Painted Bride Quarterly

Number 59
Special Film Issue
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*Surrender Dorothy* photographs by Kevin Loreaux
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Nick Angeli, Jay Ayrton, and Ray Posell of The Ritz Theatres and Posell Management
Viken Mikaelian of Mikaelian Design
Cindy and Moira of Doc Watson’s Pub
Bob Louis, for everything and the fax
David Simons & The Kyber Pass
Yusef Komunyakaa, Stephen Berg, and Rick Barthelme
Cafe Gallery
Millennium Coffee Shop
Villa Barrone
Teresa Leo
Mike Weaver
Leonard Gontarek
Daniel Nester
Kevin Di Novis

And 2 very generous & very cool bands:
Weeds & Liki Outhaus
In the entrepreneurial spirit that drives *PBQ*, we offer you this, our first annual Film Issue. And when I say entrepreneurial, I mean the word in its most noble sense: the act of formulating or positing an idea and seeing that act of mind through to its physical manifestation; in short, making it happen.

And that's what's been happening for *PBQ*, one of the country's oldest non-university affiliated literary art magazines. By sheer force of will and depth of commitment and undying love/passion/dedication to and for the written word, our editorial staff has kept *PBQ* in forward motion (both in terms of funding—and the lack thereof—and our vision of what is "good," what is "art," and what is worth the read).

*PBQ* has always been—and will always be—a forum for strong visions, for clearly articulated voices, for stories that must be told and read. With this issue, we took these standards for inclusion and used them as a lens through which to view works on and about film, its artistry, its cultural impact. The result is a stunning collection of work: poems by Karl Patten that celebrate and reinterpret cinema and its icons; essays that stake out both familiar and unfamiliar terrain, unfolding and deciphering mainstream as well as independent films—essays that afford insightful, mesmerizing glimpses of the clockworks of their respective films; an interview with MacArthur fellow Louis Massiah; a screenplay by a local Philadelphia screenwriter whose presence here marks his first publication. Thus we offer you pieces that range from works-in-progress and studies of emerging voices to pop icons defined (and refined) through the vision of poets and critics... and more.

Don't miss the recurring themes of power and gender and cultural identity, the interplay of text and subtext, how in one great accidental conflagration these works speak to and of each
other, and there we are, acting and reacting to it all and there you have it: film allows us to connect.

Say you’re at a dinner party and drop a name like James Fenton, in the hope of wrangling a definition of the New Recklessness: you’re met with polite nods, maybe one knowing glance. You’ve alienated some of the party guests. With film there is a certain pleasure of familiarity for all of the party goers as one title leads to another and the genre sustains ranging intellects, all sorts of experiences, all sorts of conversations. So come, sit with us here at the bridal table, the celebration is about to begin.
Film: One Minute
for Jean Renoir

Would-be lovers at a table:
Not the cuts, face to face,
No, the long shot following
Them around the room after
Rising, each manouevering in
Strategies of near and far,
With some of the city, a bit
Of river, deep behind, through
The window, for they live
In a world in spite of their
"Hold me, no don't" tension.
Shoot it whole and simple
As a piece of broadcloth or
A plank. Let the viewer in.
The Rink
(two-reeler, 1916)

Balancing like God, Chaplin appears,
His skating legs at ninety degrees,
A flesh-and-bony caliper
With ball-bearing knees.

The town outside and the rink around
Are loosely basketed with evils,
With thwart, the fat man’s frown.
He thumbs his nose and daredevils

Fate with a split, giggles
Like a penny lecher
At the pancake Janes who goo-gaw
In awe at this tawdry stretcher

Of little hopes. During the battle
He rat-tats with Fatso, drills
Bamboo in off-hand fettle,
Until, inevitable of inevitables,

He is driven, derbied Adam,
From his Eden-rink, his rightful world.
Left in the silent skirling is Madame
Eve, as he rolls away, face unfurled.
good/bad news from the physical world

outdoors is the sultry
rain sucking
his fingers

an emotion requiring an act
outside
the body

evelyn reaching for anything to drink: body oil,
rubbing alcohol, bug lotion. a guy waits (in
vain) for her outside. it looks like he’s standing
in a hole but there is no hole. the skin teaches
love is a porous child

even if
you’re dead it’d be nice
to be so
tense

a doctor opens the speculum (deafness)
& a woman for
the first time
& out flies a moth
raining
blue dust

torn raven wings stick to the highway
i am trying to prevent this

luckily you are old, you may touch
everyone/anyone  the body is not
supposed to be anything
except the final conduit
the power in
Surrender Dorothy is an independent feature film written and directed by Philadelphia filmmaker Kevin B. Di Novis. Produced by G. Rich Entertainment, the 16mm film was shot in August of 1995 and edited throughout the various east coast blizzards of 1996.

Surrender Dorothy’s disturbed protagonist is TREVOR, a twenty-six year old busboy who is obsessed with but terrified of women. He takes in LANH, a young drifter addicted to heroin. In time, Trevor realizes that he can use Lanh’s addiction to manipulate, coerce, and finally terrorize him into becoming “Dorothy” — Trevor’s twisted conception of the “ideal woman.” But the more Trevor attempts to make Dorothy perfect, the more desperate Lanh becomes for escape, until, ultimately, they push each other to a final violent confrontation.

A film about gender, identity and power, Surrender Dorothy seeks to explore the nexus of these concepts. If identity is a social construct, then it must be negotiated and renegotiated constantly — on an individual basis, on a collective basis, and within each social set and subset, from the smallest unit to the largest. Positing power as the basis for such negotiation, Trevor’s attempt to create and impose a “romanticized” reality on Lanh suggests that identity (and gender) is the unstable result of the negotiation for social power. Essentially, Trevor and Lanh share
a prison romance; that their respective prisons are psychological rather than literal perhaps places their peculiar negotiation within a larger social context. The scene that follows occurs midway through the film. Trevor, Lanh’s immediate drug supplier, has been using heroin to assert his control over his “jonesing” roommate. In a last-ditch effort to rebel against this kind of psychological oppression, Lanh invites a girl back to Trevor’s apartment. When Trevor returns home from work he is incensed to find Lanh and Vicky locked together on his couch, but in her presence his fear prevents him from taking action. He retreats to his bedroom and seethes himself to sleep while Lanh takes blessed advantage of this rare opportunity.

The next day, Vicky is gone. And Lanh is sick.

INT. TREVOR’S APARTMENT - DAY

[TREVOR’S apartment is less an apartment than it is a vast interior space — a factory warehouse bereft of machinery, its high vaulted windows long since bricked to day and season.

There are no walls here; each “room” is defined by the empty space that surrounds it. The improbable pack-rat debris of TREVOR’S living-room, for instance, simply bleeds out into nothingness until it becomes the chronic clutter of the dining room. Only the bathroom, which is surrounded by thick floor-to-ceiling shower curtains, offers any semblance of privacy.]

At the moment, the sound of violent vomit comes from behind the bathroom curtain. TREVOR leans against the wall next to the curtain, his arms folded across his chest, a smug look on his face. He wears his busboy uniform.

A toilet flushes. A moment later, the bathroom curtain parts and a cadaverous LANH stumbles out, his face bathed in sweat.

TREVOR
One too many last night?
LANH
This is not a hangover, Trevor, and you know it.

LANH staggers back to the couch. TREVOR dogs him:

TREVOR
Where’s your girlfriend?

LANH
She left.

TREVOR
Did you fuck her on my sofa?

LANH
You should know, Trev. You were listening the whole time.

TREVOR
I don’t appreciate you inviting people over without asking me first.

LANH
Girls you mean.

TREVOR
People. In general.

LANH
Girls, Trevor. You don’t want me to fuck girls on your couch because you can’t fuck girls on your couch, and if you can’t fuck girls on your couch then no one can fuck girls on your couch.

TREVOR
It’s my couch.

LANH
Yeah, well it’s my dick and I’ll fuck whoever I want with it.
TREVOR
Not on my couch.

LANH
Fine, then let us use your bed next time.

A long, tense beat as TREVOR stares at LANH. Finally:

TREVOR
I would expect someone in your situation to be a little bit more cooperative.

LANH
What’s that supposed to mean?

TREVOR
What that’s supposed to mean, Lawnboy, is that for a smack addict who just puked all over my bathroom, you got a really smart mouth.

He moves toward the front door.

TREVOR
I get paid today. You sit tight and keep throwing up, and if I get an apology when I get home tonight, maybe you’ll get a fix, okay?

LANH
Maybe?

TREVOR
It’s better than nothing.

TREVOR opens the door and steps out into the hallway.

LANH
Trevor.

TREVOR spins around, looks at LANH.
LANH
It's not my fault you don't like girls.

Dead silence as TREVOR'S eyes bore into LANH'S. Then he SLAMS the door, leaving LANH alone in the room. Immediately, LANH doubles over, giving himself up to the terrible pain and need he must endure at the onset of heroin withdrawal.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. TREVOR'S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

LANH writhes on the sofa, shaking, swallowing hard, his eyes shut tight.

THE FRONT DOOR
opens and TREVOR walks in carrying a package.

TREVOR
Wake up, Lawnboy. I have a surprise for you.

TREVOR moves over to the couch, hands LANH the package.

TREVOR
Sit up and open this box. I bought you a present.

LANH
Did you score?

TREVOR
Open the box.

LANH takes the box in his trembling hands. It is wrapped in gold paper.

LANH tears at the paper, rips it off the box. It is a red box with "Annie Sez" printed on it in white letters. LANH looks at TREVOR.
TREVOR

Come on, open it.

LANH takes off the lid. A brand new syringe lays on top of folded red and white material. There is a yellow ribbon tied around the syringe, drawn up into a bow.

Slowly, curiously, LANH lifts the syringe out of the box and looks at it. TREVOR takes it from him and holds up a small bag of heroin.

LANH

You scored.

TREVOR

Of course I scored. I eat it too.

LANH

Thank you.

TREVOR

Now you’re going to have to do something for me, remember?

LANH

(sincerely)

I’m sorry. I’m sorry, Trevor.

TREVOR laughs.

TREVOR

No, Lawnboy. Your apology’s in the box.

Confused, LANH looks back into the box. There is nothing in there but the red and white material. He takes it out, unfolds it.

It is a dress. LANH looks at it in disbelief, shaking his head. Then he looks at TREVOR.

LANH

It’s a dress.

TREVOR nods.
TREVOR
It’s your size. I want you to wear it.

LANH shakes his head, almost reflexively.

TREVOR
I want you to wear it for me tonight. I want you to be Dorothy.

LANH looks down at the dress. He swallows, then looks back at TREVOR, searching for humor in his eyes. There is none. TREVOR remains impassive, unmoving.

LANH
(incredulous)
You’re serious.

TREVOR
You’re right.

LANH continues staring at TREVOR, the reality of the situation finally hitting him. He is disgusted, sickened.

LANH
You’re sick.

TREVOR
No, Dorothy —

He holds up the syringe, its pretty yellow ribbon almost a mockery.

TREVOR
You’re sick.

LANH continues staring, continues holding the dress.

The sound of RUNNING WATER wells up on the SOUNDTRACK.

CUT TO:
INT. TREVOR’S BATHROOM - NIGHT
LANH stands in front of the bathroom mirror, crying. The water gushes in the sink. The toilet tank lid is balanced on the countertop.

In one hand, LANH holds the red and white dress. In the other, he holds DENIS’ gun. He sobs uncontrollably, his thin chest heaving spasmodically, his eyes red, bloodshot. Snot covers his nose and mouth. He coughs into the sink, choking on air, crying.

Desperately trying to control himself, he looks at the dress in his hand; then he looks at the gun. Slowly, deliberately, he forces his gaze away from the gun and focuses it on the mirror in front of him. He stares at his own disheveled reflection, calming himself. After a moment he begins to wrap the gun back up in the plastic.

CUT TO:
INT. TREVOR’S LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

TREVOR sits on the couch, prepping the syringe. OFFSCREEN, we hear the plastic rustle of the bathroom curtain.
TREVOR looks up, then stands.

TREVOR’S POV

LANH wears the dress. Still crying, he carries his other clothes in front of him like a shield. Although he looks awkward and out of place in the dress, his intense embarrassment makes him seem smaller and more feminine.

TREVOR
(sincerely)
You’re beautiful, Dorothy.

TREVOR moves over to where LANH stands. He takes the clothes from him, puts them on the floor. Then he looks LANH full in the face, studying him.

TREVOR
Don’t cry. You’re beautiful. Why are you crying, such a pretty girl. You should be happy.

He wipes a tear from LANH’S cheek with his thumb. He keeps his hand there, caresses his face lovingly. For once there is no hint of sarcasm in TREVOR’S voice. He sounds sincere, caring.

TREVOR
Come on, now. Don’t cry. Please.

LANH doesn’t move. He stands stock still, sobbing, trying to make himself as small as possible, his feet together, his arms folded across his chest. He trembles. TREVOR caresses him, moves closer. He puts his finger under LANH’S chin and gently lifts his face up toward his own.

TREVOR
You think I don’t like girls?

TREVOR leans closer.
TREVOR
You’re wrong.

He kisses him on the lips, passionately. Instinctively, LANH tries to pull away, but TREVOR holds him there, forces him closer.

Finally, TREVOR breaks the kiss. LANH crumbles.

TREVOR
(whispering)
That’s your apology, Dorothy. I accept it.

He holds up the prepared syringe, hands it to LANH. LANH takes it, turns and hurries back into the bathroom, yanking the curtain shut behind him.

TREVOR walks back over to the couch, sits down, smiles.

HOLD on TREVOR, smiling, thinking.

[A MONTAGE ensues, cut to the Ronettes’ classic “Be My Baby,” in which TREVOR conducts a gleeful shopping spree for his new “girlfriend.”]

...  

INT. TREVOR’S KITCHEN – NIGHT

TREVOR AND LANH
eat a Spaghettios dinner at the kitchen table. LANH wears full “Dorothy” regalia: an ultra-short pink smock dress, a blonde wig, makeup, and red nail polish.

TREVOR
I got extra hours tomorrow night.

LANH
That’s good.
TREVOR
I'm working til close.
(pause)
I won't be home until one-thirty. Earliest.

LANH eats in silence.

TREVOR
Will you miss me?

LANH
Yes, I'll miss you, Trevor.

TREVOR
That's convincing.

LANH
I'll miss you.

TREVOR
I'll call you on break... Will you answer?

LANH
Of course I'll answer.
TREVOR
As Dorothy?

LANH
As Dorothy.

They eat.

TREVOR
This is very good.

LANH
Thanks.

TREVOR
I used to love Spaghettios. They used to serve them once a week when I was in kindergarten. They taste the same now as they did then.

LANH
Same recipe probably.

TREVOR
I bit this kid once, in kindergarten. I forget why, but I bit him on the arm. Just leaned over and laid into him. Hard. Broke the skin. You know what he did? He told on me. He screamed and cried and told on me, the little bastard. I couldn’t even say he was lying because he had proof dripping all over the floor.

LANH
What happened?

TREVOR
What do you think happened? Miss Schulz grabbed me by the arm and dragged me and this kid down to the nurse’s office. The kid cried the whole way there like he was choking and
couldn’t breathe and I knew I was in trouble.

TREVOR puts down his fork and continues.

TREVOR
Miss Schulz took me in this room by myself and closed the door. She took out this pair of scissors. I don’t know where she got them even, but she took out this huge pair of scissors and said she was going to cut my tongue out for what I did.

LANH
That’s fucked up.

TREVOR
Tell me about it. She held this huge fucking pair of scissors in front of my face and said she was going to slice my tongue out because that’s what I deserved. I knew she wasn’t allowed to do it, but the door was closed and she had them right up touching my mouth. I think I peed my pants.

He laughs nervously at the thought.

