CUTS
from
the
BARBERSHOP

Poems and translations by

Steve Arntsen
Janel Burnett
David Cummings
Jay Darrow
Greg Hall
Liz Henry
Sanja K. Pesich
Walter Martin
Yehudit Oriah
Robert Pesich
Brenda Simmons
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Edited by Liz Henry, Robert Pesich,
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Tollbooth Press
Redwood City, California
Some poems were previously published in various books and journals:

"Fall", in Arsenic Lobster

"Winter", in Bellowing Ark and also in Sand Hill Review

"Not Just a Dream", in Zapizidat World Anthology

“While Traveling,” in DMQ, February 2003


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ISBN # 0-9719891-6-8
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Why Baby Why

Poetry, the invisible art, revealed by 3D goggles
Of feeling, intuited, longed for, the lack
Of which is fatal over a lifetime (suddenly one
Is 48 or 19 or 70) and what's missing, when
Poetry's missing, is like a bullet that can't
Be removed, and sets off a metal-detector alarm
In the heart or soul
Everytime one's confronted/shaken/
Awakened/broken
By
The beautiful...
One way to reach the warm hand
Of her is to conspire to smaller
Groups of poets, 3 to 6, and read poems
To one another without microphones,
Telephones, videodromes, or the vast howling
Of industrial drones found inside every
Public building...
Some may refer to this as a salon, others a
Barbershop, still others call it a reprieve from
Execution a few seconds before midnight.
I write it myself, though no one tells me to,
Or told me to start doing so.
I figure if you are reading this, you are
Already also somewhat indicted by beauty to respond,
In your own way, your way, (like Sinatra, if you want),
Poetry being the only place on earth where you can do
Anything you want...
“I love you, too...”
One by one
the parts of a body
arrive & attach
themselves
& flight
becomes more difficult
barely escaping
collision with chimneys
I sweep
through the air
with great effort
they are sharks
the left leg
the left foot
the wrists the hands
the neck the head
"I felt a great heaviness
in the water & everything
became silent"
then I was lifted
only to be
swept down
all the while
caught in a vise
"I felt no pain"
all I saw
was the eye
it seemed flat
& dead
& then the
water
turned
red
this is
getting
old
now the doctors
with aspirins like frisbees
& tubes & wires
& admonishments
every time
I light a smoke
I felt better
when I had
no body
& all I did
was fly
blind
& ecstatic
into
the
present
without
regret
or remorse
I recommend
to the young
not to age
& to fly fast
because
the sky
is
falling
NATURAL BRIDGES

Oceanic night
the pregnant moon
slowly belling to fullness
inexhaustible salt
and chill tons of oceanwater
a single dead cormorant
riding the shorebreak
upside down
wash of a wave
carrying the small body
two feet towards the shore
backwash carrying him
one foot back out to sea
this natural mathematics
of drift
ensures
his sand packed feathers
will ruffle
dry in the sun
his rainbow
legs
still beautiful
tangled
in dry kelp
and
surrounded
by
flies
SMOKE  THIS IN YOUR PIPE

After the
Depravity sisters
arrived
we got drunk
we danced
all night
and in the morning
the floor was black
and everything stunk.
Their hair
was hanging in ropes
and we three
were dripping sweat
toasting marshmallows
on the incandescent bulb.
We wrote
with matches
on the wall.
Everyone put
something up
somewhere
and it was all
"just for kicks"
especially the ritual
slaughter
of a dozen onions.
We peeled
off their skins
one by one
(did I mention
we were sweating
and the sisters' hair
hung in ropes?)
It was sick and glorious
it was better
than any religion
and we got
away with it
and we
are going
to do it all
over
and over
again.

Greg Hall
In my chubby checker existence
I go around with pliers in one hand and a hammer in the other looking for yr mother so I can help you out I will twist her thoughts so you can find a woman who is not crazy with no screws loose then you can celebrate the birthday of yr balls

Cuts from the Barbershop
EASY IN OCTOBER

At the start
you own nothing
but eyes & heart
an observation
& a feeling
deep inside
she arrives
& your emptiness
is unbearable
everything
you know
that is
what you see
is hauled in
to construct
an edifice
heraldic in array
to populate
the desert
a sky is thrown up
and tacked on
with driftwood
an ocean
lowered into place
now the sun
don't burn
your fingers
and a moon
and stars
don't touch them
with bare skin
or you'll stick
birds flung
helter skelter

Greg Hall
and a single raven
and one shark fin
and a starfish
and lots
of black feathers
now you
are ready
to own
everything
ready
for
a
kiss
Walter Martin

The Poem is a leap of faith through a ring of fire, deliberate, precise, and overwhelming.
Poetry, or Self-Abuse

Come, let us abuse ourselves now with remorse.
Let’s see what all we’ve done wrong since Jesus wept.
Surely we must have taken our eye off the target.
We failed to run for help when the trouble started.
Yes, but His safety net shall support us come what may,
The Angel of Mercy swoop down to the rescue once more.
At the start of each day we prayed for a better miracle,
Prayed for the Muse to condescend to do our bidding.
This morning we meditated on the camel’s back –
All it takes is the paltry weight of one more straw.
Hidden in the crawlspace of a safehouse, we learned
The nerve-driven motionless fretwork of the buck,
Deep-frozen in the headlamps of Hell’s huntsmen.
Forcing the hand across the ice-laden page’s tundra,
One line grafted to the next by next to nothing,
We do what we have to to words, to ward off the world.
Making Do

From bank to bank I run, hounding the tellers,
Letting the numbers say grace over my future,
Rubbing my two cents together, shuffling
My hopeless portfolio, while the homely young
Women stuck in their cages gnaw their new rings,
Tasting the diamonds, as if to say “See? I too have been
Living, little by little, when no one was watching.”
Law of the Suburbs

Alice can watch whatever she wants to now, and read the paper as soon as she brings it in.

His grass is browner than it’s ever been and longer than it was ever allowed to get.

A neighbor said he’d lost the will to live. Maybe she had to let the gardener go.

He kept a spotless car and a careful yard. We must have waved a hundred times over the years.

Gave me tomatoes he’d grown when we moved in. Polished his clubs even after he gave up the game.

Raised the garage door at night when she came home. Retirement didn’t agree with him from what I saw.

Brought back a Mustang once and spent One heck of a lot of time spit-polishing chrome.

No leaf allowed to touch that car, no sir. Three Mexicans came by one day and hauled it off.

 Didn’t set foot outside much after that. Day nurses came and went, and oxygen.

A quiet ambulance, a flower truck. I see in the paper now his name was Spear. Al Spear.
Everything Must Go

Foolhardiness has been my bent
And wasted Time my element;
A feckless recluse, I lament
I've grown too old to fold my tent
And far too stubborn to repent
The fool's gold that I've found - and spent -
That should have gone to pay the rent.
A reckless recusant, my stint
(By now it should be evident)
Was more or less an accident.
Could not the bread be heaven-sent,
The miracle, the manna, lent
To save my heart's establishment?
The landlord's here. And won't relent.
The Men's Room

I scowled at the mirror
and caught hold of my father,
    my long gone father.

Lemme go! He shouted,
Let go, you old gray-headed bastard!
    he shouted.
Envy and Dread

A man walks by the car where I mutter and moan. He wears a magnificent parrot on his shoulder, bending his ear. Rich crimson, gold and royal blue from head to tail. They are deep in discussion, man to bird, and friend to friend. They speak of the nature of life, the virtues of earth. They have nothing but good things to say about water and air, women and fire. How intimate and admirable, the companionship of Adam with the beasts of the field. I watch in the menacing dark till the two disappear, filled with envy and dread, for I have only this threadbare monkey gnawing my skull, and money is all we know how to quarrel about.
Sanja K. Pesich
and Robert Pesich
СТАРИ САВЕТ

Изникле иконе
из пунка безглавља,
pале су у воду,
onда кад сам дознаo
да сам некада
човек биo.

КРАЛЕНТКА ЗА ДЕМЕФИСТА

Раз-очаран
раз-чињењем.

ОКВИР ЗА ПРАЗНИНУ

Замисли глас храпав и сув
из људила исчурео,
глас похотљив и зао
као масти бескућника и моћника
и из његовог сна убери
латице мртвих речи.
Old Advice

Icons sprouted
from the belly-button of madness
fell into the water
when I realized
that I was once a man

A cradle for DemeFisto

Dis-enchanted by
   un-doing

A frame for emptiness

Imagine a voice cracked and dry
which has leaked out of madness,
a voice lustful and mean
like the imagination of the homeless and the mighty
and take dead words' petals
out of its dreams

by OLIVER MILIJIC

Translated from Serbian
by Sanja Kolarevic Pesich
and Robert Pesich

ABOUT SPACE AND MOVEMENTS
О ПРОСТОРУ И КРЕТАЊУ

Нема вода, нема звезде, нема шума
gоворљиво нам срце
Ветрови љубе камен, наше чело земљу
наш језик сок биљака
Ухо нам је на кори дрвета, око пред цветом
као пред кључаоницом света:
Гле! Рекосмо, ево начина за одређивање правила
о владању звезда
веома сличних начинима за одређивање правила
о владању младих ћелија
у првим пролећним изданцима
Ево линија кишних капи
на млекоцрвеним круничним листићима цветова
dевичанских суза испарљивих у првој зори
ево биљака окренутих ка светлу са учвршћеним
корењем
са ружичастим плодовима, са зрелим семењем
што га развејава ветар
Ево затим биљака раслих у тами
у мрачним просторима
у сталном присуству смрти
биљака оболелих од хлорозе
Ево граница простора противних нашој песми
Ево најбољих објашњења за чудно понашање
једра
заљубљеног у звезди и сопствено кружење
слично кружењу Сунца
Ево струја опасних мириса који су нам
усмрћивали машту
Ево употребљених плодова од чије је
хранљивости зависила
Oh hear me water, star, and forest - Nothing
our gregarious heart
The winds kiss the stone, our forehead the ground
our tongue the sap of the plants
Our ear is pressed to the tree bark, peering into the flower
keyhole of the world
Look! We thought, here is a way of exercising the rules
that govern the order of stars
not unlike the rules
essential for the behavior of young cells
in the first spring seedlings
here is a rivulet of raindrops
on dark red flower petals
so much like virginal tears that evaporate with the first dawn
Here are the plants turned towards the light, deeply
rooted
with rosy fruits and ripe seeds
that are blown by the wind
Here are then, the plants grown in the shade
in dark corners
in the constant presence of death
plants affected by chlorosis
Here are the boundaries of space contrary to our poem
Here are the best justifications for the odd behavior of the
sail
in love with the stars and its own circling
not unlike the circling of the Sun
Here are the currents of dangerous smells that have
numbed our imagination
Here are the used fruits that were directly
responsible for
the amount of pleasure the girls from distant
величина задовољства које би осећале девојке из далеких интерпланетарних покрајина у ноћима проведеним са нама Ево најзад унутарњих продуката протоплазме тако потребних за потхранивање наших снова
interplanetary provinces would feel
during the nights spent with us
Here are, at last, the protoplasm’s byproducts
so much needed
for the nourishment of our dreams

By Mirojlub Todorovic (1940)
Translated from Serbian
by Sanja K. Pesich and Robert Pesich
СВЕСТ О ПЕСМИ

Мене више ничег није стид.
Клону сунце преко свега. Жељан плод
пун је ноћи. Глас, што себе сања, зид
откри у даљини где зазидан ми брод.

У том зиду чувам своју гордост, певам
из те зазиданости лепше но на слободи.
Откуд та моћ да себи одолевам,
А не одолоше виногради родни!

Је ли то чудна жеља да се живи
без себе? Жеља за песмом без песника?
Од прошлости и заборава време што се диви
Издајству мога заустављеног лика?

Да ли то значи рећи промени: нећу!
И оставити песму да се сама мења?
Поклонити себе животињама и цвећу
И снагу своју дати глади црног корења?

У овој ноћи мене није стид
Што певам из зида лепше но на слободи.
Сунце ми у пети бриди. Блешти зид
На крају пута што никуд не води.

Cuts from the Barbershop
TO BE CONSCIOUS ABOUT A POEM

I am no longer ashamed of anything.
The sun set over everything. An eager fruit
is full of night. A voice that dreams of itself
spotted a wall in which my boat was built.

I keep my pride in the wall, I sing
from within these confines better than on the outside.
Where did the power to resist myself come from,
whereas the natile vineyards could not withhold themselves?!

Is it a strange desire to live
without oneself? A desire for a poem without a poet?
From the past and oblivion the time that admires
the betrayal of my obstructed image?

