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The Brown Is the Inferior Ninja

The black own the night
The blue come by way of water
The green traverse the pastures and meadows alike
The white from the frost ridden mountains
But what of the others, the fallen: reds, yellows, oranges, browns?
The bastards come by different routes
The yellows come with a spotlight cutting through the dark
The reds come when the rivers run with blood
The oranges walk through fields of fire
But the browns,
they trudge through years of shit
forging troughs from mud and feces,
runoff from the mountains.
Peasants mock his failed stealth
and spit on him,
pelting him with vegetables they cannot spare
just to see if he'll cry
The tagging on the cabin wall reads true for the brown;
"The things that come to those who wait are left by those who got there first."
The brown is the inferior ninja
Always the last to arrive.

— *Owen Torres*

The Sculptor

I have forged the moon beneath this garage-wall of Good Friday's whispered faith.
This hammer like the rumor of a mother's vanished child,
Sculpting tombstone poems for the family who has never learned to read.
You say that these gospels are just old stories that should not be believed,
That no boat could last upon a sea when the wind must remind the tides of her dominion,
That Noah's wife was not the woman he coaxed onto that doomed boat,
And that it was her wailing at being left behind that was the tempest sound of rainfall that
 Drowned the horses first,
Then the birds.
You shudder when the night drops below the walls that you no longer have the strength
 To walk on through,
And the hands that slap the ghosts who float like flying fish across this sea
 That neither you nor I can swim within
Hold no fortunes that will bless us with another round of years.
But where you sit inside your garden and refuse the nightingale who wants
 To sing for you,
I stand inside the cathedral of my carpenter's studio:
When the children look into the shining of a sky that reminds them this life is also grace,
It will be my fingerprints they will mistake for the silhouette sleeping on its surface,
The artist's smudged but noble signature that will silently tell them there is nothing
 In this world that cannot be built from scratch—

— *Paul Kareem Tayyar*

Sex

It's a mosquito
Crawling on the folds
of your brain
Looking for the perfect place
to suck

— *Dylan Gosland*

Karet Taipei: *Collage #45*, 1938

Bondage, amputation, impotence,
And effigy, surveilled by
The Extraterrestrial Maiden.

Surreal sexuality attempts
To neuter with absurdity
The guilt-ridden cruelty
That Bataille identified
As a primordial human craving.

Oh Cosmeticological Mannequin!
We will rescue and embrace you
As limbless, cinematic Mona Lisa,
Before recommencing the torturing
Of what is left of you.

— *Gerald Locklin*

7 A.M.

Oversized
2X
Plain white tee
Light gray sweat pants
Oh, and I always scrub my
Nike Cortez
Dark brown hair
Held
With moose, LA looks gel
Suave hair spray
Black sucnci
In the highest
Ponytail

Driving to 7-11
To satisfy my munchies
Lil Rob's "Natural High" vibrates
Francisquito and Sunset Ave

Creating blue and raspberry slurpee
The herd of semi-grayed
Undocumented
Laborers
Scatter outside with hopes of
Being handpicked to earn a dollar
Seventy-five
For coffee and
The want ads

Their brown eyes
Examine me
I feel like the
Hairy monkey
With its missing teeth
At the zoo

Air overcome by
Coffee breath

As
My
Mexicanos giggle:
Esta chola no esta con
Sus hijos
Que mala
Mujer
Si, she is out
Slanging
La mota esta manana

Esta manana
Grab my slurpee
Rock star
Awaken
Heavy eyes
Loyal to deconstructing
Beowulf for
British Literature

This morning
I slang
Burned DVDs
English and Stats
Tutoring sessions
Replenish my gas tank

Esta manana
I will not decorate
These curves with
Cotton lace tank tops
So my intelligence is
Measured by my cleavage
Hip hugger jeans will
Not keep my stomach
From exhaling so
Hips can be shaped for
Child bearing

This morning
La new Mujer

Does not
Stand outside 7-11
Waiting to
Earn
A dollar seventy
Five

— *Candace Cortez*

Alpha

Sweat pearling like prayers in a novena. Some hurts are ugly
enough to dance with anyway. Some women are wolves. I weave
between her teeth like a howl. Like sinew. Like a song
swollen from loving the moon too much. Stolen
mouth, stolen mouth. This is how the wave will break: bold
and brine across her cheekbone. A kiss sewn through every pulse.
Her height in hours. Her hand in mine. The night, caught
in a single breath like a moth seduced by artificial light.

— *Emily O'Neill*

On the Burning Shore

the pastor prays for our souls
as we set up camp near the
lifeguard station,
the ocean bathed in glitter
from the rays of the sun

three of us will be baptized in
the ocean today;
I steal away in my
bare feet scorched
against sand and pavement
to a liquor store on the
main drag

I empty the contents
of a High Life tall boy
in the grim slime confines of a
portable toilet; the mixture
of sand and salt water
caked around the aluminum
and on my hands
scratches my throat

the pastor takes me into
the waves and asks
if I accept Jesus as my
personal savior,
and belching out
beer breath
in the wind

I lie

he pushes
my head into the
water
I stay there
for a while,

but not long
enough
to drown.

