Painted Bride Quarterly

Number 61/62
CONTENTS

1 Editors’ Introduction

Film Section

2 Ruth and Archie Perlmutter Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema
7 Doris Dörrie Who are You?
15 Elaine Terranova Perpetual Movement No. 1: Shooting the Piano Player
17 Teresa Leo Dead Man Wash
28 Marjorie Maddox Filming
30 Robert Gregory The Woman Who Became a Mountain: Thelma & Louise as Ritual, History, and Myth
40 Christopher Chambers Dirge

Contest Winners

42 Marisa de los Santos Women Watching Basketball
44 Sean McDonell The Saturday Mail
45 Cameron K. Gearen Octopus
48 Molly Peacock Preface to Suzanne Rhodenbaugh’s Chapbook
50 Suzanne Rhodenbaugh Making a Christ of the Average Jesus Having Given Up My Baby for Adoption
54 Elizabeth Oness The Narrow Gate

Poetry & Fiction

62 Gregory Djanikian Voyeur A Gift
65  Bruce Smith  

His Father in the Exhaust of Engines  
Suite for the Possessed  

69  Julianna Baggott  

Women Hum at Night  

70  Marc Rahe  

Screen  
Ghost Town  

72  Charles O’Hay  

thread  

73  Daniel M. Nester  

Bildungsroman  

76  Aaron Adams  

Blank Page  
Beelzebub  

78  J. Blue Chattigré  

Elegy  
The Contortionist Asleep  

80  L. R. Berger  

Half-Life  

82  Wendell Mayo  

Lithuania  

85  Deborah Landau  

A Pair of Men’s Briefs, Size 36  

86  Andrea Read  

Ten Nights  

89  Jody A. Zorgdrager  

Living with Wasps  

90  Contributors Notes  

Cover art: “Long Exhaustion” by Danielle Ferrante.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Suzanne Rhodenbaugh’s “Making a Christ of the Average Jesus” originally appeared in The Journal.

Doris Dörrie’s “Who are You?” originally appeared in the New Yorker.
EDITORS’ INTRODUCTION

What you hold in your hands is precious. Between these covers is a space (perhaps sacred?), as it affords that transaction between you and us and these writers) created and maintained for years now, dedicated to the music of voices, visions, ideas.

Recently, we’ve been reading and quietly reflecting on the implications of the work sent to us in response to our call for film related essays, poems, and prose. And from that inward, reflective stance, we offer you this: our 2nd Film Issue.

We’ve culled an extraordinary group of poems and essays for this issue, and because the pieces are film related, there seems to be an apparent unity. But read through the film section, then pause before you go on. Look back—perhaps you’ll see what we saw: the horizon rises in the distance with your backward glance. The terrain these writers have staked out is not just cinema, but the geography of the imagination. They write of rituals, memory, love, loss, change, evolution, road trips. And film—as technology, event, or inspiration—informs their vision.

And if the horizon can be seen behind you, then what, you might ask, lies ahead? Only the best writing we’ve seen in the last year: magnificent territory. You’ll find our Fiction, Chapbook, and Poetry contest winners among a selection of the finest original poetry and prose written by both established and emerging writers.

Marion Wrenn
RUTH AND ARCHIE PERLMUTTER

Philadelphia Festival of World Cinema, 1997

The worldwide rise of city-sponsored film festivals that are neither marketplace nor juried competition attests to the fact that there are audiences for the "Film Festival Film." The "FFF" consists of neglected documentaries, shorts, low-budget American productions and subtitled artfilms, most of which will not be bought for distribution and therefore, may never surface in a movie theater after its festival screening.

For six years now, the Philadelphia Festival for World Cinema has been a showcase for "FFF" productions, and with each year, it has become broader and better organized. Not a festival with big-name stars, flashy high-tech productions and feel-good escapism, rather, the expanding array of films presented by the 6th PFWC films in May, 1997, challenged viewers with provocative topical issues about a world in transition.

Like other festivals, it showed expected categories of presentations: *Lost World* (Hoyt, 1925) and *The Man With the Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929) took care of the obligatory homage to restored classics; the featured director was French filmmaker, Claire Denis, with her new film, *Nenette and Boni*; local and regional talent were screened and industry professionals conducted pragmatic how-to seminars. Curiously, the most popular genre was the documentary film. *To Speak the Unspeakable*, Judith Elek’s cine-poem of Elie Weisel’s return to his haunted birthplace in Transylvania unfolded like a Hebrew prayer of remembrance. Nostalgic *Riding the Rails* (Ulys & Lovell) was a crowd-pleaser that recaptured the stories of the people who rode freight trains during the Great Depression. Alan Berliner’s loving and ironic autobiographical film, *Nobody’s Business*, was about his search for family roots to better understand his prickly defensive father. *I’m So-So* (Wiersbicki) was a reverential bio-documentary of the late genius of the cinema, the Polish director, Krzysztof Kieslowski (*Blue, White, and Red*)

Each year, it is possible to discern a particular thrust to many of the films. In 1997, there were many films made by women, quite a number of them first feature films, and there was a persistent thematic concern with unrecoverable cultural roots, movements of populations across Europe and the testing of traditional notions of nationalism. These emphases coalesced in the films of five talented female directors: Claire Denis, Sue Clayton, Ibolya Fekete, Clara Law and Paula van der Oest.

Ever since her first film, *Chocolat* (1988), which reflects her own childhood as the daughter of a French government official in the Cameroons, Claire Denis has been sensitive to the mutual distortions of
both the dominant and exploited classes in bureaucratic and colonial systems. In fact, Chocolate was one of the films chosen for “Screening Europe,” a conference in 1993, about the “diaspora” that is changing traditional Euro-cultures.

The textured sensual environment (color, music, food, gesture, body movement) of Denis’ films adds resonance to her character-driven unsentimental look at alienated transplanted people. Her works run counter to highbrow European artmovies with their plot-laden bourgeois melodramas. In her last two films, I Can’t Sleep (1993) and Nenette and Boni, her characters come-of-age in the midst of a chaotic world of racism, xenophobia and corruption. Nenette and Boni, her most recent work, is set in polyglot Marseilles and opens with a scene showing new immigrants being conned into a phone card scam. Called a “road movie of the human face,” the film has the same fragmented structure as its fragile disoriented sister/brother protagonists, Nenette and Boni. The camera is always up close, yet somehow powerless to penetrate the complexity of any character’s persona. Sequencing is elliptical without devices to distinguish reality from fantasy. In such a stifling claustrophobic field of inaction, Nenette and Boni move towards and away from each other, needing one another yet disavowing dependency. The tension between their desires to touch and their fear of connection is played against suggestions of incest, intense adolescent sexuality and issues of abortion.

There is a toughness to the attention Denis pays to domestic and family issues in Nenette and Boni, some of it influenced by her prior career as assistant to male directors, Makaveyev, Wenders and Jarmusch, all of whom eschew sentimentality for deliberate existential detachment. Denis’ toughness extends to her insistent involvement in life as well as on film (she calls it her “anxiety”). Only this past year, she signed a letter with three other filmmakers, protesting the unfair accusation against a French woman married for twelve years to a man from Zaire, both of whom lost their job and were imprisoned for giving shelter to “clandestines” (illegal immigrants). The affair reached larger proportions when a petition was signed by half a million people and became a media event throughout France.

Like Nenette and Boni, Clayton’s film, The Disappearance of Finbar, is concerned with disaffected youths adrift and seeking alternative lives. Rambling, discursive and with genuine Irish wit, the film is nominally about Finbar, an angry young Dubliner who opts out of his bland, blue-collar existence by suddenly disappearing, but it actually concerns the search for Finbar by his best friend, Danny. The resulting odyssey brings Danny to the pristine Arctic border of Sweden, where he discovers camaraderie, love and the possibility for a more humane existence.
Even more directly about the current problems of multiculturalism is *Bolsho Vita*, by Hungarian director, Ibolya Fekete. To add authenticity to her fictional account of three young Russians trying to get to the west, Fekete incorporated documentary footage she shot of Soviet migrants crossing Hungary’s reopened border in 1990. For a while her protagonists enjoy the exhilaration of their newfound freedom. But soon, hoodlums take over the market where transients sell heirlooms for passage money—and their dreams are quickly shattered. With both charm and vitality, the film captures both the delirium of this brief period of freedom and the subsequent frustrations of emerging rapacious “Euro-capitalism.”

In *Floating Life*, Clara Law is concerned with female and family dysfunctionalism as well as the problems of adaptation to an alien culture. She pictures the domestic spaces her displaced troubled characters inhabit with spareness and compassion reminiscent of the great Japanese director, Ozu. The film describes the distress of a Hong Kong family that is scattered as far as Australia and Germany. The family gradually falls apart as the story unfolds in chapters, each one from a different viewpoint and each also delineating the alienating colors, furnishings and climate of the adopted spaces. Law brilliantly balances the confused acculturation of the younger generation, the hilarity of some of their unwittingly clumsy confrontations with the new culture, and the growing malaise of the aging parents as they are forced to abandon the traditional customs of their revered ancestors.

On the surface, Paula van der Oest’s film, *Another Mother*, is about Juris, a Latvian who emigrates to Holland with Elvis, his young son, in search of Marie, an old pen pal he has never met. Not only is life unbearable in post-communist Latvia but Elvis has become mute after finding his mother a suicide when she learns of the collapse of her beloved communism. Once Juris finds neurotic, witty Marie, he realizes the impossible distance between them, socially and culturally, and so, he leaves Elvis with Marie and her seductive adolescent daughter as the boy speaks for the first time, saying “mommy.” Allegorically, the story is about Juris trapped between two worlds, one in the throes of difficult changes and the other belonging to the younger generation that will find its values and customs from “Another Mother.”

The Dutch film shared a preoccupation discernible in a number of festival films—young people who are struck dumb by the unspeakable events of the changing world around them. A young girl is the silent witness of her parents’ split marriage in *The Quiet Room* (Rolf de Heer); a young boy looks on in near-mute horror at a devastating murder in *The Eye of God* (Tim Blake Nelson); a voiceless roller-blader escapes from a mental institution in the Danish film, *The Eighteenth* (Anders Ronnow-
Klarlund); and brutalized Mary Swann in Swann (Anna Benson Gyles) only breaks her silence with poetry that reveals her rich inner life.

While migrations across boundaries were prevalent in many films, two debut films by two other women filmmakers, Elisabetta Lodoli (The Venus of Willendorf) and Anna Benson Gyles (Swann), shared a pronounced feminist orientation. From the first image of a baby being spoonfed to the last sequence where a mother prevents her pre-teen daughter from eating a chocolate bar, The Venus of Willendorf is concerned with the intense and sometimes destructive relationship of the mother-daughter dyad. The story is about a young woman suffering from bulimia with a self-absorbed mother, whose lack of nurture seems to have given rise to the protagonist’s need to fill the void of affection. Structured like a psychological thriller, with a slow development until the victim is “found out” (privately gorging herself), the film retains a level of ambiguity so that blame cannot be laid with certainty at the door of the mother or the culture.

Lodoli worked with a psychologist for the precise behavior of bulimics and hers may be one of the first fiction films to deal with this wide-spread female eating disorder. The Venus of Willendorf, the grotesque obese statue dating back to the paleolithic era, provides an apt title for the self-destructive body-consciousness underlying the illnesses bred by commercialized notions of “beauty.”

Lodoli, who began her career as a film scholar in Bologna, has always been interested in women’s issues. Her dissertation in 1981 dealt with the representation of females in the Italian cinema of the 50s, especially the films of Antonioni. When her protagonist sees her distorted image in the mirror, Lodoli claims she is consciously imitating the way Antonioni used expressionistic techniques to describe the neuroses and obsessions of his bourgeois female characters.

Like Lodoli, Anna Benson Gyles invoked the influence of Antonioni, specifically L’Aventurra, in her explanation for what intrigued her in Carole Shields’ novel, Swann. For Gyles, L’Aventurra was only superficially about a girl who disappears at the beginning of the film. It is more about the strong narrative prompted by the interaction of the other characters who spend the rest of the film looking for her. In Swann, keeping the memory and imagination of a dead poet alive is only the framework for a larger story about art and human relationships. Mary Swann was a naive poet who wrote about her simple country life and was brutally murdered by her husband. Rose (superbly played by Brenda Fricker, the mother in My Left Foot) is a librarian in a small Ontario town, who expiates an unrevealed guilt about Swann by dedicating herself to editing and preserving the poet’s notebooks. Sarah (Miranda Richardson), a fashionable, feminist writer of best-sellers,
whose hard-edged elegance masks deep insecurity, is embarking on a biography of the poet. The interaction between Rose and Sarah alters both of them.

Although she changed the emphasis from the novel, Gyles was committed to Carole Shields’ conceptual ideas about her book — as a celebration of the ordinary. Shields in turn, felt that Gyles had kept to the spirit of her book’s central thesis about the necessary fraudulence inherent in art. For Shields, the process of preserving an artwork, whether through Rose’s memorializing of Mary Swann’s poetry or Benson’s film adaptation of her book, was consonant with the unpredictability of art and the mysterious alchemy of the artistic gift. Gyles was very taken with how Shields “embroidered” Rose’s gestures and behavior. She made sure that the look of the film and the Wyeth/Hopper inspired landscapes, the textures, the color palette, the costumes, allowed the character to “inhabit” her role. She designed Rose’s “twee” clothes from thrift shop bits and pieces and claimed that at least 5 women said their “aunties” looked like that. She wanted Rose to resemble someone with a low self-image who never saw herself as the “enabler” who could lead someone like Sarah to recognize her own “forgeries” and self-delusions.

Gyles seems eminently suited to bio-fiction for her first feature film debut. Although she started out after London film school as an editor at BBC, she moved on to documentaries, at first on archeological subjects (like tracking the last Incan and researching ancient Mayan ruin), and then to biographies of artists, like Van Gogh and Stanley Spenser. As erudite as Lodoli about cinema, Gyles feels most comfortable with the ambiguities and adventurous discursiveness of the European art film.

The films of Lodoli and Gyles deal sensitively with women’s self-redemption, while the post-colonialist films by the other women directors— Denis, Law, et al.— speak to current problems surrounding the alienation of people as growing nomadic populations contend with recalcitrant nationalism and an expanding and indifferent global economy. Paradoxically, just as more and more ethnocentric cinemas (Korea, India, Iran, etc.) are trying to make their mark throughout the world, migratory populations are providing humanistic issues for established national cinemas.
DORIS DÖRRIE

Who are You?

On my twenty-fifth birthday I found a woman. I stopped at a deserted parking lot a short distance behind the autobahn exit Landsberg East to have a pee, and saw her only when I returned from the bushes. She sat slumped in a wheelchair, wrapped wq—despite the heat—in a heavy, dark coat, a dark-red velvet hat on her head. I could not see her face. A fly was creeping over her hand. Cars were speeding past us. The air smelled of gasoline and rotten bananas. No other humans for miles around.

I watched the fly creep over the woman’s old, wrinkled skin. I have never seen a dead person. I am afraid of them, of their smell.

Two years ago I was in the Pathology Department of the University Hospital, in a room where they dissect bodies. There wasn’t even a corpse present; we were only filming a scene for a TV mystery; I was the production manager and our corpse was a talkative actor. Red rubber gloves on the wall, saws to cut open skulls, scales for organs, the basin for blood, the stainless steel, all that was already bad enough, but what really shocked me was the smell. The smell beneath the formalin. Nothing could mask it. The different perfumes of the women in our team and the pungent smoke from the director’s cigarillo only made that smell even more noticeable. Like poison gas it penetrated my clothes, my skin, my heart. It shrunk the life that still lay before me to a tiny dot like fly shit on a window pane, and whenever I threatened to forget that, it reached my nostrils again. We had Wiener schnitzel and potato salad on paper plates for lunch, served directly in front of the mortuary door. I watched amazed at how the others tucked in, even the makeup artist who only five minutes before had studied the corpse of a strangled man to create true-to-life strangulation marks on our actor. No one seemed to smell what I smelled. In the evening when I came home, I pressed myself tightly against my friend, Chris, but he, too, smelled of that. During the night I awoke from that smell; my own flesh stank of death and putrefaction, every centimeter of my body.