TREVOR
She asked me if I was ever going to bite anyone again and I told her no. She kept asking and I told her “No, no, no, no, no, no.”

Here he pauses.

TREVOR
She told me to go back to the class. It was lunchtime, so I went down to the multi-purpose room where we used to have lunch. I didn’t even change my pants. I sat by myself. We had
Spaghettios that day. It was Thursday and we had Spaghettios. I ate what I could and then I threw them up because I was just so fucking glad to be able to taste them. I knew she was only trying to make me sorry for biting that kid, but I wasn’t sorry I did it. I was just sorry I was too scared to do it to him again.

After a long, thoughtful pause:

TREVOR
Spaghettios remind me of that.

LANH stares at TREVOR, shaking his head.

LANH
(sincerely)
I’m sorry, Trevor. I wouldn’t have made them.

TREVOR
No, fuck that. I like them. Really.

LANH stands and starts to clear the table; TREVOR catches LANH’S hand with his own.

TREVOR
Leave them, Dorothy. I’ll clean up.

And as he gathers the dirty plates and utensils, LANH has difficulty concealing his pleasant surprise at TREVOR’S unexpected kindness.

FADE OUT
The Femme Fatale and Homophobia in The Last Seduction

John Dahl’s *The Last Seduction* offers an incredible *femme fatale* in Bridget/Wendy Kroy (Linda Fiorentino), a strong, deliciously evil role, of which there are very few in Hollywood. But the woman’s power, which is to say our seduction by her, is finally due to the extreme homophobia (fear of homosexuality) which surrounds her as much as it derives from her own amorality, and her ability to isolate cultural stereotypes and use them to manipulate people (her husband’s “pretend” advances to the black detective, which mask his brutality towards women; Mike’s need to grow a new set of balls, stemming from a homosexual encounter; the detective’s stereotypical penis size; and a correlation between rich men having mistresses and abusing their wives).

The *femme fatale* is as doubled and as schizophrenic as the character, herself. She is, for example, an integral part of the narrative, ostensibly “bound” by the narrative: we have to have the illusion, at least, that good will prevail, that she can be stopped, that the “story” will tidy up all loose ends and take care of her. But, by definition, the *femme fatale* is she who extends beyond the narrative, who is smarter than the smartest man in the narrative and cannot be stopped, except at extreme peril to the world (in *Kiss Me Deadly* (1955), for example) or to the protagonist (Marlowe, *The Maltese Falcon*, for example). But there must be the momentary illusion that she can be stopped, as there is at the end of *The Last Seduction*. The double pleasure alluded to earlier is not very different from the double pleasure in gangster films, as elaborated by Robert Warshow: (1) we who are plodding, hard-working and anonymous viewers get to see the gangster hero rise to fame, rags-to-riches, with machine-gun rapidity, attaining a degree of success/ riches we can never hope to
have; but then (2) we are vindicated in our law-abiding lifestyles when we get to see the violent demise of the gangster hero: Cagney, delivered dead and mummified on his mother's doorstep in *Public Enemy*; Rico, asplash in grime and rain in *Little Caesar*; Bonnie and Clyde dying to a ballet of bullets in *Bonnie and Clyde*. In *The Last Seduction* the spectator's pleasure is also two-fold: (1) we who are moral and upstanding take pleasure in seeing an extremely amoral woman, whose only motivation is money, greed, narcissism (not unlike the male heroes in spaghetti westerns); and (2) we take pleasure in seeing her succeed, not because we want amoral women to do well, but because none of the men is deserving of our sympathy. In fact, these men are so repugnant that we finally root for her to take advantage of them.

She steals the seven-hundred thousand dollars her husband Clay (Bill Pullman) had stolen for her. Perhaps she meant all along to double-cross him. We don't in fact know for sure. The reason she gives for taking the money is that he slapped her. So, from the beginning, he's an abusive husband. It's hard to see that he ever had any deep feelings for her. The best he can offer her is "a warm divorce waiting."

His worst flaw, in my estimation, is that he flirts with homosexuality, both pretending to be homosexual and then denying the possibility. He hires a black detective to help find the runaway wife. Not once, but twice Clay/Pullman tries to hug the black man, saying clichés like "You're beautiful..." The detective spurns him, refuses the hugs, says he's weird.

The detective is also flawed. The town of Beston, where Bridget has established a new identity as Wendy Kroy (an inversion of New York), is so unused to anyone whose skin color is not white that they treat him like an alien. But he, himself, succumbs to sexual/racial stereotypes. Wendy teases him about genital size; he returns the tease with a stereotype about white women and their skinny behinds. She succeeds in getting him to unbuckle
his seatbelt and "show his," just so she can crash the car into a pole, kill the intruder and be saved, herself, by the driver-side airbag. We are so busy being amazed that she would risk death and paralysis that we forget that he brought this end upon himself by giving in to the sexual and racial stereotyping, itself a perverse "proof" of manhood, which I see as his own refusal of homosexuality.

The character of Mike (Peter Berg) is the final proof. In an ironic reversal on The Crying Game, Mike has a "secret": he got involved with a man pretending to be a woman named Trish in Buffalo. It is no doubt a stretch of my own imagination to see in the name Trish (Mike says it stands for "whatever") the French verb tricher or noun triche, meaning to trick, to deceive, to be unfaithful. In this regard it is a synonym with tromper or, in this film, with trompe l'oeil. Mike, who desperately wants "to grow new balls," was deceived, but how ultimately? Because Trish was a man and Mike was fooled into sexuality with a man? Or because Mike can't face the truth: not the fact that a marriage failed, but that the marriage mattered to him and that he cared for a man, who used him sexually but didn't return any feelings? I think there's a bit of both in the right answer. What Mike objects to with Wendy is the same kind of role reversal deception. In the first instance with Trish, he was caught caring for a man who used him; in the second instance with Wendy, he is caught again, caring this time for a woman who, more like the traditional macho male, separates sex from love and calls Mike her "designated fuck." By playing the role traditionally given to the man (and successfully manipulating the cultural stereotypes involved), Wendy forces Mike into the emotional, caring "other," the role traditionally given to the woman. The irony, then, is clear: with Trish, Mike is fooled by a man masquerading as a woman; with Wendy, Mike is fooled by a woman masquerading as a man.

He is, of course, dehumanized by Wendy. He protests in stages and varying degrees, but he always returns
to her, even when she wants him to participate in murder. The victims of her apparent murder schemes are all men: all cheating and abusive husbands, as though cheating and abusive were synonyms. They are all defective in their heterosexuality (the repressed again being homosexuality). By a curious logic, the way out of heterosexuality is murder, not homosexuality.

The murder she wants Mike to commit is that of Clay. She gets Mike to consent to her plan by sending him a letter as Trish, saying she is moving to Beston and that no one need know about their past connection. Mike is so stricken with panic that he is willing to do anything for Wendy. Translation: he is so horrified at the possibility of Trish returning (the return of the repressed, literally) that he is willing to commit murder. Murder, then, is preferable to homosexuality, just as murder masks homosexuality in the Oedipus mythology (Laius, the father of Oedipus, killed his male lover). No wonder we root for Wendy.

In her public life Bridget/Wendy wants a business-like hands-off approach. She slaps Mike's face and accuses him of sexual harassment, rather than compromise herself in public. Yet she agrees to sex with him just outside the door to the bar where they meet. A public place.

Linda Fiorentino is excellent as she cruelly stares, flirts, speaks in a monotone/bored voice, rolls her eyes, smokes constantly, waves her hair: candor and cruelty, both. She is not served by the male bartender, because she doesn't say please. Her rather crude question is: who've I got to suck to get a drink around here? We have heard all of her lines before, but they've come from men, not women. There are no other women in this film, with the exception of Trish. And there are no good men. They are all flawed.

Mike is as vehement about leaving small-town Beston (innocence, but no possibilities for sex) as Bridget/Wendy is obsessively drawn to New York (jaded, decadent, but
no innocence). Mike cares about people, not place, while Bridget/Wendy cares about place, not people. Her place mania also suggests a palindromic sense of narrative. Just as she finds Wendy Kroy in New York, the last seduction must lead backwards to the first.

There is nothing very credible about the last several scenes of the film. Mike and Clay bond together: thus, there is the illusion that she will be caught and punished and that the narrative will contain her. But she maces her husband to death and inexplicably (by invoking Trish apparently) gets Mike to “rape” her and confess to Clay’s murder while the police operator on an open phone traces the call and confession. Clay’s dead, Mike’s behind bars, and Bridget has a limo driver to escort her through the rainy streets of New York.

Here is my point: these last scenes are too unbelievable. Why have them, then? They feel like a spoof on the double-cross ending of Body Heat. I think these last scenes in The Last Seduction are a pretext, just as the first scenes are a pretext. They sew up the plotline, but they’re not very satisfactory.

They remind me of the endings to films of the 1940’s, endings in which the heroines are really too strong for the narratives they inhabit. The story requires them to cave in, be tamed, happily ever after, but we know better. When Marlene Dietrich follows Gary Cooper out into the desert at the end of Morocco, we’re not fooled. The story may require it, but we know the Dietrich character is playing “against the grain.” The same goes for Joan Crawford at the end of Mildred Pierce. Dietrich, Crawford, Bette Davis, the women of melodrama were often too strong for the narratives they inhabited. Their strength threatens at every turn to explode the narrative.

To John Dahl’s credit, I think the end scenes of The Last Seduction are silly on purpose. Contrived this way, they deflect the viewer from plot concerns to questions of motive or meaning. What, after all, has Bridget/Wendy gotten away with? Well, yes, she got away with murder.
And robbery. And more murder. And so forth. But finally she got away with sexuality-as-power. The men, too preoccupied with being “real men,” are all failures. To say she beats them at their own game and is a better man than they is to fall into a gender-stereotyping. What is clear is that we don’t hate her, don’t despise her, admire her nerve and ingenuity. And, because the men are so homophobic or repressed about their homosexual drives or vain about penis size, we don’t finally identify with them as victims. It is perhaps a sign of our own sophistication or coming of age that we can identify with the femme fatale and rejoice in the fact that her womanhood does not prove fatal to her.
The Dupree Bolton Discography

It was 1937, the last truly beautiful year
to be in Paris ... or was it
1952, buying teenager cigarettes for Chet Baker
between sets at the Lighthouse in
Hermosa Beach? Whatever the case, Hoboken
is what I think with.

So thank you for that iced latte'
& this view of Exchange Place, Jersey City
in its best across-the-river
anti-Ansel Adams effect.

And I don't know, what do you do
when a blimp lands on your mother?
You ask about the page behind the page
& the best I can muster is to
see myself swimming in Weehawken Cove
having a conversation with a spatula.
Men and Women Not Getting Along: 
Two Films by Martin Sulik

Martin Sulik, one of the most promising filmmakers to emerge from post-Wall Eastern Europe, has made a name for himself by creating odd mixtures of soap opera and national allegory. That’s a rather melodramatic classification, really, but by looking at his two most recent films, *The Garden* and *Everything I Like*, what we see is a filmmaker concerned specifically with the subject of men and women not getting along, not understanding each other, at the same time that he chronicles the difficulty that the fairly new Slovakian culture is having in its first post-Czechoslovakia days. The defining characteristic of both the national and personal dramas is that of paradox: especially when he is exploring his protagonists’ relationships, Sulik peppers his portraits with healthy doses of irony. His films are quiet, slow not-quite-love stories, although the way that Sulik portrays these seemingly unsolvable problems can’t help but give one some hope for the future.

Sulik was born in 1962 in Zilna, a city in what was then Czechoslovakia, in what is now the Slovak Republic. His academic training was at the Academy of Dramatic Arts in Bratislava, now that Republic’s capital. After graduating, he embarked upon a fairly standard path among European filmmakers, directing short films, documentaries and medium length works for Czechoslovakian television (Europe’s state-funded television stations have provided a training ground for important filmmakers that has no real equivalent in the U.S.), as well as numerous theater productions. He has also had a respectable career as a screenwriter, writing features (1988’s *Mother*) both before he made his own films and continuing after the international acclaim brought by his own features (1995’s *The Brothers*, written with Martin Lescak). He made his feature debut in 1991 with the film *Tenderness*, and while this brought him some attention on the inter-
national festival circuit, it was his second feature, Everything I Like (which was the Slovak Republic's first submission to the Best Foreign Film Oscar), that really put him on the map. The Garden is his third feature, and like Everything I Like, it's gotten much acclaim in the cinematheques of Europe and festivals around the world, but has not been widely accessible to audiences in North America.

Everything I Like (Vsetko Co Mám Rád, 1992)

Sulik's second feature film as a director was released just as Czechoslovakia was breaking into the Czech and Slovak republics. Sulik, who is skeptical of the need for a breakup, uses the well intentioned but relationally inept character Thomas as a neat embodiment of many of the anxieties the country was facing, while still giving us an eccentric, touching love story. His balance between iconography and identification is near perfection, and he defines the women so central to his story, as he would in The Garden, by paradox.

Sulik structures his film as a collection of thirteen short episodes, each titled after bittersweet diversions ("The Fast," "Something from Joyce"), all of which relate to each other without forming a linear narrative. Our hero is Thomas, a recent divorcee with a teenage son, Andrej, and an English girlfriend, Ann. His ex-wife gives him no end of hassle, Ann wants him to come to England with her, Andrej finds him aggravating, and he relates badly to his aging parents, despite his genuine affection for them. The film tracks his largely unsuccessful attempts to come to terms with his relationships with all of them, and leaves almost everything just as unresolved as it began. The exception is his English girlfriend, who does decide to take off for Great Britain by herself, right after letting Thomas feel her up in the airport lobby.

The two women in Thomas' life are notable for the way that they exactly contradict societal expectations. Thomas' surreal marriage is a primary example of this. Marriage assumes stability, dependability, fidelity, and
respectability, and Thomas' experience of marriage is inexpressibly far away from these concepts. He's separated, so there goes stability and dependability. His wife still hangs on to some need for fidelity, and is clearly upset by Thomas' relationship with the young Englishwoman. What Thomas wants, however, is to move away from this marital fidelity, to move on to something else with Ann (although he doesn't know exactly what). Respectability is what is most abruptly (and comically) shattered, however, as we see just how strange Thomas and his wife will sometimes act in the name of expressing their emotions. She crashes one of Ann's parties, he gets wildly upset with her and fails to deal with his kid's problems, and they both eventually escalate into serious dysfunction. By contrast, his affair with a younger woman is what serves as his link, however tenuous, to the world of the stable. Ann wants him to leave with her, has a serious desire for commitment and permanence. She is good with his kid. She's passionate and sensual, but far more in control of her emotions, and her life, than either Thomas or his ex. The way that these women break with convention is so extreme, so opposite to bourgeois expectations, that Sulik's overall effect comes off as satire. We see both of these women through Thomas' confused, boggalooshish eyes. Everything's all flipped around, nobody's who you'd expect them to be anymore. Thomas is finding it pretty hard to navigate around his new, post-divorce emotional landscape, because the maps that he was given are all out of date.

It's important to note, however, that just because the film is on a certain level a lyrical, tender love story does not mean it's just a piece of pretty-looking, empty formalism. Writing in the catalog of the Washington DC Film Festival (1994), Eddie Cockrell called Everything I Like "a sly but emotionally true metaphor for the state of the land." The film is set in 1992 in Prague—the modern Slovak Republic was just starting to emerge as the split-up of Czechoslovakia loomed on the horizon. Thomas'
long suppressed national identity could not be far away. The nation found itself having to deal with the results of a divorce from the Czech Republic recent enough to still be painful while trying to integrate with a distant, culturally distinct Europe. Sulik, in introductions at the 1994 Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema, expressed skepticism towards the need for a split, cheerfully noting the irony that his translator that night came through the kind courtesy of the local Czech consulate. His characters serve as good equivalents of the salient issues in this situation, and clearly express his no-win attitude towards it all. Thomas’ relationship with his ex-wife is bound up in tradition, reliability, routine—but along with that comes aggravation and repression. He breaks from her, but somehow she just won’t leave him alone, the bond is too tight, too old. It seems quite plausible that this represents anxiety about lingering links to the Czech Republic and the problems that come with creating a new life of national bachelorhood. Furthermore, there is a chic, glamorous, EC-member woman waiting in the ranks, inviting Thomas to come along with her (literally—she wants him to fly to Britain with her and join her in glorious, sexy westernness). His parental relationship remains unresolved, getting loonier as the film goes on. Thomas, like Slovakian culture, is stuck between a rock and a hard place. The western Europeans are just not familiar enough for him, but his old world life provides little satisfaction. The film’s sustained melancholia, in this both personal and national light, seems an altogether measured response.