Does this mean saying no to change
And leave the poem to change by itself?
To give oneself away to the animals and plants
And give one’s strength away to the hunger of black roots?

This is not a night when I feel ashamed
of singing better from the confines of a wall than on the outside.
The sun tingles me through my heel. There is a dazzling wall at the end
of the road that heads nowhere.

By Branko Miljkovic
Translated from Serbian
by Sanja K. Pesich and Robert Pesich
Janel Burnett

There’s nothing poetic about being in a nursing home where the misery of the old, ill, and abandoned—the demented—is ridiculed. Except for the immigrant aide who bathes my foot as if it were Christ’s. And waking up to Bellini’s aria, “Casta Diva”, which begs the goddess of the silvery trees to bring us all peace.

Janel Burnett

in absentia
Lying down in the center of the planet

where a bird fluttering helplessly
in my ribcage
bursts into flame, resurgent

and the wingless dead smile
floating dry-eyed
on their trellis of white lilacs

where the cost of love is forgiveness
and a greening breeze
fans wheat grass into grain

where a last cloud pulls water
from the hesitant sky
‘Singing Sand Mountain’ (Nevada)

a white curved rib
    of alkali dune
blown
against grey stubbed hills

in sky’s brilliance
    a razor black crow
floats
probably sleeping
Desert Meditation

...in such spiritless times, why to be poet at all?  
(Friedrich Holderin, in Bread and Wine)

... man's solitude is never less of a blessing than when he has eye trouble (Nietzsche to Franz Overbeck, Nice, 1887)

Speak, so the dead can't find you.

All the numinous eyes, stranded in a nervous dark.

Where red pigment handprints were blown, you stand — on ritual, artifice, love affair? Pick. Gather your grain, and belief. The afterlife? arguably a genetic, neuroprogrammed adaptation to manage this unbearable anxiety — foreknowledge of your own death.  
Could we have fed, sheltered, and sexed the species otherwise?


And I ask you, What are human skulls grinning about?

Well, the wars! — murderous chaps mainly,
self-forgiven by way of some totem
god or papal ordinance — Land,
is it, land, boy? (Secondly)
brokerage in illusion: consumer confidence,
incited by hook or crook.

Still, how can you tell a dream
from a portal?
asleep here, in vermilion canyons
where travelers have camped and foraged,
rested and chiseled
for millennia,
asking the sky
to drizzle down rain and mystery.

Scientific record on desert varnish.
Supernova, owl, dragonfly. Gyrating,
hand-holding snake dancers.
The lost art
of exacting astronomy. Why
this symmetrical alignment of doors,
homes, communities, outliers and roads?

Asleep by an archaic water catchment,
I climb a ladder, propped by air
and leaning west, till
a haloed white light —
mind or no mind —
greets me lovingly, at a border
whose name I know.
So enter Death's unimaginably blue
quietude.

Don't speak.
(Oh! can you hear it?)
All the numinous dead, singing.
A blind woman
doesn't have a roof over her head
till it thunders.
Comes the unnerving face
of mystery — that luminous question mark
which has dogged me my whole faithless life.
The hell of it is, I want to know
dream from death from parallel plane.

If simply neural clicks in a cloud chamber,
why these particular appearances, voices and travel tips,
to places and personages that astonish?

Or again, could enough of us will ourselves to rise — without faith in the Other — each day to fulfill the taste of all living creatures to reproduce, and flourish?
Ritual, artifice, love affair. Pick.
Speak, so the dead can't find you.
Now, Pretender

Your studied sweetness; my dank
sunken beauty, my hip bone
a stepping stone out
of your common law marriage. How
lightly you walk, eyes
all averted, now — 'Pretender'.

Happiest among the old girls,
blind folded back
when teachers were Men.
So unbecoming, that: pursed
lips. but you were never Keats;
no cenote — but Citte— and cannot imagine
what Bierstadt saw.

Unmanageable mountainous wild; my
disarticulate cliff chasm,
the ungrammatical language of coyotes
— a mere drive-through inconvenience
nonstop on your way home, on a self-
same road. If you could
love, I would burn down the maps,
gather fragments of my truncated
bones, to take you to your Mother
now, Pretender.

The Mayans feared it: soul loss.
Not many willingly, walked that
pilgrimage.
Entered the jaguar maw mouth, dripping
toothed cavern, where rivers
underflow the earth, hundreds of miles —
as elsewhere, men imagined a river Styx.
Such ineffectual persons we are, regarding death, and love.
To gouge out a heart; then throw it aside. Having consumed its passion,
to simply thrive, not bereft!
The operative word is: sacrifice.

I think I would have been among them,
lost my head and heart, unsuspecting.
And that you might have lived in town,
a scribe sophisticate
inscribing it all, cautiously, commissioned, and
categorizing stars
    with your bright, acknowledged intelligence
till Venus dawned — loving just that.

Always we see a captive, on bent knee.
And the lord or lady who can,
without wincing, command the deed —
believing oneself thereby
transported
beyond the worm/blood river/the Trash Master
to a stark and lovely Milky Way
— then sit back down to dinner.

Some people believe, you know, that trees create the wind. A dead red leaf
floats in your fist,
with never a dream of me. And I just dreamed (or if not, what?)
    the great white lightning snake
uncoiling, freed from the temple stone.
So honored, expect this thing in me may heal. Yet awoke
to grief, that invective breath of
contrast: malice; and devotion.

You and I, by a sweet water lake, met infinitely but secreted, in rushes.
So, the unnatural roots grew bitter, and severed. And still,
I make this offering for you these many years — to live tormented in the Place of Fright.
To mask my face; shutter my voice; and shun the marketplace — that you may thrive, now Pretender, in your sincere and honorable indifference.
The Water Poet
"There's something to be said for anonymity." -- Greg Hall

When I forget the white-brown sandpiper at the sea's edge, the grey gull flapped by wind, your songs return them to me. You insist on woman and wave and the moon's pull — despite history, dspoilment, bitter heartedness.

We have not loved you well, mistaking your hard-won gifts for something we might make on the cheap. Why should you continue among us, who act as if we don't need you anymore?

We are starved for song. Come. Endure the vanity of our self-congratulatory notices. Maybe you are greater than Neruda. Your words are no less beautiful. Did he wait for the tide to bring love as solace? Did he want for pleasure, or companion?

And still you hope, still you believe in woman and water. You return to the crows with green glittering eyes, hunched in the pines of rocky Nepenthe. They are the people who await you, read you, follow you.

It is odd. And that we failed you. And don't say again, after your death we may know you. Come now.
Letter from Circe to Penelope

Elpenor stumbled with the taste of women
and my wine cellar in his mouth,
"shattered the nape nerve,
the soul-sought Avernus", and died drunk.

Then weeping, Odysseus tried to drag me to the
hollow hold of that cursed ship,
thinking me to marry Telemachus and
stay near in case

the olive tree rooting your bed to earth
break under the weight of a
false marriage.
Lady, he has a slow way of loving you.

He has everywhere made enemies
of strangers.
And cries 'witchery' while suckling dreams
from the breasts of women
whose hospitality
toward the starving and storm wrecked is made
'noxious' by some poison herb or spell.

I say, a Man of No Name,
the relentless push of sun and stars unsteered by,
made swine of sailors.
And I suppose the lovely Calypso locked him away?
them seven years' bad luck for her!
She'd rather suck bone marrow
than prostitute for a man's hearth - or honey.

So hard to winnow from wind and sea stone
a patch of startled, flowering weedy
that men say 'goddess' to make of her a strange,
unmangeable thing.
But you, Lady, confined by fear lifelong to father
and husband, kin and country,
thrill to hear of single-eyed men,
bloody battle and lotus eaters.

What of his long living with women?
(True, he loved none of us.)
If he wraps his face in rags till content with news
of your fidelity?

What drives a spineless suitor
to service a queen who sits at the center
of bad faith, weaving, then unweaving
a man's death shroud?
flirting cruelly with men
she'll never bed, threading

their lives into her indecision. I say
you refuse to be known, lest unloved.
Why else stay marriage-slung
to a man gone nineteen years?

Odysseus, too, forbids men to listen to the
blood red tide that flicks us
high, then drops sixty feet at a whim.
But beauty is voracious, and we will hear
sirens no matter how tightly
strapped to wishful patter like
'Joy alone is worthy', or 'A day's work
puts a gold coin in the mouth'.

You do not speak for me. Willfully and again,
I've opened the ox skin bag
to unloose winds
that would blow me off my small map.
I may live mad and alone,
clattering my cane against spiked rocks,
but I will die having risked my life.

Go now, your husband has returned.

He’s killing the household, Lady,
all those who tried to love you.
Tonight and together in red linen you’ll toss
till a new day breaks and he says (as a blind poet
will tell it to a hundred generations): Go
to your room upstairs and stay
quietly there, see
nobody, and ask no questions'.
Dear Robert,

I am sorry to be sending the poems so late. Any that do not have cross-out lines may be used. I couldn’t decide. But what is enclosed here are representative pieces from a series relating to 1996 Burning Man. If you find some to your liking, great, but if the committee isn’t comfortable, I will not be offended. Just keep them for occasional reading. Basically, the all-caps are titles—you will find 2 about “CAFÉ EPHEMERA” and 2 concerning the House of Doors. Very sorry for the wretched presentation! Little edits, etc. Your deadline was approaching, and, well, I put it off, the tidying up the manuscript. In case your group had counted on finished, ready to copy stuff, egads! Be well, and thanks much for thinkin’ of me!

Warm regards, Steve

P.S. Liz Henry, I think, has some pieces too—
SHARK CAR / ART CAR

Shark car     art car
     of the gruesome persuasion

During an afternoon of hot temps, tents and tarps
the shark car came
circling a pool of anxiety

You had your Night of the Iguana     Day of the Dolphin
now
it's Afternoon of an Engine
   interspersing panic
Cold weather come to Indian summer
to engineer a hybrid offspring climate of fear

The heliometer measures a "point a" to "b" of mealtime attack
In transit of Lahontan moonscape     lunar mare
Being about the business of finding
     ordinary fish
who shall absorb the shock of being fed upon
for their chrome
for their leather

Patron saint of infinite space     circling     with
   olfactory focus
Just when you thought it was safe to sun yourself
Its accelerator's hammer's down to dinnertime!

There's vibration throughout its unibody parts
And its shark teeth tremble in the ambient evil
The ocean has wheels
   whose tires are inflated to peer pressure's pounds
   per square
Hunger is its fuel
And dust clouds clean its carburetor well

It will bite you before you can even say "Hello!"
and not even Danger Ranger can help
You will need thirteen doctors thirteen hundred stitches
And be the worse for wear-and-tear

A tamborine accompanies the passengers' revels
The shark car LOVES its rpms
    and always attacks from the tachometer's red zone!
A shark fully apprised of Opportunity's "knock" and "ping"
Rip-roaring through the menu with artistic intentions

Taste is what you get used to
    what may even not be good for you
in the hot pursuit of Peter Benchley

Last time we saw him he was heading for Escalon
and deep desert wells beyond
    in flight from his own creation
its shark glove compartment gills
    gear shifted to feeding time

You're out in the open
Don't be a fool!
Don't indulge shark car's peculiar hospitality
    only to be overtaken by that certain new-car-smell
    an appetite that bad!

If you were the shark
You'd have remarkable teeth
    and brush regularly
    see the shark dentist

Even your primitive motor would start right up
    with Idle's expectations and rear-view's hindsight
A metabolism breaking for everything
But you aren't that creature!
Your flashing scales are a liability
The heart's hammer's a sledge on course to break-neck!
    if the car doesn't get you a coronary will!

Because it's a shark it has to keep swimming
    in dusty circles
        a tail
            with a tailpipe
                a fin of funnybone

"Beware!
    you're killing yourself!"
It's overbite's overhaul
The points and plugs are eager sparks
There are no mechanical problems

He's a creature from the body shop
    designed to be awful
        designed for consumption of your tricycle minnow!

You're in harm's way, man!
You're due a rebate in blood
    enacted as time-lapse!

You don't agitate yourself lest the shark come your way
    attracted by the struggle
        a biology unraveled
It is a clutch job joined to simplistic gluttony
All is lubricated salt water taffy

For once the eating machine makes perfect sense
    a non-contradictory differential terror
        proof the animal and mineral may actually cooperate
            in making you a vegetable
Great White investigates the desert with desire
    as though talk-radio found the ultimate Mouth
    and it opens
    and closes
    with attack
And you turn up the volume on the dial
K       H       E       L       P!!