She lifted her hand briefly and waved away the fly. That really did not simplify the situation. If the woman was alive, what should happen

to her? I took a few steps closer. She had her eyes closed and seemed to be asleep; I heard her faint snoring. I touched her hand—it was ice cold in the sweltering heat. I straightened, hoped another car would drive onto the parking lot, a family with a resolute mother and an office worker as father; they would know what to do with old women found on autobahn parking lots.

After all, it was my birthday; I was on the way to my birthday party that Chris was giving for me in one of his father’s meadows. Chris had insisted on the party; I would have liked best to stay alone in my small apartment. We had not been getting along well lately; he hated my passivity; he wanted to do the job properly as he called it, wait no longer.

I was too young to deal with old women, still much too young. The last few steps I ran to my car as if I were pursued.

I did not look at the old woman as I drove by her and headed for the autobahn. Like a glittering snake people in their cars moved by; they seemed to have been driving for ages to an endless weekend; their faces looked tired and disillusioned. I merged into the traffic.

Twenty-five years ago this day was a Saturday, my mother said into my new portable phone at eight in the morning. Thirty degrees in the shade.

Speak up, Mama, I can’t hear you.

Ah, she whispered, I’m already speaking so loud. Vera, are you still there?

Yes.

When we drove in the taxi to the clinic, my whole body stuck to the hot leather seats. I will never ever forget this feeling. It will be hot today. Already now it’s more than twenty degrees. I hate the heat. I have drawn the curtains. It’s cool and very dark in the apartment. I’ll stay indoors all day; yes, that’s what I’ll do; I won’t do anything today; I will sit in the big chair and think of you. All day long. And I won’t cook either. I was so happy when you were born. When the nurses brought you, I heard you crying already in the hallway. You could cry louder than any of the other babies. I was so happy. Are you still there, Vera? Is a man lying in your bed? Am I disturbing you?

No, Mama.

She sighs. It will get terribly hot today. My legs are already very heavy. Here is your father.

She hands him the receiver. My father always talks too loud on the phone. She whispers, he bellows.

Well? Have you grown overnight?

He has asked me that for twenty-five years. Yes, one meter.
That’s good. You’ll be the greatest yet. I’ve known that all along. Twenty-five, by golly, girl, a quarter of a century, who would have thought that, eh?

When I returned, she sat there exactly as before. The parking lot was still deserted as if a large warning sign were posted at the entrance. I touched her shoulders, shook her gently. Confused, she looked up, looked at me with her small water-blue eyes from a snow-white, soft, slightly crooked face.

What’s your name? What are you doing here? How did you get here? Where do you live? Who are you?

She looked at me with interest as if trying to decipher the sense of my words, and kept silent. When I turned to check once more if her companion was perhaps lying unconscious in the undergrowth, she reached for my hand and clasped it. She did not look at me. She held my hand and did not let go. It’ll be all right, I whispered, it’ll be all right.

When I lifted her from the wheelchair and sat her into my car, she felt light and bony. I took off her hat; her hair was meticulously done and covered with a hairnet that had small pearls woven into it. It seemed she could not move her legs; I had to lift them separately into the car. I buckled her up; she sat straight, her red hat on her lap, and looked alertly through the windshield. As I struggled to stow the wheelchair into the trunk, the music of U2 suddenly screamed earsplittingly across the parking lot. The thought that I might still get rid of her to another car driver shot through my mind, but who would believe that the woman sitting in my car was a total stranger?

I straightened, turned toward the source of the music, but it came from my own car. The woman must have switched on the radio. Now she sat still, and I was uncertain if she even heard the music. I switched off the radio. Slowly, like in slow motion, she reached out with her left arm and again switched on the radio. So she liked U2. That was all I knew about her. I got into the car. We just sat there. Bono, the singer, the old woman, and I were alone in the world.

My portable phone rang in my purse. My mother was on the line. My darling, she said, I believe I completely forgot this morning to wish you a happy birthday. I wish you a wonderful life, she whispered, one that is rewarding; a man who will idolize you—that I wish you; a romantic, tender, educated man. Don’t get me wrong, your father is a good man, don’t get me wrong. Are you listening?

Yes, Mama.

I can’t hear you, where is this loud music coming from, where are
you, what are you doing, is it as hot at your place as it is here?

Yes, Mama.

What I still wanted to say—is I hope, I'm not disturbing you—take your time, I wanted to say, you are only twenty-five. When I was your age, I was already married. Yes, that is what I still wanted to tell you.

The airstream did not move a single hair of the old woman's hairdo. A faint smell of moth balls and lavender, cats and alcoholic liniment came from her, of pink Smarties and illness. She wore old-fashioned, laced boots. Throughout the drive her legs remained exactly as I had placed them. Once she turned her head like a lizard and looked at me for a long time. Not even her eyelids moved. Her face appeared hard and rigid on one side, soft and unmoving on the other. The eye on the rigid side watered. The radio brought the programme "Only with You." Love letters of listeners were read and musical wishes were played. The announcer read with a voice like velvet: Jens from Wyppertal writes to his Gabi: My beloved Bunny. Without you the world is pale and empty. What have I done wrong? Without you I am not myself. Please, please, give me another chance. Your Jens.

Jens asked for his Gabi the song "When a Man Loves a Woman." I could not do otherwise but sing along. Baby, baby, please don't let me go, I bawled and looked at the old woman, grinning.

A tear ran from the one eye over her cheek, perhaps from the airstream. She was still staring at me, but perhaps she did not even see me. As if her head were locked in this position, she never moved it back until we stopped at McDonald's in Landsberg.

I bought some french fries and an orange juice and put both under her nose. She wrinkled the tip of her nose, but made no attempts to eat or drink anything. I pushed the straw between her lips. With a gurgling sound she emptied the entire cup in one go. Wonderful, I said—then the next inevitable problem occurred to me.

Better here than later on the road. I unpacked the wheelchair, heaved her into it, pushed it into the restaurant. I did not even get round the corner to the restroom door; the hallway was much too narrow. We blocked the way till I finally had turned the wheelchair around, parked it at the entrance door, and lifted her onto my back.

No one helped; guests watched with interest my maneuvers like a show presentation while they, with steady movements, stuffed themselves with french fries and hamburgers.

Listen, I wanted to shout, I don't know the woman on my back, I don't know who she is, I have never seen her before, I found her, and I don't have to keep her!
Under her small-flowered dress she wore old-fashioned woollen stockings that were fastened to her baggy underpants with clips.

I didn’t know that system and took an eternity to open the clips. I tugged at her while she watched me patiently like you would a child who tries for the first time to unbutton its jacket alone. When she was finally sitting on the toilet, she looked up at me with a trace of a smile in the one corner of her mouth. The other stayed rigid as if it deliber-
ately denied any effort to bring an expression to her face. The move-
able side appeared younger, satisfied, at that moment almost happy, while the turned-down corner of her mouth on the other side gave her an expression of bitterness and disillusionment.

Two girls giggled in the cubicles beside us.
I’m warning you, said the one, he lays you and won’t ever call again.

In any case, I was in a solarium, said the other and giggled, and I’ve also got two condoms with me.

Two? sputtered the first one.
Why not make the most of it, said the second, one doesn’t live for-
ever.

The old woman and I were listening. The girls left. We stayed alone with the roar of flushing toilets.

I dressed her and carried her back to her wheelchair, pushed her to a table and, soaked with perspiration, walked to the counter to get myself a large coke.

I was uncertain whether I would return to her. A fat man with a red bald head looked at me fixedly. Probably he had already taken my car license number. Outside a woman was filming her children on the slide. Perhaps she had already documented how I had swayed to the restroom with the old woman on my back. Amateur movie makers smell happenings before they occur. How else can one explain that someone with a camera is always present at the right moment no mat-
ter if Kennedy is being assassinated, if a hotel is burning in Manila, or while an airplane is crashing?

I already visualized a movie clip of the old woman and me on TV. A good-looking journalist with a dotted tie asked me questions to which I had no answers. Why did you take the old, handicapped woman with you in the first place and then abandon her in a fast-food restaurant? Why are you so indecisive, so weak, so without any vision of how your life should be? Why do you visit your parents so seldom? Why don’t you finally move in with your friend, Chris? Why did you break off your studies? Why don’t you know what you want?
The celebration had started without me. Benches and tables stood in a flowering meadow surrounded by forest; colorful Chinese lanterns hung from trees; the fire burned in the grill; cases of beer and several bottles of wine lay in a small stream. We were jolting along a track across a field toward my birthday party. I saw Chris. He stood beside Rita; his blond hair shone like a flame; he looked young and healthy; he laughed.

He recognized my car, gave his glass to Rita, ran toward me.

Hey, Vera, where have you been? he called excitedly.

Only when he gave me a kiss through the open car window, did he see the old woman. She was leaning against the window and slept.

I found her, I said.

Rita thought one must inform the police immediately; Axel wanted to drive her to a hospital; Olaf suggested dropping her off at night in front of the nearest home for the aged in Lechbruch.

A granny-foundling, said Chris and laughed.

Imagine if she were your grandmother, said Rita.

Or mother, I said.

Your wife, said Axel, and you are already dead.

But she isn’t, said Chris.

He took my arm and walked with me a few steps across the meadow. His kiss tasted hot and hungry. Don’t you like the party? he said.

Yes, I said, thank you.

One can bust a gut for you and you say thank you as if someone has just passed you the salt shaker. He ripped off a stalk of grass and whipped it over his pants. I never know how I stand with you. I warn you, I’m no yokel. One day you’ll look for me and I’ll be gone. Simply gone.

I watched Axel drag the old woman from the car. Her legs got stuck, the door closed halfway; Axel stood there helplessly. Help, he called, help. Rita came and grabbed the legs. They carried her through the partying people across the meadow and set her onto a blanket at the edge of the forest. For a while she sat there with outstretched legs, then she keeled over onto her back like a beetle.

But I am pleased, I said to Chris, only you can’t see it.

Axel helped the old woman up again and sat down beside her. I pinched my eyes shut until my eyelashes blurred my view and the two of them together looked like a couple.

Come, said Chris and pulled me into the grass. He unbuttoned my blouse.

I saw a grasshopper hanging on a clover leaf, his wings quivered. Buckbean, buttercup, red bartsia, long-leafed speedwell. My mother had taught me the names of these flowers. Picked, dried, pressed, every
spring again and again. I brought my father countless bunches of flowers that had already wilted by the time he came from work in the evening.

Chris’ unshaven chin floated close above me, light stubble on a dark field. He kissed the hollow between my collar bones and squeezed the breath out of me. I straightened up. Not now, I said. I got up and walked back.

When, Chris yelled after me, when, dammit?

No one gave me a thing I really liked, as if they did not know me; even from Rita, my best friend, I got a green silk scarf, although she must have known that I can’t stand the color green.

It grew dark; Rita lit the candles in the Chinese lanterns. Chris has taken great pains, Rita said to me, it was to be really romantic. You brought this woman along and everything is ruined.

We looked over at her. She was leaning against a tree trunk and letting Axel put small pieces of Wieners into her mouth.

Should I have left her sitting at the autobahn— and let her expire in the heat?

Rita shrugged. Someone would have come along, you aren’t the only one, said Rita and blew out the match.

I did not understand her. I understood no one at this party. I sat down on a wobbly beer garden bench, holding my paper plate with potato salad, and listened to Isabel, a tall, beautiful girl, telling the others of a faked orgasm competition in a disco in Munich. A little fatso with glasses was the best of them, she said and everyone laughed. He looked like a virgin of fifteen, but he was at least in his early thirties. He yelped like a dog would when you step on his paws, always faster, always faster; at the end he yelled: Oh, Mama, oh, Mama, no, no, yaaah!

She threw her head back and howled like a wolf. Yaaaah! Yaaaah! But he took only third prize, she added dryly, the public goes more for female orgasms, that’s how it is.

Beate from Rosenheim started panting and beating the bench rhythmically; Isabel joined in, then the others got into the act as well; the bench below me began shaking; yes, everyone shouted, oh, God, yes, yes, yes. They got faster and faster, they yelled and shrieked and howled at the same time. Jesus, Olaf called, Jesus!

I got up. The others who were standing all around, laughed. Chris stood beside the fire and drank rum from the bottle. He looked at me reproachfully. I opened my mouth and gave off a high-pitched scream. He stared at me, shook his head.

Axel was still sitting beside the old woman on the blanket. The weak light of the red lantern enveloped them. I stood between the fire on the one side and the two on the blanket in the darkness on the other side. It was a mild, calm evening, an evening for making love. Like a
mirage the party lifted off the black meadow. The fire threw twitching shadows over the shrieking young people. Axel had taken off the woman’s coat. He held her arm in his lap and stroked it, moved with his thumb and forefinger up and down, up and down without pause.

When I stepped out of the darkness, he looked up. Check that, he said and pointed at the black coat. A notice was sewn into the lining:

Thank you for helping my mother. Since she had a stroke, she is hemiplegic. She can’t speak, nor can she understand anything. I am sorry. But I, too, have only one life. The daughter.
PS. She likes it when you stroke her arms.

I sat down beside the old woman and took her other arm in my lap. Slowly I brushed over her old skin. It felt like a wilted leaf.

The phone in my jacket pocket peeped. I did not release the arm of the old woman.

Something else I wanted to tell you, said my mother, Petra Kuhn threw herself in front of the subway.

Who is Petra Kuhn?
You don’t remember Petra Kuhn? Your best friend in second grade. You must remember that!

Mama, but I’m telling you I don’t know who she is.

Petra Kuhn, the girl with the clean hands; surely you remember. She always had spotlessly clean hands and fingernails. Four days ago she threw herself in front of the subway. They say, she couldn’t bear that her father is dying. Cancer. Perhaps she only slipped; no one will ever know for sure. The poor thing. I happened to meet her mother on the street; she looks twenty years older. Terrible, eh? Are you still there?

Yes, Mama.

I thought you’d be interested. After all, she used to be your friend. I won’t disturb you further.

You’re not disturbing me— not a bit.

My mother kept silent and breathed quietly into the phone. I stroked the arm of the old woman until I imagined it was my own. Around us the air smelled of fresh grass, resin, and burned wood.

Translated from the German by Gustav A. Richar
ELAINE TERRANOVA

Perpetual Movement No. 1:
Shooting the Piano Player

Black and white with mirrors
like a Brassai print,
the small hotel on the docks
your parents owned.

A clientele of wharf rats,
longshoremen, sailors jumping ship.
And though its years, you’ll go on
touching all its surfaces,
that tingling in your hands
like an alarm clock going off.
Wood planks, a little rotten,
still roll beneath your feet.

Now, thugs from the old neighborhood
you’re sure are stalking you.
One wears a battered hat,
the other’s in a cap, so that the audience
can tell the two apart.

You are a timid man but women will
lay down their lives for you,
pop-up targets in a shooting gallery.

Jealous, the owner of the cafe where you play
would sell you out in a minute;
in a minute, punch in on the cash register
the whole repertoire of his feelings.

Still, you hover over the piano.
Hope bounces up into your open palms.
You let the music with its flapping wings
fold over you. But you know how it is
with a piano, how the next note starts
before the last dies out. And in a moment
the whole world moves around, 
rearranging itself. 
Your heart has clenched up like a fist. 
Glass shards spark your queasy dreams.

At last you make your move, 
cross asphalt shining with the ghosts 
of splintered windshields. 
The neon moon just calls 
attention to itself but doesn’t 
brighten where you’re going.

You reach the terminal. There’s light 
and people clustering. And then 
a pin prick breaks the skin. A thin 
red spider crawls down from your forehead. 
You circle for the longest time, 
perform this lurching dance, 
but no one is applauding you.
TERESA LEO

Dead Man Wash

An ordinary road sign pokes up alongside Interstate 17, saguaro thick in the hills behind it: DEAD MAN WASH. I’m driving north towards Jerome with Loretta and her five-year-old daughter Luisa. Luisa is singing “You Are My Sunshine” in the back seat of the rental car, while Loretta reads the signs out loud, disapproval in her voice: DEAD MAN WASH, BLOODY BASIN ROAD, HORSE THIEF BLUFF. But I am thinking that perhaps they simply call things as they see them out here instead of making up agreeable euphemisms that hide the truth.

