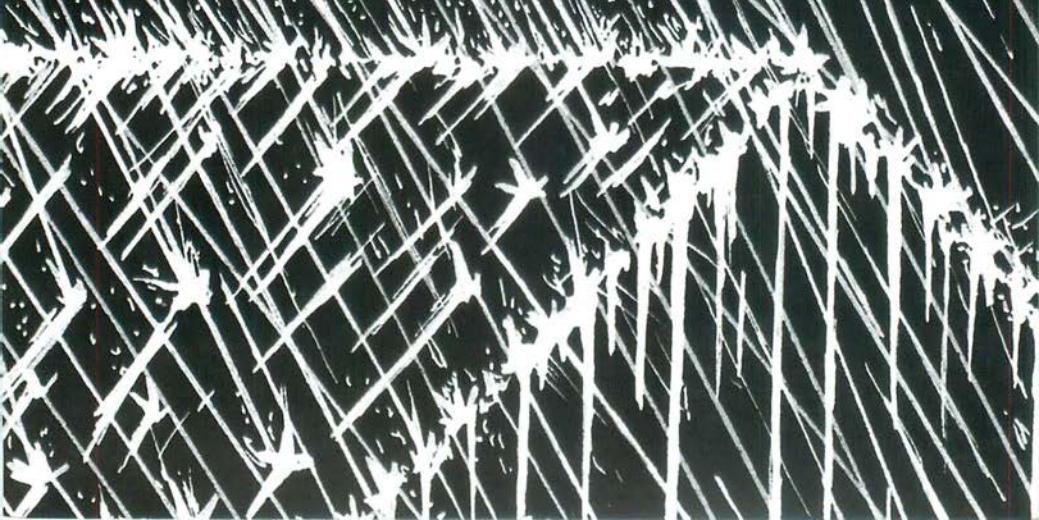


WATERSHED



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Fall 2005 CSU, Chico

Volume 29, Number 1 Department of English

Watershed

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Fall 2005

CSU, Chico

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Hopper's Nighthawks

Solitude has its back to the world
while fleeting company faces forward,
dark suit, red dress and hair,
and coffee cups spaced like thoughts.
He balances on his cigarette.
She addresses her nails.
Meanwhile, just a job,
grey-haired beneath white cap,
bends down behind the counter.
The diner's a fluorescent beacon
in a dark city.
But it's totally encased in seamless glass.
The door has vanished.
All who enter can never leave.
And spectators belly up
to their own drab countertop.

DAVID D. FERGUSON



Conspiracy Theorist Takes Afternoon Tea

Boiled the water himself,
ran a test or two on the teabag.
The package the cookie came in was sealed.
Besides, he had this Mrs. Field checked out.
Later, he'll run the Magruder tape one more time;
tie a family tree or two to Anastasia.
For now he sips and nibbles
on four PM's undisputed truths.
No other facts can be verified.
Sure he was born
but were they really married.
And he'll die
but there's a preacher in the background
hitching eternal life to job security.
He smokes a cigarette
to foil those twenty-first-century Jesuits,
the AMA.
Deep inside, the cancer eats
away more of his lungs.
He's unconvinced it acts alone.



Keystroke

Raed Tihs

The Isat sartw cmae wehn I settard witnrig tihs way. At frist tehy thhogut I'd Isot my mnid. Tehn tehy nocetid taht the herdar tehy teird, the hrader it was to raed. If tehy jsut *gelcnad* at the wdros, tehy culod raed tehm wtih no poreblm. Taht was wehn tehy raleized I was tniyog wtih tehm. And tehy dnd't lkie taht at all.

No one appeeciats taht knid of baeiohvr out of an eeeelvn-yaer-old. My teehacr tlod me I wsna't bineg a taem pealyr. I wans't tneiog the lnie. I was diisprestecng the man. Or wathveer it is the old pleope say. Who can keep up?

I konw ptery mcuh all the wdors tehy do, wciih tehy dno't atcreiappe eehitr. Drunig our fsrit prenatal-tcheear ceefronnce, wtih me stinitg rhgit trhee, tehy celald me peiccoorus, as if I dno't konw waht the wrod menas, and wehn I swehod tehm taht I do konw waht it mneas, they acetd sprisued, as if tehy ddin't konw I was pocorecius. Mroons.

I feel bad for my ptearns. I rlleay do. I'd tlel tehm how to dael wtih me, but taht wulod jsut cufone tehm. The way I aalwys see tehm, wehn I cosle my eeyes and prutice tehm, is with tshee peaknicd lokos on thier fecas. In one of my eelsarit mmeeiors, wr'ee at the dniern tblae. I diecde to say my ABCs bdaacwks, jsut to see waht tehy'll do. "Z - Y - X," I beign. I puase for eecfft. Tehy gnlace at ecah ohetr and get taht look, taht fareked-out look.

"W - V - U - T," I say.

My metohr mohuts, "Do shintomeg!" to my feathr.

I fsiinh qckliuy: "SRQPONMLKJIHGFEDCBA!"

My mheotr lugahs nousverly. "Taht's ctue," she syas.

"No, it ins't," I say.

I am eetighn mnoths old.

Two wekes atfer the imounfas "aabehlpt inndicet" I baegn my vtisis to a "siacpel dotocr" who had me paly wtih bkclos and "iatnerct" wtih ohetr credhdin. Shrae the toy, fgiht oevr the toy, wheehtar. I got the hnit. I pealyd ncie and siad my ABCs the way God manet tehm to be siad. I dndi't let on taht tehre was a vertox of wodrs and nebrums in my haed, eyeihnvrtg snikucg in and binloug out and tppiing over and trnnuig iindse out. My own ltilte screet.

I kpet qieut for ten yares. Tehn, tehre mnthos ago, I'd had egunoh. It was yet antheor splinleg tset, and tihs tmie I jsut cloudn't do it. Snellpig tetts? Deos it raelly mtaetr if I can splel "cabclnrue"

whlie eevonrye esle uess laanugge to lie, to cahet, to satel, to riun
the penalt? I raed the prapes.

I'd mdae a precfet sroce on ervey ohetr snipellig tset—duh!—so
wehn the oethr kdis lfet for Inuch, my tacheer tlod me to saty,
tehn cmae to my dsek hinldog my qiuz by one creonr lkie it was
a hetamsr trud. It had all tshee hlaf-heetard red sleashtugroh
"bvaeer" and "tmuerpt" and the egeethin oethr wrdos, lkie she
cludon't baer to mrak tehm wnorg buscaee it jsut ddn't seem rghit.
She pobblary thughot I'd been kckoned in the haed at reecss or
smothenig. I tlod her I had "seddun-osnet dixslyea."

"No, you dno't," she siad. "Sotp dinog tihs."

"You sotp fsirt," I tlod her. "All of you sotp."

"Sotp waht?"

And I jsut gvae her tihs look and she gvae me one bcak.

That artfeonon, she cleald my ptrneas to agrane a cornfnceee.
The fsrit of mnay. I'm minkag lfie ducliffit for envoyere now,
dinraggg my motehr form her spoas and plulnig my feathr form his
bunisess menetigs. But tehy konw olny the hlaf of it.

See, I can do nbemrus, too, all knids of thigns wtiht nerbums, but
I paly dmub beascue I konw whree taht ledas. I've seen taht mivoe.
You sartt sownhig you konw sutff aobut nubmers and tehn the
gnenevmort men sohww up and tkae you to tshee sapicel cusmapes
and mkae you wrok on larses and nulacer wonapes and bowipoean
noooeachgltnny and rbotos with detah ryas. Tihs is why I've awyals
mdae a pinot of gtenitg Cs on my mtah tress—hesnot-loinkog
Cs—buecase I dno't wnat taht gluit on my haed. So I jsut do
wrods. Taht way wehn the grovennmet men cmoe teyl'hl hvae me
cocamimintung with the anlies or innntiveg a urnisveal luganage
taht ervoneye wlil urnastdend.

But stiting hree in pneart-taceher confecene nubemr eeelvn,
I cna't tkae it aynrome. My theacer's anctig all sprueior, stupnoig
smoe nnnosese she leenard ttnewy yares ago in gudraate sohocl.
My meothr feles lkie seh's dnoe seminthog wonrg, lkie seh's ceertad
smoe knid of mostner, so seh's wrinnigg her hnads and cyrnig. And
my feathr's jsut aynoned. His aappcorh to my etiocudan has awlays
been to let my mhoetr hnlade aimadecc metarts wilhe he bnaks
tmie for strops leatr on. He kepes cinckheg his wtcah.