However, it is his son, a perfectly reasonable metaphor for the Slovak Republic’s future, that holds the most hope for him, a force that demands that Thomas bridge his past and his present. Everything I Like’s closing image is one of Thomas sitting with his son by a sumptuously photographed lake, eventually coaching him into playing his favorite Beatles song (modernity and western Europe if there ever was an example) on that most classic-
cal of instruments, his cello. It’s a quiet, bittersweet image, not exactly optimistic, but far from hopeless.

**The Garden (Záhrada, 1995)**

Sulik’s most recent film looks very much like his previous one, although he here turns his focus inward while simultaneously expanding what he wants to portray. Our hero is again a hapless, romantically inept thirtysomething seeking to retreat from his problems. Sulik’s narrative takes place in a garden, stuck between past and present, between fantasy and reality. The film’s overall effect is to create a mirror of a man’s life in this space, an unstable, rich place, fraught with anxiety but with a sense of the wonder that hides beneath mystery. Paradox, as in *Everything I Like*, defines Jakub’s relationships with women, and his relationships with women define the film.

We open in the city, introduced to a confused, anxiety-filled schoolteacher named Jakub. He still lives with his father, a tailor, and is having an affair with a married woman named Helena. When his father discovers them *in flagrante* (a reverse from *Everything I Like*), he sends him away to his long-forgotten house in the country, which has attached to it an old, overgrown garden. His mission is to sell it, but within the house, the garden, and the surrounding area, he finds delectable mysteries that tell him about his father’s past and his present. Not the least of these is a young girl (whom the titles dub “the virgin miraculous”) who seems to have supernatural powers, utterly ignored by her abrasive mother. Of course he has not seen the last of Helena, and an emotional firestorm is not far away. He continues to explore the garden and develop relationship with the young girl (which is not without uncomfortable sexual undertones), whom he finds his father has taught to write in reverse script (which her mother dismisses as gibberish), and who, as a closing image, he finds can levitate. Again the film is broken into episodes named by title cards, which Cockrell
notes (in the 1996 Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema Catalog) are written "in old, formal Slovak."

The two women in Jakub’s life, as with Thomas in Everything I Like, display the exact opposite characteristics of what bourgeois respectability demands of them. These shifted ground rules are exactly what is making Jakub’s life a little too complicated for him to handle. His efforts to take refuge in traditional male-female relationships is much less pronounced than Thomas’, and his affair with a married woman shows us straight away that he’s not much concerned with conventional morality. Nevertheless, he’s unable to find his grounding (for he is in search of some grounding), seeking sensual solace from someone who inexplicably can’t provide it for him, but ending up finding it in exactly the place where he should not, with a teenage girl in the dull countryside. By starting out the story with such casual adultery, Sulik again confounds our most basic set of respectable-married-person expectations. But when Helena comes out to confront him, these expectations are contradicted forcefully, as she gets extremely upset with Jakub, in front of her kids (who look on nervously) and her husband (who is remarkably nonchalant about the whole thing). The young girl, on the other hand, is transcendently wise beyond her years. She is, in fact, in touch with herself and her lush environment in a way that none of the adults who surround her are, especially her supremely gruff and insensitive mother, not to mention the ever-confused Jakub. It is she who provides the moral and spiritual center of the film, with all of those who have been spoiled by the mad world that they inhabit struggling to achieve some small degree of her enlightenment, an enlightenment that seems to spring directly from this garden that she inhabits.

Indeed, Jakub’s sojourn in the garden is a move from the confused, decadent city to the purity of nature, an admission of defeat in the face of confusing, modern life. Cockrell calls the film “a paean to the love of land that is distinctly Slovak,” and much about Jakub’s retreat to the
middle of nowhere is about allowing himself to manifest his own identity, without any outside interference, be it from his father or his lover. To put it another way, it’s about a Slovakian asserting his independence from both his stuffy, stifling past and the threatening, unstable outsiders. Jakub’s attempt to flee the sophisticated, somewhat decadent (she is, after all, married but unfaithful) Helena echoes nicely the Slovak Republic’s anxiety about its place in a changing Europe, in much the same way that Thomas’ relationship with Ann did in Everything I Like. Now the crisis is more under control, however, and rather than the forever-brooding Thomas, we have a remarkably calm Jakub, utterly unmoved by his former lover’s tears when she comes out to meet him. This film is, after all, made in 1995, after independence was less an anxiety than a fact of life, and Jakub’s temperament reflects this increasing confidence in the “backwater” identity with which much of the EC continues to regard Eastern Europe, as Jakub is clearly far happier in the garden with this eccentric, mystical teenager than he is in the city with his lover. Again, Sulik translates what is a national crisis into the shape of a mid-life crisis, and again it is a remarkably smooth fusion of the personal and the national, with the specifics very much up to date.

Put together then, these two films give us a portrait of the Slovak Republic as a nation in a major mid-life crisis, still vaguely hooked up to its parents but trying, frequently badly, to make its way in the world of adult relationships. Sulik’s allegorical tendencies, however, are never overshadowed by his concern for story (indeed, it’s more the other way around). Within these films about men and women not getting along there is much grace and much confusion. Most of all, however, there is much pain and much sweetness summed up beautifully by an image in Everything I Like: Thomas sits in a corner with Ann, who smears blood-red jam all over him. It is this play between pain and sweetness that makes Sulik’s
films life affirming but still true to the lives he portrays. His films are intimate portraits, but his concerns and obsessions, in both these works, are writ large.
Spirits Dancing in Private Rapture: on *Persuasion* and *Devil in a Blue Dress*

Advertisements and trailers play up what a movie offers at first sight as if first sight is the only sight there is but I notice I’m more interested in the other movie hidden in the movie. In that way (for me at least) each movie has its hidden double, its shadow-movie. It dreams of itself.

For example, Carl Franklin’s version of Walter Mosley’s *Devil in a Blue Dress* offers a lot of immediate pleasure in its look, in the rightness of the dialogue and the casting, in the working out of the plot, in the jump blues on the soundtrack, in the look of Central Avenue in 1948. But to me what’s really beautiful is the fairy tale in which a mouse becomes a ferocious animal, a kind of spirit-helper. In surface logic, the character named “Raymond Alexander” and called “Mouse” is a person not a spirit; a ruthless gunman, he comes to the aid of his old friend Easy Rawlins, a much less ferocious and violent man, when Easy, out of work and desperate, takes a job that leads him into the violent underworld of post-war L.A. The added twist is that Easy is hired because he (like Mouse) is black and can enter black areas of town, thus mixing him in with both the black underworld and the white world of politics, corruption, and gangsters.

Franklin’s script streamlines the novel, eliminating characters and incidents, but it also smooths out and sugars the characters. The story in Mosley’s hands is dark and full of moral twisting; no one’s motives or conduct bear much examination. In Franklin’s version the story has much clearer good and bad guys; in fact it almost becomes that familiar cliche of the decent man made angry by the bad guys who fights back to defend his home (his neighborhood, America, the cosmos, reality itself, etc.). The film even ends with a warm and fuzzy episode, one of those “Let’s Get Drunk, America” commercials as Easy gazes around his neighborhood: kids on ponies, families together.
But, in a way, that sweetening plays up the magical aspects in the role of Mouse. In the novel, Easy is deeply ambivalent about his old friend, a man who saved his life, a man who always makes him feel safe, but a man who likes to hurt people, a man without any conscience. When he repeats the word Easy uses, "guilt," Mouse says it (Easy notices) as if it had no meaning at all. That ability to stay clean is matched by one of Mouse's early crimes, a magical incident when he shoots a man several times from close up and gets no blood on him at all. This guarantees him a kind of magical invisibility; the police let him go because they are sure no one could do that shooting and not get bloody. But "Mouse didn't ever feel bad about anything he'd done," Easy notices.

However, in the circumstances, Easy, who does feel bad about things he's done and things others have done, has to stop behaving that way temporarily. Remorse and guilt are too dangerous. For example, the most violent of his enemies, and also his new boss, a man ironically named Albright, humiliates a teenager who had been harassing Easy in a racist way; instead of enjoying the episode or feeling grateful, Easy is distressed for the teenager. This good quality of his is going to get him in trouble because the situation calls for total ruthlessness if he is going to survive. Franklin emphasizes this when the black gangster Frank Green hears Easy has been asking around about him; Green's attack comes with no word of warning, no threat at all, and when Easy tries to talk to Green, the man simply continues to attack in a kind of menacing inhuman silence. Finally when he has Easy down and is beginning to cut his throat — we see the blood start — there's a voice from somewhere and Mouse appears gun in hand and saves the day. We heard no footsteps, saw no one drive up. Mouse simply manifests, as if "called up" by the extremity of Easy's need.

The need is a need for violent ferocity to match that of the gangster Albright, a man who reminds Easy of Mouse, and who makes Easy "uneasy" (as he says in the novel).
The pun is a kind of switchpoint to the fairy tale (the hidden movie) in which Easy needs to become someone else, the opposite to his decent civilized self, what Jung would call "the shadow." That point comes through in the novel when Easy is held by the police for hours by himself and finds himself staring at the dried corpse of a mouse on the floor of the room; another prisoner, probably infected by the sadism and boredom of the police building, stamped on it. "The mouse looked papery and dry so I supposed that the death had occurred at the beginning of the week; about the time I was getting fired." (70)

This meditation introduces a new idea to Easy: that size doesn’t matter, a classic fairy tale realization. He has tended to notice men’s size when he meets them, but only roughly, as either "big" or "little." He also tends to be fearful of big or powerful men. However he encounters big men who are more or less tame, like Dupree, and little men, like an annoying security guard, who can be fierce. He sees a pathetic mouse, dead when all it wanted to do was hide and be safe. He knows of a very different kind of mouse as well; Mouse is called "a little man" several times, by Easy and others, but at the same time, his presence immediately intimidates anyone he confronts. It isn’t size then that is power; it’s something else.

Easy already has one magical helper, a kind of Socratic daimon, a voice that comes to him when he is in big trouble and always gives him good (but often ruthless) advice. Thus, when Mouse, in the novel, suddenly manifests to save him from Frank, Easy at first thinks it is his "voice": "'Evenin', Frank,' somebody said in a friendly tone. It wasn’t me. I could tell that it was real because Frank froze." (148)

Easy is glad to see Mouse and yet is worried; he demands Mouse either go away or accept Easy’s orders. In the film version, Mouse agrees to the conditions and raises his hand to swear obedience. Easy notes, dryly, that he has raised his left hand. Then they laugh and embrace
like old friends, partners, allies, two halves of the same person. This way that Easy will let Mouse loose and pretend to ignore him (not let his right hand know what his left hand is doing) is brought out when Easy tells Mouse to guard Joppy, former friend and now enemy. When Easy returns Joppy is dead, strangled; Mouse has done him in so he could go to Easy’s aid during the gun fight—which he does spectacularly. Easy is distressed at the sight of Joppy’s corpse and wants to know why Mouse did what he did. Mouse asks, apparently illogically, “Why’d you leave him with me if you didn’t want him killed, Easy?” Good question. Now that the villains are all dead, Easy can stop being uneasy, so there is time for guilt and remorse, but Mouse is simply surprised. He did what Easy wanted him to do. As Albright, Mouse’s double, says early in the film, when Easy asks what kind of work he does, “I do favors for friends.”

What is Mouse’s favor, beyond the killings, the “favors” of the plot? The favor is a message of glee, of delight in danger. When Frank Green has vanished, Mouse regards Easy (this is in the novel) with a smile and tells him he has changed. “You use’t’ be kinda scared of everything,” he tells Easy. “Take them little nigger jobs like gardenin’ and cleanin’ up.” (152) This is a recognition of Easy’s pleasure in the danger of his new life. Looking for Green in various gangster haunts, Easy confides to us: “I felt a secret glee when I went into a bar and ordered a beer with money someone else had paid me. I’d ask the bartender his name and talk about anything, but, really, behind my friendly talk, I was working to find something. Nobody knew what I was up to and that made me sort of invisible; people thought that they saw me but what they really saw was an illusion of me.” (128)

It’s as if there’s a parallel world, a fairy tale place where the normal rules don’t apply and Easy, thinking of the mouse and of Mouse, has managed to get through the door and has found the delight that the fear can hide. Franklin shows Easy doing this kind of playacting in the
film but there’s no voiceover to tell us of his pleasure. We see it when Mouse sees it. Easy interrogates Junior, a man he was always scared of, a man who almost killed him until Mouse rescued him, and Mouse watches delighted, as Easy fearlessly baits and outwits the big man.

In the surface movie, Easy does what a man’s gotta do (blah). But in the dream-movie, he comes out of a life of obeying the rules and working hard which translates into being fearful, depressed, and bored. In the dangerous world of playacting he comes into himself. He should never have been uneasy, he now realizes, now that this doesn’t scare him, now that he’s easy about it. And of course in the upside-down logic of fairy tales you learn about being fierce from a mouse.

The shadow-movie beneath the movie Persuasion is a little harder to see at first — though there is that curious opening shot. Why does a film about the landed gentry and their dry surfaces begin underwater?

The film version of Austen’s novel is more or less faithful to the book, following the story of how Anne Elliot, the heroine, loses her lover, then loses her looks, and has to stand by and watch while he courts younger and prettier women right in front of her. The director punches up the characters a bit, so that Anne’s family, the grotesquely snobbish and bitchy Sir Walter and Elizabeth, are more obviously grotesque than the book lets on, but on the other hand he and his writer have obviously studied the novel carefully, even the early drafts, since they use Austen’s original ending and not the revision. So faithful that where they can’t render something that the text does, they do it visually; in one nice example, there’s the scene when the longparted lovers Anne Elliot and Captain Wentworth finally have their chance to come to an understanding. Unfortunately they are in public so they keep their public faces on but internally, says the narrator, there were “spirits dancing in private rapture.” To get this effect, the director and his writer have a circus
parade passing by so that the street is filled with men on stilts, dancing clowns, music, acrobats. In other places, where the text has Anne responding with confused rushes of feeling, they shift the distance or the angle of the shot abruptly, to give us as viewers the feeling of disorientation. This idea is especially good because in this society so structured around "place," around one's "estate" as both "house" and "status," strong feeling is the dangerous thing because it can make one lose one's sense of place.

So why does the film begin with a shot from under water upward at the glimmering white bottom of a rowboat seen through pale blue clear water? This image has no real equivalent in the text at all, it seems at first. The novel itself begins with a devastating account of Sir Walter Elliot's dependance on his status as "baronet" to give him comfort and allow him to feel contempt for others. There is nothing in the plot equivalent to the shot of the longboat carrying the admiral to the anchored men of war.

A hint at the answer is given by Charlotte Bronte's dismissal of Austen's work. She doesn't do much, says Bronte, though she "does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well." The editor who quotes Bronte says she missed Austen's point here, she "found it hard to look beneath the surface of Austen's placid-seeming text." [Pat Rogers, Everyman ed.]