TRANSMISSION FISH!
We will hear of your gastronomy and appetite that bad
    late night
    Radio Publica
    will publish the horror

But for now no lifeguard is visible
Read the ticket again
    "You risk death in attending"
    his dining on your fender-bender bones
    and more than that is more than psychology can say

Rack-and-pinion pining for leaky leftover seals
Roadkill where the roads don't go
    "Be sure to wash it down with plenty of salt water!"

You'll lose your virginity to a sleepy-manic contraption
You'll learn to swim in alkaline flats upholstered with Disney
The storyboard calls for a happy happy ending
    the shores
    and safety
    but
The brain of all that cartilage says
    getting around won't be that easy
    and miles-per-hour's open-ended
    on a sliding scale
You’re a main course you’re a side-dish
The passengers are tucking their bibs
car culture vultures subject only to ignition

A GASKET CASE!
Like Burning Man himself who
but for the fire
is
predatory wood grain
lumber
and neon
THE HOUSE OF DOORS

The House of Doors seemed doors to all your houses

And there was Huxley perceiving something
Huxley at the keyboard
Huxley with his headphones
mixin’ a set for a micro-burst of broadcast
from the ready radio room

Cozy like a windbreak

We were going to sleep with a memory of Morrison singing
"This is the end my friend the end"
of a root system's supply and demand
for wooden doors making wooden walls

And once within their circle of power
No music is denied you
All bands are heard hearing Jim
his coming and going
Doors seeming closed upon a crop circle’s circle
of knobs
jams
and keyholes

You enjoy each panel’s pale braille relief
Fingertipping and tapping
as if to after the end of the world
Knockin’ knockin’
"Can I come in, Aldous?
Do you perceive me? Do ya’? Do ya’?"

We’re going to keep it cosy for ya
Keep ambient yellow aglow
Keep the heat enclosed and let the cold escape
while f minor spins a turntable 'round
'midst the spaghetti of power cords and cables
And memories are gathered the way a crowd is convened
where each member's a version of recollect
A drought just dyin' to invade
as a silt so fine
it's through and through the knothole
the keyhole
A story passed down
Like a whispered text of dusky stars
by the westerlies conveyed
NOW is THEN constructed from available endings
Huxley sitting side-saddle at the Roland portable keyboard
You trust the things you see and hear
in the night of his music ensconced
What do you remember?
What? Iyard in your desert robes aflutter
entering
leaving
An architecture's solace
long deferred and finally allowed
A love of "Lucy in the Sky"
Where Aldous plays his musical triads well into morning
And Jim Morrison revisits The End one door at a time
band at a time
Instruments hiding in and out of existence
Like heat and cold
in a house that is open to Andromeda's quadrillions of miles away
You remember an arson conceived in the heart of harmony
No doors have ever so pleased
or blissful made the day the night
First doors to all the hours in all the houses you've known
schools you've known
with Latin endings
for whatever you can get the teacher to say

House of Doors
Like a playground's background scrim
that contains the lecture long enough
for prayers to succeed
and shelters magic
as if it were a secret required a perimeter
to keep acoustics inside
and well-enrolled
and well-behaved.

You remember a band a book an enclosure
A miracle supplied by once-upon-a-forest
in the care of a mountain's gateway granite

Green door white door blue door ochre
Component wall of sandblasted portals
open or closed for a musical inspection
their stories of the flats and sharps and naturals

The philosopher's in quest of grieving artists
Doors propped closed for their auditions

An album assembles its songs
from a radio announcing a perception of airwaves
The paint job's ajar with mystic acrylic
As curious pandits strategize heaven
turn the latch key 'round
hospitality inserted

You enter the woodwork the wood grain the woodcut
As if into a friendly fort or stylized abattis
Windy-cozy
you huddle from the dust storm
interpreting DOORS
their many-splintered penitentiary's compartments
open on the Pleistocene

You gather with others
To think of bygone paint chips in a flurry of lead-based
whirling closed
or open for radio astronomy
'round midnight's moonlight

Sleeping through a psychedelic improv
Sleeping all those Sixties' entrances and exits
So out in the open you cried for shelter
in earshot of hinges swinging squeaky arcs
in the vicinity of sofas and chairs
With others of your kind saying
"Morrison" "Doors"
their vowel in common

You are listening now
The doors tall enough
to be taller than the teacher's pet
And pillows absorb a radio intelligence a radio silence
The galaxy gone drowsy
gone to sleep to consider Eternity

Singing singing
"This is the End my friend the End"

What door? what address? what visitor?
SUNDAY NIGHT

Sunday night

A light overcast
    pall mimics ash cloud    with humidity's subterfuge
    mimics rest
    from all-out starry see-through ceiling

Saw too much!
Closed the lid on Love's imaginings
Pulled the sheets of condensation over
    on a lay-away plan for dreams
Goes to bed happy with bonfire's finale

The Man is sleeping past tomorrow's ability to wake him
And has transferred white Fear
    to the sky of Night!
THE OCCASIONAL NUDE BODY

The occasional nude body was less and less an occasion

The occasional nude body
if not Geographical and National
was nevertheless neutral

The occasional nude body
if not ho-hum
was yet a colony's less-than-clandestine
less-than-alluring
less-than-disturbing

The occasional nude body
became the artwork intended one day in the Sistine

The occasional nude body aspired
if not to ballet
at least to a mud-bath
if not to seduction
at least
the occasional nude
would go in search of itself as another
enraptured

Sometimes the occasional nude body was poorly placed
like the big, hairy curious man
who decided to sit amidst teeny-bopping skirted girls
They pretended to ignore him
And sometimes
The occasional nude body was just plain spacy
awkward
and grim

But mostly
The occasional nude body was a big baby humanoid
drest all in sunshine
just for today's occasion
that was less and less an occasion
A BETTER MOUSETRAP

The man is a grouch who has fathered the vision

The bowling ball hasn't reached its pocket-of-pool finale
after all the stages of gauntlet
where each trick is fifty-fifty failure success

The catapult
like a perpetual motion machine
its giantism and calculated leverage
is moot pivot prowess
For it's really more than a gravity-assist
as eager hands aid the fulcrum in its work
and help the caged chute to empty its cargo
of three-hole pin killer

It is heavy in translation from micro to macro
And bowling somewhere
lacks the one cannonball
that lets the beginner score 300 the first time out

We have killed our televisions as ordered
for the entertainment of the Mousetrap
And it is so enlarged that capybaras should beware
and think twice about home invasion!

The show is live though more of a rehearsal
And hands help the black planet's progress
through a cascade of stunts
when things that are supposed to work
refuse their physics
refuse to be physical
and pout their part of the demo
Or the coil is tired that springs the trap
And we settle for a cradling only

Imagine the sound of it "bowling ball" that onomatapoea
Imagine it touching down on lacquered laminated slats
and pour its purring acoustics down the runway lane
slow-motioning the pins to fall down and die!

Remember the board that embodies the sound
as smoothly executed TWO-dimensional mobius
that returns the sphere so it may tell what happens beyond the city of fat white ducks

What goes on in the vibratory recess
clanging approval of "strike" or "spare"
and longing for some lacquer here lacquer there
to smooth the way

Scott attempts to soothe the creator
The man is slaving into even the last day of Burning Man
determined that it shall work
damn it all!

IT SHALL!!
Wishing the concept the contraption
had not succumbed to a theory of chaos!

Perhaps a woman in yellow will attend his wishing party
Take prisoner its gremlins
and scream "GLITCH! GLITCH!"
as they are taken away
For they would make a mission impossible forever

The Mousetrap is hair-trigger already
A mechanism so beyond Beyond
its maker has dreams of calling God up just to say how embarrassed and alone he is
and ask what can he do to make it finally work
so he can have his own seventh day of rest!

That the Mousetrap's poor powers
to add or subtract a mouse from the world
is something to be enjoyed
in spite of the jeers of children
who should know better
with names like "Tiffany" and "Blair"

A better mousetrap
For its serendipity for departure from the Plan
and in spite of a lack of grace
in the dark

After other recreations have tired the citizens
and they have no leftover energy for trapping
A privileged bowling ball tumbles in approval
Jumps the gap to makeshift bucket
tipping spare change momentum
traveling the dark star's interrupted equinox

Still throwing the marble away
monster "peery" of the midway
Twilighting technology's handicapped constable
able
in spite of the rules
Some would say that poetry is at the center of my soul, but I think it would be more true to say that fire, music, desire, ideas are at that center and poetry is only the place where all these forces come together. Or perhaps poetry is the vehicle that drives these forces into the world.

I’ve found life to be staggeringly lonely. But when I read about my life in someone else’s poem, or simply life, that sense of desolation loosens and I am warmed and freed, somehow.

I can’t not write. And I write all the time. It’s maddening. In a restaurant, at the doctor’s, in the market, I am constantly watching and listening to the human life kalaidoscoping around me. Unsettling. I don’t know where I am most of the time.

When I finally sit down to write there’s the boy with M.S. lurching to the pool, there’s the piece of Beethoven I heard on the radio during my commute, there’s the flock of Japanese students, all with dyed red hair waiting for a bus just as the sun is going down, there’s the stray bit of conversation, “Two months, but I don’t know…”

It’s terrifying and thrilling to be alive. Poetry is about being alive. The best poetry is the absolute truth, not necessarily factual. I call it illogical truth.

I never wanted to be a poet. I wanted to be a dancer, but that took money. Poetry can be written on the back of a grocery bag which I often did when I was young. And it doesn’t require any commitment: it simply makes off with you.

And now I am not young. Perhaps I could have been something corporate. Perhaps I could have helped the world to be a better place. Instead I wrote and did not become famous. But I lived at times in a place so exciting it is almost beyond language to describe. A place where days or hours before there was nothing and then days or hours later there was a poem and when I was very, very lucky, a good poem I want to keep with me the rest of my days.

JCWatson
SAINT BARTHOLOMEW'S 1955

Red Dog, a kind of slag, a waste product of processing steel

The year lapsing into September.
Garden shaking itself dry.
Birds convening.
September, the empty cup,
schoolbus roar stored in your head.

Empty, leaving your front door, empty classroom full of the enemy.
The basement of a life, the dark, the unknowing, the cold hands, web strings across your lashes, fear.

Against a new plaid dress, the limit of your pride, nun's teeth, gold strips, menace. An icestorm blowing into your bones till summer.

The drawing, arithmetic, geography, in a duststorm about your head. The flashcards/your dumb tongue. Flashcards smack against your eyes.

All the eyes on your birdbones. Jeanne Brown telling the enemy your father couldn't get the spots out of their clothes.
Recess on the gravel, uncold milk,  
jelly in the cracks  
of your teeth and trouble,  
a small lead ferris wheel pulling  
in your chest.

On the bus, the school guards,  
diagonal orange striped chests,  
at the ready to report the failings  
that fall from your plaid pockets like nails.

Up the highway, leaves beginning to scuttle.  
Down the red dog to the flown open  
door, warning rrreek, rrreek.  
The green screen in the living room  
flapping black and white. Nine.
NOT JUST A DREAM

If night is a river and it is,
pull something out of it,
something to wriggle in your hands,
something to shine
moon-shine in your face.

Simple, these tricks of joy;
they are written all over your face.
Like your face they tell a certain story.
Your face, the last one I'll see
before crossing the river,
the only one I keep behind my eyes.

When you lean your head to the right
a river of light shines through
and I could drink if I were a soldier.
If I would ever touch you
I would tear your flesh, crush your bones;
you would be in my hands in a minute.

When the moon slips up,
forget the devil.
He is everywhere.
Forget him.
He's a lost soul
dragging us with him.
He is incarnate.
He is the most beautiful being
you will ever see.

And all that's left is reaching
but it's a new religion;
I don't understand it.
I have thought the road was a road, not a highway toward heaven--my car a vehicle for my own birth. Give me just a sliver of your life to grow on and your miraculous body.

The river is so quick; it pulls dreams out of the air, drowns them. Don't slip.

I need your nightmares to fire off in my head. I need your loneliness to drown in my need. I can feel all the rushing and I am filled with sin and resurrected.

All the lights on the rain filled streets are laughing. Your head is bent back laughing and then you say my name. This is how the world comes to an end: you, saying the name I've never told, me, erupting into flame.
WINTER

The wife re-enters
her life, a country
vaguely familiar,
the lily on the pale plates,
she remembers,
the spider web above
the hearth. She makes
smiles for the family
next door. She considers
selling her smiles. She's made
a cloak for winter. It's
the color of his eyes;
it holds her still as
she stands in the yard
the night the moon
is full again. She thinks
it is a long fluorescent tube
she could walk through,
a light so bright she
would see her bones.

