Everything is subtly working class. The apostles in the low (concrete) reliefs making up the Stations of the Cross look like gym rats after workouts, punchy, out of breath. There are too many grief-destroyed women averting their eyes—these Grays Ferry women look everything in the eye, and look it down until it’s dead or it confesses—and other than a couple of beefy Romans with pecs modeled on the artist’s favorite film actor or on local gangsters, little is memorable. Stripped and transfixed on the cross, girlish and disturbing, Jesus has strong features but for his mouth, which is F. Scott Fitzgerald’s. (“Worrisome,” Hemingway called it.) The Virgin looks like the Blue Fairy in Pinocchio. Martha’s bustline is impressive. The Roman soldier wielding the flagellum is Tony, who owns the corner candy store. Magdalene, stylishly hooded
and svelte in a pink shawl, is a ringer for Melanie Griffith. All three women shade lowered eyes, touch pale unlined throats, and look off. They seem to be sharing a secret or about to giggle.

In mid-mass at the point where the sermon is delivered, the young priest walks to the lectern and reads announcements. He reads them badly. His voice is high and blunted by feedback. He syllabicates the names of the recently deceased and sounds like speech recognition software. In him the congregates see either the future of religion or a confirmation of the wisdom of clerical celibacy. Imagine, they think, if he had children. Picture the IQs.

•

On Monday the girls and boys will go back to school, the women back to their jobs, the men back to their stoops and firing cigarettes at strays. Many worked for one of the industries that existed when America’s neighborhood economy was still industrial and still made and exported things. There was the clothing factory that closed and relocated to a city in the southwest before it was again closed and relocated to Singapore or some other geographically desolate locale. There was the ice cream plant that closed a long time ago and didn’t even relocate, just closed. There were other regional factories—locomotive boiler factories, jet engine plants—where some (too broke for cars let alone car insurance) bussed each morning, places where many worked as security guards, maintenance men, sweepers. All back in the day. The men like to say they’re retired because it sounds better than unemployed, laid off, furloughed, riffed, living off an insurance scam, on disability, or fired.

They attend closely to Vatican successions. They’re relieved when a cardinal named Joseph Ratzinger is elected Pope since it’s about time they gave a German the job. Best run country in the world. What we need now is a little colonel to fix things. If this new guy had grown up in the neighborhood, he would have been plain old Joey Rats.

•

They hate politicians and love politics. Their parents were registered Democrats, so they registered as Democrats, but after the sixties and the race riots, their parents went Republican, and so did they. They
condemn politicians who disagree with the church on abortion though half of their kids either had abortions or paid for one. Politics is what’s in their freezer, whose kid got killed, who’s got a job, who lost a house, how all the bankers ought to be hanged. They talk politics on the church steps, on the sidewalk, on their porches and stoops, on the bocce court at the playground, against the fenders of limos lined up for rides to Holy Cross, against railings, in taprooms where you best believe nobody is enforcing this “no smoking” crap, at the corner body shop under the 25th Street Bridge, in booths at the Melrose (open 24 hours), or in line at the unemployment office where one guy turns to the one behind him (the women still have jobs) and asks Where’d you go to high school? because college was regular Army or, if you were cool, Marines. They grew up corner rats listening to the old guys at the pizza shop, which survived until a mob hit (they hit the wrong pizza shop) closed it. They ran prescriptions for the old Jew druggist until he moved to Florida, the drug store now owned by immigrants with pharmacology degrees and English so bad don’t even dream of doing the prescription over the phone, you’ll end up with poison. On the bakery steps two generations learned pinochle and some version of patriotism until it shut, after going from bakery to boutique to flower shop to hardware to video store, but its steps are intact. (Somebody on the block’s grandfather poured the steps.) Afghanistan, Iraq, 9/11, and Grenada fade into outtakes from ‘Nam, Korea, the South Pacific, the Bulge. They gather there — they still call it the bakery steps, right across from church — and talk war and do lines of dialogue from Goodfellas, The Godfather, The Wire. But deep dialogue, whole pages, How about them Japs bombing Pearl Harbor on Pop’s Birthday? or Middle of a drought and the water commissioner drowns! It’s how they spend their time. My parents used to sleep on their steps, they say. The Depression years, when air-conditioning was like sci-fi. My grandmom scrubbed steps. Poor don’t mean filthy. Their despair is profound. It is a kind of wisdom.
I Remember, I Remember

I remember being so young I thought all artists were famous.

I remember being so young I thought all artists were good, kind, loving, exceptionally interesting, and exemplary human beings.

I remember—I must have been eight or nine—wandering out to the ungrassed backyard of our newly constructed suburban house and seeing that the earth was dry and cracked in irregular squares and other shapes, and I felt I was looking at a map and I was completely overcome by this description, my first experience of making a metaphor, and I felt weird and shaky and went inside and wrote it down: the cracked earth is a map. Although it only takes a little time to tell it, and it is hardly interesting, it filled a big moment at the time, it was an enormous ever-expanding room of a moment, a chunk of time that has expanded ever since and that my whole life keeps fitting into.