So tihs is it. The end of the lnie. All I crae aubot now is gintetg out
of tihs lfie. I've tired wodrs. Wrdos can svae us, if wl'el let tehm. If wl'el
use tehm rghit. But tihs is the evelneth cronncftee and trehe's no end

in shigt. Ehetir tehy ccark or I do, and I'm souserily onberetumud. I guses, tehn, taht I'll jsut hvae to see waht the gremnenvot men hvae in srote for me. So I strat: "2 – 3 – 5 – 7 – 11 – 13 – 19," and so on. I get to 199, the 28th pmire nebmur. Tehn my moethr smrecas.

My Education

"The only things you learn are the things you tame."

The fox—from The Little Prince by Antoine De Saint-Exupéry

I.

I'm almost fifty years old, just finishing my BA. I started Kindergarten
When I was four years old. Miss Vogeli, in first grade, thought I was a star.
She touched my brown hair, my shoulders; told me I was smart
And sweet. I was her helper at reading time. After school, I helped erase
Her white words from the green chalkboard. My color was brown
When she taught us how to write a poem about colors.
Miss Vogeli called me a poet, wrote my poem in purple
Magic Marker, on poster board, and taped it on the wall of Room 8.
She gave my mother a black and white photograph
Of me standing in front of the poem, at the front of the class.

II.

My oldest brother went to a different school because he was so smart.
My mother wanted me to go to a different school too—
 away from Miss Vogeli
Who, my mother said, spent *too much time with her head in the clouds.*

III.

There is a big room with wooden floors that makes my shoes sound
 too loud.
There are closed blinds over big frosty windows. There is a big man
Sitting behind a big wooden table who tells me to sit in a big
Swiveling chair. My shoes cannot touch the wooden floor. The big man
Doesn't laugh like my dad does. He smells like Doctor Holloway.
 Seeing his big lips
Makes my eyes close. And cry. He has no name, no face, only lips
That ask me questions. "How many pencils can you buy for 50 cents?"
"Which one doesn't belong?"
"Which one is bigger?"

IV.

I'm still in the big room.

V.

How on earth did you manage? is what my mother asked when I dropped
The ripped squares of my blue high school report card in her lap. Fail
Times seven classes: easy.

VI.

In my mother's garage, ten years ago, I was looking through
psychology books,
Leftovers from her deceased second husband. The Stanford-Binet
Intelligence
Scale. I flipped through it, picking out which animal didn't belong,
which shape
Was bigger. A rabbit was missing an ear. A shoe missing a shoelace ...
Page twenty-eight. You can verify this. Page twenty-eight: A man
Is walking in the park with his suit on. That is what I told the big man
with the big lips.

The man is walking in the park with his suit on.

My answer made his big lips move around, poke out,

Like Dr. Holloway's when he was going to give me a shot.

My dad works in a mine with my uncle Jack and my grandfather.

They don't have suits.

I didn't tell the big man this.

The chair was too big; my feet couldn't touch; he told me not to cry.

Now, in my mother's garage, there on page twenty-eight

Of The Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scale, the man

Walking in the park, wearing his black suit,

Has a shadow on the wrong side. Thirty-five years later—a shadow

On the wrong side.

VII.

I am trying to write this poem.

The Difference a Day Makes in the Definition of a Word

Desire: an abstract word; difficult
To understand. Understanding,
(relative to yesterday), defined *desire*
As *want* (i.e., wanting you).

Want: elemental craving
With underlying inference of promise
To be fulfilled
(that is, you said you *wanted* me).

Yesterday, *desire* was ocean wind
Lifting my wings—
(see history of flight for further explanation)—
Aloft. Why, I actually flew
With the larks when I thought of you!
An exaltation of wings
(see flight of larks to verify this),
Unafraid of sun's burn,
The sky held no limits
(so to speak) as I danced
On air, dipped and soared
In *desire's* whirling whirlwind.

But, today you tell me you *need*
(at least that is the inference)
That same abstract *word*
(I cannot say it)
For someone else (specifically: Trish)
Whose wings are ready
In wait and want of you.

So, I ground myself
(lacking the Wright stuff after all),
Rip my wings out quick,
And realize (at least for today)
That I hate that starving *word*
Suddenly defined as *salt*
In a wound that won't bear healing.

MARY WURLITZER



Labor Intensive

Seventh Circle

"Hey-wei-wei-hey-ha."

My people sing as they come together in a circle. They chant to the rhythms of the great drum on this day of the Moon of the Spring Blossoms. They stomp their feet to the ground and dance around a gravestone in this place where the wasichus go after they die. Next to the gravestone lies a casket where the bones of my body have been sealed for seven generations. But today, my spirit floats free once again because my people have come to perform a sacred ceremony.

They have come across the waters from the Black Hills to this place that is named Brompton Cemetery in the great city where Mother England lives. They are dressed in red satin jackets and white-feathered headdresses; they are wrapped in blue woolen blankets to keep off the rain and the cold. The women make a tremolo.

"Uhi-ye-ye-hey-wei."

There are voices in the wind. There are sounds of wasichu spirits. There are sounds of black crows that sit in the tall trees and chatter. There are sounds of deerskin drums and prairie-grass rattles as my people prepare to carry my brittle bones back to the Black Hills, the center of all things. I will see once again the tall fingers of red rock, the mariposa trees, and the cottonwoods. I will hear the call of the meadowlark and the coyote in the early morning. I will have a vision of my people dancing in a circle, strong and powerful.

The great priest, Eagle-Rock, stands in robes of deerskin at the center of the circle. He points with a stick in his hand. He turns to the North, then to the East, then to the South, then to the West. He says: "Look down upon us, gods, spirits, ancestors! Bless this place. Bless the spirits of the strangers gathered around us, the kind men and women who brought us here. And bless the Great Mother, Elizabeth Knight, for returning our beloved ancestor, Long Wolf, to his family."

And he turns to a small white lady dressed in a black robe and black hat. The wasichu from Bromsgrove steps out of the circle and she speaks: "Thank you for coming to today's ceremony. I apologize for the drizzle and the dampness. I know how strange it must seem for you all to be here in a cold and wet corner of England, so far away from your home." The good lady smiles and my people laugh also. Then she continues: "Ever since I discovered, quite by

accident really, that your ancestor, Long Wolf, had been buried here in a remote corner of this London cemetery, I knew that it was my responsibility to find the burial site and return him to his people. He died, as you know, from pneumonia while touring in England with Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. And even though it appears that Bill Cody liked and admired Long Wolf, it is also clear that the burial was hastily performed and that Long Wolf was never granted the rites that a man of his stature deserved. I spent seven years looking for the exact location of his grave until I eventually found it here, under this poplar tree. Its headstone was, I'm afraid, badly damaged and overgrown with weeds." The good lady looks up to the dark sky. Then she says, "I know Long Wolf wishes to be at home with his people, at the foot of his beloved Black Hills. Today's ceremony therefore represents, for me, the fulfillment of a special kind of vision."

The Bromsgrove lady speaks with simple truth. Her words are strong and honest. She has been blessed with the gift of a sacred vision.

I, too, was granted such a gift.

It was given to me by Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, when I was eighteen years old. The Great Spirit's words were whispered into my ear as I lay asleep on the highest rock of Devil's Butte in the Black Hills. For three days and nights, I had gone without food. I had only tasted water and a drop of the white man's poison, whiskey. I was told that the buffalo would return with the wild grasses and that the white man's farms would disappear from the land. I was told that the sacred hoop would return to my people. But the Great Spirit also warned me that I would have to wait a long time for the fulfillment of this vision. The voice went away quickly. I woke and heard a coyote calling in the distance. The sun went down and nightfall spread across the white sky. The air became cold. In the distance, lights flickered on and off. Thousands of buffalo eyes were charging toward me. I decided to find out why the Great One had given me the vision, and when it would come to pass on this earth.

I thought I found the answer in the Valley of the Greasy Grass in the Big Horn Mountains when we wiped out Long Hair. I shared a vision with brave warriors from the Hunkpapa, the Blackfeet, the Oglala, and the Cheyenne.

We cried: "Crazy Horse is coming! Hoka-hey! Hey-hey!"

We were all crazy. The valley was dark with dust and smoke. There were shadows all about and there were many cries.

We circled Custer and his men and put them to death.

I shot a wasichu in the forehead and got his scalp. I rode through the camp and the women were all singing and making the tremolo.

I heard a coyote calling in the distance, "It is a good day to die!"

But later, the Black Hills were taken from us. Pine forests were ripped out. Gold was stolen from the hills. The spirit of Paha Sapa was destroyed, and my people, also, were broken.

I went across the big water so that I might learn from the wasichu how to mend the sacred hoop and bring back the vision.

I joined the Wild West Show of Pahasuka, Buffalo Bill, and we made many shows for the wasichus in London.