— *Kevin Ridgeway*

The Crone, Friend of the Queen, Is Asked to Advise in Lieu of the Mirror

You grant me privilege to speak the truth
without threat of boiling alive or removal
of blackened fingernails, so listen up.

Your skin turns red like wine every time
you stand before the mirror. What is it now?
23 times a day? We all know you're jealous
of Snow. She frolics in the woods; you're stuck
in a palace filled with sniveling idiots.
I get it; life is *so* unfair. Stop visiting the glass
behind that curtain. It's no secret what you do.
Or get over her. I know, I know. How dare
she be happy after deserting the love
you gave for 18 years? But you never knew
how to govern a wayward child who preferred to rub
elbows, among other things, with woodland
critters and wolfish men. Turn those flinty eyes
toward me and listen: Give her a candied
apple glossed with nightshade. Return her
immediately and I will undo the damage
and Snow will thank you. Now off with you.

— *Justin Holliday*

Psoriasis

All those patches
under the knees, the
back of the elbow, the buttons of
body are filled with
cortisone and creams from France.

My father would lift his foot onto the lip
of the bathtub and rub his ankles
until he was breathing hard.

My fingers crack and bleed.

“And where do you think that comes from?”

my father asks at his new table with
his new wife, new children, new tub.

There are scientists scratching
their heads just trying to figure it out.

“The VA will pay for it.”

Pay for what?

When you were twenty-two and in boots, in the hot moisture of a jungle, were you
pulling up layers of your skin wondering what your unknown children will scratch
at?

Money? A peeling badge? The door? Their pinky fingers?

— *Caroline Shepard*

waiting for memory

we are waiting for a memory,
the cat and i,
under where a sun might have been
but for the night and the roof
there is this expectancy
as she moves laborious
to clean herself of sin
of the sad exigencies of living
and find places for her babies
that are not the perfectly well-appointed
birthday box
that i have assigned her;

we are waiting for a memory,
slaves to corporeal necessity
and perfectly free

— *Dave McLean*

Hollywood Success

There was nothing to suggest greatness
unless you count the vastness of the Arizona desert
which doubled as a movie set.
The horse she rode in on was an anguished creature,
caught and trapped in a faraway land
and brought back to Burbank to be whipped and broken
and led away in chains.
If you look into that beast's eyes you will know what it is to be terrified,
not of anything in particular
but the sheer monotony of the carnival carousel,
the sea of eyes
and the horrible horrible laughter of the pop corn munchers,
the screamers,
the peeing and sweating mob—
the way they feed on the meat of the beast.
They want the beast to be funnier,
they want the beast to be bloodier,
they want the beast to kill or be killed,
they want to eat the flesh of the beast and become the beast
but they cannot,
these multitudes who demand so much from the beast
but give nothing in return.
And she, the girl with knees that bend in front of powerful men
and a head that bops like a turkey to their members.
She who rides the beast with a gloved hand and an orchid between her legs
that spread onscreen.
She with a body they all want to dip their fingers into and taste and eat
and rip open with the juices running down their chins.
And you,
who work in offices, you who are teachers, lawyers, mechanics,
and dentists,
you who are mothers with a baby at your breast,
you who hate your lives,
you who are children afraid of becoming adults,
you who left your wife for someone else's,
you who left Nebraska because you were bored—
when you go to that dark temple to pray
look up into her eyes
and you will see a vacancy there that we have mistaken for greatness—
as vast as the Arizona desert.

— *Wendy Rainey*

Still Listening

to the grassy earth of her words
around my neck buried
in the brown dirt.

where flowers
of sunlight spill

blue sky reflection

glimmer off the water
dripping from my eyes.

I smell the soaked
soil, and try to breathe
life into the dead
roots surrounding

my lips,

but only swallow
more of the thorns
that lace her grassy
words of earth.

— *Jeffrey Graessley*

requiem for a bartender #2

dan used to call him faustus
the way he slumped angrily
behind that bar on thursday nights

tossing dirty pints into the blue and sudsy water
like he'd made some kind of a deal with the devil
and was only now paying it off

he never smiled or said a word
just slammed the drafts down on the bar
before slouching off in agonizing servitude
of the next thirsty bar denizen

his defeat streaked across the floor
in smears of beer slop and old whiskey

but we never wanted a smile from him
or his words

the ideal of kindness being a fallacy anyway

instead we wanted to study his overthrow
try and understand his magical downfall

how our faustus had descended
into a low-ceilinged hell like this
to sling shots and put up with the bullshit
of the st. marks crowd night after night

no, we never needed any joy
emanating out of this sour man

we only hoped that the deal had been worth it

that before this place of rotten wood
and shit piles in the urinal

that there had been a peaceful and joyous life

happiness like a good woman or his dog
laying in a field of grass

the scent of spring rain on his shirt collar
soft ambition rolling his mind.