I remember writing a letter to President John F. Kennedy and a few weeks after mailing it finding it in the bottom of my mother’s drawer.

I remember sending my poems to Little, Brown and Company and suggesting they title the collection “The Little Golden Book of Verse,” and I remember their rejection was very kind and I was stunned when they made a guess at my age and were correct, I was in the fourth grade, and I felt the people at Little, Brown and Company were so smart they could read minds.

I remember I chose Little, Brown and Company for a very special reason: they were the publishers of my favorite author, Laura Ingalls Wilder, who wrote the Little House on the Prairie books (this was long before the television series). And although Little, Brown and Company sent me a very kind letter indeed, and guessed my age, they also did something I could never forgive them for, something that upset me for days and weeks and months. They sent me a picture of Laura Ingalls Wilder as a ninety-year-old woman; they told me she was dead, her mother and father and sisters were all dead too,
and her husband, and that one of my favorite characters had died in a threshing machine accident — *a threshing machine accident* — it was so specific I was able to picture it vividly in my imagination, the mangled body in its overalls, the hat fallen off, some blood on the ground, the machine stopped in the noonday sun, one of its wheels bent out of shape, or some spoke or cog, and a leg or arm was in there, and the whole scene took place in the center of miles and miles and miles — as far as you could see — of beautiful golden grain, all the same length, like a crew cut.

I remember I was not exactly sure what a threshing machine was.

I remember they said that although Pa was dead, his fiddle was in a museum somewhere, and once a year somebody took it out of its case and played it. I remember feeling sorry for the violin, and thinking how lonely it must be to live like that, in a museum.

I remember when I was in the fifth grade my grandfather died and it was my first funeral and when everyone was filing out of the funeral parlor I remember asking if Grandpap was going to stay in there all alone at night and they said yes and I thought that would be awfully scary, lying in a coffin in an empty building, just like the fiddle in its case.

I remember when I was forty-five and my mother died it poured the day we buried her and late at night I thought of how cold her body must be, with the freezing rain pouring down on it, and how much she would hate being out in the cold and rain if she were alive. She would want to be under the blankets of her own bed on such a night, with a cup of coffee on the nightstand, and the coffee would be on top of the first art object I ever made, at the age of five, a ceramic coaster: a white tile with my face drawn on it in brown lines. For forty years her coffee cup must have burned my face, and since my mother died by fire, I did not want to think of it anymore.

“I remember, I remember,/The house where I was born” are the first two lines of a famous poem called “I Remember, I Remember” by a not-so-famous poet named Thomas Hood, and it was in the first poetry book I ever owned, *The Golden Treasury of Poetry*, edited by Louis Untermeyer.
I remember (later) thinking it was a curious thing, that there were so many famous poems by not-so-famous poets.

I remember (later) being shocked when I discovered Hood was a contemporary of Keats, only four years younger; I always thought of him as a later Victorian, for the diction of the two poets is remarkably different. No matter how you look at this, the implications are truly startling: either the lesser Hood was ahead of his time, or the greater Keats (Miltonian) was behind his time. It means poetry is more than the sum of its diction.

I remember I recognized the allusion when I read Philip Larkin’s version of “I Remember, I Remember.” Larkin’s poem is also called “I Remember, I Remember,” and in it his train happens to stop in Coventry and he happens to remember he was born there. The last line of the poem is “Nothing, like something, happens anywhere.”

I remember my Thanksgiving poem being pinned to the school bulletin board, where everyone could see it, and leaves cut out of orange construction paper were stapled all around it. It began, “We thank God for the living land.”

I remember in high school there was a girl named Lizette. She had black hair and a very pale face and because her mother was French she was an outsider and to make matters worse she was not the best student but was awfully good at art and took all the art classes and we worked on the literary magazine together and I liked her very much but I was afraid to be her friend because after all she was strange and I think I was jealous of her strangeness at the same time as I was afraid of it, and when we were together we read our poems out loud to each other, and in this way, through poetry, it was always safe to communicate.

I remember (much later) wondering what ever happened to Lizette.

I remember another friend in high school whose mother was an artist and their house was full of statues — the Buddha and nymphs — and the furniture looked like it was hundreds of years old and there were paintings on the wall and her mother had a separate apartment called a studio and in it were figures of clay on pedestals and in one
corner an old hand-cranked Gramophone and I liked being in there but it was kinda scary too, it seemed forbidden in some way I couldn’t figure out; art was scary, strange, forbidden, and the really confusing part was I wanted it and needed it.

I remember one afternoon my friend and I were in the studio and all the clay figures on pedestals were draped with white sheets and my friend told me her mother did that when she didn’t want to look at them anymore and I was totally confused.

I remember standing in a field in Switzerland at dusk, surrounded by cows with bells around their necks, and reading John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale” out loud from an open book I was holding in my hands, and I started to weep — weep is a better word for it than cry — and I remember the tears slowly streaming down my face, it was that beautiful to me, and I loved poetry that much. I was eighteen.