The concept of DEAD MAN WASH entertains me for several miles. I picture dead men floating face down in a low creek, ambushed by horse thieves, their blood draining toward a basin where the creek loses its muster. Or the stiff bodies of dead men rising miraculously under a desert moon to wash themselves clean of trail dust, only to fall back to the earth, exhausted and well groomed.

As we drive north on 17, the terrain changes and at some point we lose the saguaro completely. I am looking for the area where Jim Jarmusch shot the film Dead Man, the story of a naive accountant turned hunted outlaw, forced to wander the desert outback of the 19th-century west with an Indian named Nobody who becomes his spiritual guide. The film was shot somewhere between the low and high desert, but on this stretch of 17 the mountains are too brown, the roadside bushes too mangy and far apart. We get off 17 and head up Route 260 towards Jerome, an old mining town built on a cliff in the mountains, now an out-of-the-way tourist spot. Some 5000 people live in town, various artists who sell over-priced pottery and Indian jewelry in shops that line the main street. The shops hug the edge of an astounding vertical drop.

Neither Loretta nor I want to buy anything in Jerome, and the only thing we actually do in town is take Luisa to the public bathrooms perched on a little bluff. I am beginning to see that the trip will be punctuated by hourly bathroom stops, that later when asked about what I saw in Arizona I’ll say things like “Jerome had a two-staller, one that didn’t flush, with a hand towel on an endless loop that forces you to dry where other people dried, or go without.”

***

We wind up Route 89A, through Sedona, a new-age town surrounded by the red rock cliffs of the Coconino National Forest. I pull
off at the tourist center so Luisa can go to the bathroom and the man behind the counter asks me if I want a vortex map. I look down and realize that perhaps today I do look like the sort of person who has traveled all the way from Philadelphia to sit on a cliff where energy is said to gather and calm even the most weatherworn spirit. I often get classified as earthy since my hair is long and curly and I don't wear much makeup. Today I'm wearing Birkenstocks and army shorts, and the man slips a vortex map onto the counter. He's drawing a route from point to point with a red pen and asking me if I'd like to take a guided tour.

I ask him if he's ever felt anything at a vortex and, while he's describing the experience, I think of the African Methodist church across the street from my apartment in Philadelphia where on Sundays I hear churchgoers call out as spirits enter their bodies. I ask him if it's like a house party where, for some unknown reason, guests always seem to conglomerate in the kitchen, even though it's too brightly lit, even though the living room is set up like a catalog showroom, a game of musical chairs waiting to happen. He's not amused by my comparison and moves on to the eager couple in line behind me.

I leave the tourist center, my darkened spirit trailing at my heels, an afternoon shadow.

***

We don't get far on 89A through Oak Creek Canyon when Luisa begins the ritual: "I have to go potty." Then seconds later, "I have to go potty real bad." We pull off at a Dairy Queen that doubles as an Indian trading post where tables with jewelry line the parking lot. The sign says BUY DIRECT and Loretta begins navigating the strip while I take Luisa to the bathroom. Again two stalls with one that doesn't flush.

"At school the kids say I'm brown," Luisa announces.

"Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah," she says, exiting the stall, "but I tell them they're wrong. I'm white." I look around and the Indian woman at the sink glances at Luisa, then at me, and smiles at me the way people do at mothers when their kids blurt out some embarrassing lie.

On this trip people are confused at two women in their 30s traveling with a small child. We're co-workers, Loretta and I, and we both had a week's vacation to take before the beginning of summer, which we decided to spend together since it turned out we were traveling to the same place. I had frequent flyer miles saved up and wanted to experience the desert of Jarmusch's Dead Man; Loretta planned this trip for a year and wanted to take her daughter to the Grand Canyon. I notice
that people have been glancing back and forth trying to make out who exactly is the child’s mother. Loretta is half-black and half-white and Luisa’s father is Puerto Rican. I am second-generation Italian and actually look more like Luisa than Loretta does.

“Honey, you are brown. See, Luisa, all of us here in the bathroom are brown; it’s good to be brown, brown like the mountains we drove through this morning, remember?” She looks at her skin first, then at the Indian woman’s, then at mine.

“You guys are brown; I’m white.”

“OK sweetie,” I say, “let’s go,” and as we leave the bathroom I imagine Luisa checking OTHER on forms for the rest of her life.

***

Oak Creek Canyon is lined with towering trees, lush and green, making the brown desert we drove through this morning seem like a different country. Flagstaff shoots up out of nowhere and we find our motel on Highway 66. We’re staying in Flagstaff two nights, at the Saga Budget Host Motel. The place is cheap and right on 66, sandwiched between other motels with names like Wander Inn and The Weary Traveler. The TV has no remote and there are no little shampoo bottles in the bathroom. Luisa wants to know when we’re going to get to Disneyland, and Loretta distracts her by pointing out the rusted swing set in the back of the motel. The swing set has two lonely half moon straps dangling like old belts you keep hooked to hangers in your closet but never wear.

It’s late and Luisa flops on the bed and Loretta turns the TV to the Nickelodeon channel. I tell Loretta that there weren’t many cartoons I could stand as a kid. Something about the incidental music in the background of cartoons made me crazy, all boinks and bells and frantic chase music, like that certain frequency of sound that drives dogs to howl madly. I believe for every living thing there is a sound that ropes and strangles the nervous system, the kind of sound that would have you chew off your own leg to break free.

I leave them there, sprawled out like hostages, and head to the downtown area, looking for a bar; a conversation, Jim Jarmusch.

***

I drive around the downtown, which is a mere five-block patch of stores, and see a red-lettered sign high above the tops of the other buildings: THE WEATHERFORD HOTEL. I enter the lobby of this turn-of-the-century building and am asked to show my ID on the way to the
lounge. The bouncer looks like he’s in his 20s and immediately takes me for an outsider.

“Where you from?” he asks while I search for my ID.

“What, is it the city shoes?” I reply, pointing to my Doc Martins. “Philly. Just passing through. I’m here to see a dead man about a horse.” He gestures to the bar like he’s heard this one before and turns back to American Rifleman, which he holds in one hand, my ID in the other.

The lounge is like an Elk Lodge, with muted red lighting, a pool table, and wooden tables lined up cafeteria-style at the foot of the stage. A woman is on stage with an acoustic guitar singing a Joni Mitchell song. Badly. People in the lounge look weathered, all red-faced and bushy-haired, like they’ve walked miles from their campsite in the woods just to lend their authentic outback looks to the hotel.

I sit in the leftmost of two empty seats at the bar, the one closer to the door. I imagine Jim Jarmusch as the kind of person who likes to sit as much on the interior as possible. A filmmaker’s perch, perhaps, a good vantage point from which to watch people enter and exit the room.


People come and go and then Jim Jarmusch walks in and sits in the empty seat next to me. He’s wearing a dark baseball cap that hides his trademark punk-style hair and orders a beer. I wonder if the locals know who he is. The bartender doesn’t seem to know or care and delivers his beer without speaking.

Somewhere Jim said that it’s a “sad and beautiful world,” and I want to tell him I know it, this sadness, that nobody is everybody with a story to tell, that somewhere in the desert or the bar there’s a story, the ghost of a story, remarkable and true.

“Excuse me,” I say, “aren’t you Henry Jaglom?”

Jim turns to me and grins. “What makes you say that? Do I look like Henry Jaglom?”

“No, I know who you are,” I say.

I want Jim to know that I’m not some crazed fan, but simply someone who appreciates films that aren’t mainstream, that don’t have pat Hollywood endings, that don’t assume the audience has gone Code Blue after the opening credits.

“You know,” I say, “I’ve been looking for that spot in the desert where you shot Dead Man.”

Jim seems mildly amused and lights up a cigarette.


A man sits in Jim’s seat, breaks my reverie, and gives me the up-down without even the slightest attempt to be subtle about it.

“Hey there,” he says, eyes red as bingo markers.

“Hey,” I reply.

“You’re not from around here, are you?” he asks. His eyes are fixed on my fake silver cigarette case while I flip it open and jimmy out a Marlboro.

“No, just passing through.”

“You alone?” he asks, blinking at the case as if trying to bring it into focus.

“No, I’m with a friend.” I imagine Loretta and Luísa passed out in the glow of some ethnically-balanced children’s show.

“I don’t see nobody,” he says, leaning back to look past me to the stool on my left.

As usual, I tell the truth, when I know full well that a little embellishment would go a long way. “I’m traveling with a friend who has a five-year-old, and they’re crashed at the motel. I wanted to come out and see the town. Actually, I’m looking for Jim Jarmusch.”

“Hey your boyfriend?” he asks, fumbling in his shirt pocket for a smoke.

“He shot Dead Man outside of Sedona; have you seen it?” I ask.

“The only dead man I know is the Japanese tourist who backed up too close to the rim at the Canyon. They have special body recovery people, you know, to bring back the dead. Where you say you boyfriend is?”

This is the kind of conversation I’ve seen people inch away from as though it were a rattlesnake poised to strike. But it’s the motivated traveler in me that reaches into my back pocket for a bill, lays it on the bar, and asks for another Wicked Ale.

“What’s your name?” I ask.

“H.”

“H? What’s that stand for? Harry, Harold, Hugh, what?”

He pulls out his billfold and slaps down his Arizona driver’s license onto the bar. “Just H.”

A young black man with short-cropped braids emerges from the shadows behind us and introduces himself as Chuck. Chuck says, “Hey man, what’s up with that? What kind of a name is H.?”

H. leans to his right and bumps into the man next to him. He mumbles something and then shouts out “Nobody gets it; I’m sick of this shit. You want to start something here?” H. is now swiveling around like he’s going to grab Chuck by the shirt collar.

By now the bar staff is looming in front of us and in my mind I say something like “Hey, H., you’re not going to get postal on us here, are
you?” Instead I say, “You think that’s bad, that’s nothing compared to the guy I sat next to on the plane. His last name was Self.”

H. seems to be distracted by the mention of the name Self. He now blinks and focuses in on me, leans over close to my face and says “Is he self-employed? Does he read self-help books? That’s funny. Shit.”

“Yeah,” I say, “he’s so funny he takes himself out.”


In the morning, I get up first and in the half-light see Luisa flopped over Loretta like a dead fish. Together they form the letter T—Loretta stretched out normally from the pillow to the foot of the bed, Luisa lying crosswise with her head on Loretta’s stomach. Seeing them like this makes me want my own child with whom I can make letters while sleeping, the ascenders and descenders of our bodies coming together lyrically at night.


The diner across the street from the motel is decorated 50s-style and smells of new vinyl. I imagine it’s been built recently, like most roadside stops I’ve seen along the way, sprouting up overnight like a bloated mushroom. It’s 7:30 AM and Luisa wants bubblegum. I want coffee badly and was even tempted to use the little hot water shooter in the motel to make a cup of complimentary instant, the packets of which were riveted to the table by something red and sticky, which I couldn’t identify. We are the only people in the diner except for the waitstaff, who are all wearing bopper uniforms—swirling poodle skirts, pink shirts, anklets, saddle shoes. A photo of a young Frank Sinatra hangs over our booth like a crucifix.

As usual, the restaurant doesn’t have a smoking section. So I drink coffee quietly and watch Luisa make mountains and tunnels out of her hash browns. She sends a sausage through, like a train.

“My daddy gives me Cocoa Puffs for breakfast,” Luisa says hopefully.

“That’s nice,” Loretta tells her, “but today you’re having a big-girl breakfast.”

“But I want Cocoa Puffs. Why can’t I have Cocoa Puffs?”

“Luisa, they don’t have Cocoa Puffs here. They only have grown-up food.”

Listening to their exchange, I run through my head the various lies Luisa has been told on this trip, which seem, in one way or another, to involve the police. Luisa, you can’t stand up in the car or you’ll be arrested by the
police. The police don’t allow little children to have bubblegum before noon.

“Mommy,” Luisa whines, “why you don’t want to marry my dad?”
Loretta looks at me and winces. I cannot help. I have no point of reference. “Because he was mean to Mommy, mean like that boy at school who likes to pull your hair.”

“My dad’s not mean. He gives me Cocoa Puffs. Why you don’t want a boyfriend? When you going to get a boyfriend, Mommy?” Luisa is now sending a blue crayon through her tunnel.

“OK Luisa, it’s time to go. You’re going potty before we get in the car.”

“Are we going to Disneyland now?” Luisa asks.
“Somewhere like Disneyland,” I tell her. “It’s called The Grand Canyon.”

***

We head north on Route 180 toward the Canyon’s south rim. The trees, thick along the road, remind me of upstate Pennsylvania. Suddenly the road juts out of the forest and we drive into a valley between the mountains. Luisa has to go to the bathroom again and we are lucky to find a store that sits at the halfway point on this flat stretch of highway. When we pull into the parking lot, I notice smoke funneling up from the mountains behind us.

The store is more like a shack, wooden, complete with an old dog asleep on the front stoop. The only person inside is a short, dark man, who I assume to be Indian, standing behind the counter. His hair is buzz-cut and he’s wearing what looks like army-issue camouflage fatigues from cap to boots. I imagine him being dropped off by helicopter each morning to run the store.

“There’s a fire back there,” I tell him.

“Yeah,” he says, “we have lots of fires up here. Been in a drought for months.”

“How do they start?” I ask.

“Lightning mostly.”

“Lightning?” I say. “I thought you were having a drought.”

“Not all lightning signals rain,” he says seriously, his dark eyes penetrating mine like he’s trying to communicate something that lies on the other side of language. A pair of wings begin to spread over my mind like a giant hood.

“Do you have a bathroom here?” Loretta interrupts.

“Back there, first door to the left,” he says, reaching into the glass case by the register to adjust something shiny.

We take turns in the bathroom, which has a sign on the door that
says 35 CENTS, WATER TRUCKED IN. I go last and the toilet doesn’t flush. There are no knobs at the sink and a Red Feather beer cap is jammed into the drain like a stopper.

***

Grand Canyon Village looks like Disneyland might if its life-sized characters were out on strike. It’s the middle of the week and I can’t understand where all these people came from, as we barely saw any cars on the drive up. We’re forced to endure the tourist center since Luisa has to go to the bathroom again. I get a map and try to move away from the counter, but the man at the information desk grabs the map from my hands and launches into his script, like those people who call your home at night and try to sell you vacation packages over the phone.

“These are the pull-offs, beautiful views, just drive your car along the road and follow the signs. Make sure you hit Mather Point and the Yavapi Museum, then keep driving past the lodges to the west end.” He is wildly circling points on the map as he yammers on. “Park near Bright Angel Lodge where the road ends and get on the shuttle that takes you out to Hermit’s Rest. When you get back, eat at the Steakhouse or bring food to the picnic area, and oh, don’t forget to drink lots of water.”

I back away from the counter slowly, as if after 20 paces we’ll square off and shoot, as if only one of us could be left standing.

***

The shuttle moves along the west rim, stopping at lookout points where you can get out and hike. Both Loretta and Luisa are wearing strappy sandals, the kind they sell at Payless that have no support and smooth soles.

“Here’s the first stop for all you hiking enthusiasts,” the shuttle driver says deadpan over the intercom. “It’s .8 miles to the next bus stop. You leave your camera on this bus and I have a nice present for my wife. You may think your kids are cute, but don’t leave them behind because I don’t want them. Doors opening.”

Some career hikers get out, all backpacks and water bottles, and we move on to the next stop.

“Second stop coming up. It’s 1.3 miles to the next bus. Don’t even think of getting off this shuttle here if you have a heart condition. It’s dirt and no guard rail all the way. For those of you traveling with mother-in-laws, this may be the best place to take mom’s picture. Have mom stand real close to the rim so you can get a nice aerial shot. Mind the
doors.”

Loretta is horrified by the shuttle driver’s monologue. We get off at the next stop since it’s the shortest hike, only .3 miles to catch the bus again. Loretta shoots an entire roll of film, pointing the camera in every direction in an attempt to capture the whole view. Luisa is fidgety and spits her gum out over the edge.