— *John Grochalski*

Staying sweet, after all

In a bath of peach nectar
in a room full of bees
a door opens, thank god,
an enormous sunflower.

— *Peter Cole Friedman*

Nocturne

The night is a key turned and summer
came in. I watch everyone around the table
have a smile the shape of a different country.
We belong to the ruins: Industrialization is over.
If there's a future to be had we cannot build it.
If tomorrow looms it isn't because of steel.
The Golden Gate Bridge is now just a hyphen
between California and the world swallowing California.
And in this old house the creaking pine floor
beneath my feet is my friend's midnight aria
on his thirsty walk to fridge. This is how we live
with stability. Tonight we have coals to smoke through,
and whiskey to keep us warm, and fireworks
for the sky to wear like jewelry.
I've been drinking three hours now and have
become a windup bird. On the other side
of the house another friend buys pizza
from a station wagon that shakes in order
to stay together. Any car is more beautiful
than an earthquake, even one that sounds
like an earthquake. It's a rolling museum of hands
and smelting, of families and their efforts to have
what they make in factories. The night is all of us leaving
at the same time, is how our era is over,
is how we are pulled apart to different places
and time zones. The semester is over.
The Industrial Era is over. The night is.
The night is a dark dress I don't want
to see slip off. It's much too close
to the only thing I have in place of goodbye.

— *Rob Talbert*

Ode to a Grocery Store

The customers of Ralph's have always been fair.
Bags of peanut M & M's—you could never walk on by.
Lottery machines carry a rich supply
And the Coinstar has never been worse for wear.
The cold draft from the air conditioner: noisy, bare.
Red roses, pink, yellow, white and balloons don't lie.
All for the town to see, and towards the sky,
Adult contemporary melodies fill the air.
My serenity will slowly creep
As I mouth along to the music by force of will;
Time and again, I have heard the song "In Too Deep."
The food may be too much, but still
I have yet to fall asleep,
And I feel the chill.

— *Sarah Gurney*

Ridin' on Beggars' Tracks

i haven't been in *The New Yorker*
but i've been A New Yorker
squishing my feet in lovely tar boroughs
of cement splash bubbling
like ideas of poets who can't escape their own concrete confines

themes that reach skyscraper height
then topple over into dust dichotomies
of spilt words that never make it to pages
of proper journals

just become street bums with odd twists
of verbosity
humming hobo tunes, hitching a ride on untrained stanzas

while a restless city grows weary of whistles
that break the night air
and voices from dreary cafes
uncouple themselves

sending box cars into dark caverns
of letters which make up
precious bios of writers
who refuse the rest of us

even the smallest handout.

— *jacob erin-cilberto*

Baker's Dozen

She places her love
on the kitchen table
much like freshly baked bread.
There,
her family divides the love,
takes what each need
and it nourishes them.
Hers is a Kansas love
bursting
with warm sunshine.
Her only rule
is that it must
be all gone—
no crusts,
no ends
may be left.

— *R. Gerry Fabian*

The New Class

There will be no plastic on furniture,
empty inhalers, no notions of invalidity.

Downtown, with its knack for framing
the wicked with pamphlets, will bend over,

touch pavement and spread legs far across
the tracks, opening its womb for everyone.

We will all spread, money will become Freudian.
Dogs walk unleashed. Kindness becomes euphoric.

Gravediggers and doctors breed together. Distinctions
will fall like barn doors when a tornado is over.

Men will fake orgasms at museum exhibits,
to reinvent the past. We will craft children for love.

Walls transform to canvases, billboards to picnic
spaces. We will unname the streets, turn war

into fire wood. Savagery will sound as distant
as the ancient stars, need will sound archaic.

Schools will replace batons and bulletproof vests.
The old world will be taught as mythology

where Gods with cigars and podiums, gold
cufflinks instead of hands, blew giant winds,

threw lightning bolts, greedy for sacrifices.
The children will imitate them in the streets:

chasing each other in circles, flailing their arms,
puffing their cheeks, yelling “the world is mine.”

— *Olivia Some*s

**Lauren Simonutti: “Bring the Candle to the Flame,”
Slipstream Postcard**

It’s three-quarters of a birthday cake,
Minus the wedge of chocolate flour
Sliced out of it, with nine or ten candles
Aflame atop the thick white frosting,
With the hand of a tattooed or shadowed arm
Clenched aside it in anticipation of sharp pain,
An ample breast extended towards
The highest, hottest flame,
The nipple half-exposed to it,
A human moth about to fuel and feed
The fire.

The woman’s eyes are shut;
Her lips are tightened,
Hair and dress simple black,
A futuristic heroine of 1950s cinematic lust,
Born to draw boys and men to her bosom,
Seeking now the ultimate in sensual intensity
The re-birth of self-immolation:

And we’re privileged to witness it
And weld the purity of our pain
To hers.