She sees that winter is
a graveyard. Her feet make
tick, tick on the frost
as she surveys the small graves.
Dalias, Poppy, Phlox, rest in peace.
Tulips, Scillia, peace. Like
fetuses, she thinks,
like beautiful girl children,
their flowery dresses
desiccated. This is why
resurrection was invented,
she thinks.
Think
what has been said
of the moon: fingernail,
disc, cheese, blue, man in the,
face, cup, luminous, goddess,
a woman's gravity. Gravity.
No one has called the moon a cave.
Cave. The moon is the cave of the body.

She turns,
her velvet boots walk her
to the door. Tick, tick. She should remember her gloves.
Entering, she glances back briefly, as she mounts the stairs, finding the moon in the center of her high kitchen window.
Lover, she thinks, cold, far away, fluorescent.
Her only one.
WHAT WE DO

You work because everything depends on it,
cest attached to desk by cable wide as your arm.
You work because the time given you
is dispensed in crystal bricks you drop as you go.
You work with shards biting your feet;
Your clumsiness never diminishes.

If the night sat under your head,
if the night were a silken pillow,
but the night is work,
you extracting the stars, pulling them
when they won’t come unstuck for anything.
God has your hairs numbered
but he has forgotten you—
forgotten, in this valley of the forgotten.

You work because without work you are falling;
the speed is enormous,
and where you arrive is the same place
you arrive after working but only faster.
You work because the turmoil in your brain
believes it will uncoil itself.
You work because you live in a world of work
and do not wish to be isolated from common loneliness.
God has a crown for good work
and a flaming sword for bad;
you run just ahead of his fire.
You are tired but there is no question of rest.
You have experimented with rest and the
labor involved is not worth it.

You know there comes a time when
you can no longer work.
You know that time requires
all of your will to make it work
and daily, you experience that will, trickling.
For now you work. Call it habit. Call it instinct.
Call yourself yoked, burdened, shackled,
but the flesh on your table is exchanged
for your very own flesh.

You work because when you awaken
your hands manipulate air.
You work because even the glass slipper
was begotten with swept cinders.
You work because of the bees in your arms and legs,
because of the ponies in your chest.
You work because you are digging and need to see.

And when the mystery
of no work commits itself to you.
When your heart stops in its tracks
or the brain ceases leaping across its bridges––
when your blindness is complete,
your own undoing is begun.
You are surrendered to the small works of earth.
You are the task of quiet things.
You work; then they work.
It is what we do.
Dear Jeanne,

Thank you for your company Saturday. It was a marvelous day for me to have the company of you and Greg as well as that of the golden light, the cypresses, and the grass. I hope we did not compromise you in any way given that we kept you out late. It seemed appropriate though that we return in the light of the setting moon given that we began in the light of the rising sun. And what happened in between was a marvelous series of gifts...I must thank both of you for your relaxed honesty, spoken with confidence and also, love. The willingness to speak one's mind out of interest for the other is refreshing and also reassuring in that I can still find that here. I don't really know what you see in me given my naivety. Sometimes, I wonder if I am just a bore with little to say and thus, my company is good for just a brief time. I certainly do not feel that I have the vision of either you or Greg. It is a difficult proposition, to find one's “familia”, to cultivate those relationships against so many distractions that are born out of, among other aspects, the struggle to simply survive in a reasonable manner, without compromising our human dignity in the face of daily horrors. There are also our basic responsibilities to insure the health of children, their education, that our parents are taken care of, that the lights will be on, that the water will flow (unpolluted)...The point I'm trying to make is that I'm glad we had the opportunity to share one another, that the feelings of affection between us all continue regardless of the absences. Sometimes, it seems that we speak to each other in the wind and the rain. But, it is damn nice to see you both in the flesh. Greg mentioned that it would be a gift to live under those cypress trees for three minutes and indeed it is a gift. They provided a luminous moment in time that will continue to live.

I must go for now.

Love,

Rob
Blasphemous pilgrim

It is not enough to know
that there are cypresses leaning
over the cliffs into their continual births.

Nor is it enough to know
how to build Neruda's boat
out of burning matches and newspaper

how to ply the silences with unanswered questions,
with color photos of emptinesses,
to a horizon of black and white

under an unabridged edition of sky

May the wind teach me how to write
the first word of your breath tonight,
shape of the sea and the river entering each other

accompanied by the cries of the terns
announcing the continual arrival of a pilgrim
clothed in scabs and dreams

in your cathedral of mist and smoke and stars,
the sound of your voice in the breaking waves
setting my idols ablaze.
Thirst

Mosquitoes, flies, bees
hover over the salty skin of our hips
as we embrace,
our singular shadow
edge of another
greater body
of water.
Breaking & Entering

Laughter in the back alley
behind Joy’s Beauty Box.

Archangel Michael rummaging in the dumpster
searching for the day’s cut hair and nails

after having broken into the salon
to inspect the checkerboard floor

and making certain he could see himself clearly
in the blades of all the razors and scissors.

A stray dog watches him pick black pubes from wax strips
new down for his wounded wing

while the four skinny kids robbing the grocery next door
load up their bike baskets with steaks, wine, skin and gun mags

and cigarettes which light instantly
when touched to the street.
Lost & Found

(setting: a field in the foothills of Silicon Valley)

Nail: What are you holding in your arms?

Oak: Earth and sky. Why?

Nail: I need help. I've been twisted
free and abandoned. Amnesia, now rust.

Oak: Is that why your shadow resembles a dagger?

Nail: No! I'm innocent!

Oak: Yes, I agree
but sometimes...

Nail: I do remember a hinge and a red door.

Oak: I too am a hinge. Step through my black door.

Nail: Did you just offer me a secret?

Oak: I have five blue secrets
resting in my trunk.

Nail: How will they help me to recover?

Oak: Listen. You are the sixth. Your shadow is a wing
when you dream.

(enter Wind, blowing kisses to everyone)

Wind: Shall we dance?
(cast, crew, and audience all join
to form a broken circle)

Nail: O! I remember this! Maestro, a kolo please!

(Flicker knocks in the arbor, offers Nail an old vocabulary)

Thunder clears her throat, opens her bandoneon...
Because the sun roosts in your hands

Because the sun roosts in your hands,
I turn my face to you when I dream.

Others on the street point and say,
“Look at that idiot dancing in circles!”
“Something is bound to hit him.”

Yes, I am circling
your moist nest tonight.

Even the trubaci band can’t keep up with this dancing.
The tambourine is a blur of coins and kisses,
the horns, wet and salty.

My white shirt is a falcon
flying from my fingertips to its master.

Struck by your radiance,
I gladly fall up into your embrace.
While Traveling

While traveling from one silence to another
may we continue to follow the hummingbird of flame
born of the stillness underneath our orphanage
and of the ash and tears in our hair
and the few words remaining today.

May its slender tongue pierce the black seam
behind our eyes, capsizing our little fishing boat
loaded with the rare and unnamed
we devour and without prayer.

May its brief song, cast from the end
of the branch along the El Camino Real,
cast from nowhere to no one in particular,
may these songs pierce our already forgotten moment,
gather us from one depth that we might begin
translating our selves into another depth
which begins when we begin to suture
the torn red seam bleeding underneath our voice
and intentional indifference.

And if we can touch, let us embrace
and thus articulate the invisible bones between us,
resurrect our own air
because the 10,000 skies depend upon this
and so too, the one blue sky.
Dear Liz,

Wait a moment...ok, a shadow passed over the landscape. I think it might have been you passing overhead as you made another orbit of our MOTHER before leaving to explore the eye of the Horse Nebula. All the birds started singing as they were caressed by your dark hands. And in your flight, you take the time to send me a communication! I appreciate it very much and find it educational and entertaining. I hope you continue to transmit as you plunge deeper into the cosmic cerebellum. And I hope that you find the appropriate receptor for your face that opens the membrane to the invisible ladder. Do tell me about your navigations in the mitochondrion and make sure not to carry too much asteroid dust on your wings.

***

More later,

Rob
Liz Henry

What happens when you kick ass

One of those muses was hanging around a little too much. I thought I'd kick her ass. She was jumping around with her robes on fire. What the fuck! Why'd you light my ass on fire?

Get up old muse! I'm freaking out; the quince trees are blossoming somewhere in the wet morning and I would like them for my newspaper instead of this newspaper full of obituaries. Get up! And mercilessly I flick the lighter in front of the can of aquanet and blowtorch her ass again. But I miss, because now she's jumping around like a squirrel with its tail in a mousetrap. I keep trying to light her robes on fire, whatever they are, some kind of chlamys or peplos or something or other.

She's swinging wild with both fists. Is she drunk or what? The fire goes out. "Quit writing in your lap while you're driving 70 miles an hour, you fool."

But I want to get to where there won't be any pigeons on your head. Don't just sit there in that fakey "The Thinker" pose. I'm in this room and all you can do is sit there. I would rather be a brain in a jar than be sitting here in this room with my knees aching and my stomach rumbling and my mouth wondering what a quince tastes like: pink? sour? bitter? grainy or crispy? Snakey cables would lead into the jar and bring me sensory input in a very high speed data feed. They'd be whipping around madly with sparks flying out. My captive brain would be flying, swimming through space. Words fly out.

"You call yourself feminist? You're attacking me! We're sisters, you fucked up bitch!" Exactly, that's why I keep trying to light your ass on fire. I don't even care which muse you are, I got Erato whipped long ago and you're next. I mean, why do I keep waking up covered with bruises?
A Study in Breaking and Entering  
(for Morgan Lynn, Nora Wilkins, and Amber Hatfield)

“Yo queria entrar en el teclado para entrar adentro de la música para tener una patria.”
— Alejandra Pizarnik

I wanted to enter the typewriter to get inside music so I would have a country.
I set out to enter the typewriter so I'd become its music so I'd have a country.
I desired to penetrate the typewriter so I could get under the skin of music in order to have a country.
I crawled up inside the typewriter to live inside music to found a country of my own.
I fucked my typewriter to curl up in its music to give birth to a country.
I longed to get inside typewriters, to be the avatar of their music, in order to create a motherland.
I yearned to become the typewriter's body to become music because I wanted a homeland.
I'd be in the typewriter for/getting in music for be/longing.
I'd go into my typewriter to dwell in music and make it my home.
Fallen camellias

"Scattered handful of red grenades,
unnatural cabbages,
sowing of alchemical rust & hot pink lipstick,
your individual ruffled wingbeats
shudder hot
round the gold stamen wheat clusters.
Oh sprawled constellation of Mars & prostitutes,
you abandoned yourselves to a star couch new fallen with
philosophical grace flaming through the atmosphere,
in the dappled shade of moss and dead oak you kiss earth
proud,
pink shock of glory, red harvest of matches all lit at once,
unrepentant revolutionaries shot without blindfolds by an invisible
firing squad,
your carnelian lips scorn all secrets but your own
multifacet knives prism-dripping with artificial blood.
Your burn almost shames me - "

"No! We won't decay alone - our pact,
our Sacred Band of brothers taunting death,
our tenderness demands it.
We hurried to put on crimson robes.
No pity was in us.
No particular wind did it.
We leapt so you could see us without lifting your heads,
without looking up to the treestar canopy.
Look at us - how we trembled on the branch
and all leapt together into the tumbling sky
with no parachutes & yet came down
gentle to this bold repose."

And one blossom heard these words,
fell kamikaze to my crown
& broke open like a blessing and explosion.
moon veil your mirror
March 19, 2003

Moon, sky-hook, when I turn to you
my face is turned away from my mother.
My face is turned away from my mother.

I want to forget I am part of this world.
I want to forget I am part of this world,
so I can become round enough to pity the dust.

Future light won't shine here.
Future light won't shine here,
because the wheel of stars will dip below
a housing development conveniently named 'Purgatory',
built where teenage boys wake up
handcuffed with their black bandanas.

Moon, breathe the atmosphere of sorrow,
suck it from my dying mouth
as I prepare to put out the light,
because what you are about to see is blood.

What you are about to see is blood.
Turn your face away
if you aren't strong enough
and for a moment I'll look for you
long enough to put out the light,

because teenage boys like thin colts
veiled in ash & black bandanas
nerve their legs and put out the stars in their eyes,
preparing for that day when no light will shine.
That's why they can stare at the sun
while I can only look at you, moon.
Because I don't have any blood to give.  
I've bought too many telescopes  
in my housing development coincidentally named "The Shadows".  
I don't have any blood to give.  
I've bought too many telescopes that fold up like ice  
and they'll endure until licked away by a cow's warm tongue.

Moon  
shutter your face  
to cut out the harsh light, the violent light.  
Wear a black bandana  
because a silver lamb unfolds from your pocket like a sailing ship.  
Because you can't close your eyes,  
I'll give you my black veil.