The placid "surface," by analogy, is silence. Anne Elliot is the disregarded person whom nobody listens to, who doesn't tell what bothers her, who devotes herself to listening when others tell. The film marks this well, giving her the look of a shy, much-rebuked child, nervous and quiet, afraid to speak out while the others speak out fearlessly without hearing how grotesque they sound. Even her one confidante, Lady Russell, cuts her off or changes the subject when Anne tries very tentatively to unburden herself.

This enforced silence of hers is a kind of punishment but is made into a strength. Anne is a favorite because she
is such a good audience and so little insists on her troubles and her whims. She also develops a special ability, that of sympathy, what the narrator calls "entering into the feelings" of another person. This gives her an understanding of people far superior to anyone else's in the novel. She is like the orphan in Leslie Marmon Silko's short story "Private Property," the destitute child who is considered to be of no value and therefore gets to sit quietly and listen to everyone talk — and so, paradoxically, knows more than anyone else about what goes on in the village. According to Laguna legend, the orphan child will be the one to save the pueblo when the danger comes. That is, the silence gives one a kind of magical knowledge and power.

In Anne's case the power is a power to get out of herself. Where her sister Mary makes a fool of herself by dwelling on her own concerns, she also blocks any sense of other people; her own face is always in the way; in that sense, she is trapped in herself. Anne, on the other hand, tends to praise those who have "employment" of any kind that takes them out of their own troubles and engages them sympathetically with others. Her friend Mrs. Smith, poor, widowed, crippled, keeps her spirits by "finding employment that carried her out of herself."

But the reverse needs to happen for Anne. Her reanimation must come from bringing herself back in from the outer world: "Anne saw nothing, thought nothing of the brilliancy of the room. Her happiness was from within. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks glowed, — but she knew nothing about it." (164) That passage describes her joy when she first suspects Wentworth still has some feeling for her — but many curious things need to happen before she can get to this feeling. Or rather before this feeling can come back to her.

Although a comedy of manners and therefore concerned with the reasonable and rational, Persuasion is also a story of magic, a fairy tale. Like Cinderella, Anne is the devalued sister and the other two girls leave her to do the
dirty work. The only persons who could appreciate Anne are gone; her mother is dead, and as for her lover, Lady Russell, who functions as a wicked stepmother, has prevented that by persuading Anne not to marry him — putting a spell on Anne. The novel marks that magical sense of words later when Anne is momentarily entranced by Lady Russell's depiction of how, by marrying the snake-in-the-grass William Elliot, Anne could become her mother, a second Lady Elliot. This piece of persuasion works to "bewitch" her until she considers William Elliot again and then, says the narrator, "the charm was broken."

The film suggests the same idea of a magic spell early on when it stresses the way the class structure enforces silence and expressionless faces on the underlings. The sailors rowing the admiral are shown silent and self-contained; so are the servants at Sir Walter's. In many of the shots they are in the room but are silent and expressionless. When the others leave for Bath, Anne is standing dowdy and humble in the doorway, silent, taking orders. The others are haughty and arrogant in their clothing and language and gestures. Next to Anne stands a servant frozen at attention. The suggestion is that like the servant she is frozen too, under a spell.

The novel marks another aspect of that malign magic in the scene when Sir Walter and Elizabeth enter the room and Anne notices they bring with them a "general chill." Before they arrived the Musgroves and the officers were chatting and teasing but now "Anne felt an instant oppression . . . . the comfort, the freedom, the gaiety of the room was over, hushed into cold composure, determined silence, or insipid talk, to meet the heartless elegance of her father and sister. How mortifying to feel that it was so!" (201)

The film conveys the death-bringing spell by standing Anne next to the silent frozen servant and then by showing, on the wagon in which she is conveyed to Uppercross, a piglet in a cage, a goose in a cage, then oxen
being led, sheep being herded. These shots, which focus on the animals’ expressive eyes, follow shots of the silent and therefore mysterious faces of the tenants on the estate who had gathered to watch Sir Walter leave. By association: silent like caged animals. Bad magic: people changed into animals, so that they lose the ability of speech. We see in their eyes a living spirit but we know nothing about what that spirit is feeling or thinking.

There is a deathly quality to all this, hinted at by the associations with the word “mortifying.” The opposite word, one that appears when things are warm and going well, is “animated.” So we may suspect that this trouble of Anne’s is a case of soultheft or catatonia, a case of being buried alive. The film suggests this when, as the servants cover the Kellynch furniture with white sheets, we are covered with a sheet ourselves; the shot has us looking upward at a servant’s face as the dark thing is tossed over us and blackness ensues.

But there is a magical cure for this death-spell and Anne, when she goes to the seaside, has what the novel calls “a second spring of youth and beauty.” As in a late romance from Shakespeare, the natural laws are broken and after fall instead of winter spring appears again. What brings this is “the fine wind” off the sea. It would be logical, in the fairy-tale sense, for the wind to restore her soul. The wind is spiritus and soul is anima. To say the wind restores her animation is to say that her spirit has returned to her.

Where was it? At the bottom of the sea, looking up. In terms of the novel’s plot, the seaside is where Anne is admired by a stranger, which seems to improve the animation of her looks even more and where she proves herself capable and resolute in Wentworth’s eyes, thus setting in motion their eventual reunion. It is here also that she must think of fall in a fairy-tale sense, an illogical punning sense.

In the early scenes at Uppercross when Wentworth is flirting with young Louisa, Anne is along for the walk but
tries to ignore them by observing the signs of autumn and quoting to herself various lines about the season from the poets. Then, when Wentworth gets a bit too warm in his commendations of Louisa, Anne's composure fails her a bit. The narrator says, mockingly, "Anne could not immediately fall into a quotation again."

Fall into a quotation? "The sweet scenes of autumn were for a while put by — unless some tender sonnet, fraught with the apt analogy of the declining year, with declining happiness, and the images of youth and hope and spring all gone together, blessed her memory." (74) That is, Anne loses her protection, her distance from the others, her body of words. The only apt verse would be about the loss of youth and bloom and this would give no comfort. So she does not want to fall into quotations any longer.

Falling of course can hurt you. Therefore one must look before one leaps, as Lady Russell must have said when dissuading Anne from Wentworth's proposal, from a marriage in which she might be "sunk by him into a state of most wearing, anxious, youth-killing dependence!" (22) But fall is not just fall. It's autumn, which means it can be spring again. It's also a fall young Charles takes, trying to climb a tree, which proves not fatal at all, though worrisome. It is also the fall Louisa takes, a fortunate fall for all concerned since Benwick gets someone to love, and Wentworth witnesses Anne's capability with admiration. Perhaps the terrible fall Lady Russell warned her about, the fate of being sunk down in something youth-killing would after all have been no worse than one of these other falls, no worse than the sensation of being sunk beneath the sea in silence and despair. As it turns out, the novel is full of the danger of sinking or being sunk:

'Very dear Miss Elliot!' exclaimed Mrs. Clay, lifting up her hands and eyes, and sinking all the rest of her astonishment in a convenient silence. (189)
[Anne] saw the disdain in his eye.... Her spirits sank.
(202)

Mary had not Anne's understanding or temper. While well and happy and properly attended to, she had... excellent spirits; but any indisposition sunk her completely.

...sinking into the chair which he had occupied... her eyes devoured the following words.... (211)

... no one of proper condition [to propose to Elizabeth] has since presented himself to raise even the unfounded hopes which sunk with him. (223)

The most obvious analogy comes when Harville says men's feelings are like ships at sea: "capable of bearing most rough usage and riding out the heaviest weather." (208) To which Anne responds, in the remark that proves decisive for Wentworth, that women have the ability beyond what men can do "of loving longest, when existence or when hope is gone." As if one's soul were stolen, thrown into the sea and sunk to the bottom, but could still (magically) return. Thus perhaps the source for the dream image of the white rowboat passing over us as we lie under the sea. Thus the source also for the image of reunion, a close-up of Anne's ungloved hand reaching slowly for Wentworth's hand enclosed in a dazzling white glove. There's a perverse pleasure in watching this movie dreaming of itself, this fairy tale hiding in a rational (though fictional) world.
Artist's Statement

“Barcel in Love” is a story told by textual narration and a series of approximately 165 black and white photographs of (primarily) street trash with writing on it. Akin to photo-montage, this collage of works and pictures—or what I call vermontage—is a complicated layering of cultural elements that shifts with time. The shift points to the illusory nature of existence as Barcel falls in love and pursues Nadia, an archeologist. She rejects him in favor of her work only to realize too late that love may be just as real as the artifacts she examines.

Barcel and Nadia began to see more of each other.
It was an emotional time for both of them.

It was as if the whole world exploded.
Structuring History:
An Interview with Louis Massiah

In the spring of 1996, *W.E.B. Du Bois—A Documentary in Four Voices* was successfully screened at the Philadelphia Film Festival in the International House to a packed audience of festival patrons, intellectuals, artists and old-time activists. The inclement weather, high winds and unceasing rain of that characteristic May Day, was no match for the excitement and energy brewing in the lobby before the viewing.

The two hour documentary film directed and produced by independent Philadelphia filmmaker Louis Massiah, examines the life of Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois. Human rights activist, social scientist, literary editor and historian, Du Bois was one of the 20th Century's greatest political leaders.

Presented in a series of short stories written by four prominent African-American writers—Toni Cade Bambara, Amiri Baraka, Wesley Brown and Thulani Davis—the film traces Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois' rise to academic stardom at the universities of Fisk, Harvard and Berlin; his dogged will to document African American life during Reconstruction; his controversial leadership during the Harlem Renaissance as the editor of *the Crisis*, the official organ of the N.A.A.C.P.; and his involvement in international struggles: Pan Africanism, Socialism, and the World Peace Movement which provided the McCarthy Machine fuel for an unsuccessful government indictment against Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois.

Despite a few interruptions from the building's fire alarm system, the audience sat riveted by the film's stunning photo animation, rare archival footage, interviews and engaging musical soundscape that all worked to weave Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois' ninety-five years into a cohesive, rich history of African American determination
for equality and intellectual freedom.

The following interview with documentary filmmaker Louis Massiah took place in his North Philadelphia home. Mr. Massiah credits include "Power!" and "A Nation of Law?", for the PBS series *Eyes on the Prize II*, as well as *The Bombing of Osage Avenue, Trash!, My Own Boss* and *Cecil B. Moore*. An Emmy award winner and PEW Fellowship in the Arts recipient, he is the executive director of Scribe Video Center, a low-cost workshop program for aspiring film/video artists. In addition to receiving awards from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Columbia-DuPont, and the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, he recently was bestowed a MacArthur Genius Award.

We sat in the kitchen with the back door slightly ajar. The city's mid-day noise—construction crew, children romping down the street, and passing traffic—served as a backdrop for a discussion that ranged from aesthetics of documentary film to the United States government’s attempt to silence artists and intellectuals.

*MJ: Could you discuss how you became a documentary filmmaker?*

*LM: I think what that pulled me towards documentary was that it was a medium that had great political possibility. Meaning, it was a way of sharing ideas with a broad public that could function as an analytical & storytelling tool.*

I had been working at the public television station in New York, WNET, as a continuity writer. One of the things I did was very short science news reports. I had studied science as an undergraduate at Cornell University: physics, astronomy, among other things. From there, I became interested in production.

I then started working in programming. Programming television is different from programming computers. Programming for television is sort of working with
ideas and then shaping those ideas into a series. The projects I was helping to develop were documentary proposals. So I began to think more of the medium I had decided to go back to school. M.I.T. was just beginning to explore the arts. There were five programs, one of them was a film program that focussed largely on documentary.

**MJ:** *Who were some of your mentors or teachers at M.I.T.?*

**LM:** The person people had come to study with was a guy named Richard Leacock. But I wouldn’t say at that point I had mentors. There was a television producer I had worked with previously in public television, a guy named Ellis Haizlip, who I would say was a mentor of sorts. I think by the time I got to M.I.T. I really wasn’t in the mentor-seeking mode.

**MJ:** *Watching Du Bois' documentary, I thought “What an appropriate medium to discuss Dr. Du Bois’ life!” Here’s a man whose life was primarily dedicated towards documenting the lives of black people. I imagined, had he available today’s resources and technology, he would have taken advantage of the documentary film.*

**LM:** He was a documentarian. He was a photo documentarian. You see and understand this once you look at the work that was involved in putting together the 1900 Paris Exhibition on the American Negro. He gathered this incredible volume of photos—several thousand in fact—of black life in the United States at the turn of the century, which is the baseline visual work for documentary filmmakers.

**MJ:** *How much research do you think went into the Paris Exhibition?*

**LM:** It was a project coordinated by several black schools at that time. In terms of personal hours I’m not sure. But,
it was a fair amout of work, months and months of work, and very comprehensive. Certainly, those sociological studies that Du Bois presented along with the photographs were years of work.

\textit{MJ: How many years did the Du Bois documentary take to finish?}

\textit{LM:} The Du Bois film? The research began sometime in the 80s. Then I began to research seriously beginning in 1990.

\textit{MJ: You had this idea back in the 80s?}

\textit{LM:} At that point, I was more interested in doing a film on the \textit{Philadelphia Negro}, particularly looking at the \textit{Phila-}
delphia Negro from a contemporary perspective, beginning with Du Bois’ seminal study and sort of seeing where we are today; somehow using that as a jumping off point for a documentary. It grew to be much larger.

MJ: Was the growth a result of your fascination with the research materials?

LM: Well, it had more to do with time. I went to work on the Eyes On The Prize documentary. When I came back to the project, I began talking with advisors and a number of scholars who spent their lives studying Du Bois; they really impressed upon me that it was a much bigger story.

MJ: Did you have a vision of the documentary from the beginning? Or when you did decide, okay, this is a larger project than the Philadelphia Negro — this is Dr. Du Bois’ life — did you visualize what the film would look like?

LM: The structure of the film I had put together by early 1990. I knew it was going to be four sections. Rather than looking at this huge expanse of Du Bois’ entire life, even at the very earliest meetings, I had thought of doing four important moments of Du Bois’ life, which, as a filmmaker, you know, is probably a more interesting way of doing things because of the actual unity of time and space. I knew there were going to be four writers involved in the storytelling. I even had a pretty good sense of who those writers would be.

To me, films really gain momentum once you understand the structure then it’s a matter of filling in. Switching from the structure is probably the most unpleasant part of the film-making process. Or the other thing that can be unpleasant is when you’re going through the process of trying to give life to something you’re not wholly invested in; that can become kind of grueling. But if your form has vitality to it and it seems to match what your trying to do with the film, that can be ecstatic.
MJ: Considering the collaborative nature of documentary filmmaking how does form, or the filmmaker's vision or structure, change once you invite the talents and opinions of others.

LM: Prior to beginning production in June, 1991, I had put together a scholars' meeting at the Afro-American Historical Museum in Philadelphia for two days where we met and talked and presented papers. Conversations with scholars involved with the project at the very earliest stages were William Strickland, Herbert Aptheker, Addison Gayle, Paula Giddings, Myrtle Glascoe, James Spady and Sylvia Ardyn Boone.

Well, let’s take the visuals for example. Arthur Jaffa [the brilliant cinematographer behind Julie Dash's Daughters of the Dust] would often say, “Let’s try this.” My first reaction whenever AJ says something is “This is too out.” and I’ll nod my head. But AJ is persistent. AJ designed it and then when we got ready to shoot, Spike Lee hired him to do X. I then started working with Larry Banks, a really great DP. He's also done a lot of work for Spike. Larry Banks was the one who put into practice some of these things AJ came up with. Larry did these tests with the film stock. We tried about fourteen different film stocks, different lighting conditions and really tried to see how things would work. Some things didn’t work so well; some things worked much better.

What happens is everyone brings their own talent to the project. But it still has to match because there’s nothing more ragged than when you’re trying to make things look cohesive and they look a little bit out.