— *Gerald Locklin*

Words to romance me by

There are certain words
That illicit a tingle in the pants.
Everyone has their tastes
Mine are simple.
He says “I’m horny” and
I am there.
No matter the hour on the face of the
Mocking clock, if he says “I want
To shoot my wad” I travel
To wherever he is.
I want like Pavlov’s dog.
I am reduced
To a pool of my own drool --
A cocktail of blood and oxytocin.
I am the result
Of casual sex and evolution:
Wanting the touch
Then expecting the nest.
I will forever be at war with my DNA
And perhaps his.

— *Jeri Thompson*

Iscariot

Someone cried for Absalom, who will cry for me?
Joshua said He would.
Who better to weep for me?
Holy tears for sins—
Ain't that love?
I loved Him,
that's why I killed Him.
I beat Him 'til His welts split,
I stole His clothes,
spat on Him as I rammed the iron through His palms,
laughed as He drank vinegar and mocked His naked not-quite-corpse.
They'll ask me why
and I'll shrug saying He wanted me to.
They'll damn me,
but what is damnation if not from God?
Fools—
They'll despise me
Crucify for the crucified, they'll say,
curse my name
throw rocks at my tomb
like they still do to Absalom.
What's up with that anyway?
He said he was sorry—
didn't need to pump him full of wood and iron
when his hair got caught in a tree
before beheading him.
The king mourned him, absolved him of his sins
and yet still they curse him.
I won't give them the luxury of that—I'll depart on my terms
Let them curse me when I'm gone.
Cowards—
They don't know what it's like to have choice ripped from you.

— *Owen Torres*

T.S. Eliot's Veins

The apartment festers like open sores on feet, memories of dope itches and milky spoons of diseased liver brown, Coca-Cola brown, everything is brown. I continue to think of you, T.S. Eliot; would you write a poem about the apartment, about working-class beaner fiends who double as modern day Dantes? Probably not, but my arms hurt. My veins are an adorable apple bruise barely oxidized. I love my veins, always have. Sometimes when I can't sleep and my nose is running and I can hear the water in the wall and the delicious couples screaming at each other out on the sidewalk, I wonder if you love your veins as much as I love mine.

— *Jordan Jamison*



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Round E: [z] God Mode ∞ +1 vs. iDialectical [x] Derivative and the "Verbes auxiliaires" = 0.

Nuclear thirst scratching at the heels of Nagaski; begging for relief and all you do is shovel dirt.
I think. There is

Time reaching right through those cozy maggots grasping that tender,
gravedigger's glove. So subsumed by the body, that the "I" had
no idea. Still striving, too. Do you

Wonder?

This mind—limited as it is—can wrestle with eternity. But,
it appears that the heart is
still flesh.

— *Tarik Linthicum*

poetry is math
music art and how are you
Mister Jones

— *Thomas R Thomas*

rachel's doc martens

were scuffed because she was careless and punk rock.
we snuck out sockless and walked blisters that bled
over the Intracoastal Waterway Bridge until sunrise.
I smoked. she was straight-edge. he was too old for us,
he had a Mustang and kissed her with a Pepsi tongue
but asked for my number when he drove us home.
I got grounded because I was late for church,
and it didn't matter because he called me later
but she never did again.

— *Allie M. Batts*

What if

What if I dawn like a halcyon day beside you
and whisper words of deliverance in your ear?

What if I cast my elated stare
to fondle the daunted look in your eyes?

Would you then let me infiltrate
the armoured essence of your anguished ego?

— *Stavros Karagiannakidis*

The Pacifist

I am waiting for the island fairy,
The flying poet of the cypress trees, the sudden rains,
The sunsets that seem to last for days.
Where she hovers there is the silence of a sleeping guitar
And the shell of a moon,
Which is being held to the ear of a dreaming child and yawning the way the ocean does
At morning-tide—

When the soldiers left they did not bother to pack their arms,
Their diaries,
The boots which they had once worn to walk across lands owned by someone else.
I gather all of them into a mound and then I watch them burn.
The fairy will see my act of peace and know that I am no stranger,
The sea will douse the flames and then, in thanks, allow me to walk,
Just once,
Across its lovely surface.

— *Paul Kareem Tayyar*

Falling for the Shit End of Things

Suppose I found a hatred for the good things:
refused buy-one-get-frees of canned tuna,
free coupons for snow cones,
mistook a hammock for a log,
saw rescued dogs as free loaders, all altruism
as a postponement of the inevitable,
resented the rumble of a trombone
that could soothe the scalp off a mule,
thought Bukowski was some chump
who couldn't smear a wash rag with his stink
let alone a poem with anything beguiling.

I enjoy the long anecdotes
my barber shares that end with nothing
more than his sweet cousin Jean roasting
peanuts, a goat finding its way to a piece of clay.
I like the sore, unbinding feeling
of sun burnt skin, the butt end of a loaf of bread,
which I prefer out of the freezer.
I applaud the man who keyed my car,
let spiders crawl right up my arm to my neckline,
adore the conspicuousness of a rolling black out,
that quarter of black tar that leeches onto
the bottom of my foot at the beach, the inside
smell of my belly button.