Moon  
veil your mirror,  
because my eyes have been defiled.

Because my eyes have been defiled  
by the future of my country,  
because the light gathered by you and thrown back in our faces  
has seen the blood that I can't bleed or see,  
because of that, I'll look, though I have no tears to give,  
because my tears are gathering dust in a gallon jug  
under the sink, where I keep my lambs and my telescopes,  
where I keep my mirror, and the ruins of the Golden Gate Bridge,  
and a cow's hoof, and a ship in a bottle.
Kissing Nadine in the rain

The holy moment of transfiguration wetleaf thunder
Me swinging competent off my bike
completely soaked
& knowing the moment full is or will be lost
in time but by its holiness
will merge with all others

Her warm at the sliding glass door
under the wooden walkway
under the labyrinth steps and blue rails of the 21st Street Co-op
warm & dry leaning up to the wet wood with a knowing look
kissing me as if I were about to leave for war
when in fact I was just coming home from work
to her thin arms & spider arms
thin from some past abortion & three months
of some kind of egyptian dysentery

Once I heard that she described me:
"Kissing her is like falling into a sea of pillows"
and on hearing this my lower lip felt cautiously for the top one
looking for that mythical sea
and in the deep green thunderflash
could that be me, my bike spokes clicking
and pecan trees dropping
their fern fronds, their arm branches
at the arrival of noon's nightfall
green twilight of thunder it was the carnival moment
just before the kiss when her coarse black
waving hair and extreme pallor
lit up in the rain's warm dim light
leaning against the doorframe legs crossed casual and body bow-bent slim
not speaking though I can still hear her hoarse crow voice possibly sultry with Africa –
I am home from the wars, mother,  
and take you in my arms knowing  
you won't mind my clothes are wet  
and everything broken can be fixed and all hunger fed,

Nadine standing tall as Grahn's Woman Talking to Death  
standing strong and fragile on the bridge holding up her hand "Stop!"  
aware of Israel and white south africa and Birmingham Alabama and all injustice  
and the divided city of austin with highway 35 splitting the university from the east side  
Standing on the bridge at the edge of life  
making the bridge her back like a diplomat to the unjust judge  
as if in her knowledge of the world's imperfect love  
she would protect and gently forgive my relative innocence  
her strong and resistant life an elegy and apologia for all betrayals  
since her own death like any of us could come at any time  
and since we contained death embarrassed and naked between our lips meeting searching  
for the mythical ocean and the thunderhead  
of our important kiss a moment found in the vast lost unjust world,

O my child-wife with starved arms outstretched I would protect you,  
thinking of how I thought you my first friend  
untouched by love but then whiskey brought your lips to me  
and because of the husky sincerity of your voice  
I didn't look back,  
At that point wiser than I am now I'd seize any day's offering  
though I can throw myself back in time because of that moment  
before kissing you in the rain and coming home to you,  
it is unfair to make you the subject of my informed scrutiny,  
since only today I bothered to think about what I didn't ask  
but was content to assume or never know if you're a woman living your life  
though you are nearly forgotten in my stories  
because at the time I was nearly insane with the intensity of memory  
so that none of my loved ones now knows your name,
though I did run into you years later with your hair cut dyke short
screaming hoarse and deep "Liz Hen-e-ry!" from the parade's crowd
as I rollerskated naked down Market Street
overcome suddenly with love again for you and our past
and everything golden in the San Francisco sun and me overcome
by the guilt of having left you I don’t remember how but I’m sure badly,

she also a turncoat with her voice an informer on the run
having cooperated with the law to get out of jail by turning in her source
her voice still leading her to follow the Dead though no longer dealing
(It's clear that because you knew you weren’t in jail
you were free on a vast great plain of freedom and should still be so free)
The knowledge of guilt infused through her thin bones
Possibly the responsibility of being born
who she was there in South Africa but also with so many dead before her
that not only having been born
but bearing the seed of survival in a big family nearly destroyed
all grandparents most certainly long ago starved ash in maybe Hungary
compromising her voice and her continued living
And me loving just the way she said "Birmingham Alabama"
darkly holding the city's whole history with love
as if having lived there entailed a certain civic duty to enjoy life's dark history,

As if she were always inventing new ways to stay alive,
always ready to learn a new trade, handy with her hands and working hard
so that it seemed no Depression could ever overcome her handiness
Anything - anything was possible,
such as, Here I am, I'll make the most of it,
as if her whole life and all our lives were a desert island where she was
inventing and creating everything necessary for the continuation of life
And coming up to her walking my sturdy bike having worked all day
and then ridden healthy home under my own steam
I felt my own self sufficiency and hers
would find all corners of use and beauty & use them and see them
and so I seized the temptation to stay with you, impossible apocalypso,
though I know I'm destined to be the only survivor,
Village girl long limbed and clean against the wet wood panels waiting,

Camp whore lounging in the doorway
with an eye out for the return of Odysseus
and the offer of a golden lotus,

Pale stick-girl in dull green straddling
the gun's huge cannon of some Israeli tank as if to say ride em cowgirl
a mysterious photograph unexplained of maybe being in the army
that you knew I thought of as a dirty army with full sympathy
for my fellow students and protesters in Palestinian checkered scarves
and other dirty wars and people who have been disappeared
but – riding that tank squinting thin into the sun with joy –
and now into the texas thunderlight under the massy anvil, the cloud-wind

anvil
casting its mossy penumbra over the Austin hills, my kibbutzni, my beloved
and me
filled up with light incredible happiness from the rain-ocean;
I sent up a buoy to mark the spot for my own future grief already contained in
my happiness
the way girls are born already containing all their ovaries' eggs fully developed
and the light blessing us until I saw every molecule
of our love in the moment
that was temporary beyond the nature of time
because you loved me forever
but as a wanderer alone
I could only look forward
to the moment of coming home
so I loved only forever
because I had to leave my country

i had to leave my country
to find the other countries in my country

if you would like to speak to a customer service representative
dig here
between my legs

for a good time call
GOD
and listen to fire engines answer someone else’s emergency
because here
it is predicted to be sunny and clear

I had to check to make sure it was still thursday
and what time was low tide
so that i could hop into my individual rocket powered jet pack helicopter
unimpeded by garbage picking seagulls and teenagers in bondage pants
and fly to work
where all day I feed red legged newts out of eyedroppers and wash oil slicked otters
and practice spanish on winged serpents

those guys, they've got scales under their eyes
nictating membranes
that flick down to keep out racism
I heard on the radio they can even sleep that way
just like I'm asleep right now

so when I tried to TUNE IN
the radio kept flicking around on perpetual "seek" mode
since I was driving with one hand while with the other hand I sucked down a quadruple blood 70/30 latte made with motor oil and decaffeinated union grapes
I couldn't fix the radio because with my other, I mean my third, hand, I was adjusting the mirror
to see that my nose had developed a bloom of carbuncles like angry flowers
or like the la brea tarpits full of bones bubbling in slow motion
and I kept hearing the individual bubbles of radio sound staticking past,
whop, whop, zzzt, beep, then seeking again past voices and howly guitars
announcing things importantly,

and when I tried to TURN ON
the rearview mirror just laughed and shot me the finger and said that yeah, I
was the fairest, blanca, whitey, the queen, the princess of all the realms, and
the fucking red legged newts and otters and oily ducks wanted to suck me
off, blanca nieva, wishing and wishing in the streetlight forest with my
princess dress, sucking my latte and singing I'm wishing with my 2 hands
classed and the third hand on the wheel,

and when I tried to DROP OUT
i kept remembering that the ERA amendment had never passed
and that because of my questionable sexual history
it's easy to get a chokehold on the moon,
throw that loony chick on the ground and stick a dirty finger in there
she's famous
flaunting her ass in that shiny miniskirt up there where everyone can see
and then she wants us all to use the same bathrooms in airports and join the
draft doing one armed pushups and cleaning out her fucking rifle with
tampax
so that as i drove down el camino and the moon kept following me in the
rearview mirror no matter how far I kept driving because I was looking for
the good target, not the ghetto-ass Target where they never have anything, I
kept driving but the moon kept looking at me through her piratical eyepatch
and because of this I could NOT become an astronaut, not the first
astronaut, not the first girl astronaut, not the first visibly menstruating
astronaut smearing blood all over red mars to get revenge for the moon’s
existence,

and then I remembered it was 1984 and I wasn't in hippielandia
but in somekinda reaganomic planet of the apes AND IT WAS REALLY EARTH ALL ALONG
that's why I was not in my personal jetback rocketboot spacesuit tootling through the air waving at reconstituted archeopteryxes but just in a beatup pickup truck sporting some faded bumper stickers blasting my air conditioning that smells like mold I was just doing some errands and going to work like always and wondering if the bridges would blow up today driving down El CarMeano on an important mission to save the world with my high caliber revolutionary credit card at the Safe Way

I took a swig of my double triple blood latte, at a light I stopped and the guy next to me had a thumping thumpa bass thing going on and he revved and I revved

I didn't look at him but i knew it was a guy and what he would look like from the music he was pumping but I was just going to TARget and then to WASH some fucking diSEASED tranked up ANimals i didn't want to look at the dude who was making fun of my crap ass rusty old pickup truck so I ran the light, and a van, the ghost of a WebVan delivery van, plowed into this guy.

I could not believe it! because of the real estate boom and dot com crash that guy was running a whole server farm out of that car and the computer guts spilled out in the road and stock options laser printed on fancy letterhead flew up like doves, like shards of candy plate glass, and the IRS sent an emergency jetpack helicopter to clean up the mess meanwhile the guy laying there in the street while the IRS leafblowers got busy with the confederate money blowing around and obscuring the intersection like thick fog that guy had his whole family in there too I heard them screaming zhou-laaaaaaaaaa!
and it was terrible because his HB-1 Visa was smeared all over the road with blood and its feathers
I could see it all in my rearview mirror
so I got off El Camino and tried to circle around to help him out
I never should have run that red light to win the race with him
but i got lost
I think my mapquest was running off the server farm in his car because it went down and I somehow took that left turn and ended up in albuquerque in the middle of a bullfighting ring with bugs bunny
I didn't have on the right kind of pants
I didn't want to disappoint anyone
So I went home

As I left the arena
the crowd pelted me with roses and diamond necklaces to give to the guy in the street if I ever found him again
some other guy played me seis por derecho
he played the cuatro so good I cried with joy at that golden moment and wished I could always be leaving places regretfully

But I couldn't find that guy
the radio kept seeking
my mom was worried about me getting drafted into the Maoist army and missing dinner
so I figured it was about time to blast off into inner space
I got out of my car and opened up a Manhole
and went down there into the steaming rectum of El CaMano (figuring that anal health was at least as important as washing ducks for money)
I got my rotorooter out
and made my hand look like a duck and stuck it in there ready to fist the whole fucking world

because I wasn't sure what was going to happen, whether the sewers and steam tunnels and imaginary railroads and pneumatic tube systems under my everyday life
would suck in my fist, my arm, my whole body, and the rest of me right up to my zillionth kundalini chakra with all those roses and diamonds I got at the bullfight getting covered in shit,

I was scared that my head might fall off my body as it rolled away I'd still be talking with the head part, blah blah blah, bababa, looking, looking, looking, and writing with the hand part, down below but the head would have nothing to do with the hand anymore the hand that wasn't scribbling would be waving "hey!" and "help!" to the head and the other hand, like a witch tit, would be saying in sign language,

"I had to leave my country so that I could see that my country was invisible"
Sentences

Let's not fool ourselves
The car is a wheelchair
The lion is made out of lambs
Poets don't have life stories
Death is a collective habit
Kids are born to be happy
Reality tends to disappear
Fucking is a diabolical act
God is a good friend to the poor.

Frases

No nos echemos tierra a los ojos
El automóvil es una silla de ruedas
El león está hecho de corderos
Los poetas no tienen biografía
La muerte es un hábito colectivo
Los niños nacen para ser felices
La realidad tiende a desaparecer
Fornicar es un acto diabólico
Dios es un buen amigo de los pobres.

Nicanor Parra, 1972 (from Emergency Poems)
translated by Liz Henry
Roller Coaster

For half a century
Poetry was a paradise
For solemn fools.
Then I came along
and set up my roller coaster.

Take a ride if you want,
Just don’t blame me if you get off
bleeding from your mouth and nostrils.

La montaña rusa

Durante medio siglo
La poesía fue
El paraíso del tonto solemne.
Hasta que vine yo
Y me instalé con mi montaña rusa.