MJ: The film, in some places, seemed very traditional in technique. Were there moments you felt you were experimenting?

LM: I think the use of animation in documentary is non-traditional. So that you don’t get the sense that you’re watching a computer monitor, how do you make the written word visually interesting? Everytime the mate-
rial is up doesn’t mean the audience is reading. So, how do you give the audience a sense of the material? It’s definitely an abstraction of sorts. We spent a lot of time on the look of the film. In addition to having those content meetings with the scholars, we also had these visualization meetings of which Arthur Jaffa proved to be pivotal with the style of production.

MJ: It was beautiful.

LM: Realizing a lot of the people we were interviewing were “Others”, and knowing what they were going to say was going to be interesting, we had to come up with a style of shooting that was visually engaging.

MJ: I noticed some tints in the background, behind the interviewees.

LM: That’s somewhat of a trick. Its not really tints. I won’t go into it right now, but we played with the whole visualization of the film. The person who actually did most of the shooting that took the credit is another superb camera person, a guy named Michael Chin, who shot most of Eyes On The Prize.

MJ: Were the Crisis magazines animated?

LM: There were two animators who worked on the film. One was a film animator named Lewis Klahr, an experimental filmmaker and a brilliant guy. The person who oversaw the visual development was a woman named Beth Warshafsky who did a lot of the computer animation, particularly the stills between each section and the second montage of the Crisis magazines.

MJ: There is a nice aesthetic tension between the archival footage and the interviews.

LM: Yes. Yes. The archival footage is largely black and
white. Another thing about my approach, which is a little different, is I don’t like actors. I don’t like reenactments. I don’t know how you get around it. I don’t even like taking contemporary shots of old buildings. If we’re going to talk about Constitution Hall, 1896 then I like to use an image from that period. Specifically, if we’re talking about May 19. I will drag up the newspaper and get the engraving that says May 19. Or in the film if we’re talking about Du Bois going to Wilberforce in 1896, I want Wilberforce 1896. We had images of Wilberforce from 1910. I didn’t want 1910. If not 1896, then 1895.

MJ: What do you think is sacrificed in making those kind of aesthetic decisions?

LM: You feel it. We’re very sensitive. I think film is different because you’re suspending your disbelief. If you suddenly use an actor then you have to double suspend your disbelief. First, you’re suspending it once to say that this is the story. Throwing in an actor can be very jarring. However, it can be done and it has been done well. If its a fictional film, then fine. You’ve entered into that.

MJ: How did you go about selecting the writers. Were there any stylistic criteria you used?

LM: The four writers were chosen; well, chosen isn’t necessarily the right word, I think they sort of gravitated towards the project. They all seemed appropriate rather than, in some ways, “the writers” to do it.

Wesley Brown had written Boogie Woogie & Booker T., a play about the meeting of Booker T. Washington and Dr. Du Bois. An attempt towards reconciliation was made between the two at Carnegie Hall. He had also written a play about the whole development of ragtime. So that early period of Du Bois’ life seemed particularly appropriate for Wesley.

Thulani Davis had been very interested in the rise of
nationalism. She also wrote the libretto for *Malcolm X: The Opera*. She also had written a play about black soldiers in the first World War and the impact on African American music, focusing on Hames Reese Europe, the great conductor. She is a journalist who has written many years for the *Village Voice* and many other periodicals. So that period of the Harlem Renaissance when Du Bois is the head of *the Crisis*, especially during the rise of the Garvey movement, seemed pretty much appropriate to her.

Toni Cade Bambara had always been interested in strategy; how do you look at your situation and figure out where to go next? She also, in a lot of ways, followed Du Bois’ physical path, New York and Atlanta. She knew both of these communities and their characteristics really well. She was very interested in the whole Reconstruction period in which Du Bois becomes interested in the 1930s. So it seems particularly appropriate she would deal with that whole Harlem to Atlanta story in the 30s, as Du Bois was trying to figure out a strategy for African Americans.

Baraka? Baraka is somebody who through his politics and his life has felt the heel of the United States government on his neck. He also had written a screenplay, commissioned by Bill Cosby, about Du Bois’ life, particularly focusing on the indictment. It’s a very interesting script. Unfortunately, it was never produced. He is very much a scholar of Du Bois as well.

MJ: Could you discuss the other folks behind the scene who contributed greatly to the film?

LM: The music is very important. Originally I had this notion of replicating the expanse of African American music from the late 19th century to the mid 60s. We do that somewhat. I first contacted David Murray who is one of the most extraordinary musicians of his generation. In his music you sense this respect for the varieties of African American music, be it gospel, sorrow songs, or the blues. He just covers it. He provided some of the base elements.

The film took much longer than what we expected.
And although David Murray is an extraordinary, generous person, he is also an extraordinary busy person. He hooked me up with Dave Burrell, an accomplished pianist and a student of early music forms, particularly Jelly Roll Morton and ragtime. They had done a lot of work together.

But still I realized the film needed an overarching tone to keep it together. We needed someone who was a superb composer, someone who knew film scoring but also knew David Murray because Murray in someways was the kick-off man. Dwight Andrews who is one of the most talented scorers out there, who actually did all the music for August Wilson’s plays (*Piano Lesson, Fences, Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*) came in as music supervisor.

The editor, Monica Henriquez, is absolutely critical to the film. It’s an edited film. Yes, there is a vision and a structure but the script, after awhile, is driven by the editing.

*MJ:* That’s interesting. I recall a couple of moments when I thought the transitions were very slick, very smooth. It was amazing not to sense . . . .

*LM:* Some of that is editing. Some of that is writing. Some of that is music. And some of that is the camera work. You create a kind of rhythm and the rhythms sometimes can carry you from one place to another. Sometimes, those rhythms have everything to do with camera work.

*MJ:* I was terribly fascinated by the compression of Dr. Du Bois’ ninety-five years into two hours. I guess like any other artist you have choices to make. In this case, huge choices.

*LM:* Film is a work of judgement. It is a work of art. Therefore, yeah, you are making judgements on presentation. If you’re making the film knowing you cannot fit ninety-five years into an hour of public television, you have to figure out how you are going to be able to tell this story in a short amount of time. Du Bois lived a very long life and I wanted to come up with a format that would
allow us to look at his entire life in a way that wouldn’t put an audience to sleep.

MJ: I couldn’t help but thinking—looking and listening to Paula Giddings, David Levering Lewis, Harold Cruse, Hubert Ross as well as the narrators—that part of the subtext of the film is our own collective, but mainly, individual debt to Dr. Du Bois' rigid defense of black intellectual self-determination. The film was almost, in that respect, a homage of sorts. There seemed to be this clear lineage between Du Bois’ scholarship and the work of black scholars in this country. I wonder what would have been the state of 20th century black thought had we followed Booker T. Washington’s program of economic self-discovery.

LM: Indeed, Du Bois is the intellectual forefather. He was someone who spent his life fashioning himself an intellectual, an unabashed intellectual. Sooner or later you’re going to have to brush up against him. Either you’re going to be right in his path or you may find yourself in opposition to Du Bois. But, it seems to me, you’ll have to encounter Du Bois at some point.

MJ: I imagine you wearing many different hats with this project.

LM: Probably too many. If I were to do it again, I don’t think I would try to executive produce.

MJ: What are some of the demands of a producer/director?

LM: It’s just extraordinarily time-consuming. It’s just hard to do.

MJ: Back to content. In looking at the finished film and thinking about all the choices you had to make, is there anything you wished you would have included or played up more?
LM: I guess a couple of things. Quite a bit was chopped out as a result of time. The film at one point was three times as long. However, I am at peace with what’s there. Certainly there are many, many different things about Du Bois’ life; I mean, in the 30s he traveled around the world. He was investigating co-ops; he traveled all throughout the United Kingdom. He looked at the economy and education. I mean there were also other people that became close to Du Bois, like Paul Robeson.

MJ: I noticed Robeson quite a bit in the archival footage.

LM: Right, which is a way of hinting at that relationship. At some point you can’t do everything. Many people we interviewed we unfortunately could not use in the film and there were other people that we interviewed that you don’t get a full sense of, like Esther and James Jackson, very, very important people to Du Bois. Du Bois also gave a very famous speech, I think in 1946 or 1947 at the Southern Negro Youth Conference called “Behold The Land.” Du Bois also gave the eulogy or spoke at the gravesite of Ethel & Julius Rosenberg. They may seem arcane mainly because we haven’t been told about them but they are quite important.

MJ: How does a filmmaker insure the life of their creation? I read somewhere you were developing a CD Rom for educational purposes.

LM: I guess it depends on the subject of the documentary. This is a documentary that will, I hope, have educational use for many years in schools and libraries. One of the problems is there are rights issues. Since you’re working with archival material you may not get broad, long-term copyright usage. These sort of things have to be negotiated and re-negotiated.
MJ: What’s in the future for the Du Bois project?


MJ: Is this the first documentary on Du Bois?

LM: It is the first full-length documentary on Du Bois. A year after I began the project a woman in Springfield, MA, a first-time filmmaker, made a film about Du Bois’ childhood in Great Barrington.

MJ: How do you explain that gap in American artistic production?

LM: It’s called McCarthyism. It’s called the Red Scare. It’s called “red-listing.” It’s basically being erased. Like his granddaughter says in the film, his books were removed from public libraries. The speaking engagements stopped. Du Bois had been up until 1950, the best-known black American, the best-known black intellectual around the world.
The *Painted Bride Quarterly* is pleased to announce the winners of its Third Annual Poetry Contest:

**First Place:**
Jean-Marc Sens  
"Plantains"

**Second Place:**
Richard Fox  
"My Father at Seventy"

**Third Place:**
Janet Poland  
"Lines Composed Above the Observatory at Kitt Peak"
Plantains

Contortionists at recess
the plantains bend their spines
reclining side by side on the kitchen shelf
trying to keep abreast their change of colors
maturing to the daily repetitions
of their two suave syllables: Plan-tain,
aerial cluster of vegetal ribs
cradling under green-vermilion palms.

Now yellowing and darkening to copper amber
you grow more redolent,
softening beneath your thick pod,
almost buttery inside
with the thin tender black line of your foreign horizon
wind agitated to your suspension.

Today, I disrobe you,
still hard to pull you out of yourself
sugary and slimy in my hands.
The blade goes clean through your flesh.
I slice you, opening you to the thin star
of your umbilical pistil inside—
gone flower with an aftertaste of earth.
Buoyant in the boiling oil you
hold up to your golden effervescence
browning, deepening a taste of fresh rains
you sapped from your tree roots—
crisp and sunny I salt you
to the tang of your Caribbean land.
My Father at Seventy

I. February 22, 1994

As my Father turned seventy,
I fell asleep on a
train crossing Michigan.

Waking, I disturbed a swamp,
a tannin sea of streams,
by the wings-gentle skimming
from the husks of my dreams.

I saw split-rail fences propped
by guide wire and
wearing traffic cones like the
hats witches adopt
for Hallowe’en. And while idling
at those places marked,
importantly, by
places they’re between,

(with train wheels hissing
all round and braked),

the track becomes the back of his hands
at the back of his life.

II. February 22, 1959

The bruised gray sky is slaked
by all the lives that have ceased
the night gone by. Despite all this
I hear
my childhood bedtime prayer
which asked only that all things
be disarmed
and wither with night—to be

still as me, who might,
unconscious, miss the
rise of a bird
up the ladder of air
—and to be without the fear
of things that do me harm

(like the nights I left Grandma’s
house, full of her apple pie, and found
the chill of Not Enough).

III. You Without You

You are without you, Dad,
doubting the dark at first
and then the laws of gravity

that skate like you without you,
on errant strides, on eclipses slung
beside the cup of our planets.

Our setting sun can dye these
nine planets, these nine grousing friends
a startling patch of gold—or

carve the green beginnings
of a soybean fields
at February’s end.
IV. The Perfect Geometry

Where is the perfect geometry
of your presence?
It is as likely that a stone,
worn smooth by the stream,

will take on the shape of the water,
as you, like the stars,
will ever assume the shape
of a whole universe
safe in the subtle hum
of tilting solstices.

What is the point of looking yourself
askance halfway 'round your life;
you still believe that
loss is only a hoop of water.

The bruised gray sky will unhinge
its seething roof. The ozone will slide
its lake of death from pole to pole.
Lines Composed Above the Observatory at Kitt Peak

Perhaps you came because
you knew he could not speak,
could no longer argue;
knew the dark cells
had rearranged his words,
stored some behind glass,
close, but beyond his reach,
left others out, disordered, underfoot;
knew at last he could no longer win
on every point but faith.
He saw the heavens his way,
through a lens of his own design,
and sometimes from the middle air
he saw most clearly,
towed aloft, released, to ride
the thermals in between the hot red earth
and the cool and everlasting sky,
as on that final flight, ash to dust
the softest of all descents,
for a moment, he rose.
9:30 Topography

Oh, you know what you do when you raise your fan to me. You cover your eyes and the buses go past, crying, the sound of their name here, guagua, sweeping the heavy air onto our legs.

You make the too-bright street, everything, go on. What’s ugly doesn’t stop; no, nor beauty— the way I turn my face from yours, the way the sun is walking.
Equinox

It is the exact moment of spring recorded by the ranger’s watch
and punctuated by the shrieks of children
and the gongs of the big bell
outside the nature center.
On the far side of the lake,
like some graceful prize-fighter
a buck bursts out of the brush
and bounds across the ice.
The other side is a sure thing
but, then, the ice
gives itself away to spring
and the deer plunges
into the frigid water.

Now, there is a second deer
running up the softening backbone of winter.
It will surely pull up short
on the safe ice
or it will take a long curving turn
or it will skid and genuflect
to its knees
but it will stop, somehow,
and go back
taking the long safe way around
across the stream that feeds
into the south end of the lake.
But the second deer
is not backing off.
It is running along the same breakneck ice as the first deer,
whose head is visible now,
whose legs are kicking their way
through the freezing water.
Just as the buck is clambering up
onto stronger ice, the second deer is swallowed up,

Then there is a third deer running
and a fourth
and a fifth,
wild hooves beating
the grey sky of ice
back to a life-giving blue.
Deer in ancient, forgotten numbers,
not satisfied with shrieks and bells,
carrying spring across the blueing heavens
in their raw courage,
sick-of-winter hearts.

Carrying the high holy day
and hour and minute
of spring
across Lake Galena,
across Peace Valley Park.
No more tough bark.
No more grass buried
under a foot of icy snow.
No more tasteless twigs
and deadwood.
Winter is gone,
broken,
and the deer,
still breathing hard,
gather on the other side,
near the big willow,
shake themselves like dogs,
but not like dogs,
shake the last cold drops
of winter
into the grasses
of spring.
Bag

One big gold star crown above star
lions on hind legs left right jaws wide their long tongue
   flames
old pouch of manhood holiness equipment
Jews give their boys my dad’s
tfilin shawl yarmulkah stuffed into blue velvet
hung on a nail above my desk benevolently—
you wind the leather thongs on your arms like veins
you drape the white silk over your shoulders
you perch the black silk cap on the back of your head—

consciousness is what you know you know about yourself
   and what you don’t know yet’s a second you doomed
reckless free
in acts of ruinous change
in prayers of unheeded babble
in sparrows thrashing the dry dirt of flower pots
in the holy spark of the moment
the stark primeval fierceness of the Jew bent over a book
as if the real world weren’t enough weren’t really real
as if in the pages beneath his eyes in strange tortured
   letters
a man could guarantee God’s absolute primal absence beyond
   argument
could seize it like a butcher grips a chicken neck
slashes the knife across it
really real
Heat Wave

"It sounds like an airport in here," she complains over the whir of the window fans.

"I hadn't noticed," I say. I am naked, supine, sprawled out on the couch. My forearm covers my eyes.