I acted the part of Sitting Bull. I put paint and feathers on me and rode my horse into the great circle of the circus ring. Others, dressed as warriors, made the tremolo, and the wasichus in the audience would give out a cry. Then Pahasuka, dressed in a buckskin coat and long hat, galloped into the circle and made his horse rear up before me. "Sioux, pity us!" he cried aloud, and there was great silence in the place. I allowed Pahasuka to strike me down with his bare arms. My people would carry me out of the circus ring and the audience yelled and screamed with applause. They called the show "Custer's Greatest Moment."

Pahasuka was generous to me. He treated me well and told me he would like to visit my homeland in the Black Hills. He promised to show me how to restore the sacred hoop to my people. He said that he, too, had a vision of his people and mine living together in peace according to the laws of our great nation. He said that he would like to share this vision with me once we returned across the big water. But, before then, we must finish our last show, which was to honor Grandmother England.

I remember the day clearly. Grandmother England arrived in a big, shiny wagon. We danced in a circle for her. She was little and fat and we liked her because she had a kind face. After we danced, she said to us: "I am sixty-seven years old. I have traveled all over the world. But I have never seen such good-looking people as you. If I had my way, I would not let them take you around in a show like this!"

We shook her hand. It was little and soft. We gave a big cheer

for her, and then the shiny wagon came, and she got into it and went away.

Grandmother England's words gave me hope and strength but soon after she left, the fever came to me. In the rain and the cold, my bones started to ache from sickness. In a dream that lasted many days, I traveled in a cloud. I saw far off the Black Hills and the center of the world where the spirits would take me. I was floating over Pine Ridge and the cloud stopped. I heard frightened people. I could not get off the cloud. I saw strip mines and uranium plants. I saw big pits and silos. I saw women and children with cancer scars on their bodies. I saw rusted trailers and broken-down huts. And then I heard a coyote calling in the distance and saw that the coyote's face was my face.

Then I was lying on a bed, and a wasichu doctor looked at me in a queer way, as though he were frightened. He said I would soon be dead and they were going to buy my coffin. Pahuska had a strong heart, but he was going to put me in a box and bury me in a square piece of ground in London.

I realized I would never mend the sacred hoop or bring back the sacred vision during my lifetime.

Now, thanks to the goodness of the Bromsgrove lady, my people will finally return me to the Black Hills.

Now I can understand what the Great Spirit meant when he whispered words into my ear at Devil's Butte. Like a ripple that grows wider and wider as it moves to the center of a big pond, my vision has taken seven generations to move to the center of all things. And, by performing one small gesture of kindness, the Bromsgrove lady has created another ripple that will take seven generations to move to the center of the big pond.

My vision is clear. Before me are the valleys and hills of the Great Plains. There are no wheat fields, no cattle herds, no strip mines, no barbed-wire fences. Instead, I see buffalo, tall grasses, sagebrush, mesquite trees, and greasewood. In the distance, under a brightly colored arch across the wide-open sky, my people sing as they come together in a circle and carry my body home.

"Hey-wei-wei-hey-ha."

What Troubles the Water

The dead were not counted that week:
the week corpses floated toward the gulf
past sunken on-ramps, driftwood porches,
dismantled storefront gates,
the week corpses, deaf to gunshots and commands,
were tethered to street signs and lamp posts.

In the Ninth Ward
city rooftops harbored
survivors of the eye
while the Mississippi
and Lake Pontchartrain
unloosed an aquatic parade,
a tidal second-line around them.

No one must ask what lingered of betrayal
on the night murals drowned in crescent depths,
what caskets for the unaccounted
when New Orleans knew no quarter or saints' haven,
or what troubles the water ...

But this we knew:
that week the dead were not counted,
souls whose faces were caught up in the trees
rose and climbed the approaching, reluctant sky.

Phoenix

Your occasional complaints at work
led to rants on the phone,
but I *still* didn't realize
until you told me about the cracks—
Punched in the wall,
Punched in the windshield.
The shoves, threats, and accusations.
My fists clenched and my jaw stiffened,
But to what end?
An intervention was needed.
Literally. My body
blocking his from yours.

It happened half a year ago,
but the details are still crisp.
You, spent, cradled in my lap.
Flesh on flesh
pulses slow, eyes closed.
Emotional warfare forgotten.
Know that the calm
we found was a gift you
gave yourself; I just
helped you wrap it.

Now, a *real* man.
He's everything I wanted
for you. He fixes cabinets,
clears out weeds and
holds you gently.
You call late at
night to ramble about
how he trusts you
out alone, about his
compliments and honesty.
I don't smile the same
way at you now, but
my stomach is settled.

Open Heart

Stab me. Rape me. Shoot me.
Make me hate you.
It's the only way.

Constant masochistic cuts.
You are my hard drug,
And I keep breathing you in,
Hoping that you will save me.
But alone here I lie
In this huge bed that mocks me,
My frail body curled up into the corner.
You have taken all of my dignity,
All of my strength.
Helpless, hopeless,
Pathetic.

Bitter. Jealous. All my posters are hanging
Crooked.

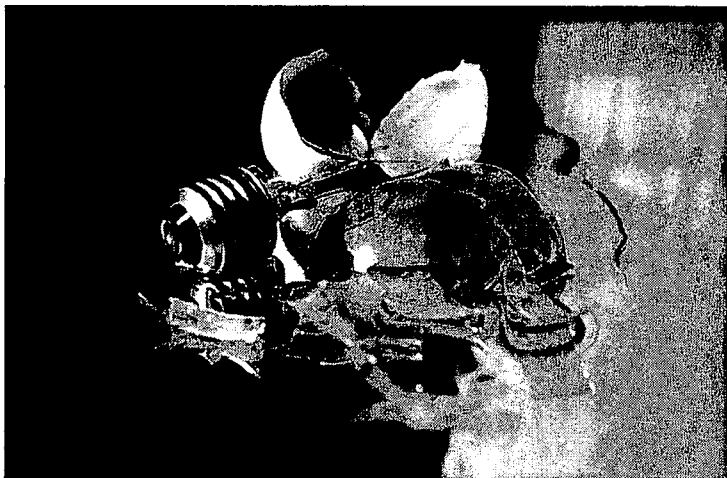
All my photos show smiles.
It's ironic. It's sick.
I thought I was stronger than this.
But the relapses are the most difficult,
Because I can't seem to get enough.
Late night calls.

I take your abuse, your harsh words,
All on bended knee,
All with tears brimming and "sorry's."

I am sick.
I am truly sick.
And I am the only doctor that can save me.
But I have lost the keys to the patient's room.

I am too shaky to operate.
I think we may lose her.
I think she might fill
Our unwanted quota
Of those struck
And killed by
Love.

PHIL MORRIS



40 What

During the Storm and the Blackout

My love,
you say
the dark outside
is crying.
How hard are you trying
to see it
through the hundreds
of tiny glass snails
glowing in candlelight
and racing down our window?

RENGA

Renga

Hawkins Camp, 2005

Rust flicks fades along the edges
Of the fire a color of late leaves
And the cold sighs along the canyon

As the canyon's rivers quiet a black bear
Looks back the way woodpiles look to winter

Her hot breath spires of gooseberries she feels the wind
Rise from the river on the whorls of late summer molt
That streak the brown fur of her hindquarters

And gooseberry thorns soften in a season
Of brown famine and coming white knives

The axe handle has split down the middle
Like a wishbone only sharper so he quits it
And starts the fire with what he has

From the last felled pine
He whittles the winter sliver by sliver

Dirt splits snow in pockets
What breaches its hiding to prove
Its persistence a guarantee

From now on the river
Is always getting smaller

for Jeanne

Lord of the Flies

As the Adirondack summer
Builds toward its dog days
I work with my Skilsaw, near the edge of the porch.
And the flies come
The big ones
The drones, more than a half-inch long,
Drawn by a vibration so much greater than their own
That they hover about, as if expecting some apocalypse:
God Himself, Lord of the Great Buzz!
One lands on my bare shoulder to watch.

Similarly, the dung beetles
Who inhabit the five-gallon plastic bucket standing in the woods
Near the dead poplar tree and covered by a lidded toilet seat
Continue with their ordinary lives,
Until suddenly
A great light appears overhead,
Only to be partially blocked seconds later
As manna rains down from above.

Some would say they are fools, and worship an asshole.
But I would not go so far.
Rather, I would say their God
Gives them the makings of a universe
Half digested.
And in so doing
(Thanks to His Grace),
Leaves them with something to chew on.

CHRIS BURLISON



[Your red shirt]

Your red shirt
lies on the floor
a siren,
calling.
calling.

and
as I bend down to pick it up,
wraithlike, a warm flush
slides across
my cheeks, wrapping

your heady, musky,
animal scent, around
my brain, my heart,
my flesh;
surrounding me,
embracing,
engulfing,
touching and teasing.