Actual viewing time of the Grand Canyon is a total of 15 minutes. We get back on the shuttle, pass up other hiking points, and take the express bus back to the car. Loretta says, “Well, I guess there’s nothing else to do up here,” and I imagine them a few weeks later in a living room in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, pictures fanned on the floor, the story of the Canyon narrated like Cliff Notes of a book never read. And so we begin the long drive back to Flagstaff.

***

As I make my way to the lounge at the Weatherford, the bouncer says, “Hey Philly, you back?” and for a split second I have to stop and think. I have this tendency to think too much when people ask rhetorical questions. I reply, “Guess so,” as if there were something unresolved or uncertain about where exactly it is I am. The lounge still glows red, but tonight there is a Latin jazz band on stage, well into their last set. Four of the five guys look like fraternity brothers, white and collegiate, but the front man is Chicano and an obvious decade older than the rest.

Tonight there is only one seat open at the bar. I sit down between a young kid in a ski cap, which he has pulled down past his eyebrows, just to the rims of his eyes, and an older man with wild hair and a long beard. Two women are arguing loudly on the other side of the bearded man.


A different bartender than the one on duty last night comes over and says, “We have plenty of entertainment tonight. Can I get you a drink?”

“Do you have a beer that’s not light or dark? Something in the middle, like an amber?”

He puts a Honey Brown in front of me and asks if he can bum a smoke. “I’m trying to quit, you know.”

“Well, this is a good place to quit,” I say. “All this second-hand smoke really takes the edge off.” The bartender smiles and pulls a lighter out of his pocket.

One of the women runs out of the bar crying. The bearded man also asks to bum a smoke. I hand over a Marlboro and say to him, “So
this is what goes on in Flagstaff after dark, huh?”

“Yeah, we have a little of everything here,” he says, “what with the highway cutting through town and all. Just last week I saw some idiot shoot a paint gun out of a car window on 66. If the light was red I was going to yank him out of the car.”

“Paint gun?” I say, feeling the urge to tell him about the drive-by shootings in my neighborhood and the various people who sleep on my doorstep.

“Yeah, you know, the kind they use in those army-type games? I hate it when people do stupid things like that. No respect for the world around them.”

“So what else do people do around here?” I ask.

“Well, I just got settled in town, but I’ve lived in the area for about 15 years.”

“Where’d you live before? Sedona, up near the Canyon?”

“Actually I lived in the woods just outside of town,” he says, finally lighting the cigarette. “I used to come into town to take showers, though.”

I begin to look at him closely then, and in fact he does look like someone who lived in the woods for 15 years. His eyes are glassy and muted blue, like someone who’s been drinking for years, but set deeper, somehow, like he’d come back from the dead. “You know,” I say, “maybe you can help me.” I’m tempted to ask if he’s heard of Jim Jarmusch, but I figure he probably doesn’t go to the movies much. “I’m looking for a certain spot in the woods where the brush isn’t too thick or too thin, where the trees aren’t tall or short. It’s around here somewhere, but the terrain changes so quickly I just can’t pinpoint it.”

His eyes grow wide and he takes a deep drag on his cigarette. It’s as if I’d asked a question he’d spent years preparing an answer for, a question he waited his entire life to be asked. For the next 45 minutes he speaks like a botanist who specializes in Arizona plant life. I learn about the difference between the low and high desert, the mountains, and everything in between. He interjects stories about his life in the woods, stories about how the color of morning changes as it creeps up a sleeping bag, how the sun could blind even a dead man lying face-up in the snow.

At the end he looks exhausted, like he’s talked more tonight than he’s talked in years. I’d left my cigarette case open on the bar so he and the bartender could help themselves, and we’re down to the last one. “Why’d you want to know?” he finally asks. “Who exactly are you looking for?”

“You know,” I say, extending the last cigarette, “nobody.”
I pull back the drapes in the motel room and look out at Highway 66. The moon is barely visible in the dark sky, like the face of a stranger who looks suddenly familiar, then turns a corner on a busy street and is lost. But nobody’s out on the road at this hour, and the motel strip is shut down for the night. High above the parking lot the words NO CANCY rise up and over the highway.

I turn back to the room, and in the red glow of the sign, I see that Loretta and Luisa are stretched the length of the bed, side by side, like fallen trees. They are exact in every way, two synchronized swimmers at rest, but then one of Luisa’s arms shoots across the canyon of the bed between them, her tiny hand landing on Loretta’s hip. At first I think they are attempting an H, but moving around the bed, I see it’s an I they’re after, two halves of a lonely letter pressed silently against the sheets. The sign blinks on and off, and I watch them, this human alphabet dead to the world, an endless stutter flickering in the night.
MARJORIE MADDOX

Filming

*Folk Park: Bunratty, Ireland*

When guards
hold us back, we fire up
telephotos, aim at pasts
not held back over their costumed shoulders.

Behind the small-scale General Store,
a dozen lads fidget, tug at britches,
and suck their stick candy loudly
while waiting to play
the year and moment of their characters.

Unvictorian and unrepentant,
our cameras dictate their own scene,
zoom in on cinematographers,
and watch the watching. The crew,
obediently working the century,
acquiesces to voyeurism.

Through the tunnel of our lens,
their frames click rhythmically,
choreograph film and fiction
over the trucked-in dust,
past barbershop and bank,
past facts stacked beside burlap in the *Dry Goods Store,*
now lives old though just constructed
on this island today misconstrued as England.

On the new old streets of Bunratty,
brogues curve into cockney,
roads pose cobblestonish for *Copperfield,*
while Ustinov collaborates with Disney.

The professionals focus
off-center, blur lines
between lives, follow the gist
of history.
Waver ing between f-stop and photo,  
we follow the thin film of pretend,  
watch for the soft blur  
when everything goes light,  
the story once more removed and developed  
before, through, and for the snap of our eyes.  

Even behind cameras,  
we know they also  
bend our boundaries,  
aim at our everyday  
with an other-century gaze.  

It’s then we wish for the quick shoot,  
the rebellion, the turn and point  
that frame and capture.  

We in the wrong clothes,  
just past the periphery,  
there in the crowd, selling apples,  
behind the shoulder of the hero  
the split second before the credits  
clip past on horseback and carriage.
ROBERT GREGORY

The Woman Who Became A Mountain:
*Thelma & Louise*¹ as Ritual, History, and Myth

I have lost my way many times in this world, only to return to
these rounded, shimmering hills and see myself recreated
more beautiful than I could ever believe. — Joy Harjo²

Typically, when we picture “the road,” we see it as some literal or
maybe fantasized thing out ahead of us, not as something behind us,
something we have to turn around or look in the mirror or the past to
see clearly.

I was talking to an older Hopi man the other night as we drove
around Miami. He was lamenting the way the traditional knowledge
disappears so that no one knows any longer how to read the world, to
see the images and metaphors it is written in. The young people, you
know, they listen to the TV, movies, rock ‘n’ roll, they aren’t really inter-
ested in the old ways, he said. He meant his young people, but since
I’m a teacher, I could only agree with his comment.

At the same time, I knew I was being unjust; I was enjoying a
moment of self-satisfaction (in being a bearer of “high” culture, sadly
shaking my head at the follies of the great unwashed).³ It is not really
ture that there is only high culture or trash and I should know better.
The new and ephemeral things are sometimes full of very old and
secret things. Sometimes “the stars” are the stars.

Controversial at the time of its release in summer, 1991— it even
made the cover of *Time*— *Thelma & Louise* was nevertheless not taken
as seriously as it deserves to be.⁴ It had its instant of buzz and then
seemed to vanish from the scene. But it should not vanish because it
has important things to tell us about the function of images. And about
the road as history, as behind us.

When late in the movie Thelma, the character played by Geena
Davis, says “I feel *awake*, wide awake. I don’t ever remember feeling this
awake... Everything looks different,” she’s pointing us to one of those
old, secret things. Discussing the universal features of initiation rituals,
Mircea Eliade comments on the meaning of the ordeal of staying
awake:

This is an initiatory ordeal that is documented more or less all
over the world, even in comparatively highly developed reli-
gions. Not to sleep is not only to conquer physical fatigue, but
is above all to show proof of will and spiritual strength; to remain awake is to be conscious, present in the world, responsible.5

Commentators have noticed Thelma's change in the film; she begins as more or less an airhead and is dependant on Louise for all initiative and direction. By midpoint, after J.D. (the con man played by Brad Pitt) has stolen their money and initiated Thelma into a real (as opposed to routine) sexual experience, there is a change in Thelma. The change is signalled by Thelma's taking over, being awake and responsible, when Louise falls apart and loses her bearings completely.

Thelma has also been initiated in the sense that she has found her "calling." One important purpose of initiation, according to Joseph Campbell, is to help the initiate realize what calling he or she has. Thelma says after the robbery she feels like she's been doing such things "all my life." After she disarms the cop she says she just feels like she's "got a knack for this shit" (a sign one has found one's true calling). Louise recognizes that when she asks: "Found your calling?"

However, when Thelma robs the convenience store, demonstrating her natural gifts as a thief and criminal, we watch her performance on the store's videotape and realize she has learned the whole routine from J.D., who, to entertain and eventually seduce Thelma, demonstrated how he robbed stores. Normally in the old hero-tales, the male sleeps with a female (a witch or divine being) in order to get some knowledge from her but here it is the other way around. J.D. is not simply a person. Hermes is the god of thieves and a psychopomp as well, a guide to the other world, an initiation figure. Because he steals their getaway money, Thelma has no choice but to accept her calling.

Campbell also reminds us that initiations are often preceded by a cleansing or purgation6; Thelma and Louise both vomit after the near-rape and shooting episode at the Silver Bullet. The nausea comes from shock, of course, but also from the spirits, a profane medicine here associated with birds (traditionally, messengers between earth and sky) because Thelma drinks "Wild Turkey"7 and Louise orders "Cuervo," the Spanish word for "crow."8 Other aspects of the initiation ritual visible in the film: (1) being terrified by "monsters" and loud noises (the huge noisy trucks—a monster they later conquer and laugh at); being wounded or scarified (Thelma's bloody mouth and later her hickey from the episode with J.D.); ordeals (their journey itself and the memories that Louise especially must increasingly try to endure) new clothes (especially hats, Louise's an old battered cowboy hat and Thelma's a cheesy gimme cap like a trucker or farmer would wear), fasting (we never see them eat, only drink coffee or whiskey), visions (in the mountains).
This violent episode in the parking lot triggers Louise’s memories of a similar situation she endured in Texas; we never learn the details precisely but we do discover that she shot a rapist and that her story of self-defense was not believed. No one listened. Her shooting of Harlan is not to prevent the rape, which she has done already by brandishing the gun, but is a reaction to his arrogance, his sense of being invincible, unpunishable. But in mythical or initiatory terms, this episode is what Campbell refers to as the “shock” that wakes up the novice, the metaphorical death that “kills” the childish self-centered ego and begins the adult process, the awakening to oneself and to responsibility for others. The double sense of the images (in a literal, plot direction and in a mythological direction) makes this event a crossroads, an intersection. It also changes the point-of-view, from passive helpless victim of crime to awakened and active warrior. Such a change is a way of getting completely turned around; in the New Testament it is a metanoia, a conversion, a turn; in movie parlance it is a reverse shot. You look back at yourself from the point of view of the other.

In his lectures Campbell has shown male initiation centers as metaphorically “female” places, caves or huts, wombs into which the novice goes to be “killed” and reborn. What is important in these wombs is the role of images, sometimes painted on the walls, sometimes manifest in “mirrors.” For example, in a ritual from the mosaics at Pompeii, a young man is told to look in a metal bowl and he will see his true face. In the painting, a figure behind the young man holds up the mask of an old man in such a way that the mask is reflected back from the bowl to the novice as his “true face” and this shock, delivered by the image, is the shock of waking to one’s own mortality, Campbell argues, to the image of the “long body,” the body as a process in time. This shock is what is needed to force one to wake up, throw off the sulky, passive “sleep” of childhood, and make dangerous and consequential choices.

Think of what we do when we go to a movie. We enter (often enough from the daylight) into a dark windowless interior, like a cave, and giant mesmerizing images appear and we go into a state of trance, a hyper-receptive state. In Freud’s Studies on Hysteria a similar state is described but there it is pathogenic; Anna O. for example spends her time inside an imaginary space and this space creates a disposition toward hysteria that her trauma triggers. In Freud’s theory, the disease is the inability to verbalize something either created or endured in a hypnoid state; instead the trauma is converted into a symptom and goes into the body. For example, “moral disgust” becomes literal “vomiting.” The cure therefore is to tell the story: a talking cure.

The most important image in Thelma and Louise is a mysterious one.
We are prepared for it by a series of shots: Thelma in profile, close-up, her face at that range as much a landscape as a face; then we see dissolves between Thelma's and Louise's face, as if they are becoming each other. This sequence is followed by a long wordless moment in which Louise gets out of the car and stands in the dark landscape listening to the insects, looking around her and up at the sky, seeming to grow more peaceful as she does so, as if the qualities of the landscape (of Monument Valley, setting of the classic John Ford Western *Stagecoach*) were entering into her. Just before Thelma makes her remark about being "wide awake" for the first time, we see her looking in the rear view mirror. Many shots of either Thelma or Louise looking in a mirror have occurred previously in the film; Louise progresses from looking very made up and frozen to looking warmer, unpainted, and more herself, while Thelma looks less decorative and simpering, more serious and capable. But Louise also has a glimpse of the "long body" when she notices faces in the window of a café staring at her and quickly reacts in her habitual way, by grabbing for her lipstick and checking her face in the rear view mirror. When she realizes the absurdity of this worry and tosses the lipstick away, we may not see that she saw her own face, a true face, in that of the old woman looking at her from the café (like the very old man with whom she trades for his dilapidated hat, neither of them saying a word, he simply staring and staring, eyes big with something he sees that we don't).

When Thelma looks in the rear view mirror she sees not her literal face but a mountain; in fact, she sees the mountain we see at the very beginning of the movie, the one that turns from black and white to color. But it seems to me that when you look in the mirror what you see is your true face, so that when she sees a mountain there, she sees herself: she is a mountain.

In Jane Tompkins' brilliant study of the Western, she sees the genre as male—in the sense of anti-female and anti-spiri-tual, a drive especially visible in the urge of the males to merge with the landscape:

The landscape's final invitation—merger—promises complete materialization. . . . The monolithic, awe-inspiring character of the landscape seems to reflect a desire for self-transcendence, an urge to join the self to something greater. . . . Power. . . . is what is being celebrated and struggled with in these grandiose vistas. The worship of power, the desire for it, and, at the same time, an awe of it bordering on reverence and dread seem to emanate from these panoramic wide-angle views.
If that is true for the male POV in these mythic objects, what of the female? This urge to become material is not at all the drive Thelma and Louise are feeling or making. It could be like the urge the woman with mysterious powers in Leslie Marmon Silko’s novel *Ceremony* feels: “I rode the bus this far. I saw the mountain and I liked the view from here.’ She nodded in the direction of the mountain, Tse’pi’na, the woman veiled in clouds.”

But many sacred mountains have two names. “Woman veiled in clouds” is called by the whites Mr. Taylor. For them it doesn’t exist in mythology but in history. Another mountain is worth mentioning because it resembles the one we see in the credits, the one that changes from black and white to color (from literal to mythological?) as the movie begins. It is called by the Cheyenne Noah-voie, the Sacred Mountain. “This is the holiest place in all the world,” says the author of *People of the Sacred Mountain*, Father Peter John Powell, “for here Ma?heo?o, the All-Father Creator Himself, gave Maahótsé, the Sacred Arrows, to Sweet Medicine the Prophet . . . . An endless stream of sacred power flows from the Creator’s lodge within the Holy Mountain, blessing His People, giving them abundant power for new life.”

Why would the Cheyenne’s sacred mountain be involved in this film, most of which takes place in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Arizona, outside historical Cheyenne territory? I suspect it is because the Cheyenne women played a role as warriors in the Battle of the Little Big Horn, a victory they considered to be revenge for the massacres perpetrated by the soldiers on the Cheyenne during peace time. The revenge was especially sweet because Custer and his men had raped the Cheyenne women they took captive after the attack on Black Kettle’s camp some years before. Father Powell’s history tells the event this way:

Later that evening, or perhaps an evening or so later, some thing happened that the women never forgot. Years later Red Dress, Wolf Looking Back’s wife, who was herself one of the captives, still spoke of the terribleness of it. For it was this evening that Custer and his men came to look over the frightened young women. Then they chose the ones they wanted to be their companions for the night.