The mailbox has melted. Kaye comes into my apartment, to hand-deliver the mail. It's already 108 degrees and it's not even noon.

She undresses, except for the Yankee-gray cotton socks and vibram-soled Rockport shoes. She folds her Post Office issue shorts and blouse, hanging them over a chair, then her panties and bra, the safari hat on top. She sits across from me.

I ask her if she knows where Felix is. I take in her spectral appearance against the harsh molten light that oozes through the bamboo curtained windows: the persimmon breasts, the midriff as pale as talc, the fawn-colored pubis, wiry and glistening, the tawny hazelnut legs. "Went out for coffee and bagels," I add. "Said he'd be right back."

She doesn't answer.

The whole situation is sexually charged. Yet, we are too fatigued by the heat. Just crossing one leg over the other, the flesh chaffs and burns.

We talk about what everyone is talking about, the weather; drink prodigious amounts of iced tea, Kool Aid, Gatoraid, grapefruit juice, banana papaya juice, beer, V8....

"Shall I come back tomorrow?" she asks as we drink water from the tap.

Each day Kaye visits me, she undresses. We assume an easy familiarity. For months she has been my mail carrier. Unobserved, I have read the intricate blue veins behind her knees.

She watches me as I paint. My Harmonia Mundi, a wall-sized map of the world. Or we discuss the continuing heat
wave: the warning signs of dehydration and heat stroke, the virtues of the various sun shields and antiperspirants — thinly veiled references to our lives.

The temperature 111, like sun-baked car vinyl seats, everything searing to the touch.

Kaye holds her hair off the back of her neck, walks around inspecting the religious statuary, framed art, the books on Schopenhauer I am packing away in a box.

"What religion are you?"
"They belong to Felix."
"You don’t believe in God?" She is looking at the oil painting that still hangs on the wall: Jesus and Joseph with adz and planer are finishing a trestle table, Mary serving them a lunch of falafel and goat cheese and honey-sweetened burdock tea.

"I am an orphan. My parents are unknown to me.... Or dead."

Kaye comes into the apartment, behind her the sky like a scorched butterscotch pudding. I am seated on Felix’s weight bench, talking on the phone, missing persons.

The police ask if he has any distinguishing features.
"He’s blind," I remind them. "He cannot have gone far." I can barely make myself heard over the screaming cicadas, the whirring fans.

Why is it, Kaye wonders, she’s never seen Felix.
"He works during the day," I explain. "At Pillsbury."

"What is Felix like?" she asks.

We are clipping out weather maps from the back of the newspaper. We study closely the red zones which flow forth and recede around our sun-baked city like lava from a newly erupted volcano.

"There’s no room for the faint-hearted in this world, Felix used to say. We live defiantly, or not at all."

Kaye and I plan our escape by marking off in miles the distance to those places on the map that are only orange, or even green or blue. We weigh the cost of air travel over car or bus.
117 degrees. I have spread out the horse-hair blanket on the floor. We pretend we are at pool side, sunbathing.

"No one wants to believe their husband is having an affair," Kaye says. "The pantyhose in the glove compartment, the marathon work weekends, the mysterious phone calls...."

We have on dark-tinted goggles, protection against the pool's turquoise glare. We say things like, "Are my shoulders getting red?" or, "Pass the Bain de Soliel."

"The postmaster general says I should have one, too."

"One...?"

"Affair!... Be a sweetie and rub some lotion on my back."

112 degrees. Still no word from Felix. How could he have just disappeared? Kaye and I are seated Indian fashion on the carpet, peering out over the window sill.

"What do you enjoy doing?" Kaye asks.

"Painting. My Harmonia Mundi."

"Besides...."

"Travel books, National Geographic, the issues with the fold-out maps.... More recently, books on the molecular structure of refrigerants. The neat symmetry. Carbon, hydrogen, and oxygen. Billiard balls all in their rack."

We are watching as black crows alight, get stuck in, slowly sink into the molten tarmac out front.

"How did you first meet Felix?"

"At the 'Y.' I was teaching map making. He was power lifting. This was before I developed this strange illness which, for reasons the doctors don't understand, is eating away at the walls of my heart."

The air sulfurous, the temperature souring. Kaye and I sit side by side, the large fan blowing on us, our hair matted at our temples, the hot dry air gritty with ash.

"You never talk about yourself," she says.

"Since starting my Harmonia Mundi, my map of the world, I have found it increasingly necessary to stand farther and farther back from my subject."
Kaye waits for me patiently.

“T am no longer in the picture, see?” We watch the hot cinders wafting downward just outside the window, the paint factory that ignited during the night on Central Avenue just three blocks from here.

Kaye and I luxuriate on the large horse-hair blanket. I wear Felix’s sepia-tinted aviator glasses against the brilliant sun-glazed sand.

“We went to the Outer Banks for our honeymoon,” Kaye tells me. “Second, third day out, he takes me to Myrtle Beach. He takes me out. He goes back to the hotel with someone else. Later, he says it was the Harvey Wallbangers he’d been drinking. Didn’t discover his mistake until the next morning. She was sitting up in bed in her teddy, drinking her Cafe Amaretto, blow drying her hair. ‘But I thought it was you, sweet buttons,’ he keeps insisting. ‘It was your name I cried out!’ he tells me.”

“Did I tell you, when Felix was twelve years old he gave up talking? Discovered everything stood for something else.”

We wave away sand flies. The joyful screams of children playing in the breakers lull us to sleep.

The continuing temperature inversion, the stalled air mass that blankets the Midwest. Kaye crying. I continue my Harmonia Mundi. Felix still not back from bagels and coffee.

114 degrees. Kaye and I wear wet towel burnooses against the feverish heat.

“My husband talks in his sleep. After he left the Institute of Atmospheric Science, he went to Revlon. He was on the product team that developed Decadence, their premier perfume. After that they made him a big shot. ‘I’m happy,’ he’d say. ‘For the first time in my life....’ Of course he’s happy. Those aren’t Howard Johnson’s 31 flavors of ice cream he’s calling out in the night.”

Kaye and I stare out the window. The stream that runs
out behind my apartment — the water turbid with machine oil, sewage, airplane parts fallen from the sky — ignites spontaneously. It gives off stinging plumes of smoke.

"Am I attractive to you? Do you find me sexy?"
I am distracted, cannot help thinking something terrible has happened to Felix. "Since starting my Harmonia Mundi," I tell Kaye, "I've become increasingly priestly."
"Perhaps," she suggests, "your life is hopelessly mired in paint."

115 degrees. Kaye and I lazily swirl our arms in the large galvanized vat that I have bought with one of the credit cards Felix left behind. Cans of cola and beer float in the ice.
"Felix was married once," I tell her. "Anne Marie brought him up on a charge of rape, though he thought at the time they were only playing rough. The court system made him take a sensitivity program. They taught him the horrors of penetration, the degradation of sex, how women are treated like chattel. How their shoes pinch and their pantyhose itch. How all their ties, clasps, and zippers are just a little out of reach. They showed him how child bearing makes a woman into a pack animal, the self-mutilation, the stretch marks, the varicose veins. They showed him training films, scenes of natural and man-made disaster accompanied by ear-jangling music to which Susan Brownmiller chanted 'Man is the rapist' again and again.... Felix claimed that after his rehabilitation, he saw clearly how aggression ought not to have any part in sex—"
"Have you ever been married?"
"Felix used to say that since his marriage his whole life had been broken into a succession of unrelated acts."

119. Kaye and I lie prone on the carpet. She tells me of her heat stroke, her husband away, the International Perfumer's Conference, the summer it was over 115 for eighty-five consecutive days. They lived in an un-air-conditioned brick bungalow, a structure without protec-
tion of shrubbery or trees. She had long since given up her own needs to those of her husband’s. Day after day she sat indoors, motionless, the vapid, stinging heat. At first she stopped eating. Then drinking. Time ceased to exist. She was neither awake nor asleep, the sun whirring at her like a power drill, its bit boring holes in her skull from which a mercurial substance poured out. And so they found her, at the end of July: emaciated, dehydrated, delirious.

“Did you have a vision?” I ask. “I’m thinking of the sacred Indian sweat lodges, superheated stones, blinding smoke.”

“That’s when I decided to become a mail carrier. I’d no longer be subject to my husband’s whims,” she says.

“Lots of wampum. Good medicine,” I say.

“Tell me about Felix’s blindness.”

“I once told Felix, ‘Christianity is just one of those stories we tell each other to comfort ourselves against the dark.’”

“What dark!? Felix answered.”

“Read to me,” I tell Kaye. I crave information, any kind of information.

We spend several afternoons reading to each other: Wittgenstein’s Logical Tractatus, the back of the Sugar Pops box, the libretto to Die Fledermaus, the capitals of the world.

“What are we supposed to gain by this?” she complains.

“A glimpse of the larger view, Earth seen from the dog star.”

Kaye explodes into laughter — her sudden resemblance to Felix who used to complain that my whole life was dedicated to creating these complex geographies from which I could not hope to escape.

The heat wave continues unabated.

“When I’m unhappy,” she says. “I get a facial and a hairdo. I page through the Spiegel catalog, order a new dress.”
I am absorbed in my *Harmonia Mundi*. Under a swirl of cirrus clouds I paint an ancient coniferous forest, burnt umber and murky green. A railroad trestle, rusted and twisted girders, hang over a precipice. A frothing cataract plunges into the canyon below.

"What do you do when you’re unhappy?"

"Call the Library of Congress and have them read to me from *The Book of the Dead*."

119 degrees. We lie on the floor, both of us on our backs. We pretend we are in traction. We have been in an accident and are unable to move. The sudden explosion of cicadas in our ears, the room heating up like a kiln.

"It’s a shame about Felix," I start. "Felix Ungar, whose name might even now be emblazoned across the marquees of America, the darling of talk show hosts, in all the poster shops, the insouciant pose, the tear-off football jersey, the Ray Charles shades."

Kaye is silent.

"Only he did not go out for a drink that night with Arnold, at the Peeping Eyes Tavern, after his weight lifting. All because of an argument he’d had with Anne Marie. The very night Max Lehman, also at the Peeping Eyes, was putting together the cast for his film *Stay Hungry*, the film that launched Arnold’s career, the film Lehman would have instantly cast Felix in — Felix, who had all the bulk and definition of Arnold... and much better teeth."

Perhaps she is asleep.

112 today, the ceiling fan rocking nervously on its mount. Kaye is seated on the floor, a cigarette dangling from her lips. She holds her hair up off her neck, tying it back with an elastic band.

From my perch on the sofa, I am staring at the medal that lies between her breasts.

She follows my eyes, her chin pressed to her chest. "It’s St. Salomé," she says.

I take it between thumb and forefinger.

She arches her back, puts her cigarette in the ashtray,
takes another sip of her wine.

"Touch me," she says.
I awkwardly cup a breast in my hand.
"Are you afraid?"
"We really don’t know each other."
"Do men and women ever know each other?"
I am sorry that, like Felix, I do not know Braille.

We have taken to reading the mail. At the beginning,
third and second class, and then one day, overtaken by a
mellow spirit induced by gin and Gatoraid spritzers, first
class mail.

We have only to place a letter on a half-filled cup of
water in the sun to break its seal.

In fairness to us, we never unseal a first class letter that,
after perusing its contents, we do not immediately reseal.
We are not common hugger-muggers.

One John Doe writes: "I am sorry if, from the tenor of
my previous letter, you concluded I no longer care. I do care.
It is just that I care so much that I find it impossible to allow
you to commit such an abhorrent act."

Kaye and I repeat this fine turn of phrase to each other,
saying it backwards and forwards, committing it to memory.
I am likely to remark to Kaye, "I am sorry if, from the timber
of my voice, you decided I meant to impugn your judg-
ment. I revere deeply your judgment. So much so that I will
not allow you to say something unflattering to you." Or
Kaye: "I am sorry if by touching you so, you concluded that
I meant disrespect for your person. My respect for you is
unbounded. So much so that I only touch you thus to assure
myself that you are indeed real." And on and on.

Though I am troubled by these purloinings, Kaye pushes
us onward. She is looking for letters brimming with lust,
still steamy in their wraps. And I for one instance of
enduring love.

"Tell me about Felix's rape?" Kaye says.
It is 119 degrees today. We are seated in the inflatable
wading pool I ordered from the Sears Catalog with one of Felix’s credit cards. The pool has a sinister clown at the bowsprit, a red bulbous nose, tartar yellow cheeks, clown’s suit of white polka dots against a cadaverous green. As fast as we fill the pool — water that runs from the outside faucet through the garden hose passed through the window — it evaporates, making the air astringent, like iodine on an open wound.

“All a horrible mistake, Felix claimed. She made certain wiggling motions he construed as a sexual overture which Anne Marie later claimed was a seizure induced by the gin she’d been drinking, combined with her antidepressant Prozac, and her sunbathing in the too hot noon day sun.”

118 degrees. The incessant warble of central air conditioning pods outside my apartment, wheezing and sweating in the heat; my fans, the cicadas, screaming. In the distance, a cooler sound — a calliope, Mr. Smoothy, the ice cream man.

“Don’t you have a dream for yourself? A cedar bungalow, a BMW in the driveway, a schooner in a slip on Biscayne Bay?”

“Felix used to say, we are but imperfect machines endlessly trying to reproduce ourselves.” As we watch, a band of marauding thugs shoots the tires out from under Mr. Smoothy.

We call 911 and get the recorded message, an operator will be with us momentarily; Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head plays in the background.

They are beating Mr. Smoothy. He lies face down in a puddle of cherry jubilee.

Now they are fixing themselves banana boats and matterhorns and caramel swirls. The calliope plays on and on.

“How did their marriage break up?”
“After Felix’s sensitivity course, he became ... placid.”
“You mean—”
“Like a windsock on a windless day....
“He took to bringing her flowers. He showered her with gifts. He fixed her sumptuous meals. Still, Anne Marie was displeased with him. He upped the benefits on his life insurance policy. He took up sky diving. He took an executive position for which he was really not qualified. He gave up power-lifting while working himself up to three packs of cigarettes a day. He used power tools without reading the instructions, operated heavy machinery while on medication.

“Anne Marie’s unhappiness was breaking his heart. ‘What a feeble excuse for a man you are,’ she’d say. ‘Where’s the person I married?’ ‘Gone,’ he’d say. ‘Go read your Schopenhauer,’ she’d say with disgust.

“Eventually she had the marriage annulled. ‘All a case of mistaken identity,’ she told the judge. ‘Someone switched my husband in the night.’”

A brief respite in the weather, only 102 degrees. I leave off painting my Harmonia Mundi, and we use this occasion to paint the living room: forest green and parrot green and Kelly green and olive drab and jade and teal and lime and avocado and chartreuse. When we squint just so, we have the feeling we are in a great dark rain forest.

We have begun to paint each other. Like mandrills we chatter noisily, lope around the living room on our knuckles, sit back on our haunches and groom each other.

Then the ear-shattering crunch of metal on metal, a car pile-up out front of my apartment, our jubilant spirits sullied. A wedding party discovers ours is a dead end street — too late. Car horns, then sirens, then the chop-chop of air rescue, a rabbi with a propeller affixed to his yarmulke, to perform the last rites.

“You taste of bitterroot!”
“How do you mean?”
“You taste of bitterroot!”

I am silent. How does bitterroot taste? Does this herald the onset of some fatal disease? Should I launch myself upon a conscientiously applied program of oral hygiene? Should I see a priest?
Working on my Harmonia fitfully. Kaye, paging through Mirabella, pouty-mouthed models attired in Chanel and Armani and Christian Dior. “I don’t remember saying it,” she insists. “And even if I did say it, you’re making yourself sick always trying to figure out what everything means.... What are you saving yourself for? Life is to be spent.”