I remember (later) thinking that it was actually hilarious that I used to read poetry to cows, that they were an integral part of my most serious moment.

I remember in junior high my leg was in a cast and it was summer and I was lying on a sofa in the basement where it was cool; there was a tv down there, and an ironing board, and a room for my sister to stay in when she came home from college, and my sister was ironing — she was always ironing, sewing, or cooking, she was majoring in Home Economics — and to pass the time she gave me one of her college textbooks, a book of poems by the British Romantics, and the only other thing I can remember is that my life changed that summer. My life changed for good.

I remember when I graduated from college, we were asked to submit exactly how we wanted our names to appear on our diplomas, and I spelled my middle name (which is Lorraine) Low Rain, because the day before I had been reading W.S. Merwin’s new book and in it was some kind of brief Japanese thing along the lines of “Low Rain, Roof Fell.”

I remember when my parents saw my diploma, they were horrified and kept asking me how I could have done such a thing, after they paid for my education and all.
I remember finding the diploma among my mother’s things after she died, and throwing it away.

I remember I never did like to save things much.

I remember saving everything.

I remember the afternoon I sat in a literature class, my hardback edition of *The Collected Poems of Wallace Stevens* open before me, a book I had already owned for years, the pages worn and softened by endless turning and fingering, page after page filled with marginalia, notes, the definitions of words, question marks, exclamation marks, and underlinings, all in the soft gray graphite of my own living penciling hand, when a distracted classmate I did not know very well leaned over my book and wrote in it with her ballpoint pen: *I’m so bored!!! Are you going to the party tonight?* I remember feeling like my blood had stopped and reversed course, not in the heart, where that is supposed to happen, but midvein, the feeling medically called *shock*. I remember trembling and soaring with anger, and I remember the weekend after the unfortunate incident took place, sitting for hours and hours in my room with a new book, trying to cope, copying by hand everything I had ever written in the old book, with the exception of that one bold, sorry, uninvited guest.

I remember, in college, trying to write a poem while I was stoned, and thinking it was the best thing I had ever written.

I remember reading it in the morning, and throwing it out.

I remember thinking, if W.S. Merwin could do it, why couldn’t I?

I remember thinking, because he is a god and I am a handmaiden with a broken urn.

I remember the first poetry reading I ever went to; I was in college and it was W.S. Merwin. He sat on a stool under a spotlight and the audience sat at his feet. He had a halo of curls and he looked like a god with his face in the spotlight. He wore blue velvet knee breeches, a flowing white shirt, and soft, flat yellow leather boots—more
like slippers really—that came up to his knees, where his trousers began. Surely this is an imaginary memory, surely he never owned such clothing.

I remember liking the reading.

I remember being young and liking everything.

I remember liking a great many readings that, if I were to sit through them now, I would not like.

I remember hearing the great Spanish poet Rafael Alberti read. I was very young and so he seemed very old to me, with his shoulder-length white hair and his white suit. I was also shocked that he was accompanied by a woman who did not seem to be much older than I was; she wore a skirt so short you could see her underwear when she walked, and white plastic go-go boots, as they were called. I remember one of them carried a birdcage with a white dove in it, but to tell the truth I may have made this detail up, in my mind over the years, perhaps to emphasize to myself that it was, and remains, the strangest poetry reading I ever attended. Alberti read his poems in Spanish and his American translator, Ben Belitt, read them in English. Ben was sober, shy, outwardly conservative; he wore a tweed jacket and tie. Alberti gave Ben a toy pistol, what was called a cap gun, a toy capable of making very loud noises, and told Ben to shoot himself in the head whenever he, Alberti, gave the signal, and that is exactly what happened: Alberti would be reading in Spanish, pause, look at Ben, and Ben would reluctantly shoot himself in the head. But when Ben read the poems in English, Alberti had the pistol and from time to time shot himself in the head with real gusto. I felt it was a great lesson in translation.

I remember hearing James Merrill read, in August, in Vermont, in a barn. He wore a white linen suit and read to a very small group of people (no more than twenty) sitting on folding metal chairs; I remember a shaft of light coming in through an open window and that I spent most of the reading watching the dust motes floating there. Beyond that—nothing, except one detail, the memory of which overrides all else: outside, a car was parked (had he arrived in it?), its rear window was filthy, and someone had written in the dust
clean me, in Greek. I always instinctively knew he had written it, and that rear window is my memory of James Merrill.

I remember my first Ashbery reading, also in college. Ashbery was reading from his new book, *Three Poems*, and he said that it was a lot like watching TV—you could open the book anywhere and begin reading, and flip around the book as much as you wanted to. I remember hating him for saying this. I remember the word *sacrilege* came to mind. I remember not liking that reading.

I remember, two years later, reading *Three Poems* on a grassy slope while across the road three men put a new roof on an old house, and I was in love with one of them. I could watch the men working as I read. I remember that everything I was reading was everything that was happening across the way—I would read a little, then look up, read a little, then look up, and I was blown apart by the feeling this little book was about my life at that moment, exactly as I was living it. I remember loving the book, and that it was one of the memorable reading experiences of my life.