When I look
at the frothed gutter on a rainy day,
absorbed with the gunk of slack hairs,
cellophane wrappers, ends of cloth,
an indescribable tooth, the suds,
water and spit, loose gravel hydroplaning
on the rejections of someone's esophagus,
I let the toes out, my feet get wet—a talon
heaving into the mucus membrane
of the universe.

— *Olivia Some*s

Whore Stories #2

the Army paid for me
to have a private sleeper car
from St. Louis
to New Jersey
one night
and two days
riding the train
halfway across America
from the Midwest to the East Coast

I would go to the dining car to eat
and there was this one
young lady walking
the hall
very pretty
even beautiful
who had a tattoo
back when tattoos
on women
were never seen
and I would not see another
for years and years
until the tattoo and piercing fad hit
but back to the train
and this beautiful women

she had the tattoo of something
on her left shoulder
she wore a tank top
so you could see it
she was kind of a sleazy classy
but walked up and down the aisles
a few more times
than was probably necessary

so the conductor comes by
and I haven't talked to anybody
for over a day

I'm anxious for the company
so he says something
or maybe I say something
and he kind of hints
about what she is doing
working the train

what I remember most
was how surprised I was
about that
sort of fascinated

after that
I stayed mostly in my little room
watched the landscape roll by
listened to the rhythmic sound
a good train makes
worried about basic training

— *Mike Perkins*

Out of Hate

First he removed her feet.
There be no more midnight departures.
Placed them on the shoe rack
Between lavender sandals and red stilettos.
Then he removed the knees
To end her bending back and away
He loved her hands.
The deep lines that scored her knuckles,
How those hands molded to the shape
Of only his face
Knowingly traveling the shadow of his jaw
Well after 5pm.
He could not be without
Those palmy pillows.
He'd not have them trace the cleft chin of a fireman
Or tangle with a calloused guitar player.
These became more important to keep
Then her tramping feet
Or contortionist knees.
He twisted them counter clockwise
At the wrist
Each turn recording his hate
Till they were dismantled.
Now what was wholly beautiful
Lie in pieces
A woman, his woman,
Destroyed by love.

— *Denise Weuve*

“Creationism”

You electrify my atoms
and not even God
can stop the
big
bang
of your nuclear fission smile.
I am in pieces.
Completely disintegrated
by your E.T. touch—
you light me alive.
You are planets colliding
in slow motion.
Your eyes, black holes
sucking me into a continuum
of I can't breathe, but I like it.
You are my favorite poem,
reading yourself to me over and over
the folds of your pages.
Never collecting dust.
You are unwritten poems.
Clear, yet unspoken, your lines define my body
with the electric buzz of your heartbeat.
Waking me from lonely.
Waking me from empty.
Waking me from half full.
You melt me alive
with the trembling of your kiss
and I want to be frozen in the hold of your equator arms.
Don't ever let me go, even if the sky is falling
because I only know how to write
and you make the world beyond words make sense.
I don't ever want to know what Pluto felt like
when the solar system disowned him.
You are the words I wrote first.

— *Shanice Shamzy Thompson*

Your Tears

Used to be Sweet
Tropicana Orange Juice

And Strong
Three jiggers
Of Absolut Vodka

If I would
Drink them Right
Now I too would fall down
Stumbling drunk

Spinning on the ground
You spiraling through
The spiral grooves of my brain
Wind-washed Star-rinsed
Teetering to a bossa nova beat

— *John McKernan*

A New Kind of Family

Beer sloshes in the teen's
plastic cup; over the blare of
pop he tells me a secret:
Colleges makes orphans
of all of us. We frats boys sign
our own adoption papers.
Because orphans living together
are closer than orphans farther apart.

He taps his shirt, identical
to the other boys'
3 letters, like D-N-A
He says: those boys dancing shirtless
are brothers from another mother
(and another father)
If we don't have common blood
Heineken is also thicker than water

Hang the mask of loved ones
over the faces of strangers—
add glasses, a sweater
and Sammy there could be my uncle.
Add the right shirt
and you can be my brother.
How about it?
We already have in common
as much as any siblings start with.
I'd love you in my family,
what's your name?

— *Jule Pattison-Gordon*

Piglets

Your face is disappearing

Piglets sleep on my heat grate
As they grow they struggle
to maintain their positions

The weaker ones get pushed out
find places on my living room rug
They glare at me
as I watch the Broncos game

Your face has disappeared

— *Mitch Grabois*

Mexican Heritage

SALSA

Red onions, cilantro,
Garlic, jalapeno peppers
I reach for the fire extinguisher
Pues, no eres mexicano?
Si, pero la salsa es muy picante

My Mexican heritage fades
As her innocent brown eyes cast down
And the seventy-eight year old wrinkled face of my
Abuelita shakes
Whispers escape her chap lips:
Candace es Americano

Generations of my Mexican
Heritage fades

Banda, mariachi, and cumbia music
Doesn't exhale on my 160 gigabyte ipod
Britney, Fergie, Destiny's child
The cast of Glee
Are the beats that pulsate
My café mocha hands to fist pump

Don't deny my Mexican culture
Please!