Again, I am struck by Kaye’s resemblance to Felix. Once, he had pointed to the shell of a cicada affixed to our doorway, drying in the sun. “Art is not the answer, pupa brain,” he said. “Deplete yourself!”

“If you were suddenly given a good strong heart,” Kaye asks, “what would you do?”

“Play the hazards,” I answer unthinkingly.

“Everyone knows, the man conquers the woman by overcoming her resistance,” I tell Kaye. “And the woman conquers the man by allowing herself to be overcome. It is the natural order of things....”

The fans going on and off — something wrong with the electricity.

“Fortunately, Anne Marie had been liberated from the natural order of things!”

Kaye sound asleep.

119 today. Forced to take my contacts out. The unrelenting heat. Now I cannot find them, or they have melted into the air.

I ask Kaye to open Felix’s Bible at random. This, from Isaiah: “My people are come into captivity because they have no knowledge and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude dried up with thirst.”

Was I wrong to suggest to Felix that his faith was misplaced, that we were already in hell?

“You know what your problem is?” Kaye says. “You don’t laugh enough!” She dabs at my brow with an ice-pack while she smokes.

A dream last night. I am falling from the wheel-well of a plane. I see a vast landscape beneath me, a patchwork
quilt all amber and emerald and forest green. I am falling, falling. I awake slick with paint.

"But if Felix is blind, how is he able to read?"
"He spreads a dollop of honey, say, on Deuteronomy. He plants his elbows on the table, the heels of his hands to his head — the subtle seismic fibrillations as ants swarm over the page, their mandibles masticating the sacred word."

Kaye is right. I must catch the ability of laughter, learn to frolic and play.
In my zeal to demonstrate my willingness to learn, I suggest that we play that party game where everyone forms a circle, their heads on each other's stomach, the laughter bubbling up....

Of course, the game requires at least three. What a fool I am. We try it several ways, and only succeed in giving each other head.
I blush with shame.
Kaye combs her nails through my hair. "Mmmm," she says, "the official snack food of the US Olympic bobsled team?" She laughs and laughs.
I despair of ever completing my Harmonia, this feverish delusional world.

The temperature soaring, 121 degrees. It is not enough that we have flung away our last articles of clothing, our very shame. We crawl along the floor heedless of rug-burn. By now, the cottonwood leaves glimmer blindingly in the dust-laden wind, the cicadas scream unceasingly day and night. My apartment glows like the yawning maw of a volcano. I wonder what it is that prompts Kaye to come back again and again when she might easily move on to another apartment on her route, one that is air conditioned perhaps.

My heart beats only faintly. I touch Kaye's parched lips, the lips that have just touched my shoulder, and touch my lips. I feel this strange stirring inside, as if what separates us has been burned away.
We slip in and out of consciousness.

"Do you have a special relationship with Felix?" she snaps. "Are you two sweet boys? Are you Felix's wife?"

"What's the matter with you? Felix and I are like one. I am his vision. He is my legs... Don't you have to keep your appointed rounds?"

I'm the last person on her route, she says. "Worked out that way, by fate... and the postmaster general." She files her nails with an emery board wholly indifferent to my worsening condition.

An energy outage. It couldn't have happened at a worse time, the temperature 124 degrees. The civil engineers announce that, for reasons they don't understand, the locks are closing above us; the hydroelectric power has failed. One by one the fans, the central air conditioner pods, the window air conditioners, stutter and come to a halt. Even the cicadas leave off their whining. There is an ethereal silence punctuated by occasional ear-splitting screams: across the street from us, above us, next door. Kaye and I crawl on our elbows and knees, like a defeated army, into the kitchen, the cooler linoleum.

"Tell me Felix Ungar exists!"
"Of course he exists."
"Look at me!" she says.

I avert my eyes, difficult in my kitchen, no larger than a bread box.

"Isn't it your name? On the Pillsbury paycheck stubs? On the Bible and in the phone book and on the mail?"

"I want you to go," I say quietly, looking at the underside of the table, the seams encrusted with flour.

A power failure again. The air conditioning pods outside, the fans stall and come to a stop. Sirens far off. Distant cries for help.

She swivels to a kneeling position, glowers at me, her eyes like thunderclouds, the damp heated air strong with her musk. "Don't you dare tell me to go! You try to push
me away, I’ll have you arrested for tampering with the mail.”

“Your idea,” I protest. I try to raise myself up.

She pins my arms down. “I’ve been a mail carrier for over ten years.... I’ll claim you raped me. Who’ll believe you? You’ve raped before. Haven’t you, Felix.” She whispers it, like an imprecation, a threat.

Weakly, prey to this unrelenting heat, I push her away. She bears down. My heart stammers in my chest. Bathed in sweat, we slide against each other, roll along the linoleum floor. Our hands, arms, legs, flail the air. Upended objects fall around us, a shade snaps upward. There are thunderclaps in the distance, heat lightning.

She is astride me, impaling herself upon me. The walls seem to collapse. I murmur and plead with her, the wounded animal in my throat. Now I am moving up inside of her. Random, disconnected thoughts drift into consciousness, voices from another room: “Don’t you believe in heaven?” Felix is saying, “To die is heaven,” says I. I hear Felix’s laughter. In one momentous convulsion something is broken off inside. Like a seed pod exploding I am jettied upward, a spore carried off by the wind.


The power surges to life, the air moving around us in great drafts. It starts to rain. We lie quietly in a cooling pool of sweat, my heart beating strongly, steadily, in unison with hers.
White Sail

There is a ship, and the sails are white, white cloth hung on white strings of cloud, marriage of sea and atmosphere in which the ship is stripped. The tide

forgets its leaning, the wind neglects its prod toward the horizon blue recedes into as every color recedes into the light of noon in which the ship's immersed,

blank sails in a blank environment they echo, perfect salt desert of the sea. Or the sails are a first cause of whiteness, sufficient or necessary
to this still life: the white sky bearing whiteness indistinguishable from white it wears as a ship becalmed in a summer sargasso, spread wings of an albatross

arrested in mid-flight, white feathers that neither stir nor settle in such heat. The sail is innocent, the water innocent, innocent ocean, innocent air,

stalled in a waste of stillness wearing white which both casts off and keeps all offerings: toy ship on a toy sea in a toy heat, the empty sails filling with sleep.
Bricolage

come to my land of vast residue
and wiggle in my ash
I am repository of lost format
and crippled dream

yet in these severed llmbs
and sumptuous meals gone stale
detritus of dead legend
we can pick a way
collect combine
gross rubble in egregious wrap

we are the things we fawn on
and fawnng is but one cast of mind
foul smell foul visage
and the crumblings in our hands
are all we need
or ever need

success is in the making do
for maya angelou at the inaugural

i
wanted to hear
you call
somebody a Motherfucker!

i
wanted to hear
you call
somebody a Son-of-a-Bitch!

i
wanted to hear
you say
you low down no count
Mutha-Fuckin’-Son-of-a-Bitch!

i
wanted to hear
you demand OUR forty acres
and a mule!

i
wanted to hear
you SHOUT
for reparations!

i
wanted to see you
hit the United States
upside the head
with a wine bottle!

i
wanted you to pull
out your razor and your gun!
but
your head was in the clouds
SISTUH
you held
no hammers in your hands

but
i still love you
for being there
at least
there was a pulse!
Kicking through Leaves

Come now, come now, see how I'm thinking of you, as I walk out of my work in the library into the ease of a fall night's gloaming as things begin to wrap themselves away for the night.

Ask me, ask me, about the light of the moon through the delicate crisp lines of the maple and about the leaf piles I teach my son to kick his way through as a way of walking.

Listen, listen, then as I tell you that joy is a little thing that comes unevenly and not always when you're feeling good but sometimes when you're walking out of work in a changing season or looking at a face or as a way of crossing over, just going home.
Bildungsroman

1. Backyard
The boy’s voice doesn’t register.
He climbs over a fence, onto an open field.
Several clumps of crab grass
trip him up, then orange clay.
He’s surrounded by a baseball diamond.

He falls on second base.
Several fences line the silent field,
a 20-footer for right-handers.
His father is nowhere.
Not outside, where stickerbushes
scare off toddlers and his sister,
nor the cold wet dugouts
where on game nights the announcer’s voice
echoes like God from where the boy sleeps.
He cries out, lost, giving up now,

and this time God does intercede,
points the boy towards home,
his own backyard. The piss in his pants
dampens his legs as he spreads them
climbing fences, onto the familiar vista,
that same grass, which his father
had just finished mowing

2. The Field’s Revenge
The baseball fields crowd together now
behind my childhood house—pickets
at the front gate, neighborhood watchers,
no vagabond feel-ups
in the dugouts blasting Ozzy tapes
or stickerbush-runs from the cops.

sneaking beers in jackets.
After my freshman dance, my uncle Tom
chauffeured Annette Furmansky and me
to get ice cream at Ponzio’s
while Tom and his best friend,
now a world-famous
Bill Clinton impersonator, drank beers
at the bar. Dropping her off,
they heckled me—
grab her tits, anything.

After a single peck, disappointed,
they dropped me off in the center field
reserved for girl’s softball. Tom
laid wheels with his white Cadillac.
Dirt flew at me from the pitcher’s mound.
Angry in the wet grass, I hopped
over fences in my gray suit,
whizzed on the backyard bushes,
and threw rocks at the clubhouse windows
to make sure they all of them were shattered.

3. Cherry Pink and Apple Blossom White
The night I got my driver’s license
I sang along to Purple Rain
and drove 15 miles into Jersey pinelands.

Lost and crying, I cursed
into the parking lot, the inky sky
full of stars and cow-dung air
and twirled my car in multiple K-turns.
as if changing course would take me home.
In front of convenience store arcade games

I called my father collect. Eager
to make me a man, he told me
to look up at the sky:

find the big dipper, the north star.
Then he said—and this is the good part—
he said go the other way.
The Sound of Your Mother Chewing

Sometime in childhood you begin to hear it and, affronted, draw away.
You know her teeth are starting to chip, discolor unevenly as fillings
and crowns pulp food. Swallows are intolerable, too, and intake of breath.
Then the touch of her hand.
Still, as you shrink from toothmarks or fingerprints, you consider
texture and taste, covet its complexity.

Grasshopper, caterpillar, ant: chew and keep chewing as part of the relentlessness of decay and regeneration.
Children keep them in jars, listen to them at night before all chewing grates and touch hints of mortality.
Since decay taints a child’s eternity, most ignore that generations of glass-walled caterpillars chew themselves patiently toward death.

Across great distances, countless mouths chew. Mother’s, too,
as she reaches out and strains to touch me again. Tell me, I call into space, what you know about flavor and rapture.
Her mouth opens, but instead of sound, butterflies arc from it.
Instead of ordinary touch, I feel a light dusting of pollen on my head.
The History of Desire

begins on a Sunday believe it or not. Cora has one of those flying dreams the night before, she flies over Persia and Zarathustra is eating a sandwich and her mother is shouting “polish the silver.” She thinks this means something when the next day she meets a man called Sterling. She’s in a health food deli, the food is dry, lacks flavor replaced instead with textures. It’s some sort of penance: sacrificial, martyrdom, eating this food. There are no tables left either, illustrating that eating here is worse than fasting. A man alone at a table offers her a chair. He’s drinking something of indescribable color. She asks what it is.

He responds with, “Mango-passion.”
Only what she hears is, “Mangled passion.”
“I should’ve listened closer,” Cora thinks, later.

***

Monday
and Sterling asks to separate.
“Why?” Cora asks against the advice of every therapist she’s ever known. Why is an alienating term.
“Why is a squawking bird, a barking dog, a bawling brat,” says Transcenda, the psychic.
“I don’t know,” Sterling answers. Cora looks at his socks, the ones with holes in the front. She looks at his big toes staring back at her: ugly little dwarves she knows too well. There’s something vaguely obscene about this so she looks away.

Tuesday
Transcenda reads Cora’s tarot. Tarot Tuesday every week for a year now.
“You are going through transitions now,” she says, when the three of wands comes up. “Keep your bearings. Ah, the moon, you will have to pass through darkness to reach the light.”
Cora is looking for pictures here though, and she’s worried. The card Transcenda’s referring to does have the moon but there’s more, two dogs in conflict on the bank of a stream, the moon looks earnest, concerned and a scorpion is heading for land. She never thinks Transcenda is telling her everything.

“Here, temperance,” she points to the angel, one foot on the earth, the other in the water, the angel is pouring water back and forth between the two vessels. There is a triangle emblem on the front of the robe. “You will stay balanced during this difficult period,” says Transcenda. “You will make the necessary adjustments.”

Cora walks out thinking, “if only I could crochet, he would stay.” It is a nonsensical thought, not to mention the nauseating rhyme, but it won’t go away.

Wednesday
is a limping labrador, a lame St. Bernard, a three-legged dog. Wednesday is a graceless attempt.

Thursday
Sterling is amputating the library, the sweater collection. The aquarium, he has said, may be a problem. The painting, a gift from an artist friend in Greenwich, is going to be a tug of tension. Sterling is practical, he will think monetary. His first preference is to slice things neatly in two, when that’s not possible he considers numbers. Division before value, only one of the countless differences between them. Cora is a lumpy oatmeal bowl of sentiment. She emotessloppily, a leaky jar of honey, an over-ripe apricot.

Friday
She tells Seymour the therapist, “In college, I should’ve known. In college he wore neutral tones, decided to go into finance. A man like this,” she says, before bursting unattractively into tears.
When Cora was a little girl, she began growing her hair. She’s never cut it and it drags the ground, picks up leaves and lint, the occasional cigarette filter. She’s read Rapunzel sixty-three times now. She’s always been afraid of losing, metaphorically she could dangle her hair out of a window, offer a way to her, a ladder, a bridge. Nevermind the fact that Cora has always lived on ground floor apartments and that Sterling has hated her hair the last eight years of the marriage. After Rapunzel, Thumbelina intrigues Cora, what it says about the space women are allowed to occupy in the world.

“If I could be small enough to fit in Sterling’s pocket, a convenience, a credit card, a lighter, not a wife, this wouldn’t be happening. If I were Thumbelina, crocheting afghans, I could save my marriage,” Cora tells Seymour on her way out.

Saturday is all the wrong chess moves. Cora moves her bishop out, her knights, surrounds her kingdom, allows a perfect back entrance to her king. She surrenders her rook, relinquishes her queen by the ninth move into the game. “That’s the way it is,” she shouts at her opponent, just like everything else isn’t it? The queen has all the creativity, does the best job of defending the place. The king, protected sits home. Given a choice,” she screams, “we must always sacrifice the queen for the sake of the game though.” This, she says, before throwing two pawns at the south wall of their home, denting the wall and shattering one amber-carved piece beyond recognition. Sterling replies, “No, you’re just lousy at chess.” Then, “I’m so glad I’m leaving you.”

Saturday is a marred wall, a broken chess piece.

The history of desire begins on a Sunday, ask anyone. Maybe this is why Cora takes the tandem bicycle she and Sterling gave one another as a wedding present into the
canyon. At first, riding in the front, without Sterling is difficult, a bit off-balance, but soon enough Cora gets the hang of it. She pedals faster, a bit haphazard but in control. She knows exactly where she's heading, to the highest point on the route, dragging the empty seat behind her like a ghost. When she gets to the overlook, she will pull over to the shoulder. Cora has this much all figured out, the rest: how to get back, where to go next, it will come to her. It is Sunday and she wants everything at once, the wind on the trail pushing against her, fighting her a little, the apple blossoms swirling in the air like snow. Right now, Cora is in love with everything: the trail before her, the dead drop to her right and the image of the bike as her hands send it coasting awkward at first then gaining momentum, its two seats looking stupid, dazed; falling, then held for a second all glittery and caught by the light.
Another Thing

That year the heat started after Memorial Day and didn’t quit until Halloween. There was no rain to speak of. The corn shriveled up and slumped in the fields like old men. The woman living over Al’s Market who claimed to be part Iroquois read the sky at night and told us all it was our last summer on earth.