I remember reading Rilke’s *Duino Elegies* again and again and again, until I “got” them, until something burst over me like a flood, and I remember, once again, weeping and weeping with a book in my hands.

I remember a reading W.S. Merwin gave in a tiny chapel, with the audience sitting in the pews, and how after a while we were all lost in a suspension of time—I know I was—and after the reading there was a Q&A and someone asked a bizarre question, she asked what time it was, and Merwin looked at the clock (there was a clock on the wall) and every one of us could see it had stopped, it had stopped in the middle of his reading, literal proof of what we already felt to be true, this spectacular thing, the dream of all poetry, to cut a hole in time.

I remember wanting to hear Anne Carson read, but I was very ill and had to be admitted to the hospital, and I postponed my going into the hospital until the next morning, after I had heard her read. I remember I needed a ride to the hospital but none of my friends could take me, they wouldn’t take me, because there were a lot of famous poets in town, and they wanted to hear them all. I remember this made me
angry beyond words, but at the same time it was hypocritical of me, because I myself had put off my hospitalization until after a reading.

I remember the year after college I was broke, and Bernard Malamud, who had been a teacher of mine, sent me a check for $25 and told me to buy food with it, and I went downtown and bought *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*.

I remember John Moore, another teacher, who did the damnedest thing. We were studying Yeats, and at the beginning of one class Mr. Moore asked us if we would like to see a picture of Yeats. We nodded, and he held up a photograph of Yeats taken when he was six months old, a baby dressed in a long white gown. Maybe he was even younger, maybe he was an infant. I thought it was the funniest thing anyone had ever done, the strangest, most ridiculous, absurd thing to have done. But nobody laughed and if Mr. Moore thought it was funny, you couldn’t tell by his face. I always liked him for that. The poems we were reading in class were not written by a baby. And yet whenever I think of Yeats, I see him as a tiny baby wearing a dress— that photograph is part of my conception of the great Irish poet. And I love that it is so. We are all so small.

I remember going to New York for an awards ceremony, for I had won an award, and standing awkwardly in a grand lobby, and noticing an old man in a white hat who looked rather lost, and thinking he had come to see someone get an award, perhaps a granddaughter or someone like that, and I went up to him and asked him if I could help him, and he asked me where the men’s room was, and I walked him there, and while we were walking I asked him if perhaps a member of his family was receiving an award, and he said not that he knew of, and then he went into the bathroom and I waited for him outside and while I was waiting I remember thinking how surprised he would be when he found out that I, the woman who showed him the bathroom, was receiving an award, and then a man and a woman walked by in an important kind of hurry, saying, “We have lost Arthur Miller,” and then Mr. Miller came out of the bathroom, and smiled at me and shrugged his shoulders and went away with them.

I remember my first electric typewriter.
I remember sending my first short story out to a national magazine the summer after I had graduated from college and receiving the reply, “We are terribly sorry, but we don’t publish poetry.” I remember never looking back.

I remember meeting an Irish poet who had just come from Georgie Yeats’s funeral, and was still drunk, though he had also just flown from Ireland to the United States. He was furious and maudlin because Georgie, who outlived her husband by thirty years, died only weeks after she had given all her husband’s manuscripts to the Irish State, manuscripts she could have sold to an American university for millions of dollars; she did this because she had no money, was an alcoholic, and very much afraid in a moment of weakness she would break down and sell the manuscripts after all; the thought of such a betrayal she could not bear, so she gave the papers to the Irish State, died a few weeks later, and had a three-hundred-mile funeral cortege with only six people present—the poet who told me this was one of them—and not a single representative of the Irish State was among them.

I remember another thing the Irish poet told me: once, drinking in Dublin with Berryman, they had a shot of ouzo and Berryman immediately disappeared. It was a matter of hours before they discovered he had walked out of the bar, taken a taxi to the airport and flown directly to Athens using his American Express card.

I remember reading John Berryman’s “Dream Song #14” in my twenties, with its famous opening words, “Life, friends, is boring.” I remember being struck by its wit, irony, playfulness, delight: it is the kind of poem students read aloud to each other in a pool of laughter and admiration, and there is nothing wrong with that, for it reinforces their sense of cynicism and superiority, and it is crucial at that age we find a like-minded group to whom we can belong. I remember rereading the poem, not for the second time, some thirty years later, and being struck by its excruciating pain, which is entirely without irony. Many persons who knew Berryman have remarked that he spoke, always, without irony, which means, simply, that he always meant what he said. If you are going through a particularly stable period of your life, and you encounter his bleakest statements, you will react with chagrin and disbelief, as if listening to the ablest
jester. If you are going through a particularly unstable period of your life, the straightforward articulation of suffering that has already twisted and dislocated its bearer renders a tension that will very nearly kill you. But I did not know this then.

I remember reading in the newspaper that Ernest Hemingway was dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, and reading the whole article to the end, which is a very strange memory, as I was ten years old and did not read the newspaper.