The taste of your skin,
sharp and salty,
wets my trembling lips, and
your song, low,
enticing, enchanting,
captures me;
soul and
smoldering
body,
like last night,
your sighs,
feather soft and silken,
caressing my neck,
melting the world
away—

far,
far
away.

Hook, Line, and

We will go to a funny, yet sophisticated movie
So I can hear her laugh,
And hear her reason,
And hear her laugh some more
Over a nice seafood dinner,
With white candles and red wine.
We'll fetch dessert
From the local ice creamery,
Swapping fond memories from our youths
Over fudge-covered scoops
And multi-colored sprinkles.
And I'll walk her home,
Kiss her softly on the hand
Under the yellowed porch light,
And bid farewell,
"Goodnight."

I snap out of my daydream
And spot her across the lawn.
She walks this way in all her splendor:
I'm hooked by her perfect figure.
A perfect figure for a perfect fantasy.
My stomach performs leaps and bounds—
She's two feet away
And I say my line quite clearly,
"Maria, may I take you out this Friday night?"
A look of hope spreads across my face,
Despite efforts to convey it with confidence.
She doesn't miss a single stride.
I'm ignored
And left standing,
Limp as the steamed sturgeon at dinner.

Cold Music

I don't have words for these things—I'm lying on the ground feeling dead, and he's sitting on the couch with *her*, just singing in her ear, and the only reason he doesn't have his tongue down her throat is that he wants to finish his song.

So. Let him finish.

Maybe an hour ago it was still my birthday—there are a lot of people at my party, none are friends, but I'm an excuse for drinking. All I've felt is bored and angry and the only good thing is the music, but if it weren't for the music there wouldn't have been that damn singer who's making me feel like part of the floor.

The singer. He can sing the shadows off your face, the blood from your skin, your mind from your brain. He can even sing you, send you through everyone's ears and out the open window, so you'd find yourself naked in the cold wilderness saying, "Well, I sure been sung tonight." He can sing so soft and so gentle, you'd turn yourself inside out, just trying to hear him better—

So they call him the Sweet One.

The party's at my place, a wood house out in the perfect snow. They're swallowing beer like it's air and the band is playing a rhythm drunk and rocking madly off its axis and the people dance till they fall over. It smells like the insides of something living. Everything I'm breathing in has already been a breath out.

But this is all so far away right now it may as well be memory. It's all I'm looking at but the only thing I can see is May and the Sweet One on the couch, and the song he's singing, and what his hands must be doing, and the way his words are like broken glass and they go down so, so easy. I feel like I'm hanging from something sharp stuck straight through me, underneath my ribs. This is the soul. This is what the music touches.

Lonely ain't just that rock in your stomach, it's you coughing and gagging trying to throw it up—hurting yourself with it—the way it sticks in your throat, the way you feel like crying 'cause it just don't want to come out, the way you feel like beating your damn head against something hard and jagged. It would sit still and ache quietly if you didn't keep moving it around, but the only way to stop it moving is for you to stop moving, stop moving forever, and you're not sure you want to do this, but you like having the option.

May. There's no other girl in this town for me. They say she

found me dead freezing in the snow, they say she saved me. I say she killed me.

As a young boy I didn't leave the house much. I feared weather. The sun was just as bad as the rain. I wore my one suit most days—black with a black tie—and I drank my water from a measuring cup. May was all flowers and dancing, her hands would be sticky from candy and there'd be dirt on her dress. She was in constant motion and it took a while for her brown hair to catch up with her. I was bigger than everyone our age but she could still lift me off the ground. I found that out the one time she hugged me.

I only went outside for May and music, and they usually weren't that far apart—they're hardly separate things in my mind. The way she moved, it was like she thought with her body. My head and body had different ideas of what motion should be like. Everything I did was like falling down. I didn't dance, I stumbled. One day I saw May holding hands with someone, and I ran, and that night I fell asleep in the snow. Come morning the cold had rotted me some on the inside. My head was collapsing into a hollow middle. My heart was a bruise. But she still dragged me indoors, set me by the fire to thaw.

They sent me off to school because now, though I wanted to leave the house, I wasn't allowed. My bones still held the cold. I learned reading and writing and hunching myself over a desk.

And now I come home and I'm almost twenty. And I have this empty house that my parents left me before they left me. And, even in summer, the wind that blows through it is cold. So the other day, I'm chopping wood, contrary to doctor's orders, and May comes up and tells me that soon I will be twenty, and I tell her I know but I'm glad she remembers, and she says how we should have a party. The only reason I say yes is because she will come. I put my axe in the shed before I'm even finished.

Everyone is invited, alcohol and food are bought, musicians are hired. It is the biggest party in town yet and the only one there that I want to see I can't get words out of my mouth to talk to. But there's this great singer and he's singing everyone cross-eyed and the only reason he's not singing them dead is that he doesn't want to. When he takes a break I talk to him. He's younger than me. He's all bone and muscle and he tells me that there's a fire in his loins and his heart has been burnt black like a piece of meat left on the grill too long, and he gives me a grin sharp enough to cut his own throat,

and he flicks his wrist and out of his sleeve into his palm his heart comes rolling and he shows me the damn thing. It's safer here, he says, sucking food out from between his teeth.

And May comes up to talk to me and he's there and the only reason she's talking to him and not me is that I can't talk. He's looking her up and down and making soft innuendos right in front of me and she's laughing and I can't say a thing. I just stand there and watch it all happening, watch it all like it already happened.

So they sit down on the couch and he starts singing his song, and my knees just don't lock anymore, and my ass is on the ground, and then my head, too. And he's just singing his song and she's drawing close and I'm watching and then I can't watch anymore so I look away, but even looking away I'm still watching. I'm listening to the words but she isn't. No one else is listening to the words, maybe no one else can hear the words, the way he's singing them. He sings them real down low, like you have to be lying half-dead on the floor to understand what he's saying. And maybe the only reason I'm lying on the floor half-dead is to listen.

What's he saying? He's saying that the world is an empty, cold, hollow place. And he's saying that love is heat and heat rises, only it don't take you up with it, it leaves you alone in the snow. He's saying it won't carry you up, won't carry *you*, can't even enter your body with your cold, cold skin. It'll take some folks away but not you, you're not light enough, you hold your own self down. You drown yourself in snow.

He won't come out and say it direct, though he has the words for it. He's saying *die*. He's singing the song that sings to death. He's singing the song that sings you to bury yourself. And I'm lying on the floor feeling dead, and he's on the couch with her, and the only reason he doesn't have his tongue down her throat is he wants to finish his song.

So. Let him finish.

What he doesn't know: yeah, I can hear him, but I know what he's trying at. Yeah, he may be right, but screw him for being the one to say it. Yeah, he can finish his song or continue it as long as he wants, but I'm not going to die. And when he stops, I'll stand up. And while he's putting his tongue down her throat, or showing her that burnt heart he keeps up his sleeve, I'll be going outside into the snow, to the shed, to grab my axe. And when I come back inside, I'm going to lay it in his skull. And there will be no more music.

Ant Trapped in Honey

The guy cut the grass
At the graveyard today.
Blood-stained boots of electrified lime.

Smell of slain lawn,
Spring's new beginning,
Clean, fresh odor of double-stacked death.

Hard rocks with heavy words
Pin people to the ground
Among the piles of cut blades,
Like a barbershop dumpster.

The smell made me wistful.
Drew me in,
Grabbed me by the eyebrows,
Slapped me in the back of the brain.

Suddenly, I was:

Rolling around in the grass
'Til my skin became itchy and inflamed,
Red and welted.

Tearing into the ground with bare hands,
Digging dark dirt under my nails.
Pulling the thick green blanket over my head.

Squirming around
Like an ant trapped in honey,
Straining to bury myself in the smell.
Like it buried itself in me.



JESSICA BROUWER

SHANNON ROONEY

Manna

Caress me with your midnight wings,
surround me with your river hands,
enfold me in rose-bloom smiles,
immerse me in autumn halos.
I have known the searing ache
of your light's absence: dark cave in the earth,
pulling me in.
Don't let me fall there
again. I want only
starshine and full moon splendor,
the rich celebration of light
in which I bathe
when you offer yourself
like a bowl piled high
with fruits gleaming like gems.
Feed me the nectar
of your presence—drizzle this honey
onto me
like manna from heaven.

In Your Patriot Dream

The Fourth of July Fair didn't fail you.
At nine p.m. the parade dwindled down.
Crowds fond of grass sidled down to blankets.
If summer nights that perfect might be wrong
let faith be evidence of things unseen,
for a girl warm as wine reined in your hours,

kissing you blind before the fireworks flared
in sultry clouds as thin as spun sugar.
If you sank to crave like Dorian Gray,
patriots glared in amber waves of grief.
Friends just swore you off as hell-bound, but laughed.
Families gazed skyward, watched slow fires burn.