My mother said the world couldn’t end without a party. The first Saturday in August, my father strung Japanese lanterns between the trees in our backyard and lined up bottles of liquor and mix on the card table. My mother rolled her hair and put on lipstick and stockings and a dress with a skirt that showed her thighs when she danced.

I wore a dress printed in little green leaves and walked around collecting dirty glasses on a cork-covered tray. The women pinched my cheek and told me how big I’d gotten, like they hadn’t seen me for years instead of a month or two.

The party got louder. The women left lipstick mouths on the rims of plastic glasses. The men took off their jackets and rolled the sleeves of their shirts. I hid inside the willow tree at the back of the yard and ate the melting ice from two glasses of scotch. I heard a sound like the rustle of grass before a storm, but it was only my mother’s skirts as she moved closer to Mr. Campbell.

“Marie,” he said, like there was something he had to say to her. There was the liquid clear sound of kissing and he didn’t say another thing.

Late in the night, I watched as my father led my mother onto the dance floor. She fit her body into his and smiled up at his eyes, her teeth bright against her dark lipstick. Their feet moved close together in dangerous perfect time. When they turned, I could see my mother’s hand spread against my father’s back, her nails like red holes in the white of his shirt.

That was our last summer after all.
Someone

Even the faithless will tell you
to believe in someone.
Someone to fall in love with
who will return the favor.
Someone to give you a job,
or a jump-start in winter.
Someone to thrust beneath your ribs
with both hands, interceding
between your life and a fish-bone.

The list grows with time.
Someone to secede from your life
out of boredom or lack of money
and leave you with half a marriage,
dry and silent as a castanet.
Someone to call in the small hours
and hang up without speaking,
to let the intravenous pouch run dry.
Someone to seal the coffin,
having slipped off your rings,
having lifted the cool coins from your eyes.
Pomona Growing Up

Pomona’s mother dressed her in indigo with brass buttons and heavy collars like the lace mantillas worn by matrons in Spanish portraits. Poplin jackets, linen skirts, matching shoes, gold barrettes, and, on Sundays, a lacquered French twist like an animal pelt on top of her head. Still, her mother broke combs on the snarls that rose up overnight like wire fences protecting corn. Still, there were runs in her pantyhose. Still, there were ice cream stains on her A-line skirts that her mother mistook for sperm.

Pomona’s mother’s name was Ana, with only one “N.” She’d named herself for the wild Santa Ana winds that tossed her into the beds of boys with heroine tracks and road food acne, back in the days of motorcycles, The Doors, and penicillin. Her own mother had named her Anna-Maria, but it was long.

Pomona was named for the town in California where giant mosquitoes flew through the unscreened windows and left welts like chicken pox all over Ana’s belly. In Pomona, Ana had met Ramone. He’d dazzled her with his black Harley, his gold tooth, his dragon tattoo, and the fine hairs that sprouted everywhere on his body as silky as carrot tops against her frightening wiry blue-black coils. He’d brought her to a place in the hills where the scent of blue washed sky would cling to her skin for days. When she swelled up like a mango she told him she was dying, that she needed her mama back in Indiana. The truth was she couldn’t picture the two of them waiting for a toaster to pop. He was nineteen. He worked at the can company. She was not quite eighteen, a runaway, but she never told him that either.

The nursery walls at the girls’ home where Ana’s mama sent her were painted Pepto-Bismol pink as if to inoculate the girls against each morning. Ana wore a cross between her breasts. She’d gone back to Catholicism to feel connected to her mother, who refused to visit,
and to Ramone, whom she refused to write. She renounced Californication. She became devout. There were Mexican girls at the home and they introduced her to La Virgen de Guadalupe, the 15-year-old girl saint, which brought her back to her fifteenth year when she was still good. She remembered it now as her favorite time, her white anklets crisp and clean, her legs snapped shut together like her mama’s leather handbag. What had made her think this wasn’t the way to live?

When Ana refused to give her baby girl up, her mother announced her own plans: cancer—she was six months into it—ovarian. Ana found this juxtaposition metaphorical. The last thing the mother did was to make her baby granddaughter a smoky gray suit identical to her own burial costume. Both suits were lovely—merino wool, classic lines. When she died, she left Ana and Pomona with a wardrobe of fabulous forties suits, a collection of crucifixes, her widow’s pension (Ana’s father had died in a trucking accident when she was a baby), a bundle of unexpected cash, and inconsolable grief and guilt. Ana went into real estate and did alright for herself. There were a few gentleman callers, but no one for a few years now. She kept Pomona in Catholic schools until she began to come home glassy eyed and morbid, then sent her to a private girls’ school in the heights that had the greenest lawn Ana had ever seen. She sat in the front row at all of Pomona’s concerts and plays and gave generously to the school during donation drives. From a distance, she was suspected of being a Republican.

If someone had given her a crystal ball during her Dionysian days she would have shaken it up like one of those dime store snow flake paper weights and laughed.

Now Pomona was fifteen and in her room were posters of boys from rock bands her mother had never heard of—skinny boys with tight leather pants, the shapes of their penises easy to trace. There were pastel drawings of jungles to the south, a profusion of green moss, and
flowers in bright vermilion, fuchsia, turquoise, too bright for a nice girl’s eyes. Mobiles of toucans clacked in the breeze, and a mechanical monkey slurled “Don’t give me any of your malarkey” in a gangster voice. And in the underwear drawer, which her mother scoured for birth control devices, was a journal with a lock. Pomona’s mother’s final frontier. Once broken, there’d be no turning back.

Pomona’s mother sat on the bed and saw the corner of the journal in the half-open drawer. She could just imagine what it said:

“I hate her. She watches me like the Gestapo. She makes me wear pumps and nylons. She won’t let me go out with townie boys but she doesn’t know that I do. She makes me do my homework but she doesn’t understand the speed of light or the Panama Canal and why it’s stupid. She listens to that same old La Bamba soundtrack all day like it was something she just won at a contest. She can’t get a date so she won’t let me go. She has fat thighs with icko little blue lines on them like she’s been drawing all over herself with a fountain pen.

She doesn’t know anything at all.”

Pomona’s mother stared at the drawer until these words in her daughter’s curlicued purple hand became as real as a ham sandwich on a paper towel. Then, from a long way away, a voice came floating past her head like soap bubbles. It was so much like her own that she gasped.

“Mama, whatcha doing?”

She looked up to see Pomona, taller than she remembered, lugging in her cello. She appeared exhausted from the effort. A few tendrils from her French braid had fallen on her face and she looked like a young Catherine Deneuve after a row. Her faux pearls had slipped inside her teal cardigan, and her nylons were off. Ana saw at once that she’d been rolling around with a boy somewhere and examined the hem of her plaid skirt for evidence: dried leaves, mud, general debris.
“I had to schlep it on the bus, Mom. Did you forget what time it was?” Pomona sighed heavily, leaned her cello against the dresser, and pulled off her day pack. The day pack had been a concession. Her mother had wanted a briefcase. From the backpack she pulled out a baggy pair of jeans and a man’s plain denim shirt. Her nylons rolled out and fell in front of her mother like roadkill.

“Mom?”

Pomona’s mother couldn’t speak. Accusations boiled up to the surface like the fat in a chicken broth, but now that she was confronted with her daughter’s full corruption she felt vaguely responsible for it. What kind of an example had she set, not providing her with a father? Maybe she’d planted the idea for sinning in her head. She’d invented her daughter, as surely as rain brought life to her roses and *La Virgen* brought roses to Juan Diego, but when did invention end and real life begin? Had her daughter always had that dimple on just the left side of her face? Why was she so thin? If she had to picture her years from now when Pomona was grown and gone, would she know the slope of her neck, the way the calluses on her peace sign fingers stuck out like warts, or the way she lowered her eyes when she heard her name?

“Those clothes,” Ana whispered.

“What about ‘em?” Pomona said.

Words formed in her mouth, and out they came, as though from a script. “I know about you,” she said. “You’ve been leading a double life.”

Pomona faced her frankly and smiled. She leaned gently against her cello. Ana heard a faint stirring of the strings. “Yes, I have,” she said. “It’s time you knew.”

This was not going realistically. Now Pomona was following a script too, from some film noir from the forties featuring women with giant shoulder pads. There were Nazis involved, smuggling, double agents, and adultery. If the movie in Ana’s head came real she would have to be hospitalized, an idea that had occurred to her more and more frequently since Pomona’s rush into
puberty. Pomona was supposed to joke with her wacko old mother, and reassure her. She was supposed to call her “home girl” and tell her to “chill.” She was supposed to act like her mother’s melodrama amused her.

“Who is it,” Ana managed to whisper, “that you see? Who is he? And why are you carrying around his working clothes?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about,” Pomona said. “This isn’t about a guy. It’s about me being a girl. I didn’t want to hurt you so I’ve been changing back into your get-ups after field hockey, in the locker room.”

The truth about Pomona’s deception was so banal that Ana had to turn away. “Is that all?” She eyed the open drawer with the journal sitting in it.

“Yes,” Pomona said. “But sometimes when I’m out like at the mall—”

“Malls?” Ana wasn’t sure she wanted to have this conversation, now that she’d initiated it. Her ears felt irritated and raw, like she’d been out in the snow without a cap.

“Yes,” Pomona said. “Anyway, people come up to me and say, ‘Cool, vintage is going back in now.’ And some of the girls are jealous of the way you fix up my hair. They want to hire you out, for dances. But lately I feel like your pet monkey.”

For a moment Pomona and her mother stood eye to eye in front of the bed, watching the mechanical monkey on the shelf above them bobbing his head. At the word “monkey,” he’d seemed to come alive. In the half-light of the curtained room Ana caught a hint of Ramone in Pomona’s jaw, the dull cast iron pot hue of her eyes. She felt a shiver run between her shoulders as in that long ago car on that summer night. It felt like a spider doing the mambo across her skin. She thought of the sting when her mama slapped her face at the South Bend bus station and brought her home in the dark so no one would peer beneath her coat.

She caught herself before she said anything crazy she
thought. She had gotten in the habit of holding her tongue like this at her job and then saying the most mundane thing she could imagine. Sometimes when she'd show a client a house and she suddenly pictured the living room filled with people in robes carrying candles and incense to an altar she'd point to the elaborate wainscoting or the light fixtures and say, rather mildly, "Observe the fine detail," or "Good morning light." Sometimes when she was fighting off a fantasy of Pomona having sex with Mr. Huddly, the hunk of a science teacher, she'd turn to the client and say, "Expecting to expand your family? We've got extra rooms upstairs."

"Pomona?"

"It's okay, Mama," Pomona said. "You're still pretty, so don't cry anymore."

"I'm not," she said.

"You are," she said. Pomona pointed to her mother's eyes with the hand her mother had manicured for her the night before while they watched the news. "You could get a life if you tried."

Above them, something rattled. Pomona and her mother glanced up at the shelf above the bed, which was decorated chastely with white ruffled sheets and a quilt with pink roses. The roses were spread out like an offering, and Ana tried not to think of La Virgen de Guadalupe, or of proms and corsages and the back seats of '66 Skylark convertibles.

The rattle became a cough, then a murmur, like secrets exchanged among coconspirators.

And there in Pomona's room the monkey began to talk to them, his voice low, more soothing than either of them remembered.
Contributors' Notes

Lisa Barnett's poems have appeared in Folio, The Lyric, Northeast Corridor, The Pittsburgh Quarterly, and Poet Lore. She is a finalist in the 1996 Hellas poetry competition.

Stephen Berg is the author of New and Collected Poems and Crow with No Mouth: Ikkyu, both from Copper River Press. His most recent book, Oblivion, is available from University of Illinois Press. He is co-editor of American Poetry Review.

Kenneth Bernard has been doing plays with the Playhouse of the Ridiculous and the Living Theater for a number of years. He lives in New York City, and has had his book Clown at wall: A Kenneth Bernard Reader recently published.

Peter Bleweth teaches at Cardinal Stritch College in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. His poetry has recently appeared in NDQ: North Dakota Quarterly, West Branch, and the Wisconsin Academy Review. He is editing an English Renaissance play, The Thracian Wonder, and loves to spend time with his son, Hugh.

In addition to negotiating the final stages of post production on Surrender Dorothy, Philadelphia-based writer/filmmaker Kevin B. DiNovis has recently scripted his proposed second feature, Breathtaker— a thriller about a serial killer who unwittingly uncovers a deadly government conspiracy.

Doug Dorph is an associate editor of Mudfish and has recently received an Artist Fellowship for poetry from the New York Foundation for the Arts (1995). His numerous publications include appearances in Plum Review, Exquisite Corpse, Green Fuse, and forthcoming poems in The New Yorker.

Richard Fox has been published in Art Work Quarterly, Poets Guild, and Abiko Quarterly (Japan).

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Ariana Sophia Kartsonis has work which has appeared or is forthcoming in Hayden’s Ferry Review, International Quarterly, Nexus, and Quality Paperback Book Review. She attends the University of Alabama’s MFA Program where she works on the fiction editorial staff for the Black Warrior Review.

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A recent graduate of the NYU Graduate Creative Writing Program, Daniel M. Nester has taught classes at NYU, Goldwater Hospital’s Writing Program, and the Lower East Side Needle Exchange. His poems have appeared in The Minnesota Review, Santa Clara Review, and Washington Square. He lives in Brooklyn with his Bang and Olefsun turntable.

Karl Patten is the author of a book of poems, The Impossible Reaches, co-editor of West Branch, and professor of English at Bucknell University.

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Janet Poland, a former newspaper reporter and editor, is the author of five nonfiction books. She lives in Bucks County, PA and was the 1994 Bucks County Poet Laureate.

Jean-Marc Sens was born in France and educated in Paris. Currently, he lives in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, where he has been studying and teaching at the University for the last seven years. He has published translations into French of Hart Crane’s Key West and “Voyages,” and his own work has appeared in Exquisite Corpse, Black River Review, Cape Rock, International Poetry Review, Nexus, Faultline, Context South, The Crucible, and Cimarron Review.

Natalia Rachel Singer teaches in the English Department at St. Lawrence University. Her fiction and creative nonfiction have appeared in *Harper's, Ms.*, *The North American Review, Hayden's Ferry Review* and elsewhere.

J.D. Smith has been published in *Ascent, Cut Bank, Denver Quarterly, Folio, Gulf Coast*, and numerous other magazines. He has work forthcoming in *The Ledge, Mudfish*, and *Yellow Silk*, and is presently seeking a publisher for his first book of poems, *Any World*.

Lamont B. Steptoe is a poet/photographer, publisher, father and Viet Nam Vet. He is the author of seven books of poetry including: *Crimson River, Catfish and Neckbone Jazz, Mad Minute*, and *Dusty Road*. Steptoe was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 1994 and is a 1995 fellowship winner of the PA Council on the Arts as well as a Discipline Winner for the PEW Charitable Trust in Poetry.

Susan Terris lives in San Francisco. Her recent works include *Author! Author!*, *Nell's Quilt* (Farrar, Strauss & Giroux) and *Killing in the Comfort Zone* (Pudding House Press). Her many journal publications include appearances in *Calyx, Iowa Woman, Kansas Quarterly, The Antioch Review* and more.

Jerry White is a critic-in-exile. He is currently a graduate student at the University of Alberta, where he also teaches film. He spent three and a half years on the program staff at the Neighborhood Film/Video Project and the Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema, and is also the Ticket Manager of the Telluride Film Festival. His writing on film has appeared in the US, Canada, and India. Despite his quest for Canadian identity, he remains a Pirates fan.

Poet, dancer and performance artist Rocky Wilson lives and works in Camden, NJ. In 1989 Rocky gathered his poetry, dance and stories together into *River Journey*, his first major work.


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