Strolling Berkeley with my long
Since birth dark brown hair
Not ashamed of silver streaks
I earned by anxiety attacks
Over a pre-1800 literature course

Strolling with curves
Developed by years of butter on tortillas
Curves Kim Kardashian pays thousands for
A natural tan
That puts DJ Pauly D to shame

Throw away the oppressing mop
Bottle of Clorox

Hands explore
Ana Castillo's *Sapogonia* to explore
Sexuality and break free from
Machismo patriarchy
Sandra Cisneros' hollering
Brought
Release therapy of la gritas for
Mi abuelita, mama, tias, y primas
So machismo men get knocked
to the dirt by our unity
As they
Learn the meaning of
No more

Force penetration

Redefine
La Mujer mala
La Mujer Buena

Deny my Mexican
Heritage
Culture
Spirit

I redefine the Mexican women's heritage
With a Berkeley education

I redefine Latina culture by removing
Centuries of callouses hands
From my mouth

Onions
Cilantro
Garlic
Jalapenos peppers

Will not silence my 5'9
Café mocha
Chicana spirit

— *Candace Cortez*

Anorexic Shadows

Many of the young people I told didn't believe that dot-dot-dash in Morse code means "Oh, shit!" I saw tiny brown birds hopping about the gutter like crudely shaped souls. The clock never worked either. It was stopped at six-thirty. The high school girls who were smoking outside the mall entrance would cherish for the rest of their lives the memory of something that never happened.

— *Howie Good*

6:21 p.m.

You're a cancer that remains
Deep underneath my crusty core
It's as if you haven't been removed
Every now and again
You stroll by my window
And riddle me with poison bullets
I try not to let you trespass
Try not to let you drill a hole in the wall
But you insist
And your charm
Burnt on my skin
Has become a scar
And though I try to forget you

I can't

I can't burry you alive

Your coffin isn't enough

I can't burn your memory

I can't stab your existence

I have thought of the way you threw rocks
And waited for my glass to shatter

But I am no longer the frail man I once was
I am no longer the innocent boy
With starry eyes and a heart made of putty
I am however the man
That will throw your memory out with pig shit
And watch it suffer in the rain
And get stuck by lighting

I want to forget you

— *Nathan Alan Schwartz*

**With the Changing
of the Light**

Midnight blue shadows
fall on frozen landscape—
under pale yellow shifts of sun.

A young woman
becomes a lion
preparing to leap

straight across slick roads,
her blonde mane and fur coat
flying behind her.

She jumps through
an open door
or through a circle of fire

with a trick
or signal—
either way,

the lion's lured
into danger
as daylight

shifts
into
darkness.

— *Maura Gage Cavell*

For Somebody That I Used To Love

I can still see you in my head, though not as clearly,
you as I last remember you, with me.
A long, thin wrinkle of pinkish flesh and navy corduroy
stretched out over the bathroom sink.

Brushing your teeth so sloppy, clumsily,
in that adorable bachelor way you did so well.
Bare-breasted, in your swimming trunks,
grinning through the toothpaste like you don't care.

I remember you, sometimes rather soberly
raking a nearly toothless pocket comb
through all those beautiful little flyaways of yours
(the ones my fingers often tangoed with at night).

When you left, you left already ransacked,
a dog-eared book violated by my hands.
I learned your storylines, criticized your characters,
and riddled your pages with my marginalia.

I think of you some mornings and some nights,
and on weekends and weekdays, like I think of phoning
your mama's house. I wonder if you might answer
and then again, I might not answer back if you do.

I promise you, it hurts me like hell to miss you
as much as I do, and know you miss me more.
Lying in an empty bed, a casket full of daisies, if you will,
wishing the silence wasn't so plainly audible.

I can still see you in my head, though not as clearly,
you as I most remember you, with your tie unknotted.
The flyaways plastered to your forehead by sweat,
you beside me, lulling my angels to sleep with your whispers.

— *Samantha Hawkins*

“The Secret”

You keep compliments from me,
and I fall in love with you, harder.
All of the threats that I carry, would keep you wary of my knocking
if you knew them. You don't.

Your nose twitches when you're nervous,
that I will not receive what you're saying,
but I do, because I am alert to everything that you are.

This can work. This can work. I tell you, your face in my neck. *This can work.*

I want to take your picture.
I want to frame all of the things that you have not been for a while.

— *Merica Teng*

Unknown clichés

Page filled with blurred words,
I recall vibrant lines, try to forget
each bright place promised,

where death peers over a landscape
of still lifes frozen in primary colors.
I imagine a Yaqui warrior—

not with flute, haunting melodies
moaning through Western movies—
but one who warns old age lays

the final ambush and vanishes,
hinting it may not be enough
to spear setting sun to a place

low in the sky, let it bleed
into dusk, limp by half-light
up a steep draw, or down—

path there less about journey,
more, about redemption,
and forgiveness, which is said

to clear the way. Suns, deer,
stick men with bows, repeated
in paint on canyon walls,

faded reds, golds, greens,
live on, motifs, revered,
not unknown clichés who claim

half-respect only because
they have not yet died.
I rise early each last day,

sit alone, retell my stories,
eyes open, hope dawn bleeds,
remember, try not to sleep.