M. JAY LIVINGSTON

Our Fifty-Sixth

I hold the gun.

I, too, was once young and without horizons.
Landscapes stretched as far in front of me as my nose.
Aging was when my cat died.
I was beginning; there were no ends in thought.

How sudden the shift from slow-to-begin to quick-to-end.
It used to be simple when I was firm and my pockets full of mornings.
It is still simple, but I resent the emptying.
It is at night when I admit I have spent unwisely.

My father, I understand your New Year's date with your secretary.
The broken promise to Mother was your final stand.
A party of old friends, a gathering of growing old, a room full of mirrors.
I don't blame you for running now that I, too, know what it is to run.

It is now my turn for that brief visit with fifty-six.

The difference between us is that you fought.
I have no stomach for it—or strength—or secretary.
In that regard, I respect you more than I respect myself.
But perhaps that would be the way you'd feel about me were you
 alive and I dead.

Let's talk about it now.
Now that we both know about erosion.
And if we don't, it is better being kept by the dark than being
 robbed in broad daylight.

I Was Thinking About That Horse Talking

My father never got over the laughter he heard
While watching from above the gurney, like a dream,
His dentures fall from his gaping mouth.
One rescuer, my father later called a *punk*,
Even went so far as to say,

"He won't be needing those anymore."
As a child, my father was raised moving slowly
Across the heat and snow of Arizona deserts.
My grandfather, a German immigrant,
Laid iron rails, and miles later,

Supervised other men laying rails,
Driving spikes, for America
And the Southern Pacific Railroad. The children—
One daughter and four sons—were said to keep rattlesnakes
For pets. They were said to hang the shed skins

On saguaro cacti at Christmastime.
My father said this to me when I was a girl.
He said that at night, they—the children—buried
Themselves, except their faces, in the desert sand
Like horned toads: to hide from Geronimo

And to keep warm. He once told me a secret:
The quarter-sized scar that remained ivory
On his tanned upper-arm, happened one night
When he refused to get buried;
An arrow shot silently through the dark

Into his stubborn skin. He said he didn't cry
Then, couldn't tell anybody
Afterward, for fear of the lashing
His father would give him, or worse yet, for fear
Of the pain it would cause his frail mother.

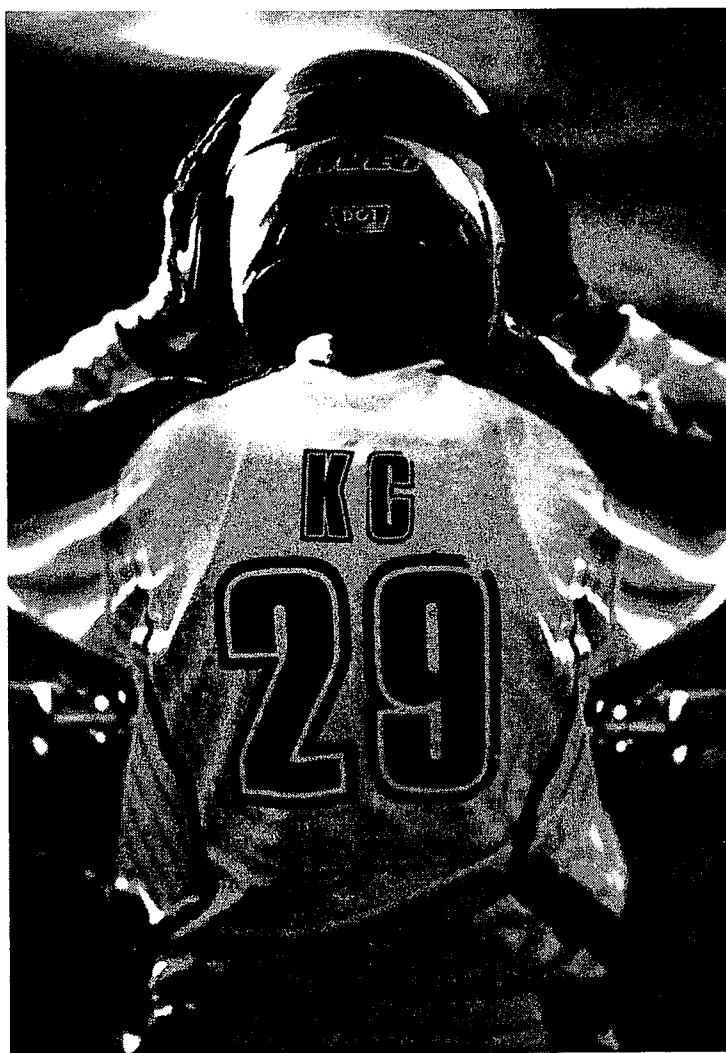
He told me to never tell, and I haven't until now.
A week before my father's last heart attack,
He called to tell me he was going to sell his horse.
It seemed that while out riding in the mountains that day,
The *damned thing* kept trying to cross over

Lookout Ridge and head toward the cemetery—
This, despite my father's lashing. *What good's*
An old bag of bones that won't listen to you,
He asked me. I was thinking about these things last summer,
Nineteen years after my father's death,

As I hiked alone, in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada.
I was thinking about that horse talking,
Without words, to my father. I was thinking
About the stories my father told me—stories
I never told anyone else. I was thinking these things

When I came upon a long twist of wild horsehair,
A tail apparently knotted up so tight it had to be shed,
Left there, draped over a spiny sage. I touched
Its weathered strands, its brown-gray
Coarseness, as I listened for the words.

MALLORY HILLS



KC

Because of My Mother

I did hit a girl once. During third grade my aunt would give me candy and I would take it to school. I placed the candy on my desk to eat it when I got hungry, but the girl who sat in front of me would always turn around, smile sweetly, and take a piece. I smiled back and let her. I remember she had pretty eyes. Once she grabbed a few and shared them with another boy beside her. I became angry, so the next time she reached for my desk I made a fist and hit her hand. She called me *pendejo* and never turned around again.

When I refer to the first seven years of my life, I focus on the place I lived because, unlike the people, it remained constant. We lived in an adobe house on a little hill. There were many mango trees which my brother and I climbed to eat the ripe fruit. There was a creek at the base of the hill behind our house where we would spend our summers. The green of the trees stained the hills and mountains that enveloped the village. Rabbits, armadillos, and coyotes roamed the floor as the singing of birds flooded the air. In the mornings my mother would wake me up at five a.m. to walk my sister to the *molino*, where we would grind the maize to make the corn dough for tortillas and tamales. On the weekends my sister, my brother, and I would go selling tamales, racing to see who could sell the most; I always came last. My mother also bred pigs, washed other people's clothes, sold eggs, and picked coffee at the plantations to feed our family. She had always formed part of the landscape which I could not picture myself without. My father, however, never became part of such beauty.

They met when my mother already had a two-year-old daughter, my older sister Sonia. I was born when my mother was seventeen, my younger brother, Adrian, when she was nineteen. My mother watched over us and maintained the adobe house, but my father retained an insatiable desire for adventure. He traveled to the United States, joined the Mexican army, trafficked drugs, and went hunting. He was rarely home. Once he brought us Tonka trucks he stole from somewhere. Another time he took one of our dogs into the wilderness and shot her because she ate the eggs the chickens had laid. He taught my brother and me to shoot a rifle, calling me a faggot whenever I refused to follow his orders. I loved my father, I'm sure, but I cannot forgive him for being irresponsible. He fought with my mother often. When my mother was pregnant they fought. As

he hit my mother with a log and she tried to hit him back, her skirt became drenched in blood. My little brother died a few days after he was born prematurely.

My father maintained a family feud with some of our neighbors. Once, after he stole a turkey from them, seven people came to our house. My mother was busy in the foggy morning preparing tamales as four men with guns and three women with machetes came to kill him. My father and a fat man struggled for a shotgun as my mother tried to keep the others away from them, getting herself cut in the hand with a machete. The shotgun went off in my father's neck. The people left smiling and cussing, leaving him for dead, as I cried. My mother then took him into town where they hitched a ride to Putla. We didn't have any money to pay for the operation so he died.

We left our village after receiving numerous death threats from our neighbor. We sold everything and moved to the Mexican cities. I got a job at age seven while my mother worked two jobs. When I was nine we came to the United States and worked in the fields as a family, picking tomatoes, string beans, and strawberries.

The same day I started sixth grade my mother met Urbano Aguirre. I awoke to see him drinking and listening to loud music. We were asked to leave our little room because of the ruckus he caused. He then convinced my mother to move with him to Escondido, California. At first he was nice, but when they started living together he started to hit her every weekend he got drunk. They wrestled and fists flew left and right while Sonia, Adrian, and I hid in the closet of the little room. We cried as we stared through the cracks at the broken glass and blood accompanied by the smell of beer and Urbano's vomit. This scene dominated my middle school years.