In his note to the passage, Father Powell mentions that “most non-Native American historians have ignored the Cheyenne statements concerning the mistreatment of the women by Custer and his men. . . . It is indeed strange that historians have chosen to ignore the above Cheyenne testimony, as well as Cheyenne oral tradition, which still preserves knowledge of this soldier mistreatment of women from the tribe
noted above all others for its women’s chastity."^13

It is this rape that the Cheyenne women avenge both during and after the battle. During the fighting, a woman warrior named Buffalo Calf Road Woman, armed with a pistol, fired "many shots" at the soldiers; all the time she "showed no fear about riding out in the open." At one point, she rescued a fallen warrior, a deed courageous enough to be painted and preserved by the tribe. After the battle, says Powell, "it was the women’s turn for vengeance now, and they, who had seen the bodies of their own relatives raped and mutilated by soldiers, did not hesitate to repay these veʔhóʔe [white men] in kind."^14 Eventually some women who knew what Long Hair (Custer) looked like found his body on the battlefield. They remembered that

he had not heard Stone Forehead’s warning eight springs before this, when Custer smoked with the Southern Chiefs in the presence of Maahótsé [the Sacred Arrows, the symbol of the Holy Mountain’s power and blessing], vowing that he came in peace. Only truth can be spoken in the hearing of the Sacred Arrows, and Stone Forehead had warned the soldier chief that if he were lying all his soldiers would die.

So the women who found Long Hair made his body into a piece of picture writing, into what we would call an image: "the women then pushed the point of a sewing awl into each of Long Hair’s ears, on into his head. They did this to improve his hearing. . . ."^15

Othello didn’t listen either. Nor did Agamemnon. In Othello’s case, he heard Desdemona’s wish to be a warrior ("she wished that heaven had made her such a man,"—I,iii, 162) but decided it was an expression of romantic love (even though he calls her "my fair warrior"—II, i, 179). Much of his confusion and hysteria comes from refusal to listen in the first place, I would argue.

The women of Argos are not really listened to either. The chorus begins the play by speaking of their own at this point vague anxieties to Clytaemnestra, who ignores them. Then they speak of Calchas and his prophecy of the goddess Artemis’ anger at the coming slaughter of mothers and children of Troy and at a father who would kill his own daughter; to the chorus the words apply also to the mother before them, Clytaemnestra, who they speak of as the one predicted by Calchas, as "the terror raging back and back in the future. . . . the mother— / Memory womb of Fury child avenging Fury!" (11. 154- 156). Now the chorus explains their sense of what a Fury is— it is a kind of manifested energy, a being made of the emotion of those whose anger at injustice is unheard:
All through Greece for those who flocked to war they are holding back the anguish now, you can feel it rising in every house . . . . they [the mothers and widows of Argos] mutter in secret and the rancor steals toward our staunch defenders, Atreus' sons. . . . The people's voice is heavy with hatred now the curses of the people must be paid, and now I wait, I listen. . . . there—there is something breathing under the night's shroud. God takes aim at the ones who murder many; the swarthy Furies stalk the man . . . .” (11. 427 - 457). 16

Here the name Fury refers to a kind of psychic embodiment of anger and grief; the emotions of the Greek women, being unheard, have taken on body and stalk the world as a dangerous force. Freud's theory of hysteria as a conversion of feeling into body becomes something much more than an individual pathogenic symptom here.

The whole experience of watching giant images inside a dark space should be considered more mythological than literal but the images of mythology can be merely decorative and unimportant if we do not see that they also carry psychological and historical truths. In Thelma & Louise we might be able to read the images of violence and anguish through Campbell's scheme but see them as merely a pretty New Age charm bracelet that scants the question of violence against women and the endless cycle of revenge when there is no justice.

This is why the history of the Cheyenne is important here. Which doesn't mean the mythology is therefore irrelevant. For example, the last image in the movie (they drive off the edge of the canyon into the air) could be seen literally as the death of Thelma and Louise but I don't see it that way. Eliade notes a constant theme of initiation rituals: reconnection. In one ritual, "the men cut a spiral piece from the bark of a tree to symbolize the path between earth and sky. In my opinion this represents a mystical reactivation of the connections between the human world and the divine world of the sky."17 From Paul Shepard and Barry Sanders' The Sacred Paw we could discover corroboration: when human beings pondered the difficulty of surviving the cold winter and metaphorically of surviving the cold death,

the bear, more than any other teacher, gave an answer. . . . Its passage into the earth, winter's death, and burial under the snow was like a punctuation in the round of life that would begin again in the spring. 'Spring' was three things: a season of renewal, the underground stream that came forth even in winter, and a 'leap' from the earth. . . . The bear seems to die,
or to mimic death, and in that mimicry is the suggestion of a performance, a behavior intended to communicate. 18

We might also recall Calypso’s guidance for Odysseus:

Sleep did not overtake his lids: he watched the Pleiades, the Plowman, slow to set, and the Great Bear—known also as the Wain—which circles round one point and spies Orion and is the only set of stars that never bathes in Ocean’s waves. The gracious goddess, Calypso, had instructed him to keep the Great Bear on his left . . . . (Odyssey, bk 5, trans. Allen Mandelbaum)

Shepard and Sanders underline this aspect of the bear as celestial guide. For one thing, the bright star in Ursa Minor is the Pole Star, pointing north. In the thought of traditional cultures the bear was the axis around which the sun turned in its “daily renewal,” which was the renewal of life. And the Hindus would dance outside a house where childbirth was going on; always they circled to the right “to ensure that the newborn child would make the passage safely into life by turning in the proper direction out of the womb.” Thus, Odysseus, going back “home,” must keep to the left. “Etymological connections between bear and child bearing and maintaining one’s correct directions by keeping one’s bearings are all deeply rooted in the bear’s power of renewing the world.” 19

But why a bear when Thelma sees herself as a mountain? We need to remember that although she is a woman warrior the likes of Buffalo Calf Road Woman, Thelma isn’t a Cheyenne but a white. Father Powell gives the Cheyenne name for the Sacred Mountain as Noaha-vose and then translates: The whites call the place Bear Butte because “it is formed like a great sleeping grizzly bear.” 20

Recall that it is her idea that they gun the engine and ride their Thunderbird off the cliff. 21 If she saw herself as the sleeping bear, the mountain, then she knows there is no dying, but only rising and renewal. There is no dying says the final image then, only renewal of life — and that is the proper service of images. It depends on the story you believe in, on your point of view. Tayo in Ceremony recalls his belief in the old ways when a young boy:

. . . he had felt that the sky was near and that he could have touched it. He believed then that touching the sky had to do with where you were standing and how the clouds were that day . . . . Distances and days existed in themselves then; they all
had a story. They were not barriers. If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; it all depended on whether you knew the directions—exactly which way to go and what to do to get there; it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone.  

1. Dir. Ridley Scott, w. Callie Khouri. MGM


3. Joli Jensen ("Fandom as Pathology") woke me up to this in her scathing and funny take on the put-down of fans as hysterical "other" that constructs a normal, rational "we" by contrast, in Lisa Lewis, ed. *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media* (London: Routledge, 1992), 9-29.

4. Reviewers note a mythic quality to the film but they tend to mean by that a pop myth, like the road movie or the buddy picture; for example, Jack Kroll in *Newsweek* (May 27, 1991) and Richard Schickel in *Time* (June 24, 1991). Perhaps because of time constraints the reviewers I read after I worked out my argument seemed to have touched on some of the themes here and then moved rapidly on; for example, the *New Yorker*’s reviewer mentions the movies hypnotic and trance-like qualities but stops there (June 3, 1991) and the *Christian Century* suggests the film not be taken "literally" (June 26-July 3, 1991) but doesn’t develop that. Linda Williams says *The Searchers* is part of the context here because of its rape-revenge theme; Leo Braudy insists the movie is myth and not realistic (both in *Film Quarterly*, December 1991). Ridley Scott himself says the film is an "allegory" but doesn’t elaborate (in an interview with Amy Taubin in *Sight & Sound* vol. 1, number 3, 1991, p. 19). Strangely enough, it is only the glib and fatuous Syd Field, the notorious how-to-write-screenplays-that-sell mogul, who says that the film is what Joseph Campbell calls an initiation ritual (29); he mentions in his introduction that Campbell was a major influence on screenwriters in the 80’s (xiv), perhaps because the use of his ideas in the *Star Wars* money machine was considered inspiring [*Four Screenplays* (New York: Dell, 1994)].


6. In his series of video lectures, *Transformation of Myth Through Time* (Public Media Video, dist. Mystic Fire, 1990); see especially "In the Beginning ".

7. The wild turkey (like the bear) is a creature important to Apache healing ceremonies; see, for example, Thomas E. Mails, *The People Called Apache* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974), 174-5; 386-387. Thelma and Louise, trying to avoid driving through Texas on their way to Mexico, head west into Arizona, Apache country, instead.


14. Powell, vol. 2, 1029. See fig. 4 for a mild example of the sights they must have seen.

15. Powell, vol. 2, 1030. The Native Americans occasionally arranged the bodies of those they killed to be a kind of picture writing when others arrived on the scene later. (See Atlas of the North American Indian.)


17. Eliade, 14.


19. Shepard and Sanders, 61.

20. Powell, vol. 1, xxxvii

21. In this way they outdo the powerful aerial monsters that survey them earlier on: the crop duster and the police helicopter.

22. *Ceremony*: 19
CHRISTOPHER CHAMBERS

Dirge

Buried at sea in our sweet vestements; united
always to always, eons of dispassionate,
gleaning infirmities; a soap opera, I have toiled
in the lungs, a soliloquy sullenly carried.

Futility for a ceiling. Repentance
prepared like a meal; at the matinee
when the others thrice cried, the unwanted crept
like obese ballerinas.

With the chorus, the lunge in the night time anguish
deep in bacchanalia: we eat inside a festival

that scars us all together. Sorrow and certainty spinning the hand
create my intrusion: the song: identity, negation, and question.
Painted Bride Quarterly
is proud to announce the winners
of our 1997 poetry contest
judged by Mark Doty:

1st Place
Marisa de los Santos
“Women Watching Basketball”

2nd Place
Sean McDonnell
“The Saturday Mail”

3rd Place
Cameron K. Gearen
“Octopus”
MARISA DE LOS SANTOS

Women Watching Basketball

For us, five writers, it’s partly
do to with the language, little spells,
hyphenated, elegant lingo,

words swirling like whiskey in the mouth:
pump-fake, post-up, two-guard,
pick-and-roll. We are casual.

Like Whitman—who’d have been a fan
for sure, adoring and bearded,
tossing his hat in the air

for the Knicks—we speak passwords
primeval, we enter this world
and belong. With adamant hands,

we argue calls, how best
to beat a double-team, the beauty
of the inside-outside game.

And, too, it’s the players themselves
that attract us, their lives, loose-linked
fragments of story

each of us seeks and collects:
the guard’s murdered father, the tranquil
center’s Muslim faith,

ten-thousand winter coats
the rookie gave to children.
But, still, it’s more than all

that. Oh, how to explain
why you love what you love?
Picture time-lapse photography,
the certain outward opening
    of flowers, one circle of petals
        at a time, a smooth unfisting

called to life by notes sounded
    somewhere in the clenched heart,
        the thirsty root-tips, the body

of the moist earth. Exhalation
    of a long-held breath. Green
        stem, delicate tendon,

twisting toward the sun.
    Because it’s like that,
        a little, the turn-around fade-away

jumper. Though we know the ethereal
    nicknames: Magic, Dream, Air,
        what we want most is pure

corpus, sharp tug of tricep
    and hamstring, five fingers’ grip
        on the ball— hard, perfect star—

back muscles singing, glorious
    climb through the air. We imagine
        it this way: to dunk would be life

from the bones out, would be
    to declare, Divine is the flesh!
        and for once to believe it, believe it.
SEAN MCDONNELL

The Saturday Mail

They're hauling the suicide's clothing away in Hefty bags the color of pond water,
when one of the men in brown coveralls the city employs for such occasions

stumbles on the landing, and the bag he cradles in his broad gloved hands
tears where it snags the iron bannister. Dark socks worm through the gash in the plastic,

the bag's translucence shrivels, deflating, and those of us knotted in the wide lobby,
taking the cat out, waiting for Saturday's mail, feel privately eased by this clumsiness,

how it loosens us from the silence we've thronged in to tell the small details we know,
how her boots tracked flour through the hallway, how occasionally, near midnight,

a rough laugh issued from her room, her name that none of us recall, though the man
who lives in Six believes it sounded Polish, our bodies circling closer on the cold tile

until the fabric of our coatsleeves almost touches, our backs to the tall, narrow stair.
CAMERON K. GEAREN

Octopus

I.
Dinner is raw octopus, included in the price of a room. Our hostess shuffles in and out of the fishy kitchen; each plate boasts one leg. I see them darting beneath the flat skin of the sea, purple as a bruise, past the harbor where fishing boats spill black, spiky globes onto the dock, sea urchins for Tokyo. A sidewalk runs along the water, granite belt cinching the village’s waist. When we walked there this afternoon, two children ran up to us, a dead snake in their hands. Now, the woman across the table from me holds her chopsticks like bow and arrow, kills the leg, chews, satisfied. Mine is too rubbery. I eat only seaweed and miso. Out the window, the sea has swallowed the sun; bursting with fantastic fish, it is lit from within.

II.
You show me how to scrub down to a clean layer, rinse what came in the train window that morning down the drain then, clean already, immerse my body in the tub. Skin holds fluids in, hairs float to the top. Six months, you have been my husband. I try not to watch your red tuft of hair, your pale floating sex. Moss grows in cracks and grooves around the edges of the room. Somewhere, a faucet drips on tile. If we interlace our limbs—four arms, four legs—we are an octopus, undulating.
III.
(In hall, hostel owner waits. He is tall and thin, a barracuda. Couple emerges from bathroom, dripping, wearing robes.)
—Men and women must not bathe together.
—Oh, excuse me. I misunderstood. (Bow.)
—This is unacceptable. I’m afraid I must ask you to leave.
—But sir, we are married. Surely you and your wife
have bathed together on occasion. (Bow. Bow.)
(He translates for her, shorthand: He says we must leave, about the bathing together, not done here, I should have known.)
—Not in someone else’s home, we haven’t.
   Anyway, you have different last names.
—That is very common in our country now. (Bow.)
   Here, see my ring? See my wife’s ring?
(His face reddens. He tells her: Go get the pictures. She exits stage right, toward their room.)
—You’ve insulted my wife and me.
   You deliberately broke a rule. I will not
   sleep well with you under my roof.
   You must leave.
—But sir, there is nowhere else for a stranger
to sleep in this village. (Bow.)
   Please forgive me for my mistake. (Bow. Bow.)
(She enters stage right, carrying handful of wedding photos. He is shaking, near tears. She bows and extends her hand.)
—(In English) Here. See?
(Hostel owner inclines his neck to look.
Then he walks away down hall,
slippers scraping linoleum.)

IV.
In our room, fragile box of rice paper, we dry off.
The sea lapping, lapping. We make love;
you trap my breast in your hand hard, to still it.
Late: I tell you a story of a couple who comes to a village,
eats, bathes, sleeps, and, in the bright morning, walks away.
Maybe the peninsula disappears after they leave it.
The couple remembers, you say. I wake now and then
to your vertical spine, lit-up hair in moonlight.
I am underwater but, all night, you sit up on straw.
Painted Bride Quarterly
is proud to announce the winner
of our 1997 Chapbook Contest
judged by Molly Peacock:

Suzanne Rhodenbaugh
“The Shine on Loss”
Preface to Suzanne Rhodenbaugh’s Chapbook
“The Shine on Loss”

Sass and wit rarely come in the same package, but here they are in Suzanne Rhodenbaugh’s poetry. Her work thrives on the paradox of raw energy and logical refinement, a union that lets her invert the world and examine it at the same time. When a writer can turn a cultural idea inside out, transforming its energy into new language with new intentions, then we know we are in the presence of poetic gift.