— *Timothy Pilgrim*

**Watching Porn featuring Walt Whitman, Charles Bukowski, T.S. Eliot,
a fight between Sylvia Plath and Billy Collins Commentated by a Monkey Named Marmalade**

Whitman walked
in on me
and
Bukowski
watching
a porn,

in a jolt Buk changed it to channel 54 that had an MMA fight between
Billy Collins and Sylvia Plath. The commentator introduced himself
as “ Hello I’m your host fine dandy Mr. Marmalade.” We hadn’t a clue he was a monkey
until

Eliot walked in with his fake British accent revoking his American birth and said,
“That is a monkey, can’t you see you bloody bastards.” He kept
sipping his scotch as me and Buk turned to find Whitman

slobbering over
Eliot’s pointy nose
asking if
he knew
what is was
to be a
homosexual

in the 1800’s when there was no acceptance for behavior
of the sort, unless you were in a brothel or in the woods.
Eliot blushed a certain shade of green, which was odd.

Buk and I
thought it was
the scotch
but when
Walt placed his
hand on Eliot’s thigh
both of them
started
to cry.

I reached into the ice chest on the side of the couch
and elbowed Buk to change it back, because Plath was really
giving it to Collins. The guy didn't stand a chance with his aging style

and hoity-toity images. Buk agreed said, "guy looks like a fucking
pansy, reminds of this artist I met named Spain..."

he passed out
mid-sentence
mid-beer
so instead
of turning
the channel
I watched
the fight, while Whitman
and Eliot
wept like a couple
of wailing harpooned
seals and I focused
on the fine
dandy marmalade
waiting for
the smell
of vomit.

— *Zack Nelson-Lopiccolo*

Edward Scissor-Hands Doesn't Smoke on the Subway

Still dressed in her fast food uniform
a young woman offered Edward Scissorhands
a smoke on the subway.
He told her, "I don't smoke, and I don't care to talk."

She watched him drag his combat boots across the train.
He was bent forward at the mercy of his
bondage pants and heavy, polished scissor-fingers.
The woman imagined he lived
somewhere trendy.

Edward had spent his day mingling with tourists
at the Chinese Theater, and holding his hands out
for tips and business cards.

He only took breaks to write down catchy dialogues
for a screenplay about sex slavery.
He thought about all the other movies
about sex slavery
and how his would be more compelling
more degenerate, sinister
like The Bible.

Edward's agent gave him a ticket to see Wicked
that day, but no one in Hollywood went to musicals
alone, so he contemplated selling it
to get a tattoo instead.

Edward did not mind looking pure and uninterested
while foreign women crouched under his armpits
to pose for iPhone cameras.
Besides, all his friends were at Cafe Audrey
buying espresso and eating pastries.

He knew
if he gained one more pound
his next audition might be ruined.

Instead he watched Marilyn Monroe hover over a sidewalk curb.
She picked at the kiwis on her frozen yogurt
and left stamps of red lipstick
on her long, thin cigarette holder
after each drag.

He fantasized about
what their wedding reception might look like,
what their kids might wear
to the Hollywood High prom.
He wondered which one of his friends
would tip off the paparazzi.

It was perfectly normal
that Marilyn Monroe only dated high-profilers.
There was no injustice in the fact,
it was understood.

Edward thought he would start smoking
if it gave him a reason
to ask her for a light.

— *Mila Anhielo*

Inevitability

Sometime before dawn cracks
the birds begin arriving. They drive
bats scared into early sleep.
Air traffic controllers check and recheck.
The first wave is only scouts, and by the time
you click off the alarm and slide
out of bed, stumbling in the dark
toward the bathroom, the branches
and telephone wires already sag
under the weight of hollow bones.
You rub your face raw in the shower.
You make coffee and toast.
Legions of wings blow over power lines
and water towers and in the foggy mirror
you pin up your hair, straighten your tie.
Outside you find the birds sitting
atop your car weigh more than the car,
and you're only halfway to work
when you can't see the road anymore
through the thickening number of feathers.
You pull onto the shoulder and look
for help, a sign, anything in the chaos.
Up ahead are two brake lights
from another car stopped. A friend.
Someone else trapped.
But in the suffocating flock the red
might have been a cardinal catching
the headlights. Still, you must know for sure.
You place your hand on the door and push
but the birds push back. Holding it closed.
Holding you in.
And there you sit. In your car,
in a city made of birds.
You're supposed to be at work,
at your desk, answering the phone,
but instead you have no choice but witness
every color and every song already exist.
What more can you do?
What more can you do when you have just one life
and there isn't one new thing left on the earth?