For my middle school graduation, my mother bought me Payless dress shoes. She also bought me dress clothes that came in a package together with pants (which were too short), a brightly decorated shirt, and a plastic belt. My mother accompanied me alone, wearing black jeans and a white blouse beautifully decorated with roses. I was embarrassed because she continually kissed me on the forehead, leaving lip marks. That night they fought again. After he left her sobbing, I remember thinking that the blood stains made the flowers turn ugly. I could not believe what she put up with and would get angry at her for being so yielding. I blamed her for complicating our lives, for being so weak. A few months prior to

my middle school graduation she tried to kill herself when Urbano told her he didn't love her. I carried her to the hospital crying out of fear and anger. I remember calling the police many times, getting Urbano deported twice. The second time I had to testify before a judge, my mother pleading, commanding, and trying to make me feel guilty so I would not do it. I could never understand how she could forgive him. It confused me, for all I wanted was for her to be treated with dignity.

My mother is indigenous. She was born in a small town in Oaxaca and spoke Mixteco. When she was four her mother died during childbirth in the middle of the cornfields they were looking after. Since they were alone, my mother stayed with the corpses for three days. My mother's father then ran off to marry again so my mother was left alone with both an older and a younger sister. The older sister left quickly for the city and my mother was left to look after her younger sister, Catalina. A year later Catalina was raped and consequently died, leaving my mother alone. My mother then worked for aunts who took advantage by making her work all day for meager amounts of food. When she was ten she learned to make *huipils*, colorfully embroidered one-piece dresses, which she sold to make money. When she was twelve her aunts were going to marry her off but she escaped the night before the wedding. She ran until after the sun came up, then hid in a lady's attic when her uncles came looking for her. Conspiring with the woman who told her to "go be happy," my mother arrived in Putla. It was then that she learned Spanish and began working as a servant.

During my high school years I struggled to free myself from what middle school had been. We found an apartment, abandoning our years of living in suffocating little rooms with other people. Seeing my mother work so hard motivated me to immerse myself in school, and slowly, almost unwillingly, I began to discover the beauty of my mother's character and culture. I found a teacher in school who became a counselor and mentor, helping me to deal with problems at home. It became an outlet for my frustration and anger at my mother, which ultimately allowed me to evaluate my mother under more objective terms.

Once, my father tried to kidnap my brother and me to take us to live with a lover of his. My mother, however, intercepted a letter from this woman and had a friend read it to her. My mother was furious at his audacity and refused to give us up. Right after my father

died, I began to get seizures and would faint, always waking up in my mother's arms. At night, when we lived in the Mexican cities, my mother would tell us beautiful made-up stories so we would fall asleep before she left for her night job in a restaurant. Once an aunt of mine insultingly wanted to feed us chicken beaks, but my mother stopped that and tried to protect us from such treatment. The first thing she did when we reached the United States was to buy a purple convertible Hot Wheels for my brother and a white one for me. When she worked in the fields she would leave at four in the morning and not return until sunset, always striving to instill in us the value of education by telling us about her childhood. She told of a time she went to the local school and sat with the other kids. The teacher told her she needed to bring paper so she went and found a cardboard box, ripped it, and returned to the school to sit in the class. She was told she needed pencils so she sold a *huipil* and bought pencils. Then she was told by the teacher that she could not be there because her father had not given her permission. She could not find her father so she threw away the cardboard and buried the pencils by the river, to rot away like her dreams.

She has good advice, but has never found a good way to articulate it. When I started high school, she sat me down for a chat. "This would be so much easier if I was a man," she began. Then she said something about how if a girl and I wanted to "be together" I should use protection. I felt so embarrassed that I quickly stopped her and told her I understood. Now that I think back I never thanked her for caring so, and I think being a woman made her advice that much more powerful. Once I asked her why she didn't teach us Mixteco and she told me that she began to teach it to Sonia, but a lady she worked for in Putla told her it was a dirty tongue, so she stopped and never taught me or my brother because she didn't want people to ridicule us like they had her.

In retrospect my mother has always been a pillar to me, serving as a testament to the incredible resilience of women and the purity of love they can offer. It breaks my heart to listen to the dream wedding my mom will never have, the mother she never knew, the childhood she spent cold and lonely. Age has given me the opportunity to respect my mother for being a woman. And to honor her struggle I wore a traditional vestment she made for my high school graduation with pride, tearing up as I walked back to my seat.

Because of a five-foot-tall woman who makes tamales and

huipils, a woman who speaks Mixteco and is currently working in a hot dry cleaners, a woman who only knows how to write her first and last name, I am attending college. My father would have never sacrificed so much for so long; he could have never raised us to appreciate hard work and to respect others.

Ashamed, I now want to address the girl who sat in front of me in the third grade in Izúcar de Matamoros, México: please forgive me for hitting you; you never did deserve it.

The Bowl

Sharp houses rise
against the foothill horizon.
Phone lines dissect
the golden-blood sunset.
But in this clearing,
in this almond orchard,
these leaves and branches,
with their warm and milky incense,
form a bowl around me
for the procession of pink clouds
through the iris-blue sky.

Check-Out Line

"Advanced Sex Tricks—
when you whip out one of *these* doozies,
he'll know he's with a *real* woman" is what

the cover of the women's magazine said.
I had always wanted to be a *real* woman,
so I thought: Maybe I should read this, but I

was distracted by "Sexy sessions that ended
in the emergency room," and I
wondered: How "sexy" could it be to
end up at a hospital? My eyes fell

upon "30 beauty boosters" and
"His secret pleasure points (touch *only*
if you want to drive him insane in the sack)," and I

questioned: What about *his* aesthetics and
my gratification?
Then I read, "I convinced my rapist not to kill me,"
noticed, "7 crucial things your gyno forgot to tell you,"
considered the emaciated cover girl with the Botox lips, and I
simply had to

buy a cat magazine
instead.

Red

Today everything is about
the Dark Woods and one wolf
or another. A woodsman who is
really a CPA. The voracious grandmother
with big teeth. A salacious red-hooded gal bouncing
a basket off her hips as she walks. The underbelly of Story
lumbers toward its inevitable resolution, the pen pulled along
by the gravity of history, a collective memory that expects
the sweetened bitter of ever after.

CHRIS BURLISON



Leaving La Juventud

Sitting on the edge of my bed, I listen to voices turning in my stomach. I know it is time. There is no light yet. Mamá will awaken soon to warm the tortillas, and I wonder when she will notice I am gone. Her sobbing will drown the voices of crowing roosters then. I cross myself and swallow hard.

I pull the folded papers from my coat pocket. The white school paper is still blank. I think: what to write? I hear my little brother reading to Mamá the words, but no words and too many words scramble in my mind, and I write nothing. I unfold the wrinkled map and trace the roads I will take—like a blind man who sees with his faith. I stop at the X—el pueblo de Libertad—where I will meet Alejandro and give to him the money I have saved for ten years. X is where I will no longer be called Carlos Casillas, firstborn son of María y Juan Carlos Casillas.

The streets are asleep, but dogs roam between mud houses with their tails tucked under. When I pass by Our Lady de Guadalupe, a gray dog runs from the courtyard and stops in front of me before fading into dark. This is a good sign. I cross myself.

When the sun comes, I am far. El Río Bravo trickles through brown silt. It is the river my father followed. I listen for him in the cottonwood trees, but hear only a pounding in my own chest. I wet the dust in my throat with juice from my orange, leaving a spotted trail of citrus skins behind me.

Later, the sky is streaks of pomegranate when I knock on the wooden door in the village. In the courtyard, there are other boys. Our eyes look down, memorizing the hard brown earth. The night full of crickets goes mute in an instant when Alejandro speaks. "Across the border, there are eyes in the dark," he says. "There are coyotes that run in packs to hunt you down. They can smell your Mexican blood, and they will devour you," he says. "You must outsmart them when they come." I remember the gray dog, and cross myself.

On the bus, it is full, and the men drink from glass bottles. One bottle falls in the aisle and shatters. I hear my mother crying when I was five. She watches me walking down the aisle of la iglesia, carrying baby Jesúcristo to the manger. I turn to look at her, and the blessed baby's head hits the wooden pew and rolls onto the floor. Father Miguel says it is a sign—the Holy One will always remember

me. The men sitting in front of me pass a bottle and laugh about the names they will call one another tomorrow. Walter, Charles, Fred. I think that I will be called Charles.

"HAI—EEEE!" "¡HAI-HAI-HAI!" the men yell.

"¡Cállanse!" the driver shouts. The bus accelerates and lurches to the right, slamming against a rock at the bottom of a ditch.