I remember figuring out Djuna Barnes was alive and living in Greenwich Village when I was in college and for a long time afterward, and I could have gone and visited her, but I assumed the author of my most beloved book had died before I was born.

I remember repeating this mistake for many years.

I remember making it yesterday.

I remember that Djuna Barnes was living in total obscurity that last decade of her life, and so was I—if we can extend the meaning of the word obscurity to include a state of non-alert mind.

I remember that I did not always know authors were ordinary people living ordinary lives, and that an ordinary life was an obscure life, if we can extend the meaning of obscure to mean covered up by dailiness, glorious dailiness, shameful dailiness, dailiness that is difficult to figure out, that is not always clear until a long time afterward. Obscure: not readily noticed, easily understood, or clearly expressed. Which is a pretty good definition of life.

I remember, I remember the house where I was born.

I remember driving by the hospital where I was born and glancing at it—I was in a car going sixty miles an hour—and feeling a fleeting twinge of specialness after which I had no choice but to let it go and get over it, at sixty miles an hour.

I remember I was a child, and when I grew up I was a poet. It all happened at sixty miles an hour and on days when the clock stopped
and all of humanity fit into a little chapel, into a pinecone, a shot of ouzo, a snail’s shell, a piece of soggy rye on the pavement.

I remember the day I stood in front of a great, famous sculpture by a great, famous sculptor and didn’t like it. Such a moment is a landmark in the life of any young artist. It begins in confusion and guilt and self-doubt and ends in a triumphant breakthrough: I see the world and I see that I am free before it, I am not at the mercy of historical opinion and what I want to turn away from, I turn away from, what I want to approach, I approach. Twenty-five years later I read an essay by John Berger on Rodin and in it Berger was able to articulate all that I felt on that afternoon, standing in front of a great Rodin. But by then I was old and vain and the pride of being vindicated was, I admit, just as exciting as Berger’s intellectual condemnation of Rodin’s desire toward dominance.

I remember thinking my feelings implicated me with Rodin and though now I liked him less than ever, my repulsion was braided with a profound sympathy inseparable from my feelings for myself. And that is a landmark in the life of an old artist looking at art: the realization that none of us can ever be free from ourselves.

I remember the first time I realized the world we are born into is not the one we leave.

I remember feeling my head was made of sandpaper.

I remember feeling my head was made of the smoothest silver driftwood.

I remember Ben Belitt, Pablo Neruda’s friend and translator, bent down to pick up the New York Times from his doorstep one rainy morning (this was before they had figured out you could put the newspaper in a plastic sleeve) and the first thing he noticed was that the “newspaper had been crying,” as he put it, that the newsprint was smudged and ran together in watery lines down the page, just like mascara, and then he saw the announcement of Neruda’s death: Neruda had died the night before.
I remember telling this story many times, but leaving Ben out of it, pretending it was me it had happened to.

I remember the night I decided I would call myself a poet. I had been invited to a dinner party of literati, and I knew I would inevitably be asked what I did. I usually said I was a teacher; I was twenty-seven years old and had been writing poems since I was nine. I made up my mind that if anyone asked, I would say I was a poet; I left my apartment with resolve, a sense of mission, and security. And someone asked. Alain, a charismatic French poet wearing a blue velvet jacket and a long white scarf, asked me what I did; I took a deep breath and said I was a poet; his face distorted into a human field of disgust: “A poet!” he cried. “If you call yourself a poet then you cannot possibly be one; poets live in shadows and never admit and do not discuss, and besides, a real poet knows that all the poems in the world do not a poet make. I would no more call myself a poet than call myself a man — it is the height of arrogance, as any dog knows.” Dear me! I left the party in tears — hard cold tears of confusion and humiliation. It seemed my final hour.

I remember, I remember, everything you said to me. We went walking out in silence, underneath the cherry tree. Falling blossom, falling blossom, falling from the cherry tree. I remember, I remember, everything you did to me: Annie Lennox, “Twisted.” There, the famous refrain from English poetry finds its way into rock and roll, more than a hundred years later.

I remember “remember” means to put the arms and legs back on, and sometimes the head.

I remember, on the first Tuesday of every year, that I became a poet for a single, simple reason: I liked making similes for the moon. And when things get tough and complicated and threaten to drown me in their innuendoes, I come back to this clear, simple, and elemental fact, out of all facts the one most like the moon itself. O night, sleep, death and the stars!

I remember the moon was covered with dust and I used my finger to write clean me on its surface, and my finger was ever after covered with a fine gray blanket, as when you pull lint from the dryer.
I remember more than I can tell.

I remember heaven.

I remember hell.
Dear Editor,

I read Eliza Griswold’s article [“Everyone Is an Immigrant”] in the January issue of *Poetry* as I was riding the bus to Pittsburgh. In the middle of the article, I was interrupted by a slight crisis: I had never confirmed the bus’s destination and could very well have been heading to Chicago. After waiting for an identifiable street sign that confirmed I was, in fact, at least heading in the right direction, I was very happy to return to her article. It was lovely. I had never before encountered that mixture of reporting and poetry and poetic prose, and it felt absolutely fitting for the story she told. I started to dream of newspapers written only by poets with questions and carefully painted descriptions of the past twenty-four hours to replace the matter-of-fact. Thank you, Eliza Griswold, for writing compellingly and proving the usefulness of the artist in the world.