In Suzanne Rhodenbaugh’s wise and electric poem, “Making a Christ of the Average Jesus,” the Virgin Mother—a classic overnurturer—and the whore Mary Magdalen—a savvy manipulator of public opinion—conspire like presidential political advisors to plot the career of Jesus, an average Joe rebuilt to fit the role of savior. The poem is knowing, broad, savage, witty, and cornucopic in detail. It also turns on an inspired idea that generates a whole poetic world, both narrative and lyric. Mary Magdalen’s punch line at the end emerges from a land both “bristly and common, common scrub at its base” and a relationship with a Jesus whose “nose got sunburned and tender” and who “dribbled honey on his beard.”

“Have you spoken with your mother?” Magdalen asks, then delivers the agenda:

She and I have been talking. We say the schedule of engagements should be intense—purposeful, and meaningful, and go beyond the surface straight to people’s hearts. Therefore, she said, to a Jesus nervous now in the corner—and soon to be taken aback—therefore, Magdalen said, the nail holes will be real.

Rhodenbaugh widens the joke into fate, a sumptuous and many-layered fate that bristles throughout this group of poems.

Brushstroking fate onto choice with a vocabulary at once ample and precise is Rhodenbaugh’s method. Beneath her varying line strategies and subjects, the choice/fate locus always pulses, never so revealingly as in the short poem, “Having Given My Baby Up For Adoption” about which Rhodenbaugh has also written elsewhere in moving prose. Between what we want to do and what circumstances allow us lay the paths of our lives, this poet says, and our paths are difficult to view through the undergrowth of daily life. Yet these paths are sharply illumined by the lighting flash of some single events—whether that is unexpected pregnancy or unexpectedly being cast into the role of savior of the western world.

In “The Difference Between Me and Me” such a stunning instance
of clarity comes to Bill at a demolition site, just before his life goes “belly up.” He witnesses a crane as it “drops a girder and it neat / slices off the back of a man’s head.” Rhodenbaugh goes on to say that “He feels it / isn’t exactly fair for him to have to see it,” and we feel, throughout her poems, that there are multitudes of sights—and experiences—that it isn’t exactly fair to have to witness. This certainly includes the demolition of the speaker’s house at the end of the poem, leaving just an empty field over which a moon rises. Yet it is that rising out of emptiness that saves the speaker and the reader, because it locates the positive pulse of life—activity as construction side-by-side with demolition. The back-and-forth of the con- and de-struction gives Rhodenbaugh her wisdom and this chapbook its richness.

The image of a head sliced open appears in “Ecology of Luck” as well, only it is Salome’s head shipped, in a reversal, to John the Baptist, who eats the head and “make[s] it / mercy.” He feeds on this brain, then spits out the seeds as if the tissue were watermelon. And the seeds grow. Growth from what is cut off is the theme of all Rhodenbaugh’s tough and vigorous poems. Hers is a mature and occasionally visionary poetry, presenting both destruction and rebuilding as the contradictory life we live and breathe. And her vision evolves from description. She spins her tales of luck with an ambling lyricism that evokes the textures and nearly tactile charge of knowing something deeply and well simply because one is capable of describing it—as if Elizabeth Bishop suddenly turned up in a Southern Gothic.

As I read the many exceptional manuscripts submitted for the Painted Bride Quarterly Chapbook Contest, it was Rhodenbaugh’s I was drawn to again and again. They are a testament to Suzanne Rhodenbaugh’s persistence and the special nature of her gift: fireworks that stay in the sky.

Molly Peacock
SUZANNE RHODENBAUGH

Making a Christ of the Average Jesus

Mary said to Jesus, Please, stay just one more day. I'll serve stuffed grape leaves, finely-twisted challah and those wonderful bitter olives you so love. Jesus shut the door. He walked down the slender roadway, really an alley, his nostrils chafing with smell of the vendors' spiccs and their donkeys' dung. He made his way to the lip of Jezreel Valley. Down the slanting mount he walked through the cedars leaning north toward Nazareth, whence he had come. The land was bristly and common, common scrub at its base. Stone chains round the hillsides marked some paltry plots along the road to Jaffa. Jesus' sandals stirred up dust and it came to him—walking on water—as if above the very element sorely missing in this land—would be a telling coup. Figure the inland sea tides, time of year, the angle of light toward dawn or dusk. He knew it could be done. The fishermen would love it. Gentiles would go for it too. In bright imaginings Jesus walked for hours. Jaffa he was before he knew it. A driver stopped: did he want a lift to the beach? No, he said, and drifted in the crowded stony city piled on minor cliffs. Blisters formed on his heels. His nose got sunburned and tender. The carcasses of lambs hanging in the market were colorful all right but God the flies! In a small smoky, ceiling draped in black homespun embroidered red and gold, Jesus sat with a pastry. Honey dribbled onto his beard. His demitasse of coffee was muddy as hell. Magdalene said to meet her half past noon. She came in a black caftan, heavy breasted, hemline sagging badly. Her face was lined and ashen. She had a hood engagingly shadowing her face, making it all the more virginal, all the more deathly. He told her his thoughts on the coming campaign. She nodded, took notes, she added insights there and here. His eyes got luminous and lovely but Magdalene stayed on topic. Lights were coming on by the time they finished their agenda—the necessary betrayals, the ascension. The cock crowing
three times was a good final touch he thought. Jesus was seeing his way clearer to how the stunted, strict and galling could be told all milk and honey when Magdalene asked, Have you spoken with your mother? She and I have been talking. We say the schedule of engagements should be intense— purposeful, and meaningful, and go beyond the surface straight to people’s hearts. Therefore, she said, to a Jesus nervous now in the corner— and soon to be taken aback— therefore, Magdalene said, the nail holes will be real.
Having Given Up My Baby for Adoption

From the window of a slow-moving train
I saw a dog on top of a building
many stories high. I could see its sound—
its frantic bark—as it ran from one
edge to another and looked down. Unable to provide
on top of all that steel and stone,
unable even to make itself heard,
it was alone and thoroughly terrified.

It was not a complicated dog
in love with the transcendent
who’d made its own way near to God.
An ironic God wasn’t present.

Cruelty or willful neglect,
this was something human someone meant.
Painted Bride Quarterly
is proud to announce the winner
of our 1997 Fiction Contest
judged by Charles Baxter

1st Place
Elizabeth Oness
“The Narrow Gate”

2nd Place
Claudia Mon Pere McIsaac
“How Heat Transforms Under
Certain Conditions”
ELIZABETH ONESS

The Narrow Gate

This time she remembers the whole weekend. His hand against her forehead while she sucked, carefully, on the pipe, his fingers holding back her hair so it wouldn’t catch fire. She concentrated on the rock. Delicate suck. Not like smoking pot. You had to go slow, not hit it too hard. His hand in her hair. Breathe out, just a little. Then an inhale, a deep breath of plain air. Breathe out now, easy. And she pursed her lips and exhaled slowly, emptying herself, and as she reached the bottom of her breath her eyes closed and the darkened room swirled into a silver bloom behind her eyelids and everything went away. She was standing in the kitchen, but she felt as if she’d been tipped backwards, off her feet, tipped a little sideways and spinning out into the darkness. She inhaled slowly, held until her chest grew tight, anticipating the long, sliding exhale into clarity. The pattern that filled the weekend. She sits up, startled. She is breathing like that here. The man across from her doesn’t notice. He’s reading a book. Something’s clenched too tightly in her hand. Clipboard. God, she actually came here. She will stop. Stop while he’s gone. A few weeks, at least. He is off taking pictures. She sees his photos in magazines: Germany when the wall came down, Russian victims of radiation experiments, AIDS babies, the Rumanian baby market, people selling kids for TV’s, a VCR. Unbelievable. Surfaces reveal the core. She closes her eyes. No one would think of her coming here. The woman who founded the place was some kind of Chinese Mother Theresa. Acupuncture to quit. Long article in the paper. Free if you couldn’t pay.

The form on the clipboard begins with simple questions: name, address—but Marthe feels hot and confused, unsure of what to write. She’ll put down some other name. No one will ever know. Put a check mark next to the drugs you use daily. Put an X next to drugs you use once to several times per week: Alcohol, Cocaine, Crack, Pot, LSD, Dilaudid, Speed, PCP, Codeine, Heroin, Demerol, Percodan, Percocet, Darvon, Lomotil, Telsid, Quaaludes, Nembutal, Seconal, Phenobarbitol, sleeping pills or other depressants, Methadone, Extasy, Ice. Have you ever been in a methadone maintenance program? When did you conclude that methadone was not a good therapy for you?

Some of the drugs she’s never even heard of. Carefully she checks off alcohol, pot, sleeping pills. Her pencil hovers over the soft blue words. Mimeograph. Nobody uses mimeograph machines anymore. The form reminds her of quizzes in high school, unfamiliar words in soft, blue type, waiting to be defined: Ethnocentric, Anthropomorphic,
Treaty of Versailles. The newspaper article called this place a community clinic: grass roots, no government funding; women with children came here so the city couldn’t trace them and put their kids in foster care. Acupuncture stopped the cravings—you could just get a treatment, you didn’t have to stay. She had saved the article for weeks. She recognized the address: south of Mount Pleasant, at the edge of the Adams-Morgan gentrification. She wouldn’t run into anyone she knew.

As soon as she walked in the door she had wanted to run out, say she must have the wrong address, but the woman at the desk looked up.

“You’ve never been here before, is that right?” she asked.

Marthe nodded. She couldn’t speak until she sat down in the chair next to the desk. She remembered going for a pregnancy test her freshman year at college; she didn’t want to say, out loud, why she was there.

She stares down at the clipboard. How long have you been using? Have you had periods of abstinence during this time? She tries to guess at the right answer. Abstinence. Christmas, maybe, when she went to see her parents. Drinking didn’t count. Of course she’d taken some valium with her, maybe a few lines for the drive home.

She puts down Marthe Kongsburg, which is not her last name, and gives a fake address in Northwest D.C. They don’t have to know. The clinic reminds her of an advocacy office—broad-leafed plants and posters only partially hide the chipping paint. Everything seems worn by use and cleaning. She leans back in the armchair and looks up. Patches of ceiling tiles are stained by water, a dried amber discoloration over the perforated tiles. Under her feet the mustard colored carpet is thinned, dark in odd places, as if it had been worn down in some other pattern of human traffic and then transported here. The waiting room contains three dilapidated armchairs and a few old wooden schoolchairs with desks attached to their arms. She had chosen the armchair that seemed cleanest, and sitting down, she sank low to the ground. Across the room, a young man with dreadlocks has a baby on his lap. When he looks up, sees her staring, he nods at her, then shifts the baby onto his shoulder and goes back to studying a thick textbook.

She is supposed to bring the clipboard back to the reception area. She stands up and automatically reaches for the doorjamb. Everything will go black for a moment. She keeps her head upright so it won’t be too obvious. The woman is explaining something about Medicaid to a person on the phone. She talks slowly, explaining why the codes won’t work for acupuncture. She nods for Marthe to sit down. The woman’s face is dark, unlined, framed by soft curly hair; the whites of her eyes are thickened, slightly yellow. A long beaded earring hangs from one ear. Her other earlobe is split where an earring would have hung. Marthe startles when she notices it, tries not to flinch. Medicaid. She doesn’t
belong here. Her seatbones feel hard and sharp against the chair. She wishes the woman would get off the phone and talk to her. She wants to snatch the forms back, change her answers, change her name; instead, she gets up slowly and goes back to the waiting room. She looks up at the smudged ceiling, then closes her eyes. Needles. They’re supposed to use disposable needles. They better. Wouldn’t it be her luck if she got AIDS from trying to quit?

She stares at the man across from her as he studies his book. Is he a patient, or is he waiting for someone? The child is sleeping now. Boy or girl? She can’t tell. Tiny mouth half open, tiny fists, tiny sneakers. She slides down in the armchair and closes her eyes.

She wanted to. It’s not his fault. He just showed her how. His hand in her hair as he lit the pipe, told her not to breathe too hard. They were still pretending to be just friends. She remembers the exact moment everything turned, became charged. She had run into him on the street after he’d been away for several weeks, and she’d said something about how it was nice to know he was back in the city. He said it was nice to be missed. He didn’t look at her when he said it. His voice was serious, unflirtatious. She stared down at the sidewalk, noticed the grass growing up between the cracks. Such a simple start. They had only two friends in common, but they kept running into each other. They don’t fit into each others’ lives. She thinks his clever, more up-and-coming friends are pretentious, perhaps smart, but not really intelligent. She doesn’t like his apartment or the art he buys. Expensively nihilistic, she once told him. And of course she isn’t cynical enough for him. She’s too sincere, too eager. He’s away for weeks at a time. He calls her from other countries, and the occasional lags in the line, the subterranean or atmospheric delays, only point out how unsustainable they would be in the outside world. They’ve come to know each other too well. So they sleep with other people. Even the idea of each other is too much.

Her scalp tingles; the heat in her throat spreads down into her stomach. She wishes there was something to read here. On the opposite wall, a poster shows the human body with muscles and organ systems drawn in detail. The picture reminds her of a childhood encyclopedia with overlapping transparencies of the human body systems. On the poster, the lines run up and down the body with little points along the lines, “The Meridians” it says. Another chart shows a large, flesh-colored picture of the outer ear. Each tiny point on the ear shows the organ that point affects—a tiny heart, lungs, stomach and eye, others are harder to guess. What does a liver look like? Ugly, brown. A spleen? At the back of the room, behind a counter, shelves are filled with brightly colored boxes and bottles, all labeled in Chinese.

A Chinese man wearing gold spectacles and a blue Mao jacket comes
around the doorway and nods to her. "Marthe?" he asks. She follows him down a narrow hall and he leads her into a small room containing two chairs and a doctor’s table covered with paper.

***

"Please sit down. Take off your watch," he says.

She removes it, and the damp, round mark on her arm reminds her that she didn’t shower that morning. She remembers how she felt when she first woke up. Fried. Her brain somehow stuck in first gear. She had a sudden moment of terrible fear, that she might stay like that forever, everything fuzzily simplified to necessity: thirst, aspirin, as if she’d lost the capacity for thought. It didn’t feel like morning, just a continuum of light and dark, a sense of dislocation, as if everything around her was in the wrong place, but she couldn’t remember how it used to be.

He sits next to her in a chair, takes her hand, and places his first three fingers on the soft whiteness of her inner wrist. He closes his eyes. She feels his three fingers distinctly; the first finger pressing lightly, then the second, the third. With his eyes closed, his face is ancient looking; even with shallow circles under his eyes, he seems unreal. A statue listening to her pulse. She wants to ask what he’s doing, but he silently lets go of one wrist and takes her other hand. The room is still. Through her pulse he seems to be listening to something very faint and faraway. Outside, she hears the scrape of the iron gate as it rings on the cement, letting someone in.

"Stick out your tongue," he examines her tongue for what seems to be a long time, then nods.

"Why did you feel my wrist?"

"I was taking your pulses. They tell me about your internal organs," his voice is quiet, unrevealing.

She feels nervous, petulant. She wants him to talk, to say something soothing.

"What do they tell you?" she asks.

He studies the clipboard for a moment without answering.

"You didn’t mark crack, or coke, on here— that’s what they tell me. Please, take off your shoes, lie down on the table," he says.

She bends to hide her face while she fumbles with her shoes. How could he know from her pulse?

"You use disposable needles, don’t you?"

"Yes." He holds up a fine needle, encased in plastic, to show her.

She lies down on the table and he pushes her hair back from her face. A cool swab of alcohol at the top of her ear. She presses her palms against the table, bracing herself. A small prick on the outside of her
ear, then another, and another. She breathes out when he puts the needles in. Each time there is a tiny pinch, nothing more. She feels the alcohol on the tops of her feet. He puts one needle on the top of each bare foot. Then he bends each of her arms and sets them on her stomach. On each hand he pushes a needle into the flesh between her thumb and her first finger. She feels a charge, and then a dull ache.

"Ouch."

He rotates the needle in her left hand.

"It aches a little?"

"Yes."