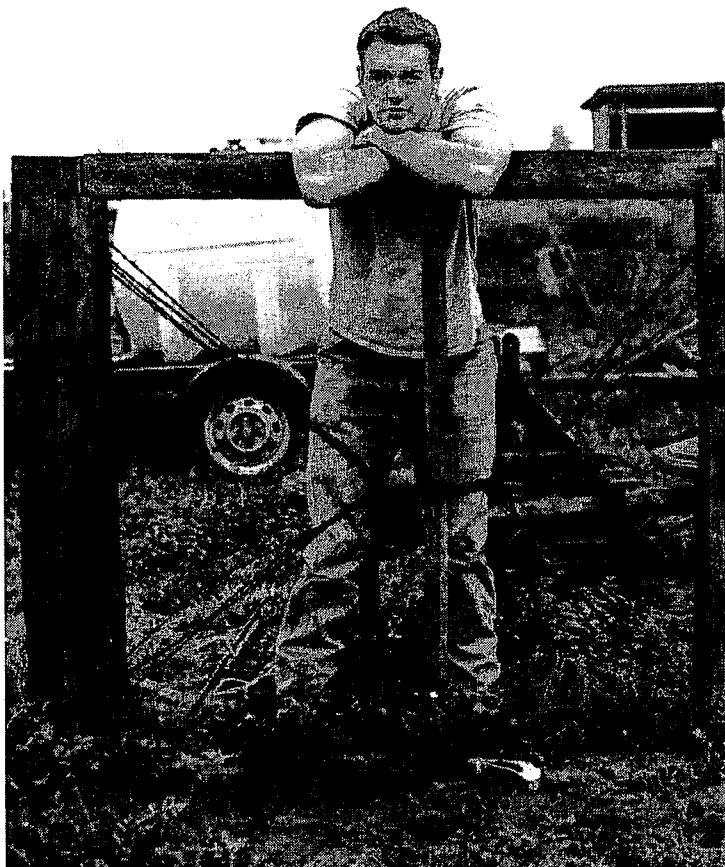
"¡Vamos! ¡Vamos!"

Bright lights block the door. Coyotes circle, aiming their guns. Men scramble out windows. As I reach the doorway, I see the gray one, and our brown eyes meet. I dive for the darkness beyond. My face hits the sand; boots kick at my sides. Mexican blood spurts from my nose, but I hold back my cries. I am in the valley where the shadow *más grande* looks for me. I will not be afraid.

The steel wall separating Tijuana from San Diego (the infamous *Tortilla Curtain*) is covered in white crosses representing those who have died trying to cross the United States border from Mexico. Some of the crosses bear the name "unknown" because the deceased individuals were never identified.

Hundreds of thousands of immigrants still attempt to cross, some by means of *coyotes* (professional smugglers) who compete for business and often collect fees only to beat, kill, rape, or desert these *pollos* (immigrants trying to cross).

JESSICA BROUWER



Alone

It is a cold Christmas Day, I
sit by the window, a wooden table at
Jack in the Box, prepare to
tackle dinner—substitute french
fries for mashed potatoes, three small
slices of bacon on hamburger
for smoked ham. I dip in honey one
more chicken bit—it still doesn't

taste like turkey—swig down Pepsi, a
basted memory of family yules.
My fingers slide button into buttonhole.
I watch dozens of buttoned-up cars
flit by on the black ground outside.
It is a cold Christmas Day.

Ceaseless Trigger Pull

You
The one with the fire in your eyes
Now hiding behind your light lines
And dots of color

You
Are not real anymore
You don't even exist
Except in square boxes I hold in my hands
Except in flashes of pictures I hold in my mind

You
The one with the electricity in your fingertips
The one with the mouth full of alphabet
And the perfect combination of the 26
You with the warm glow
And the touch
And the look
That took me to the clouds
Ever blissful and—

Now
It's storming.
Now it's

Him,
The person who betrayed.
Him,
The person who turned his back.
Him,
The person who has erased it all completely.

Him.
The force I cannot comprehend.
Him.
The one who isn't You anymore.

Now
My bed is the Atlantic Ocean.
Now
That street is the Grand Canyon.
Now
That phone number is a loaded gun.
Now
That thought (*That thought*
That this is all a nightmare.
A nightmare needed to be seen before the sun can rise.
And we realize it was just a bad dream.
And we are looking into each other's eyes again.
And we are in love.
And that love is the only thing that matters.
That love is the thing that will cure all the wounds.
That love binds us and embraces us,
And we are meant to be
And everything is just—
Bliss.) is the finger pulling the trigger.



ELLIOTT PARK

[As your body falls]

As your body falls
your hair glides
and plays
in such sudden,
new wind.

Your eyes,
they don't see
but one fast-approaching ground
of jagged rocks
and shattered shells.

Sea foam sheets
over your feet.
Feel it
if you are able.

But, my love,
take my word
as you take the world.
Believe me

the fall is shallow.
Only your hands
will sink into the sand.

Come sit with me
in the soft wash
of the ocean.
The tide won't last.

regret

is the blade beneath my tongue.
despite the great care i take,
my tact and slow deliberate decisions,

all i spit is harm,
all i taste are copper tears.

once i ingest so much blood
i grow very ill.

regret is all the bodies
i drag through empty streets
chained to my ankle,
milky and bloated,
sunken eyes,
liquid faces,
missing smiles.

i inhale their rot
and listen to the sounds
of my desperate heart,
and teeth scraping sidewalks.

Scar Tissue ...

used to hang on a rod at Sportmart with a price tag and a shiny tint.
had a snake-like texture of pure black leather with tan leather only in
the pocket.

cost me two hundred and ten dollars, but will one day belong to my child.
was beat to hell to get broken in, but showered with care to keep healthy.
is molded perfectly to my hand with
grooves and folds that snugly fit my five left fingers.

played shortstop and had crazy range up the middle and in the hole.
is small but can open enormously wide to vacuum baseballs
or to cover my face when signaling plays to second and third base.
gets stiff in the cold, loose in the heat.
has nine tally slashes to represent the high school double play count
between me and Greg.

Greg was my second baseman.

That was our thing.

has raw tips from laying and dragging in the dirt for seven years
and counting.
absorbs the impact and protects my palm from high velocities.
has teeth marks from my molars and incisors gnawing on the leather strips
between pitching changes and long innings.
has been angrily thrown in the dugout for not playing well,
graciously placed in its bag for playing brilliantly.
has been broken and restrung, broken and restrung, broken and restrung.

smells like festering sweat and stale mink oil.
doesn't receive the care that it used to two years ago.
now sits in boredom, collecting dust, waiting to be used.
may not be in its prime form, but those days will never be forgotten.

[Vibrating happily]

Vibrating happily,
The warm black cat
Sleeps on my lap.

Sunflower

Lone and steadfast sentinel,
watching the sun
dance across the graves. Each day,
longing for that same heaven
sought by those
whose graves it overlooks.

[Unexpected]

Unexpected
silence swells
to fill the empty halls
stifling breath
and stilling heart
'til laughter breaks
its spell.

They Photograph Their Dead in Mexico

When Olga's baby arrived
still pink and supple but no sound
neck limp and weighted
in her mother's arms,
They held her through morning
and the slow decline of afternoon
passing her from sister to grandmother
and cousins and aunts,
Each a whisper in tiny ears
speaking to her of beauty
her face open like the moon
damp with their tears, lips bluer
with the movement of the sun.

In photographs she is held by many
all eyes on la niña muerta.
Here we remember her smallness
and the quiet sound of her death.

DAVID D. FERGUSON



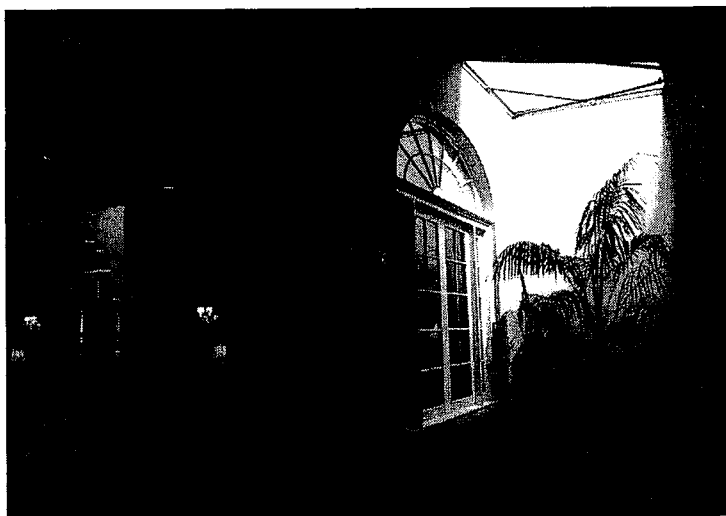
old growth

it's good that we cut
down the trees, you know

the old growth
was blocking our view

now we can see what the neighbors
are trying to do

DAVID D. FERGUSON



The Next Level

Parkinson's has drained his pocket via the pharmacy though not his spirit—he still has the big plans. So takes the pickup through its paces and finds it can't withstand the physics of a utility pole. CHP calls his wife and she arrives, not smiling. The cops want to take the vehicle too and put it wherever they'd stuck his license.