KAYLA BERKEY
PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Letters should be sent with the writer’s name, address, and phone number via e-mail to editors@poetrymagazine.org. Letters may be edited for length and clarity. We regret that we cannot reply to every letter.
J.T. BARBARESE’S new book, Sweet Spot, was published this spring by Northwestern University Press.

MELINDA BECK* is Emmy Award-nominated illustrator and graphic designer based in Brooklyn, New York. Her clients include mtv, Neiman Marcus, the New York Times, Nickelodeon, Nike, and Target.

KATHARINE COLES’S fifth poetry collection is Ice Blind (Red Hen Press, 2013). In 2009–10, she served as the inaugural director of the Poetry Foundation’s Harriet Monroe Poetry Institute.

AVERILL CURDY’S first book of poems, Song & Error, will be published in 2013 by Farrar, Straus and Giroux. She lives in Chicago and teaches creative writing at Northwestern University.

PAUL DURICA is a graduate student at the University of Chicago and the founder of Pocket Guide to Hell Tours and Reenactments.


JILL ALEXANDER ESSBAUM is the author of several books of poetry including, most recently, the single-poem chapbook The Devastation (Cooper Dillon, 2009).

LAWRENCE FERLINGHETTI* founded City Lights Bookstore, the first all-paperbound bookshop in the country, and later launched the City Lights publishing house. His paintings have been shown at galleries around the world and are currently on exhibit at the Sonoma Valley Museum of Art for a major retrospective titled Cross Pollination: The Art of Lawrence Ferlinghetti, running from June 23 to September 23. Excerpts from Poetry as Insurgent Art, copyright © 2007 by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. Reprinted by permission of New Directions.

STEVE GEHRKE* has published three books, most recently Michelangelo’s Seizure (University of Illinois Press, 2007). He teaches at the University of Nevada, Reno.
JESSICA GREENBAUM’s second book, The Two Yvonnes, was chosen by Paul Muldoon for Princeton’s Series of Contemporary Poets and will come out in fall 2012.

SASKIA HAMILTON* is the author of As for Dream (2001) and Divide These (2005), both published by Graywolf Press.


MICHAEL HOFMANN’s annotated translation of Joseph Roth’s letters was just published by W.W. Norton; Impromptus, his Gottfried Benn translations, is expected later this year from Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

DORE KIESSELBACH’s* first collection, Salt Pier, won the 2011 Agnes Lynch Starrett Prize and is forthcoming from the University of Pittsburgh Press. He received Britain’s Bridport Prize in poetry in 2009.

JAMES LASDUN has written several books of poetry and fiction. His last poetry collection, Landscape with Chainsaw (W.W. Norton, 2001), was a finalist for the T.S. Eliot Prize and the Los Angeles Book Prize.

MARK LEVINE* has written three books of poems, most recently The Wilds (University of California Press, 2006), and a book of nonfiction. He teaches at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop.

SARAH LINDSAY is the author of Primate Behavior (Grove Press, 1997), Mount Clutter (Grove Press, 2002), and Twigs and Knucklebones (Copper Canyon Press, 2008).

ADRIAN MATEJKA* is the author of The Devil’s Garden (Alice James Books, 2003), Mixology (Penguin, 2009), and The Big Smoke (Penguin, 2013).

MICHAEL ROBBINS is the author of Alien vs. Predator (Penguin, 2012).

MARY RUEFLE’s latest book is Selected Poems (Wave Books, 2010). Her collected lectures, Madness, Rack and Honey, will be published by Wave in August.

KAY RYAN’S The Best of It: New and Selected Poems (Grove Press, 2010) won the 2011 Pulitzer Prize in Poetry.

ROBYN SCHIFF is the author of Revolver (2008) and Worth (2002), both published by University of Iowa Press.
Natalie Shapero’s poetry has appeared recently in the Believer, New Republic, and elsewhere. Her full-length collection, No Object, will be published by Saturnalia Books in 2013.

Ron Silliman’s most recent book is Wharf Hypothesis (Lines Press, 2011). His sculpture, “Poetry,” was installed last fall in the transit center of Bury, Lancashire.

Brian Swann’s new collection of poems is forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press. His Sky Loom: Native American Myth, Story, Song will be published by University of Nebraska Press.

* First appearance in Poetry.
Harriet is the Poetry Foundation’s news blog, dedicated to featuring the vibrant poetry & poetics discussions from around the web.

Read Poetry

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION: $35.00
POETRY, PO BOX 421141
PALM COAST, FL 32142-1141
1.800.327.6976

Notification of change of address should include old address, new address, and effective date of change. Please allow six weeks for processing.

POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG
2012 RATTLE POETRY PRIZE

1st Prize: $5,000
plus TEN $100 Finalists
and the all-new $1,000 Readers' Choice Award

-for a single poem-

Guidelines:

1) Entry fee of $18.00 includes a one-year subscription to RATTLE (or a one-year extension for subscribers). 2) One $5,000 winner and ten $100 Finalists will be selected in a blind review by the editors of RATTLE and printed in the Winter 2012 issue; one $1,000 Reader's Choice Award will be chosen by subscriber and entrant vote after publication. 3) Open to writers, worldwide; poems must be written in English (no translations). No previously published works, or works accepted for publication elsewhere. No simultaneous submissions. 4) Type or print clearly your name, address, email address, phone number, and the titles of the poems onto a coversheet. No contact information should appear on the poems themselves. Include a check or money order for $18.00, payable to RATTLE. 5) Send no more than four poems per entry. Multiple entries by a single poet are accepted, however each group of four poems must be treated as a separate entry, with its own cover sheet and $18 entry fee. Manuscripts will not be returned; include a SASE or email address if you'd like to be notified of the results. 6) Winners will be announced no later than September 15th, 2012, and the Reader’s Choice Award will be announced February 15th, 2013. 7) Additional entries may also be offered publication. For an idea of our editorial tastes, back issues can be purchased online. Electronic submissions are accepted as well, paid online with a credit card. Visit our website for more information.

www.RATTLE.com

POSTMARK DEADLINE: August 1st, 2012

SEND ENTRIES TO: RATTLE
12411 Ventura Blvd
Studio City, CA 91604
**Toddlers Poemtime**  
**Wednesdays, 11:00 am**  
Children ages 3 to 5 are invited to a weekly storytime event that introduces poetry through fun, interactive readings and games. Admission is granted on a first come, first served basis.

**Teen Poetry Boot Camp**  
**Wednesday, July 11, 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm**  
**Wednesday, July 18, 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm**  
**Wednesday, July 25, 1:00 pm – 3:30 pm**  
Teens meet once a week for three weeks to read, discuss, and respond to contemporary works of poetry. Participants will be exposed to different works of poets and will both analytically and creatively respond. All experience levels welcome, open to students in ninth to twelfth grade. FREE. All materials and supplies will be provided. Register at library@poetryfoundation.org

**Library Hours:**  
Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, & Fridays, 11 am – 4 pm  
Children Only Hours:  
Wednesdays: 10 am – 5 pm; Toddler Poemtime, 11 am

**61 West Superior, Chicago**  
(312) 787-7070 • poetryfoundation.org

The $50,000 award honors an American poet of exceptional talent who deserves wider recognition.

The judges for the 2012 prize were Louise Glück, Marilyn Hacker, and James Tate.

The Jackson Poetry Prize, established in 2006 with a gift from the Liana Foundation, is sponsored by Poets & Writers, Inc. and named for the John and Susan Jackson family. Learn more at pw.org.
THE PRINTERS’ BALL: TIME WARP!
FRIDAY, JULY 20, 2012
6PM TO 11PM

THE LUDINGTON BUILDING
1104 S. WABASH AVE.
CHICAGO, IL 60605

The Printers’ Ball is coming back to the future! Join 3,000+ readers, writers, and artists from around the globe for the greatest literary party in the galaxy—a one-night supernova of books, magazines, and out-of-this-world ink on paper; live music, readings, and other performances; letterpress, offset, papermaking, and bookbinding demonstrations; plus even more, free and open to everyone!

This year’s theme is time warp!—time present, time past, and time future contained for one stellar night of literary enterprise, brought to you by Poetry magazine, Columbia College Chicago’s Silver Tongue Reading Series, Columbia College Chicago’s Center for Book and Paper Arts, the Read/Write Library, and MAKE magazine. For more information, visit:

PRINTERSBALL.ORG
POWERFUL POETRY WORKSHOPS
... with our extraordinary faculty poets ...

B.H. Fairchild • Terrance Hayes • Jane Hirshfield
Laura Kasischke • Thomas Lux • Tony Hoagland
Tracy K. Smith • Lisa Russ Spaar

• Focus on your work • workshops • readings • craft talks •
  panel discussion • annual gala • coffee house ... and more!

Special Guest BILLY COLLINS
U.S. Poet Laureate, 2001–2003

Visit our website and apply today:
www.palmbeachpoetryfestival.org
Deadline: November 9, 2012
Find a Poem.
Discover Poetry.

With the Poetry Foundation's POETRY mobile app, you can now take hundreds of poems by classic and contemporary poets with you wherever you go.