Suban, si les parece.
Claro que yo no respondo si bajan
Echando sangre por boca y narices.

by Nicanor Parra
translated by Liz Henry
These idyllic lovers

they're like two ants
like two eyes in the same face
like two holes in the same nose

despite motherfucking lovers
with their swaying like the sea
their mottled faces like the sun

Estos enamorados idílicos

se parecen como dos hormigas
como dos ojos de la misma cara
como dos hoyos de la misma nariz

estos enamorados puta madre
se parecen al mar en sus vaivenes
y se parecen al sol en sus manchas.

by Nicanor Parra
translated by Liz Henry
What do I look for in poetry (and therefore seek to discover in my own poems as they are written and revised)? My answer would pose another question: what do I see in life? Obviously, a great many things. A blasted human landscape (war, terrorism, genocide, poverty, environmental exploitation, greed, willful ignorance, empire, and other obscenities) across which pass the hard-luck ciphers, the lovers with their marvelous blarney and beatific truths, the whirlwind hoarders and wasters—addicted to distraction—and daredevil saints. (Ah, who hasn’t had— at one time or another and to varying degrees—most of, if not all, these roles?) Yet an even greater landscape forms a ground for our human one: unifying cycles of seasons, noons and midnights, weather, heartbeats and breath, sweet and sour hormones, sleep cycles, phases of the moon, orbiting planets and electrons. Rhythm and variation. Tension and release. Chaos and synchronicity. If I’ve learned anything in my fifty-plus years it’s that life—even when apparently routine— at best can be predicted only in part. I look for similar contraries in poetry. Pattern and improvisation. Repetition and surprise (or at least unpredictability). Structure underlying both dissonance and harmony. And this happens concurrently everywhere and at all times: life is complex and intense.

Pound once rightly said “Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree” and went on to name poetry as “the most concentrated form of verbal expression.” How is this accomplished? Through imagery, diction, voice, sound, context (groups of words forming a network of connotation), and by what I would call velocity (i.e. the amount of information conveyed per the number of words) all creating meaning at the same time and in conjunction with each other so that the total effect of those words is greater than the sum of their number.
Imagery

While even Williams used additonal poetic devices, I believe his well-known dictum “no ideas but in things” was essentially correct, though I would add active verbs and vivid adjectives and adverbs to his nouns (“things”). Abstraction takes the reader outside the world of the poem into a generalized realm whose meaning is usually hazy to begin with and tends to dissipate over time. All too often it lacks interest as language and thus neither holds our attention nor convinces us of its truth. The lack of abstraction in a poem, however, should not be seen as a lack of argument. The connotations of simple, concrete words and colloquial phrases can be arranged to play off each other to create a network of secondary meanings in an associative and metaphoric argument.

Sound

Underlying the imagery and argument of a poem is its structure or pattern, whether employing non-recurring rhythm, parallel sentence structure, and/or repeated phrases with variations in the “open,” “free,” or chant-based verse of Ginsburg, Whitman, Smart, the Psalms or Blake’s prophetic poems, or offering recurrent rhythms and rhyme in what has been called “traditional,” “closed,” or song-based verse of— to name but a few— Bishop, Justice, blues singers, Dickinson, Blake’s Songs of Innocence and Experience, Shakespeare’s sonnets and songs, Dante, and folk ballads. It is this structure which unifies the poem, creating a springboard which contrasts with variations in sound and rhythm much as a recurring riff is used in jazz as musical scaffolding for improvisation in sound and idea.

I am well aware that many today object to regular rhythm and rhyme in poetry, calling their use too rational and regimented, even fascistic. One need only consider the songs of William Blake, Bob Dylan, or Bertolt Brecht and the lyric poems of Trakl and Garcia Lorca to see the over-generalization of this assertion. I will say, however, that I prefer in my own
poems to increase the substitution of variant metrical feet, thereby lessening the meter’s regularity and creating, I hope, a looser, more synopated rhythm. I also prefer to enlarge the possibilities for surprise, by using slant or half rhymes, split rhymes (where the sounds of two proximate words at the end of one line are resolved into a single, concluding rhyme in a following line), displaced rhymes (where the first word to be rhymed more fully rhymes with another word in the same line as the concluding rhyme) and slipped rhymes (where a stressed syllable at the end of the first line is rhymed with an unstressed syllable at the end of the concluding). A few times I’ve heard the more hardline traditionalists refer to such rhymes as “inferior,” even “degenerate” or “impure.” Well, I’ve never considered purity a virtue either in poetry or life, though it’s not a vice to me either. (Western culture’s obsession with purity probably dates back at least as far as St. Augustine and peaked in influence with the Third Reich, but I digress...). It seems to me that it just as well could be argued, if one had to choose sides (and I emphatically do not wish to), that full rhymes chime too sweetly for the contemporary ear, calling too much attention to themselves and to the overall metrical design (thereby offending the ancient Latin principle that the best art conceals itself the most). To my mind, however, neither the exclusive use of full nor a more broadly defined use of rhymes (half/split/displaced/slipped) is superior nor inferior to the other. Merely different. My guess is that poems using only full rhymes and more-regular rhythm are based on a conception of lyric poetry rising out of the classical period of European “art” music with its emphasis on emotional restraint and exquisite symmetry while the kind of lyric poetry I would also welcome takes its inspiration from the more spontaneous (even seemingly off-hand) and exuberant folk and jazz traditions. This “bebop prosody” includes, then, many of the same forms as more traditional song-based verse but with a looser syllable count, more syncopated lines, and unconventionally “harmonized” rhymes (a la Dizzy Gillespie and Thelonious Monk).
Other Contraries in Poetry

What world do you live in? The sharply defined and settled one of comfort, consumerism, and officialdom or a more personal one shadowed with suggestiveness and shifting meaning? I dwell in both but trust more to the latter, though it sometimes evokes fear and discomfort in me, challenging me to think and rethink, balancing conflicting points of view in my brain till something like a personal truth comes into focus over time. I look for qualities similar to these in poetry. As Rilke wrote: “...Things are not all so comprehensible and expressible as one would mostly have us believe, most events are inexpressible, taking place in a realm which no word has ever entered, and more inexpressible than all else are works of art, mysterious existences, the life of which, while ours passes away, endures.” It is a poetry which most likely will not yield all its meaning on the first, second, or even tenth reading. Here I am reminded of Thoreau’s suggestion to write: “sentences which suggest far more than they say, which have an atmosphere about them, which do not merely report an old but make a new, impression.” Such sentences are found, I believe, in a poetry which speaks from the deepest parts of being even though it may seem to careen beyond the bounds of custom and common sense. I think of Blake, Trakl, the darker poems of Dickinson and Roethke, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, and Shakespeare’s tragic plays. Language charged with suggestiveness which forms a coherent whole but does not try to define once and for all—and consequently fix—reality. Poems which use precise language and controlled ambiguity as well as dramatic monologue, dream and myth to create a more three-dimensional reality where point of view and significance shift as in life.
NEWS FROM THE MOON

From our talk I could tell you’re still one of those myopic
middle-class whites who think they can be everybody’s friend
merely by conferring a few supportive words that wouldn’t
disturb a house of cards . . . --Letter from Tariq, 1981

When Everybody's Friend got the message
he pushed it back from his plate.
Hate mail--and a deadline almost here!
Gulping down bacon, he gaped.

Everybody's Friend had a meeting
at nine with a vested few
fired-up dynamos dressed as men.
But now this news from the moon--

and the dark side at that, the damnedest--
what could those devils be dreaming?--
what nightmare did they want to share?
Gulping coffee, he sneered.

Everybody's Friend was trembling
just as the floor fell through.
Head over heels to China he spun,
from Harlem to Beirut.

He saw faces that threw him wild--
the gaunt, the caught and fierce--
and found a tangle tying them
to frayed-out threads in his sleeve!----

he gulped. And his chair wound down to earth . . .
Then waking before The Post,
he read between far battle lines
(each number shone like a soul).
Now Everybody's Friend had questions
at the meeting of like minds
who'd considered themselves beyond compare
with the least at the line's end.

Gulping coffee down like sobs,
they shook at the sudden chill
and suggested he close the door while going—
since he wasn't feeling well.

Everybody's Friend resigned
from the Club of Unending Banquets
when at last he heard a child's
cry from a rack of lamb.

Gulping fresh air he wandered miles
through dark, dark streets like a moon
and read their news with every nerve—
hate mail cut deep and true.
ARTHUR

“The men of my islands are all a bit mad,” William said proudly.

— Umberto Ecco, The Name of the Rose

“My whole life I been kinda shaky-like most warm nights
but mean as a freezin soul can be, unnerstand—deep down—
nobody your crowd would care to surround with its wineglass chitchat,
Little Miss Fancy White Strapless, Miss Blonde in a Blue Moon, Miss
Etiquette and Honey Cunt
us wage slaves would kill to plunge into and squirm
slap-happily ever after
as a rat in a bathtub of powerhouse hooch.

“My whole life I been waitin to take you to my sacred, my barbwire heart.
So many times I been nailed to a wall of ice, starving in that darkness
like a blindfold
with a mangy cigarette for my last supper and wonderin
where on earth you hid your smile to drive the sun up like a shot.

“I been death to my Mama who always had her sparkly, fine claws on my skull
till one night in the buggy heat how could I see
which fist whipped out the blade
that shredded her wings forever?!
Whichever it was just couldn't hardly stop till I's damned-near swamped
in a rush of sweat and molten tears.

“Seems like I cried myself back through all them stabbin years
till I wasn't nothin but a child outside with the streetlights and piled-up tires,
peekin through them screens at Mama hollerin like a high wind
about to flip the roof off
cause some drunk I'd seen once or twice put his pistol to her head and said
'Give it all to me, BITCH!'
with a grin that sent whirligig skyrockets right up my spine!
“Seems like however them faces changed it was still the same quaint scene--
stick figures on fire right to their charcoal bones--
hell, that's life, I always say. And roll em down the ditch, yeah,
every last faggot and sugar bowl with tits that come my way.

“Life on a grimy side-street next to Cole's warehouse where
trucks dropped them big boxes in a steady bombardment
even on Sunday mornin. ‘Lord,
oh Lord!,' I said like the shithead I was, Arthur A. Steadman, Jr.,
ex-cub scout and fire bug king--one lens always
smacked out of my glasses--

“with a speck of luck I'da been flushed from this world before my doc
first jerked on the lights bright and early when his swat
met my impressionable ass.
He gimme life, that Judge in tawny hospital scrubs, for a crime
my mama-n-daddy done just for the damn FUN of it!

“Life with the high-voltage lines and midnight freights and the freeway
grumblin like a thunderhead above our flimsy chateau
shingled once a million years before
with make-believe brick, though the newsprint in its windows
fed us the same story each fruitless day.

“Life amongst the bright-eyed jackals, lizards, bitches, and peacock wheels
most nights at my throat with a golden opportunity
to git cleaned of every cent I'd bent over backwards to grab
tight as a life raft
on a sea of devils and deep, dark blues.
Life with the scum on my steps, the blood on my lips.

“And every rat a king in his own right mind,
ridin high on any horse's ass, or whatever, of a different collar--
pink or not-so-bright blue--
damn near most nights somebody sprawled on the corner like a snake
for a free lunch under the tread of some heel
too big to see the top of.
“Guess what? I cried myself sicker’n a dog and grew fangs--then skin thick as an armadillo’s that suits me fine.
So I blowed from town to overgrown town all the way from Brownsville to East L.A., hitchin, rippin, drivin, and hidin like the blight I’s born to be--
 nobody brushes me and lives to gasp at the fireweed dawn!

“My whole life I ain't prayed NO WAY to our mother-fuckin God--
our Daddy who had her awhile and once-and-for-all-time left
the world a black sky I cruise in like some moon of snow and ice,
that couldn’t cry out if it tried to--
who wrapped me in his robe when I was goosebumps all over, soaked, and shakin?
who brought hot dogs for my birthday and his shoulders for my throne
and wrestled and blessed me with a fist of wintergreen gum?
Only a fly-by-night smile, only some ghost of a chance in a land
of fast-talkin shades--

“yeah, he's gone like a charm to hold off demon bill collectors
so she takes in payin guests, see? But what she takes in most
is cocks so crazy they’s jackhammers up her ass,
and grunts and sucks in air, jigglin jalopy-like,
bitin her bloody lip,
all the time lost in my eyes (hid under a chair) as if they was dress-shop mirrors,

“honey, just how you did tonight in aisle three by the bread and umpteen
kinds of jelly rolls
half a tick before turning to them cakes like a bride made of icing--
oh, you was God's fond treasure doll in linen so white it drove me
close to spillin serious teardrops--
if anything ever could agin in this down-and-ripped-inside-out,
howlin world.