"It's a strong point. Don't worry. These are all very shallow insertions. If either of these still hurts in a few minutes, I'll change them. I'm going to leave you here for a half hour or so. You may fall asleep. It would be good for you. You don't have to be anywhere, do you?"

"No."

"Good. We'll have a little talk when you wake up."

As soon as he shuts the door she picks up her head to look at the needles in the tops of her feet. So slender she can barely see them. On her hands she can see they aren't in her deeply; they tip away from her fingers like delicate antennae. She closes her eyes and breathes deeply. This will let her stop. He knows she lied. Knows by her pulse. Unbelievable. She is tired of lying, excuses for being late, excuses for the black-outs that happen almost every night now. Alzheimer's Lite, she sometimes jokes, a line that always gets a laugh, distracting people from the fact that a whole piece of a night or day has eluded her. She has developed subtle ways of prompting, of routing a conversation so she can figure out how she got home, or where she'd been in the course of a long weekend. She will stop. It will all stop. She tries to relax and let her body ease. She closes her eyes. What a strange place this is, that she should come here. Her body doesn't feel any different. What if this doesn't work? Something has to. She just needs a breather, a little help slowing down. Her job doesn't help. She freelances: mostly radio voice-overs and commercials. The latitude of her schedule gives her too much time to get in trouble. He likes her voice. Men always do. Even as a child her mother coached her: your voice can be your most attractive feature. Modulation is important. Men don't like a grating voice. Right out of the fifties, her mother. Sally, Dick and Jane. Talking, talking, talking, always the pull between them was there. He sees what she can become. He sees what others don't recognize, or don't articulate: You still think that beauty lies in restraint and poise. It's sexy, but it's just a front. There has to be a counterbalance. He smiles and waits. Her resistance is understood, but he refuses to seduce her with any false assurances. He is determined to tease her into making the first move. You're afraid to try
what you want. You want something you can’t even admit to yourself. They are always at the brink. He says these things to her, and then he leaves. Quebec, Croatia, Ceasescue, Russian entrepreneurs, a picture worth a thousand... she has to stop.

When she wakes up, the room seems darker, as if hours have passed. The gate outside rasps the pavement. Someone coming out or in. Formless music seeps in from another room. As she picks up her head to look at the needles, the doorknob turns and she lets her head down.

“Sleep well?” he asks.
“I think so.”

She doesn’t feel the needles coming out. He dabs her ears and feet with alcohol and says, “Sit up, slowly now.”

She sits up on the bed and rubs the top of one foot with the other. He reaches down and hands her her shoes. The humility of the gesture surprises her. She stares at his hands and takes her shoes slowly. Her socks are crumpled inside.

“You will need to come back here again,” he says. For the first time she notices his accent isn’t Chinese or American, it’s something different, vaguely European. “For you, getting to sleep at night will be the most difficult thing. Rita will give you some herbs that you can make into tea at night, but you must try to sleep without alcohol or any pills.”

“Even the drugstore kind?”

He looks at her for a long moment; there is no reproof in his gaze, only a kind of waiting. She remembers why she came and feels vaguely ashamed.

“Anything,” he says. Then after a pause, “Why did you come here?”
“I guess I just wanted to stop for a while, take it easy.”
“Then what?”
“I don’t know.”
“This isn’t what you think. It doesn’t work like that.”
“What do you mean?”
“You have to want to stop. If all you want is a break, we can’t see you here. There are too many others who really want to quit.”

She hadn’t expected this bluntness. She feels a falling sensation, as if the entire day is sliding out from beneath her.

“How I feel is not good enough?”
“It’s not a matter of good enough. It’s just that you don’t seem to understand what you’re doing here. Did you come on your own?”

She nods.

“Then you know,” he looks at her for a long moment.

In the half-lit room, she can’t read his eyes behind his glasses, but as
he stares at her and waits, she feels herself sliding, sliding. It's that obvi-
ous. People know. She feels hot, humiliated.

"The acupuncture will help to lessen your cravings. It will balance
your body. You've been up for too long. The acupuncture helps with
the physical withdrawal, but we also suggest patients go to N.A. or A.A.
— or even go to church. It's up to you. You can see Rita on your way
out to make another appointment." He leaves the door open behind
him.

She sits still for a moment. She thought she could just get a few
acupuncture treatments and quit. She hadn't wanted this to be person-
al, complicated. She wanted to do it alone. When she bends to tie her
shoes, her hands feel thick and uncoordinated, as if her thumbs don't
have the strength to press against her other fingers. She ties her laces
with big loops like a child.

She walks slowly out to the front desk.

"Now, we want you back here real soon. You have a job?" Rita
asks.

Marthe nods.

"Regular hours?"

"No."

"Good, it gets busy in here after work. We'll put you down for 3:00
tomorrow." Rita hands her a brochure. "This is a list of meetings in
Washington. There are N.A. meetings on Wednesday and Thursday
nights, right upstairs."

The phone rings and Rita answers it. Marthe stares at the pink
brochure. The printing is awkward and crooked. Ugly. She came here
on her own. That should be enough. She will do it herself. No one will
know. She holds the smudgy list of meetings A.A., N.A., No.

"O.K." Rita says, hanging up the phone. "I can see you don't like
the idea of going to meetings. You can try and tough it out yourself, but
girl, we talk to people straight here and I'm going to tell you that you
aren't here 'cause you're sitting pretty."

Marthe picks herself up out of the chair. Her face feels hot, as if
she's been slapped. She tries to snatch the herbs off the desk, but her
body feels blurry, incapable of moving too quickly. Reaching for the
herbs, she knocks them onto the floor.

She fumbles for her purse and pushes out, against the door. She has
to use both hands. She leans her weight against the door and sees her-
sel as Rita must see her: not even strong enough to open a heavy door,
but angry, a bratty child. Rita leans back in her chair, elbows resting on
the chair-arms, waiting to see what will happen next.

Marthe leans her cheek against the door. "I'm sorry," she says.
Rita gets up and comes over to her. She smells of something unfa-
miliar, dusty and comforting. She places the packet of herbs in Marthe’s hand. “Don’t be sorry, just get yourself back here tomorrow.”

Marthe nods. She wants to smile, but if she smiles, she’s afraid she’ll weep.

“3:00 tomorrow,” Rita says.

When Marthe gets outside, the day is still bright. Very bright. She puts her hand on the iron gate and lifts the latch. She pulls on the gate, hearing its high metal scrape against the pavement, the scraping song of a narrow opening.
GREGORY DJANIKIAN

Voyeur

He looks at her from his window, a woman sitting on the grass reading a book.

Sometimes she looks up as though she knows she’s being watched, the way she shakes her hair to free it of something.

He feels oddly dangerous, one impropriety permitting him perhaps another and where would it end, his life suddenly unraveled?

He wishes he were a character in the book she’s reading, maybe cooking eggs in Altoona or discovering his true name at the Last Dance Motel, but always, his attention fixed on her merest gesture, an insistent I staring up at her from every page.

To watch under cover of being watched: he could be so openly intentful that no one would think to be astonished!

Now she rubs her calf and he feels it on his skin, she turns the page and a draft wafts across his arm.
He wants her to be happy, wants her to find his roses on page 74, and further on, along the terrace overlooking the Adriatic, to hear him say *we are never alone.*

Now she rises to stretch her legs, and just as he feels himself unwind, she shuts the book, closing the many doors of his body as well, a dark sky suddenly lowering on all he could have done for her, all they might have been.
A Gift

A man was polishing his shoes
in front of his cottage
with turpentine and bleach.
The leather was changing
color, flaking off.

You’re ruining your shoes,
his wife said unhappily from the kitchen,
look at the mishap you’ve created.

People were stopping by,
offering her their condolences.

The priest said a prayer over him,
the police chief wondered
if some foul play were involved,
the marriage broker, shaking his head,
looked at his long list of names.

But the man kept to his shoes
all afternoon, smiling at his wife,
humming a tune they had learned together.

In the evening, when they went to town together,
everyone snickered behind his back,
pointing at his shoes
as he shuffled along like a crab.

But his wife, they said, had never
looked as beautiful in her ruffled dress,
the way she walked on his arm
in front of all the shop windows
and restaurants, the way she clicked
down the street among a hundred eyes
with such style now, such inexplicable ease.
BRUCE SMITH

His Father in the Exhaust of Engines

All his life I used my father
to get somewhere

else—the game, the shore, the power,
the color, the middle class, the other

side. When he bent over
the maw of the Ford—the generator,

the alternator, the plugs he muttered
motherfucker into, the sputter

and choke and dying spark, a fender
in one hand, a frayed wire

in the other, bent like a wanderer
in the middle ages before

a statue of the virgin. I swore
I’d never bow and scrap before

the orders. He swore
softly and finally, the R’s

caught somewhere in the rivet and bloom
of the engine. A coughed harom

while we idled on the spur
of Philadelphia, America, nowhere

fast. A small purchase, a seizure
like what a moan and shudder

is from a man tortured
or bored or dying le petite mort

and I’m the son ignorant of motor
but prodigal of fuel and air.
I'm the emir of the four cylinder,  
the chopped and channeled lord  
of Detroit and Japan. I floor  
it, my foot on his back, or,  

his on mine, his face in the mirror,  
his death doubling me over.
Suite for the Possessed

Miss Bliss, in Penn Station during its renovation, dust and draped masonry, waiting for velocity multiplied by distance over time. A last dance, a sad diaspora, flickering arrivals into and from the classical dome and vault, the simple distance, light, an occasion for belief in The Patriot, The Limited. Marble like twilight. A beefy officer rouses the dispossessed.

I was looking at everything in the other's face: shining thing, baby, Shiva dancing, skin, the fetish of lip, lash, the eye and its socket, necrophilia and will: the voodoo of two thousand years.

We’re beside ourselves with belongings like bastard children, firstlings, fatlings, attachés and rucksacks, a crushed homunculus, red vanity, luggage duct-taped like the mouth of a hostage, a pouch like a cyst, money belt, reliquary. We’re not where we want to be.

_I was wild. I was banging. I loved heroine. I did whatever. I went to this place and worked all night bagging. I come home and had a lot of hundred dollar bills. I used to use the vein in my neck. Any vein I could find in my body._

The other says legs wrapped around specifically you. Entering and being entered. Like Poland, love me like Hitler loved Poland.

Down the steps to the coaches in the pearly light. We used the windows to shoot the buffalo. Now there’s no end to the horizon, to the silvered motes of other people’s lives seen from behind their trees and clouds, barrels and drums, their industries and weeds.

A voice in Esperanto is from somewhere via the boroughs announcing the cosmos expanding and contracting. It’s transmitted in that stressed, unstressed voice that seems to move us, the language a wheel.

Miss Bliss, gods and goddesses mingle their muscle with apple blossom and breath of mortals. One body is held by the wrists. In this way a nation is made. The neck jerks and twists. Then you can’t feel what it’s like to be specifically you.
A dream: Boston to New York via Sparta and Athens. I’m armed, you’re naked, a demon on each shoulder. You’re violent with words: poems, curses, songs, news. You spit in the firebox of the engine. I’m mute as usual pumping the hand truck like Buster Keaton. One track, one way. I’m slow, murderous, smokey in the soft coal of my rage. You’re swift, efficient, cruel; the wheels spark and squeal. Nobody can stop it: the demon the angel this collision we’re headed for. Why can’t they cushion it with a body of silence, a body of words?
JULIANNA BAGGOTT

Women Hum at Night

That mad spring, mother swam bare,
her voice a deep rustle of leaves;
the men hunted essential death,
winter visions, afraid of her now,
her moon gown, enormous with blood,
her woman’s skin stretched taut.
I watched from forest’s edge,
teeth sunken into bitter fruit,
but now just the thought of her
floating, white belly above the dark,
makes thin threads of milk spool
from my breasts; I am not feeding,
but weaving and as I weave I hum
songs that I have known forever
but can’t recall having been taught to sing.
MARC RAHE

Screen

The sound that could be made by breath is coming from the hallway.

There was a reflection on the blank TV screen a moment ago of a figure behind me.

In the motion when I step into the hall is the slur of shadow.

I've been in the hallway, the other rooms. I've looked behind the shower curtain. I'm alone. It's just me like me and a video of me.
I don't trust my image on the screen bent and distant at the edges. There's a dusty film. There's static. There could always be a mistake and some malice going unseen.

In what happens before I must look is a yawn, is a hand moving closer to a mouth.

The window is open; behind the curtains dry leaves tell me stories about the wind.

I am the haze in the corner of my eye: I disappear wherever I look.
Ghost Town

I’m in the cantina; the bottles behind the bar a skyline on the horizon. The skyline repeated in the mirror: the edge of the town I’m in. The view out of town is tables, floorboards, me at the piano, looking at myself over my shoulder, my fingers against the ivory. The view out of town is the dusty plain.

The ashtrays are slowly filling.

What used to be high is ruin.

The empty windows, the bullet-holed walls allow vistas of light. The dust there sparkles in a danse macabre. It’s not my music they’re dancing to, it’s allegro I think, from some unimaginable distance. So distant the word vista can’t hold its meaning.

In the quiet a bucket and sponge are decomposing.
CHARLES O’HAY

thread

Who can say where the thread begins
spooled through so many dark wombs—
the uncertain alchemy of flesh.

The air above the barge fills with gulls—
they, not the sun, stir the daily breeze.

When a boy in Brooklyn loses his arm
to the elevator door, it is a stolen sign—
something for the tailor to solve

In the cold light of evening.
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 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.
AARON ADAMS

Blank Page

It's like I'm
eight years old
in the back seat of
the family station wagon.

Sitting with my head
in my hands my
tongue comes loose.
It rolls around
inside my head
like a BB in one
of those plastic games
I bought with a nickel
begged off my Dad
at that last gas station.

Now, all I can do
is sit and tilt my head
from side to side
wondering how best
to maneuver my tongue
across the warped and
fading cardboard
inside my skull
until, if and

when almost by pure chance
it falls into the hole
where my mouth ought to be.
Beelzebub

I stood in the shower
with early morning sun
light streaming in the window
and watched as a nearly-winged fly
staggered like a lazy song
up the wall, across the ceiling.

I’ve been expecting these sticky-winged
flies ever since that evening I found
maggots— born of the rigorously pregnant
rat that gasped its final breath
underneath the house—
I watched them as they
tugged their white surprise, like dignity,
across the bathroom tile.

All week long, now, these flies
have labored toward windows and sunlight,
while in darkness under the house
a bony grin, lying couched
upon cushions of desiccated fur,
beams with its pride of flies.
J. BLUE CHATTIGRÉ

Elegy

To know love as having merely to look upon it
is as much a curse as blessing, for certain knowing
we will mourn in its presence, its loss before the fact.
That we reminisce about the present and suffer gladly
the grief to come, inescapable as a foreshadowing,
is why those already grieving have such power over us:
how they preside, how they utterly know our names.
Would it be much to offer a few words as comfort,
to give voice to our longings, and like the prayer
offered silently in the presence of suffering, betray
ourselves the fear and reverance we hold them in.
Would it be as much or not nearly enough to learn
grief through anticipation, pain in its absence, thirst
before the well, hunger amid plenty, just as we know
love when we are most alone, and loss when at last
we have but to look upon what we have yet to mourn.
The Contortionist Asleep

He does not dream of oceans or meadows, or of any such open spaces as you might think. Silence is his solace and reason, and to tempt it would be to sin against death. So as practice for his waking hours he treats sleep with equal discipline, limiting himself space and duration, focusing solely on creating his own world from within the cadenced rhythms of his breathing: and the world outside he knows is there is there only as audience, never far away or abandoning, and he has only to reach with one outstretched finger for all to see, not to point elsewhere but to gesture here, to mark the place he has made for himself as for all of heaven he’s ever needed.
L.R. BERGER

Half-Life

Report said storm but nothing
about being sucked so fast,
caught open-mouthed
necks craned at the sky.
We only say we expect
bad news, then the neighbor
drowns in his bath and all tubs
become suspect: the ordinary,
only camouflage for peril.
Or the beautiful. The papers say
planted inside a bouquet
a bomb blows the one who accepts it
apart. I see this, parting
clumps of primrose for weeds,
hear ticking in the cinnamon fern.
Mines concealed now in borders
of nasturtium. Who says
we’re entitled to refuge?
What enters the imagination remains there. My father crosses my garden with rusted shears to prune back brush. I want to feel gratitude, as if his every gift weren't a Trojan horse, but all week the nightmares rear up at his visit: stubborn half-life of a knock-kneed girl still squatting, clutched to a doorjamb, spit from the maw of sleep begging, *Somebody Stop Him*. Undisturbed by thunder, he keeps shearing. I call him in, my strongest voice diluted in wind, wind slapping the screen door shut and sucking it open.
WENDELL MAYO

Lithuania

You are very old, have purchased a fine vested suit, gray, with muted blue stripes running vertically through the fabric.