— *Rob Talbert*

Kal-el and the Apples of Hesperides

The Atlas slouches
bent
under the weight
the same way Christ slouched toward Golgotha.
He takes a knee.
Simon of Cyrene can't share this burden
No man can
He stands once more
His rough arms quake under the load,
shakes the world out of apathy.
Sweat trail-blazes down his face
forging curves and new geographical features.
His body, a stammering steam of red and blue, prepares for collapse
Sweet voices fill the air and resound in his ears which hear all
He smiles kind, but a moment then realigns back to his grimace

A creeper sneaks behind him
brandishing a shank of electric green
to give life
to take life
The piece of home is thrust into his back.
He holds firm
as the isotopes take effect on him,
blood, body and soul.
He removes the shard though he is much the weaker for it.

His knees give and so he sits
still shouldering, though in grave struggle.
He breathes so heavily now
it casts a gale upon the eastern sea.
A course, callused hand wipes the sweat from his brow.
He stares at the smile before him
through his eyes which pierce both flesh and steel
and can't help but smile himself.
He is handed a leather bound bag of treasures.
"Thanks for the apples," he says as he flies off into the golden sun, rejuvenated.
"Thanks for the break."

— *Owen Torres*

I like savory
over sweet - like the taste of
your skin on my lips

— *Thomas R Thomas*

Psych Ward Sports

we
had nothing
to do
in between
morning
meds
and
afternoon
meds
but kick
around
a half-deflated
ball,
our game
moving in
slow motion
in the outdoor
smoking area,
cigarettes
dangling
from our
mouths—

back
and
forth

back
and
forth

as
planes
passed
freely
above
our heads

and
orderlies
watched
us from
the
Shadows

— *Kevin Ridgeway*

As Crickets Dance outside our Window

i wanted to be crazy away from you
and crazy with you
as i popped metaphoric pills down my silent throat
i wanted to shout loud at you
and shout louder to you
shout loudest together with you
crazy poems into thin air
with thick lyrics meshing into humid sunshine
while our hearts cooled down together
with arms encircling the rhyme of us
and the rhythm of us
even if the love was off key
and the key to us didn't fit so normal
cause normal is crazy to us
or crazy is normal to us
when we kiss deeply into blind sunsets
and wake cuddling the moon.

— *jacob erin-cilberto*

The Older Man

He laughs at my jokes,
makes eye contact
then follows my train of thought
to unknown country
happy for the trip.

He is thankful for what I give
like a gift in July
and doesn't seem to notice stretched skin
or too many banked calories.

He says yes
to what comes his way
grasping, clutching, clawing
up the mountain
still
a conquistador
exploring new territories.

— *Jeri Thompson*

Poem for Noah

The Cellist in Modigliani's painting is how I imagine Noah might look,
Wrestling that giant wooden ship across a wild storm,
Somehow never losing faith in the music of his Father's voice.

In Vivaldi's "Concerto for Two Mandolins",
The strings speak in a language that I am only now beginning to learn.
Both musicians seem at peace with the fact that the world as they knew it is gone.

A friend that I knew from college was on vacation in Bali when the tsunami hit.
His body was never recovered,
And every time I go swimming in the sea, I look for him.

This is the first night of Autumn.
Somewhere in the darkness Shelley is still looking for his vanished son,
While his wife stays at home, dreaming of monsters.

I often wish I lived like Lew Archer,
Driving up and down the California coast solving crimes,
A secular man who cannot entirely let go of his belief in God.

Kareem, you must learn to accept that you will always be a foot soldier.
Everywhere people you love are in pain,
And you have never believed in the power of prayer.

— *Paul Kareem Tayyar*

Dry

tortured weekend walking
hipster kids
Good Will clothed, penny
price tags
still hanging

off broken line
breaks

touching

between the bars and cigarette
smoke

that veiled our movement,
and after, bled
every vein dry with:

I'm sorry

mouth empty

I didn't
love you slower, baby.

every second
losing to
every moment

I can't even make that mistake

now.

I just sit here listening
to the cigarette smoke
uncoil, Aries fire
burning blue through
another moon-cloud night.

— Jeffrey Graessley

Eileen Agar: *Ladybird*, 1936

Finally, I don't place much credence
In any theory of universal, archetypal symbols
that play leapfrog in our unconscious minds,
And, when utilized as objects depicted
In art or referred to in poetry,
Speak from our psychic depths directly
To each other.

But I'll admit that the shadows, scribbles,
Stars, dials, wheels, ladybugs,
And the diaphanous wrapping,
Which partly obscure the naked woman
In the photograph, do fetishize her abnormality
And desirability kilowatts beyond that of any
Stripper in the carnivals and county fairs
Supposed to tantalize the panting, staring,
Google-eyed, but ultimately disappointed
Adolescents of my 1950's summers.

Then again, my son says that art poems
Fall into two categories: those of women
I would "do," and those of women that
I "wouldn't."

This one I would definitely "do,"
In spite of her swollen knees
And a-symmetrical tits, but only if the
Illusory halogen remained an interface
'twixt our deformities.

— *Gerald Locklin*