“Right then I seen your hairdo was let down from heaven
as a rope to haul my ass out of the sinkhole I been in since I first
opened these eyes and cried ’Mama.’
She beat my peach-fuzz balls
blue as your eyes, Delilah Dear.
EVERY DAMN TIME she’d make me take it all in,
the huffin and puffin one-hunderd-per-cent right to the house-come-tumblin-down,
wild-eyed finish line!

“Tongue, butthole, and titties drippin cum, she moaned low, eyes shut,
while our room swung round with a whiff like skunk!
Then the devil’s sly smile and parade of favorite names--
‘Little Mr. Hard-on Gropin his Own Happiness, Dog-Suckin Wonder, Redhot
Cock of the Walkin, Talkin Easy Street Queens,
Goddammed Wigglin Sonofabitch Kingsnake!’--
and her overcast laughin, the whirlwind of kicks and fists,
the belt with twelve copper studs flung out
like lightning right and left.
I seen then that first night I’d died a thousand times and would agin
each freezin time I watched her face go haywire to hell.

“And right now I know my whole life I been dyin, tryin to swim to you,
the woman of my upstream wet dreams, my all-time prize and final glory, you--
you just screamed like a sweetheart when I carved you up
with my prick of steel
in this here grassy ravine under some backroad oaks.
And said ‘Oh God, OH GOD!’ like you loved it so much you was just gonna die
right in my almighty arms--

“oh, you shone beautiful as the haloed moon till you got real ugly,
what with spittin blood up your nose and brayin
straight-out lies about us, about me
with them china-blue eyes still bright as Christmas windows at Sears--

“like it weren’t this airy August night under the sweet-talkin leaves--
and kneelin deep in the mint and lightnin bugs,
well, I had to cut you loose,
you was just too good to ever be true to me."
Yehudit Oriah

“Poetry is its own thing. It writes me.
I have nothing to say about it really.”
A Chaccone For A Gazelle

Aleph’s sun sent its lightning,
The doe returned to its source and poured forth.

Its eye – its spring -- was music embracing the engraver in the engraved, the drowning in the drowned,
The color of a melting wave, a sown emerald.

“A closed gate, rise up and open it,
A run-away deer, send it towards me!”

1.

A Lightning Which Gleams Like Emerald

I’ve drowned in your work as if in the whirlpool of the spheres
A melting wave and I’m gone

And you wanted to draw me out of the water and you came into the powerless eye, and I
In my coming
I will come, I will come, a reflection
This bubbling
Poured forth and expressed
Prophesied prophesied
You opened
Pierced me terribly
And a string was torn, you split me in a birth and the ear was opened with
birth, and ear-swans
were singing
Strange terrible songs
Don't go sang the awful muse, leading the
Voice from kingdom to kingdom. The burst ear-bulbs are going, and the
eyes are closing and the lips
Trembling because the string incandesces the body, the lips. Go, sings the
loving muse who expels softly, carving different kinds of silence,
wherefrom, in white softness, a swan song spreads its wings and ascends.
The swans of whiteness are raised by the high tide with the majesty of
rulers of song, reflected through Degrees of the abyss, through the
whiteness of the deep cry of darkness becoming light
You are the swan connected to everything, you sing, a poet of passages,
you have touched the one, the white
And I have died and eddied and vanished and was born. I danced with
you the dance of death, God's joy
From the center, the spherical departure, I am dancing and singing, not
corresponding nor writing,
mute, there are no phones in the desert circle, the phosphoric island
parallel to the voice. In the dance your heart is close to mine, so close,
walking and weeping, and I weep
and sow a phosphorous seed of a fertile white goddess, who is your sign,
the sign of dawns, the golden feather, a winged ripple, Light's plume,
The cry-coin on our eyes, you look at me from all directions, surrounding.
From centers, from within a nucleus, a presence standing and awakening
It is impossible to reach you except through the awakening of the
presence, and I'll come and lose
my tongue in the purple waters of revival because I chose only the dawn,
the mute dove of distances
I'll go and go, I'll find the white death, my light, the fingerprints of light in
the voice, I'll walk in my providence. The northern point causes us to kneel, we are praying. We will permit the does
To drink from the fountain
Let him be at night alone
Give him all the new moons

See if you can endure
Solitude, the conception
Of the non-sacrificial identity.

On wells of complete light, there we roared, and laughed
There we hung our violins.

The poem is not accidental and
Time is not accidental,
I remember the day.
I am the last.
And I read,
by the grace of god,
the coffee cup and the hand, and I touch and cry by grace
and I am taking the grace, the hand offered to me, the key given
to me with joy, and opens me with joy and releases the doe to him.
and where shall I go -- alone -- to you with love
and the music is so beautiful and possessed -- I am possessed --
and a sweet first rain is falling -- and medicine -- and a long game
of flowers -- and gaiety -- and my heart is awake because the dew
is swinging and silence laughs and weeps and we are born and I
am seeing you now always

I never pick you -- awesome lily-wreathes, bonds
of grace

I close all the cafes in Tel-Aviv
in summer in winter in autumn in spring

And now I can leave,
because I drank my fill
4.

What's the matter with you, my beloved,
The shepherd of roses

I saw your music walking
On the water
walking and singing

I saw you -- thrilled, pulsating so, to open

I saw the fire of the rain
And the voice of the fire becoming flesh

5.

You waken me, fine metal of awakening
You look at me and then I can say say say
I'll wake you and I'll talk

The utterance of your silence
conceives doves
makes the rain fall

You reach with your hand and create because you cannot help
yourself, and I
Gaze, astonished, how the rain breathes like my child, like yours,
how everything is created from your heart
like a planet of awakening, maleness, beauty
I couldn't endure the night without you
Therefore, I put on tangible flowers -
I wore the covenant of the birds - and came -
With the blaze of color of all your ascending birds,
And this is my everlasting ascending love,
And I will show you birds’ desire

I hear the outcry of dismemberment -
The liberty to create -

I hear
the birds

I want to whisper in the ear's spiral*
That I love and I am lost

But they'll never take away from me the words
You have given me, this liberty to be created
In the tempestuous freedoms/liberties that are born in the everlasting
The ringing of the phone empties the sunset
from the sky a full light

When I'm not talking
Your lotus-spirit opens

When I'm not writing,
Forgetting your now-being-born-soul-of-mists

Then we are written in the stars
As a burning well

Because we chose to be a stranger muse,
Solitary in a desert of mirrors,
The distant, pregnant Arche –
We wanted to know the taste of water

I am holding the harness
And speed up the horse of the clouds,

My forehead, pregnant with rain,
Kisses and takes leave from your forehead –

But I see
The red sun-cubs

That you breed from the sun
And the edge of your moon

From my earth –

Fire’s edge --
The dark and awake two-edged sword
The heart-point
Go

I emit you like an arrow

I'll go, because I want to hear
A symphony for Human
voices, the great love of God
A beautiful love for choirs and human voices
Sighs for tenors
choirs that realize God's kingdom.
I want you to wake the Tephilin of my heart.
To cause the doves in the sky of my ark's curtain to ascend.
How is it/can it be that one star alone
Dares

You opened the vulva of the sun
And the vulva of the moon

I am Inana
Yes, you opened

And counted my wild almonds

There is a knife awakening in the nights
Because of my heart’s power

A knife of Dream piercing the secrets
Into the fruit

My life surrendered to you
to the hidden virtue

The words are too big

When I’m hearing
The night causing the day to conceive,

And you know,
In the name of my life (soul)

In the interval-distance which moves—
Genesis’ interval

Between your cry and mine—
My beloved, the shepherd of almost deadly roses.
Leaning on the desk,
My purple shirt
exposes my breast,
How beautiful I am for you,
Naked you'll take me

Between us is the lock-hole –
The darkness –

Will I write the sun, my rib
Tomorrow?

But today I still want to know you
Like the hues of water, of miracles
Of “may-be”, and the dark birds, throbbing
Pulse by pulse only this once

I am afraid
To be the shepherdess of the birds –
Maybe they are ugly -
I put on my panties
among words,
On and off among
my pulses, like the dream of running
along the river, running and taking off my clothes - because
Signs are branding me, seals

I prepared provisions - for the desert -
A new era started –
In Transition –You blow toward
Me, to be born.
The lute loved to swallow lovers
Even the lyre taught its hands, covered
With the blood of the covenant

And the violin is burning with fire
And god answered me from his full wide space, from within my burning Body

And you and I walked in the center of the moon
And drank from a green basin (trough)

Like two lunatic musicians
Drunk from pain and song of joy

God responded to me, responded
And my love is the wild pause (fermata)

Who moves the spirits’ caroselle
And I travel in the trains/chariot of dew to the bathhouses/to be baptized.

In your dream and in mine
The juice of the pomegranates is as sober as death,
And you appoint me to be the spokesman in the nights from your sleep.

I have to be a sleepwalker to overcome our enemies
And all the fine flour sacred to me in your temple
Can breath with no fear

How did I weep because I had found you in my writings,
And while I’d copied I had grown another organ and bone.
And I had restrained myself and longed,
How did I cry because you were crying
In my writings, as a source
How is a source to be loved?
How is a source to be fucked?
You say “source source”
You hush “source source”

And the drowned moon’s eye is opened
And the source opens its rib
Hears its name
Knows its knower

And the name of this source is “It’s Good”
And this source is good
And this source is a source.

And Carob trees grow upon it
And Carob trees kiss it

And only the carobs know, from a distance of thousand years
Its taste

The one thousand years old kiss of the carobs
Will kiss you, the lips of the source, my love
And I in your shadow will walk and awaken

And my mouth, a tanned key.
A locked garden.
A sealed source.

The tanned, the brother of the awakened
Sings us.
We shall live in one kernel
In the skin of the dew
You are so handsome, always pregnant
Like a tree trunk made to sing
Like a green Mersyas the sun could never kill

I cannot sleep
The yin-yang serpent sings me
With a movement more wonderful than me

You are telling me my Orchid-lips,
Open and wet

The manna of your enchanted soul
I flow out of absence

With the long breath of the distances
Of the great song of Haazinu.

Like the wind wakening the sea – you don’t leave me in peace.
Tomorrow I'll sit and write
I've never wept so much
And all the forms of the spirit are in my flesh:
The pulse with a face
The note signed in the language, piercing the tongue
The opened face
The almond face of the heart
The vibration that has a face
Which opens in the vagina
   in the ear
The soul-map of commitment
The covenant made under Freedom's compulsion
Be what you are,
Be as pure as a poem.
Don't notice me.

The poem wakes me at night
It comes to me and shows me
Its hand.

And I'll respond to myself,
And I will be its pendulum,
I am what I am.

Be pure as a poem.

Hear me in your clouds, your bells
are ringing
Now
we are partners of the rain, crying
from my throat, I am

Be pure, be
Clouds for me
My cry draws god
It’s god’s handmaid

I dare to write god
I dare to love you

I dare to cry
I dare to be myself

And even the spirit’s center,
I dare to be The Place

And not to run away

Even the green throbbing toads,
Ugly from rain, from weeping
Dare to do this

The toads dead and swimming so easily

How difficult it is to be toads
Among the roses

In the crying wood,
My nervous system

I know myself,
A toad that never

Knew how to play
Chess.

I am the music of your notes
Your dependence on the willows  
I understand with the sun’s fire,

Master of moon and song

I had to wait for the kiss of the Seraph  
To recognize myself

I am thirsty in the dews  
I am dewy and I am crying  
Out of so much worth

I cry cry cry  
I know myself and cry

And my organs are happy  
And my thighs and vulva are burning  
The sea rapid had swallowed me  
Also the internal whale  
Whom you represent
Ithaca

Odysseus’s arc,
The accuracy of sunset -

We are doing
Unidentified things
The elusive, subterranean beat

Poetry is the image of love
A word falling from a high place to a low

How much love is in a fall?
How much - in imagination

His gray eyes taught me how the rain falls -
Forgetful, unidentified muses, like
Knowing a woman’s womb

Other things
Are happening

The fountain in the rock.
The rock embraces its maiden,
Its flowing immortality,
A flickering animal, embraced
In his arms like a miracle

What else does Darkness know?

How it touches
Our yet unborn babies.

Accuracy -- the finding of the place
What happens in the pause
His finger finds the dead
It might be the hard step that tames the moth

Here everything is new
New words are born
Everlasting sounds in the shadow of death
Poetry truly entered my life on May the 4th 1990 at a workshop with Australian blackfellas, as they call themselves. I painted with them a painting that was represented an initiation, bought the painting, went home, began to write, wrote all night long and have written since. On that day, I was asked, "Are you a poet?" I said, "No, I am not." The following day, I knew that I had found my way.