Get it for free at the App Store or the Android Market. Find out more at: poetryfoundation.org/mobile

Find poems to fit any mood.
Listen to hundreds of audio poems.
Read Poetry magazine on your iPad.
The Robinson Jeffers Tor House 2012 Prize for Poetry

We are pleased to announce the 2012 Prize Winner and Recipient of the $1,000 Honorarium

Max Somers
Champaign, Illinois
for his poem “Dialogue”

Honorable Mentions, each with an honorarium of $200, are awarded to

Ann Filemyr
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Benjamin Garcia
Ithaca, New York

Hugh Martin
Tempe, Arizona

Veronica Patterson
Loveland, Colorado

The annual Tor House Prize for Poetry is a living memorial to American poet Robinson Jeffers (1887-1962)

Final Judge for 2012: Cornelius Eady

See www.torhouse.org for poems and membership information

The Robinson Jeffers Tor House Foundation
P.O. Box 2713, Carmel, California 93921
Telephone: 831-624-1813, Fax 831-624-3696
email: thf@torhouse.org
BLUEPRINTS
Bringing Poetry into Communities

Edited by KATHARINE COLES

With essayists—including Elizabeth Alexander, Robert Hass, and Patricia Smith—describing how poets and artists have brought poetry into different kinds of communities, and a “toolkit” loaded with experience-based advice, tools, and strategies, Blueprints is a necessity for arts organizers and those in the poetry community.

“This indispensable guide offers specific examples of programs that work well in diverse and far-flung communities. There is no guide like this, and it’s long overdue.”

—PEGGY SHUMAKER, Alaska State Writer Laureate

320 pp., paper | $8.95

 Purchase at www.UofUpress.com or at your local bookstore.

FREE E-BOOK can be downloaded at:
www.UofUpress.com or
www.poetryfoundation.org/foundation/poetryinstitute.html
MASTER OF ARTS/MASTER OF FINE ARTS IN

Creative Writing

- Work closely with faculty through workshops and individual mentoring.
- Take advantage of the best features of residential and low-residency programs.
- Choose from specializations in fiction, creative nonfiction and poetry.
- Refine your writing skills in convenient evening courses in Chicago and Evanston.

RECENT AND CONTINUING FACULTY INCLUDE

Eula Biss       Marya Hornbacher
Stuart Dybek    Alex Kotlowitz
Reginald Gibbons Ed Roberson
Aleksandar Hemon S.L. Wisenberg
Cristina Henriquez

The winter quarter application deadline is October 15.

www.scs.northwestern.edu/grad  •  312-503-4682
Verse, Stripped: A Poetry Comics Exhibition

Poetry comics combine two seemingly disparate art forms to create something wholly unique. *Verse, Stripped* features original artwork by Sommer Browning, Bianca Stone, Gary Sullivan, and Paul K. Tunis, as well as books by Joe Brainard, Kenneth Koch, and others.

**MAY 31 – SEPTEMBER 4**
**EXHIBIT OPEN MONDAY – FRIDAY, 11:00 AM – 4:00 PM**

Exhibition Talk by Matt Madden

Comics artist and illustrator Matt Madden offers a survey of the points of connection between comics and poetry over the last fifty years. That interaction can be found with poets Kenneth Koch and Ted Berrigan’s engagement with comics (often in collaboration with Joe Brainard) and carries on with cartoonists who adapt works of poetry and poets who also make comics, notably Gary Sullivan. Madden also discusses the influence of Oulipo and Oubapo (of which he is a member) and show examples of cartoonists who appropriate poetic fixed forms like the sonnet or the sestina to make comics.

**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 7:00 PM**

**ALL EVENTS ARE FREE ’61 WEST SUPERIOR STREET ’ CHICAGO**
**POETRYFOUNDATION.ORG/EVENTS**
**312.787.7070**
When Adrienne Rich received the inaugural Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize in 1986, she had been associated with Poetry for over thirty-five years. First appearing in the January 1951 issue as Adrienne C. Rich, the poet had gone on to win the magazine’s Eunice Tietjens Memorial Prize and the Bess Hokin Prize. The Ruth Lilly Prize drew together three institutions with equally long connections to Poetry. The Newberry Library, where the award ceremony was held, had first served as the magazine’s home in 1954 and was again from 1986–2003. The Modern Poetry Association, formed in 1941 by longtime donors to replace the old guarantor system that Harriet Monroe devised, had financed Poetry’s publication and, with an initial gift from Ruth Lilly, helped establish the Prize. A subsequent gift from Lilly in 2003 transformed the Association into today’s Poetry Foundation. Also playing a part in the establishment of the award was the American Council for the Arts, an advocacy group that was later absorbed into Americans for the Arts. Worth $25,000 (today $100,000), the Ruth Lilly Prize far surpassed other awards in the support it offered poets. Rich gave the bulk of it to political causes and organizations she favored while keeping some to “buy some space and time to write.”

Paul Durica
POETRY
The Modern Poetry Association

and

The American Council for the Arts

are very pleased to announce

the first award of

THE RUTH LILLY POETRY PRIZE

to

ADRIENNE RICH

The award, in the amount of $25,000, is the gift of Mrs. Ruth Lilly of Indianapolis. Judges on the 1986 Selection Panel were Maxine Kumin, Joseph Parisi, and David Wagoner. The Award was presented in a ceremony held at the Newberry Library in Chicago, on June 6th.

Established this Spring, The Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize is the largest such annual award given specifically to poets of the United States, to recognize extraordinary artistic accomplishment. Nominations are made solely by the Selection Panel, and no applications are accepted. For further information, the sponsors, The Modern Poetry Association or The American Council for the Arts, should be contacted.