Your necktie is thin, maroon. Your shirt is pale blue.

You are in Ohio, a state of the United States, whose shallow, curved northern shore skirts a great lake. You live in Cleveland, city of steel mills, of Polish and Lithuanian neighborhoods surrounding the snaking, brackish Cuyahoga River. . . . And you have a job in a great tower, the Terminal Tower located on a busy square filled with people crossing the streets in all directions, the smell of diesel exhaust from buses loading, unloading people. . . . But you are in your office, high above the square and the people crossing this way and that, so the smells of diesel drift up to you only faintly, as if in a morning dream. And in your office out the window you can see in the north a long, white concrete wall dividing the city from the water of the great lake. All you can see is this strip of white conglomerate rock running far out, and a strip of blue beyond it. The sky dissolves into the lake—the rock wall divides both from the city.

You forget, while in your office, who you are working for or why it is you work, this far above the city and the rock and the water. . . . You add numbers together on a page; the sum looks nothing like the numbers you've added; you subtract other numbers; the result looks nothing like the rock, the city, the lake. . . . You wonder if these incongruities are worth your despair. You sip your coffee; it is bitter, so you put on your suit coat and walk into the hallway to the fountain for a drink of water.

The water from the fountain in your mouth is cold, reminds you of the blue lake, and so your despair comes back. You return to your office, sit, face out the window . . .

Lunch hour, you remember you have a friend. His name is Zingeris, who works in an office one floor above yours, higher in the tower on the lake. Zingeris, who will meet you at the cashew stand in the train terminal below the tower. Zingeris who meets you in the same place each workday with his fingers in a small paper sack of fancy cashews. He is different from you—his suit is charcoal black, shirt blinding white, and his tie is blue, plain navy blue. And he adores cashews. Adores leaning against a small pane of glass in the cashew stand, legs crossed at his ankles, waiting for you, same time, each workday.

And smiling.
Smiling not like a dog which may express something to you other than what it feels, but a thin effortless smile, smile of two lips pressed into one line, turned so slightly at the ends you wonder if that tiny upward bend might signify an involuntary response to your approach, happiness, the smallest tug at the corners of his mouth by an excited nerve ending. But it is not; the slight upward tug is frozen, indifferent, a work of art.

Still, you wonder, it must mean something. It must.

Then this friend of yours, this Zingeris, speaks, and that smile is only history.

"The lake?" he says.

"The lake," you reply.

So you leave the cashew stand in the belly of the train terminal; you accompany this man named Zingeris through a wide corridor with high ceilings; you go through the double doors onto the public square where busses load, unload; you pass a greened, brass memorial, several greening brass statues, memorials to American soldiers who died long ago in the Second World War, a war so far away. You pass a fountain with six high water spouts. Small gusts of wind gather droplets from the glittering, moving bouquets of water and spray your face.

Alive. Perhaps this is how it feels.

Then you arrive at the white stone wall. You see that the lake is not a blue strip, indistinguishable from the sky. It rolls and white caps of water appear, disappear. Shadows from bellies of high cumulus clouds pass over the water, like dark hands in motion over the surface of the lake, touching, untouched, vanishing. The lake is not simple, not abstract—and for a moment neither is Zingeris; he leans forward a little and sets his hands on the rim of stone; he removes a piece of paper from his pocket.

Instinctively, you say,

"From Lithuania?"

"No," Zingeris says, "to Lithuania."

He flattens the paper on the rim of white stone. An ocean liner appears with three bevelled, slanted stacks pouring smoke on to the page:

\[ \text{AMERICAN SCANTIC LINE} \]

You read on.

\[ \text{From New York via Copenhagen or Helsingfors} \]
\[ \text{to Lithuania ... Fares during off-season,} \]
\[ \$946, \text{ Roundtrip} \]

"So you're going."

"Yes," this Zingeris tells you. He smiles broadly. His teeth show. . . . You think: there is a light in his eyes that loves someone or something
unconditionally.

You wonder why he hasn’t asked you to go with him to Lithuania, wonder what the meaning is in his new smile; it seems indecipherable: Zingeris is happy; his smile, lips become protuberant like tiny versions of the Alps his father, Emanuelis, crossed after escaping the IX Fortas in Kovno, with 64 others, Christmas night, 1943, while the Nazis planned to murder them; his lips are tiny Alps, the charming peaked roofs of Bavarian houses in Vienna which housed so many refugees. . . . All this history is there in Zingeris’s smile, then he continues to speak—

“The Soviets have left Lithuania,” he says. “I’m going. I’ve even heard there is still one synagogue in Kovno, at Ošškiens gatv 17.”

This Zingeris takes another piece of paper from his vest pocket. It is worn and creased, a small print of a painting by M. Ciurlionis. . . . Centered in the painting are wide stone steps in a half-circle. Angles with wings, blue, pink, green, yellow, descend the steps; at the base of the steps grow flowers—daisies, mums, and dandelions with delicate, seeded tops like cloud puffs. Butterflies move among the flowers, which give over to a beach, smooth sands of purple and gray, water which moves in shallow, languid waves.

Near the beach, bottom of the painting, is an angel, all in white, who kneels to observe a flower. Overhead, in a sky scudded with high, fast-moving clouds, three sea gulls glide. . . . “This is Rojus,” Zingeris says, “Paradise.”

You are very young.

The Kovno Ghetto burns.

You are climbing, your first foothold an arm, then the instep of a man’s leg, next the face of another person; then you are on a roof; you look down, but the flames are still too near; so you climb until you see the Neris River snaking its way through the rest of the city; you can see a long white concrete wall dividing the flames from the rest of the city and the river. . . . Then you are high, above the flames, above a square below filled with people running in all directions, the smell of burning flesh, hair. . . . even this high above, these smells drift upward, faintly . . . . “We are 500 Frenchmen” —scribbled on the wall. . . . 1,600 children. . . . 5,000 . . . 6,000 . . . 30,000. . . . You add the numbers in your head; the sum seems nothing like the numbers you’ve added; you subtract other numbers; the result looks nothing like the flames, the city, the river. . . .

Nothing like Zingeris’s smile.

Still, you wonder; it must mean something.

It must.
DEBORAH LANDAU

A Pair of Men’s Briefs, Size 36

A pair of men’s briefs, size thirty-six,
neat and white as a chicken egg
appears one day in my laundry basket,
hatching havoc among my purples and blacks.
For two cycles they swam with my panties,
now stainless and bereft of musk
they nest with my nightie.
Whose genitals were stashed here?
What belly breathed warm against this waist band?

Newly monogamous, I realize
this is the closest I’ll get to another man’s crotch.
All week I inspect the guys in my elevator,
pray the briefs don’t belong to the warty man
with the pipe, or the one in the leather cap
who mumbles “yeah, baby” in the lobby;
the boy with the Husky puppy, he’d be okay,
and I wouldn’t mind the super either,
with his wispy hair and snug black t-shirt.

I’m keeping his underwear in my dresser for now,
they fit in nicely with my stockings and bras.
At night I dream they multiply, overflow my drawers
until the streets are filled with men who pace naked
beneath their jeans; while I, like Cinderella’s prince,
size up each body, seeking a match.
ANDREA READ

Ten Nights

1

I woke up one night and there were the pigs. A small herd at my bedroom door. They said they had somewhere to go.

I closed my eyes and stood, arms and legs spread, in the middle of the room. I felt nothing that felt like passing through, like a moment of joining, or leaving. All I heard was a quiet shuffling—

and the smell, of battlefields, manure and rough, pink flesh.

2

I woke up one night and the pigs were there, at my bedside, eating acorns.

One of them whispered into my ear they had somewhere to go, that they lived in a cave somewhere beyond me.

“Is it true” I asked him, “that pigs come flying out of the mouths of lunatics?” The pig just pointed his black pinhead eyes at me, until I turned into a cloud.

And they walked right through me.

3

The pigs are on fire.

4

One night, it felt very cold. Underneath twenty blankets I could not keep warm. I woke up to see the pigs standing like stones scattered over a newly dug field.

Their eyes were open.
One night, I heard the pigs out in the yard, having an argument. It seems they had lost a pearl, which they needed, and there was no moon in the sky.

After a long time, I woke to see the pigs gathered round my bed. They were wearing scarves. I knew they had been traveling, but they could not tell me where they had been. They were quietly discussing which path they would take home.

One of them, who was not speaking, stepped forward, as if to tell me a secret.

He was staring at my hands, which were open.

When a boat sounded in the distance, the pigs walked over me, one by one, leaving a line of footprints up the length of my body. Later, when they had gone, I saw, in a shaft of moonlight, they had left a small basket, lined with gauze. Hidden in the folds of the gauze, was a single white egg.

One night, I heard a whistling. The pigs were on fire.

They had rocks in their mouths, and their faces were covered with flowers.

One of them was trying to sing, but he couldn’t see my hands.

One night, I felt the pigs very close to my bed, but I could not see them. They were angry. I covered the floor with blue silk pillows. They lay down and slept.

When I woke again, the pigs were gone,

but there were acorns on my eyes, and red carnations piled on top of my feet.
One night I felt sad. I woke to see just one pig standing at the foot of my bed. He was burning.

He told me he was worried about the sky, and asked, would I please touch him.

I fixed my eyes on his, and lay my hands on his face.

He started to sing.

One night, the pigs were gathered outside, around the pond, watching the carp. They could not remember who was keeping the sleeve of darkness.

Later, I heard them rooting in the garden. They were looking for feathers.
JODY A. ZORGDRAGER

Living with Wasps

Angry or busy, have they come, the wasps?
This late in the season—wild rose
petals hang limp as rags
a housewife pins to the line, wasps
bothering her neck—they are
restless, driven as street people.
They crawl all over the fruit
trees’ leaves, crumpled on the ground,
or pop like water boiling when a man
lifts the lid to a garbage can.
Still, a teenage boy might find them
beautiful, the way snakes are; they snake
above the grass, intricate toe-dances
a girl hems around his question, retracts
the answer (if only she would) she can’t
quite settle on. Should one land
on a window sill, with golden legs
rub its eyes... Lazy, you doze
in a hammock, prone to their blissful play
about your lips. Trust us, they zuzz,
we are your beloved’s kisses.
CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

Julianna Baggott’s work has appeared in numerous literary magazines, including Black Warrior Review, The Chattahoochee Review and Chelsea. This poem was written while she was a fellow at the Ragdale Foundation.

I. R. Berger has been awarded a 1997 NEA Literature Fellowship and PEN New England Discovery. Her work has appeared recently in Prairie-Schooner, The American Voice, and The American Literary Review. She lives within earshot of the Contoocook River in New Hampshire.

Christopher Chambers lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. His work has appeared recently in Quarterly West.

J. Blue Chattigré is currently working on his first collection of poems entitled Moving Geography. His poetry has appeared in the Denver Quarterly, Black Warrior Review, The Antioch Review, and the American Poetry Review.

Marisa de los Santos holds a PhD in literature and creative writing and an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College. Her recent publications include poems in The Antioch Review, Chelsea, and Poetry. She teaches at the University of Delaware.

Gregory Djanikian has published 3 books of poetry with Carnegie-Mellon the latest of which is About Distance. His fourth collection, Years Later, is forthcoming from Carnegie-Mellon as well. He directs the creative writing program at Penn.

Born in Hanover, Germany, Doris Dörrie has written and directed seven feature films and twenty-five documentaries. She is a five-time winner of the German National Film Award for cinematography and in 1991 received the Best Mystery Movie Award. Ms. Dörrie is also the author of six collections of short stories.

Cameron K. Gearen lives in Bloomington, IN, where she is pursuing an MFA at Indiana University. She serves as a poetry editor for the Indiana Review. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in Crazyhorse, Third Coast, Hawaii Review and elsewhere.
Deborah Landau's poems and essays have appeared, or are forthcoming, in Mudfish, New York Quarterly, Salamander, American Literature, and Critical Studies on the Feminist Subject. She teaches poetry at the New School and at Antioch University.


An Associate Professor of Literature and Writing at Lock Haven University, Marjorie Maddox has published over 200 poems in such journals and anthologies as Poetry, Prairie Schooner, American Literary Review, and elsewhere. Her current book manuscript, Transplant, Transport, Transubstantiation has been a finalist or semifinalist at 16 national competitions, most recently the Nicholas Roerich Poetry Prize and the Brittingham and Felix Pollack Prizes.

Wendell Mayo's collection of stories, Centaur of the North (Arte Publico Press) is the 1997 recipient of the Aztlan Prize. His stories have appeared widely in about sixty magazines and journals such as The Harvard Review, The Yale Review, Missouri Review, and Indiana Review. He has been awarded lectureships five times by the Ministry of Education of the former-Soviet Republic of Lithuania, where he has taught creative writing and literature.

Sean McDonnell was educated at the Pennsylvania State University and the University of California, Davis. He currently lives and writes in Northern California.

A graduate of the NYU creative writing program, Daniel M. Nester's poems have appeared in The Minnesota Review, Mudfish, and Poet Lore. He has taught writing in workshops in the New Jersey prison system, Goldwater Hospital, New York University and the Lower East Side Needle Exchange, and lives in Brooklyn with his Bang and Olefsun turntable.

**Ruth Perlmutter** is Adjunct Professor of film history at the University of the Arts and at Tyler School of Art (Temple University), since 1975. She has given public lectures and presented at conferences given by The Society for Cinema Studies, the Modern Language Association and the James Joyce Symposium in Paris. She has published in *Film Quarterly, Wide Angle, Quarterly Review of Film Studies, The Georgia Review, and The Minnesota Review*. Her essay on Zelig has just appeared in *Film Comedy*, ed. Andrew Horton (University of California Press).

**Archie Perlmutter** has been co-director of the Philadelphia Jewish Film Festival since 1980 and he also lectures in film at Beaver College.

**Marc Rahe** has previously had work appear in *Mudfish*.

**Andrea Read** was a winner of the W.B. Yeats Society of New York Poetry Contest in 1997. She lives and writes in an old firehouse in Jersey City, New Jersey.

**Gustav A. Richar** has published essays and short stories in many Canadian and US literary magazines. His short story collection *Cloud Lake* was released by Colombo & Company last spring. For the past year he has been translating short stories of Doris Dörrie and other German authors. He lives with his wife in Ontario, Canada.

Born and raised in Philadelphia, **Bruce Smith** is the author of three books of poetry: *The Common Wages, Silver and Information*, and most recently, *Mercy Seat* (University of Chicago, 1994). He has taught at Tufts, Boston, and Harvard Universities and at Lewis & Clark and Providence Colleges. The poems in this issue are from a forthcoming collection, *The Other Lover*.

**Elaine Terranova’s** translation of Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis* was published by the University of Pennsylvania Press in 1998. She is the author of two collections of poetry, *The Cult of the Right Hand*, and *Damages* and teaches writing at Community College of Philadelphia. She received an NEA fellowship in poetry in 1997.

**Jody A. Zorgdrager** received her MFA from Warren Wilson College. She has poems published in *Ploughshares, The Antioch Review, Michigan Quarterly Review*, and elsewhere.
In this Issue • Julianna Bagott • L.R. Berger • Christopher Chambers • J. Blue Chattigré • Marisa de los Santos • Gregory Djanikian • Doris Dörrie • Cameron K. Gearen • Deborah Landau • Teresa Leo • Marjorie Maddox • Wendell Mayo • Sean McDonnell • Daniel M. Nester • Charles O’Hay • Ruth & Archie Pearlmutter • Marc Rahe • Andrea Read • Gustav A. Richar • Bruce Smith • Elaine Terranova • Jody A. Zorgdrager