Poetry has replaced the medium which were the focus of all my years of artistic training, it is freeing, with few implements and paraphenalia.

I was born on a small island in the Carribean, but it was, as I am, only a single point from which a whole world radiated and that world I wanted to and still want to explore. I am the vehicle and poetry my guide.
I Am Not

I am not sadness
rolling in like heavy fog
filling even my lungs
bringing moisture
to my body
an already saturated
instrument of life.

I am not this
collection
of what
I am
all from a past
meeting at edges
of what once was
and what might be
edges meeting
in sharp corporeality
Manifestations
of something
thinking
it knows
what
it
is.
Luna en tinta

Derramé tinta negra sobre una página vacía
para apresar la luna cerciendo
cualdo viajaba hacia la noche.

Nada se movía
sino el pájaro cautivo
que aleteaba en mi garganta.

La luna se ahogó en mi mar de tinta
y se puso en una página nueva.
El pájaro voló hacia mis palabras.
Emancipados de mi garganta sombría,
la luna cosechaba su luz
y el pájaro buscaba su historia.
The Moon in Ink

I poured ink onto an empty page
to capture the moon
whilst she journeyed into the night.

Nothing stirred
but the fluttering bird
caught in my throat.

The moon she drowned in my ink ocean
and turned to a new page.
The bird
she flew into words.
Both freed from my inky throat -
the moon harvested her light,
and the bird searched for her story.
Me, Deer

ME
Standing in the doorway,
I talk to myself, over there:
I see my moist and limpid eyes,
Tail twisting off flies,
antennae ears turning
to the winds of sound.
Look how I have half an ear!
A morsel of frustration left behind,
In some empty, hungered mouth.

DEER
I look at myself:
No fur,
And,
this ridiculous standing-up on two legs,
What use for my leap over brush?
What use to scale the steep hillside?

ME
I look at myself:
Chewing acorns
Untainted by my aversion
Knowing only that which sustains me.

DEER
I look at myself:
Disinterest where no harm is sensed
Every sound, every smell
tells me stay or run.
I see small green eyes,
Some sort of singing-in-the-morning
ME
I look at myself:
Delighting in the tender shoots of daffodils
Their golden name
To nourish my eye.

DEER
I look at myself:
Delighting in the tender shoots of daffodils
Green and fresh to my questing lips.

I look at myself:
Taking Spring's early offering.
Robert,

I don’t know if you can use anything in this email to accompany my poems, but you’re welcome to as you see fit.

Despite the fact that I write on endlessly in volume after volume of my journals about what I think my poetry is about, what I think is the state of contemporary Am. Poetry (and how much of its aesthetic annoys me—as in, just plain pisses me off!), and in spite of the fact that I never seem to tire of my own carping, never seem to bore myself (well that’s not quite true...I do indeed bore myself), I’m pretty much at a loss as to what to say regarding these poems I’ve submitted to you.

Maybe just this: I hope that every now and then a poem of mine is of some use to someone. And I hope all the time that I’m being truthful (factually but especially emotionally) in my poems, never sloppy with the stuff of the imagination, that I go after the difficult subjects, more or less straightforwardly and with heart (without the dodge of irony, though good irony is indeed good irony and does not run away from vulnerability). I hope there’s passion and openness in the poems. (I take the advice I find in Merwin’s Berryman and Lowell’s Epilogue very seriously.) And always, always I hope the poem, its language, serves something outside the poem, something larger than itself. For me, the modernist/post-modernist contention that every poem is ultimately only about itself just gives me the #@@#!!** willies. It makes my skin crawl. I like to think that a poem has something of the conversation we’d have over a few beers in the kitchen late at night when no one is about to put up with artsy-fartsy bullshit. Which does not mean the words can’t be elegant or aspire to make something beautiful, something artful; it just means they must be person-to-person, that a poem should be a human thing.

Well there you have it, Robert, my off-the-cuff remarks. Use what serves.

Regards,
David
April

A lover teaches the darkness with just a turn

And the shadow's length the lasting gift

And you cast down into it

And compiling years that promise

Nothing

But after countless time

The female light comes to a lightless world

Then the years yielding

In the April dusk bearded irises in a yard

Yellow and purple suspended in still air

And leaves like green swords

And two walking quietly side by side knowing

Not to look a sideways look not yet to touch

The long raveled linearity of old and new before them

And they sense the sweet danger rising

The brush of zephyrs on lips

And their words their bodies await them

Only steps from here
Last Days

Little life, little vessel of the Universe,  
Wink of awareness, small gathering  
Of the inexplicable,—telling itself  
It is the Universe, knowing otherwise,  
Knowing God has forgotten everything  
(Fear sinking into despair, pain into death)—  
Even what you hoard is spent for you.
Man With Cell Phone

I shouldn’t be seeing this
at the camera’s remove. If I am to have
the zenith of your suffering, then
I should be there, in the frame,
in the time when time took love
and struck you with it like a bolt and cursed you.
For you are naked, I see too deeply in, I see
with too much safety that second when
your soul was cleaved: death and love, the going on,
to the end of your days.

Outside, the first tower has fallen
five minutes ago, the voice in the cell phone
has gone dead
and you are still listening, though
anguish pulls at your mouth. I think you can’t move.
I think it is still
the time of the voice plus one second.
I think it is eternity
and that I must put my arms around you,
lift it from you.

Or it is the very moment
and you hear the white-noise roar of floors
pancaking toward the small voice, pulling
everything down and you hear
the scream that broke you, the silence that broke
you, nearby, inside this building, safe
in a basement stairwell, and you lean a
shoulder against the cinder block wall,
and listen to it, in a cell phone, and your self
screaming, and I am watching. Forgive me.
Meditation On Nothing

In the later afternoon, one can see evening
Coming so clearly, it seems arrived already.
In evening, night. Mistake compounding mistake.

Morning was just morning, and even noon was,
For all its unexpected heat, mostly noon.
But afternoon broke and time fell out of time:

One wants something lost returned. Not innocence
And not ignorance but the escape into,—
When mind seemed to fit everything the day offered

And time was so huge it burdened a small soul....
Now the day’s last Angelus. Time for the dog’s walk.
Holy moment. I doubt it will work for long.
David Cummings
We could ask people to give us whatever poems they've read at past barbershops that they might like to see in there. Then we could choose from the poems they give us.

I have to say that I feel a surge of extreme happiness as I think about this project. Being able to pick what I (well, we, or maybe you) think is the best of it would be so great. I'm sure it's obnoxious of me. But who's looking?

Dear Liz,

My hope for this piece of ephemera is to demonstrate the variety of poetic visions that has come together in this group of people. It is not necessary for me that all the poems demonstrate a unified narrative, that each poem be related in some way to the previous and the subsequent poem. The audio component would be critical because it would underscore the aural tradition, how the poems are read, lend some insight into some of the dialectic, and would example the playfulness of what has been going on between us.

cheers, Rob
Date: Mon, 2 Feb 2004 14:46:29 -0500 (EST)
From: lizzard@bookmaniac.net
To: robert pesich <srchek1@yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: a call for poems from Robert Pesich for a Barbershop anthology

Sounds great. Can we decide jointly or do you want sole control? ie, are we co-editing?

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Liz Henry

Date: Mon, 01 Mar 2004 18:08:58 -0800
From: robert pesich <srchek1@yahoo.com>
To: lizzard@bookmaniac.net
Subject: Re: Update on the project...

I've been revising several poems of late and starting a few others. Burning the candle at both ends as usual. But it seems to be working so long as I drink water and eat well and don't entertain the varied mindless bullshit that walks the street. I wish I had more time to read and write. It is slowly turning around and in a direction that is encouraging to me. I can feel an energy rising and the writing is a little different. I have not given a reading in over a year and I do not really have that much time to test out the work at open readings; I have not read as an open reader in almost two years. So, I am not sure if the poems stand on their own feet without the crutch of performance. Nevermind, I write for myself and maybe, one or two others. I have death & the mushroom on my left and the vaginal sun & the sunflower on my right. What I don't find for myself, I will create for myself. Do I fear that the reader will not understand the work? So what if the reader does not understand the work. So what if they use it to line the
cage of their son's pet rat or to line their own cage. Maybe the
work found the wrong audience.
Maybe the audience has to grow up, stop eating its imperialistic
wonderbread and easy to chew notions of reality. Of course, this
could be used to excuse a mediocre practice. Most of my efforts
fail. The point is that I am practicing and trying to make
something work as best I can. And to make it work as best I
can, I prefer to begin from the inside, recognizing and accepting
the faces within my face. Improve the inner landscape. And I
also prefer to go out of the "country" to the innumerable
countries in this country...

Best,
Rob

Date: Mon, 1 Mar 2004 21:49:22 -0500 (EST)
From: lizzard@bookmaniac.net
To: robert pesich <srchek1@yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: Update on the project...

i had to leave my country
to find the other countries in my country

if you would like to speak to a customer service representative
dig here
between my legs

for a good time call
GOD
and listen to fire engines answer someone else's emergency
because here it is predicted to be sunny and clear
Liz,

Excellent! You are great! Let our clandestine campaign against boringness begin. I visited Janel last night. She provided revisions to her poems so, I will type those out sometime in the next few days. She also provided a kind of introduction which I think is pretty cool. I know that the idea of having "statements of purpose" may sound rather stupid but the responses have been interesting.

Date: Thu, 18 Mar 2004 03:53:24 -0500 (EST)
From: lizzard@bookmaniac.net
To: Robert S. Pesich <srchek1@yahoo.com>
Subject: charged up

i am so exhausted, but so charged up from talking with you, i was writing in my head all the way home while driving. I got home and sketched out a goofy essay for kessler which i will try to finish tomorrow while it is still fresh in my mind and send to him. he may not like it but if not I'll send it somewhere else.

***
— Liz
From: robert pesich <srchek1@yahoo.com>
To: lizzard@bookmaniac.net

... Which is to say, please send me this essay again when you have selected the poems and written specifics about them. I would like to read it. In general, people do not appreciate unsolicited advice. And since I am generally an unsavory character given to rude behavior and vulgar language...here is some unsolicited advice.

The introduction to the essay is excellent. The humor underscores a point of the essay which, correct me if I'm wrong, is about the poetry in this area, also known as Aztlan. The poetry that you are talking about is a miscegenated poetry that demonstrates a syncretic disposition. We have many different kinds of cultures here living together and not-living-together and one can see many different kinds of combinations of Eros. And so, in a way, I find your essay as a kind of manifesto or call to (each other's) arms, an announcement that we have a movement here that can not be stopped or, to say it in another way, the white fish and black snake do fit in each other's mouth and shall have many young. I love jambalaya!

Date: Fri, 19 Mar 2004 14:55:05 -0500 (EST)
From: lizzard@bookmaniac.net
To: robert pesich <srchek1@yahoo.com>
Subject: Re: charged up and blasting off into the heavens

that is all good advice! yes! thank you sir may I have another! I kiss your whip!

I will start typing Greg's poems in.

— Liz

Cuts from the Barbershop
Playlist for the CD

The recording quality varies wildly. Not all of these poems are printed in this book, but we thought it would be fun to put a sampling of readings from 2001-2004.

Greg Hall
1. Van Gogh Ambulance
2. No Charge
3. [Sugar donut]
4. Last Delia Gone Down
5. Natural Bridges
6. Chicken Little Shark Sky
7. Gregory of Oz

Walter Martin
8. Making Do
9. Everything Must Go
10. Envy and Dread
11. Law of the Suburbs
12. In the Men’s Room
13. Xenophanes quote

Sanja K. Pesich
14. About Space and Movement - English
15. About Space and Movement - Serbian

Steve Arntsen
16. Sea Rose Beach

Janel Burnett
17. Grief
18. Equivocation
JC Watson
19. Late in November
20. Thoughts on a Writing Life
21. What We Do

Robert Pesich
22. While Traveling
23. Behind Joy’s Beauty Box
24. Dry Grass
25. Ghazal
26. [humorous monologue sneakily recorded] (Rob Pesich)
27. [You have to change harmonicas faster than you can kiss a duck (Greg Hall)]

Liz Henry
28. Kissing Nadine in the Rain
29. Mother Frankenstein

Brenda Simmons
30. Me, Deer
31. I am Not
32. Luna en Tinta

David Cummings
33. Man with Cell Phone
34. April

Yehudit Oriah
35. First few sections of Chaconne for a Gazelle
36. Maria Magdalena (Hebrew) (from “Mandala”)
37. Maria Magdalena (English, read by Liz Henry)