At two o'clock the next morning she climbs hard out of sleep and into the living room to ask what he's doing sitting there with the long gun instead of a saxophone between his lips. And he can talk well enough to say with some chagrin that he forgot where he put the bullets. "The shells," she says. "I hid 'em." He's not sure, nor is she, what he's gonna do for an encore.

The Second Time Around

One less day on earth
 24 hours
 doesn't sound that bad
 but then
 I think about
 Dinah Washington
 singing
what a difference a day makes
24 little hours
 and I realize it's
 the hours that count
 not the days
 the time it takes
 to take a walk
 on a 28-degree afternoon
 in Portland
 our breath taking form
 in the air
 the heat of
 our bodies
 dancing in the cold
 I've written this
 poem before
 on some other day
 at some other hour
 when the memory
 was less now
 than then
 but now it's
 more sweet
 I can see
 our gloved hands meeting,
 you fixing my scarf,
 my hat,
 buttoning my collar
 and our boots following
 the tracks of our dogs
 winter sun shining
 through our hearts

PHIL MORRIS



Suspicion

Life's Works

She's an artist.
 She paints a child.
 Pallet hues puddled blue, black, and gold.
 Chaste canvas open and barren.
 Gilded bristles daub golden beach
 Warm gritted satin saturates where white was
 Flooding to the edges.
 She slides the sea lackadaisically
 Brush stroked into shore and back again
 Massaging the sand
 A mirror of the azure above.
 Tall tower for lifeguards
 Slathered skyward like a jet-black ladder
 A beacon of safety,
 Iron-clad sanctuary,
 Impenetrable armor,
 Embrace of security.
 Her quivering hands quake out the straightest strokes
 The surest of shapes.
 Gold sand gleams with opportunity
 But
 Paint becomes defiant,
 Draws a dark din on the horizon.
 A storm storms the landscape,
 Her steady hand sketches chaotic swipes.
 Paint slashes and splatters
 Darkening blue spins and spins
 Tearing the gleam from the gold
 Blowing the beach to oblivion.
 She tightens her grip
 Once warm and tender hand growing callous,
 Pours persuasion through soft tip
 But the brush splinters under the strain.

Paint now pushing painter
A living work
The storm presses on
Tower in the eye
The only calm beneath it
Twisted turret like a rickety shelter
Wind warped, tested by the tempest,
Ascending steps,
Ravaged blurry,
Impossible
To follow.
But the gold sand still glitters beneath, guarded from the gales.
Without pause painter peruses progeny work pondering,
"Is this my creation?"

Weary hands tremble, but don't falter.
This is not a self-portrait.
Broken brush discarded,
Fingers rub dye into creviced canvas,
Tint takes root.
She is now soaked and stained,
Spent, slumped over in exhaustion.
Tower bent but not broken
Has weathered the weather,
Storm has shattered,
And gold still glistens on the ground
Below the black belfry.
She steps back
Draws air deeply
Her life's work
For better or worse.
A masterpiece in her mind's eye
Now stands on its own.

The Last Line

Saint Peter saw me about three months ago.
I had to use the bathroom, you see.
And I was driving
On the outskirts of town.
I stopped by the side of the road
And relieved myself on a cyclone fence.
Unfortunately, it was during a thunderstorm.
The tallest thing just happened to be the fence.

What? The clouds?

Don't worry about them.
In Heaven you don't need shoes.
Especially those leather numbers you got on.

Anyway, just as I got to Saint Peter,
I was brought back to life.
I woke up in a hospital.

My sex life wasn't the same.

This time?
You want to know about this time?
I was holding up a gun store in Washington,
It was an off day for me.
It's legal to have concealed weapons there,
So the regulars were packing.
There also happened to be some off-duty cops inside.
I hope Saint Pete overlooks that little incident.
I didn't actually steal anything.
How about you?
How did you get here?

Took a meteor on the head, huh?
I hope they don't have a height requirement.
You must be this tall to enter Heaven.
Oh, hey, you're up.
Good luck, Buddy.

Jeffrey Alfter

Jeffrey's publication credits include *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Black Rock & Sage*, *The Cape Rock*, *Concho River Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Santa Clara Review*, and *Watershed*. He is author of a chapbook of poems, *Strangers Within the Gate* (The Moon Publishing, 2005).

Don Ashby

Don was born in Fairbanks, Alaska, and raised in the small town of North Pole, Alaska. He no longer believes in Santa Claus. He is currently majoring in physics and chemistry at CSU, Chico. Writing poetry is his only flaw.

Jessica Browner

Two years ago, Jessica took a photography class and has been addicted ever since. She believes that everyone needs a way to express themselves, and photography is hers. "Because there is only one of you in all time, the expression is unique, and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium, and be lost" – Martha Graham.

Gary D. Brune

As a re-entry student, Gary is in his junior year at CSU, Chico. He published his first poem thirty-five years ago, and since then, almost thirty of his sonnets have seen print. In 1989, he won the Frederic C. Fallon Award for poetry at Chabot College and has penned other award-winning verses as well. Gary's hometown is Hayward, California.

Chris Burlison

A junior at CSU, Chico, Chris is working toward a BS in applied computer graphics with a minor in art. His focus is computer animation. Currently, he is taking courses in digital photography and intermediate art photography. He enjoys traditional photography and is excited to learn about digital.

Rob Burton

Rob teaches multicultural and postcolonial literature at CSU, Chico. Born and raised in England, he moved to the United States on a fellowship to Indiana University in the 1970s, where he wrote his PhD dissertation on contemporary transatlantic writing. He taught at the College of Charleston (South Carolina) before coming to CSU, Chico, in 1988.

Vanessa Ceccarelli

Vanessa is in her third year at CSU, Chico, studying English and theatre arts. She has been writing poetry for as long as she can remember and was published in *Watershed* once before. Originally from the Bay Area, she spends her free time performing at local theatres and drinking lattes in coffee shops.

Josh Cembellin

Josh was born and raised in San Jose, California, and is currently a junior at CSU, Chico. He is an English major, pursuing a minor in creative writing, along with a certificate in literary editing and publishing. He has had letters published in *Bills Digest* (the official publication of the Buffalo Bills) and is currently working on a movie script with a friend.

Kurtis Davidson

Kurt Ayau and David Rachels write as a team under the pen name Kurtis Davidson. Independently, they have been published in *The Villager*, *The Michiana Creative Arts Review*, *City Magazine*, *The Roanoke Review*, *Tamaqua*, *Sou'wester*, *Front Range Review*, *Descant*, *The William and Mary Review*, *Exquisite Corpse*, and *The American Drivel Review*. Their work as a team has appeared in *The North American Review*, *The Portland Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *Inkpot*, *The Yalobusha Review*, and *Backward City Review*. Their first novel, *What the Shadow Told Me*, won the Gold Medal for the Novel in the 2003 Pirate's Alley William Faulkner Creative Writing Competition, and is currently available from Eastern Washington University Press.

Sanford Dorbin

Sanford is a former academic librarian, and the first Charles Bukowski bibliographer (Black Sparrow Press, 1969). His work has been published in previous issues of *Watershed*.

David D. Ferguson

For 23 years, David has directed the Upward Bound Projects at CSU, Chico. These are U.S. Department of Education grants to prepare and motivate low-income, first-generation high school students for success in college. He says he is blessed with having the best job in the world. Before taking his current position, he was a high school writing and photography teacher. Traveling and backpacking are two of David's passions.

Bob Garner

Bob is a Chico performance artist. He does this really cool trick where he falls off his bike when a clown riding shotgun in a muscle car screams at the side of his head.

John Grey

John's latest book is *What Else Is There*, from Main Street Rag. He has recently been published in *Agni*, *Hubbub*, *South Carolina Review*, and *The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Mark Herrera

Mark was born in San Jose, California, where he also grew up before moving to Chico for college. He is in his third year at CSU, Chico, is studying to pursue a career in criminal justice, and works on campus as a custodian in the BMU. He plays Ultimate Frisbee, and his passions include running, sandwiches, and rock music.

Mallory Hills

Mallory is a senior, graduating in spring 2006, with a degree in art education—studio emphasis in photography. She began taking pictures at a young age and got involved with black and white photography at Notre Dame High School in San Jose. She currently has a piece of color photography on exhibit in the CSU Chancellor's Gallery in Long Beach, California.

Lynn Marie Houston

Lynn spent the last three years in the greater New Orleans area of Louisiana, and moved to Chico in August 2005, to take a position as assistant professor in the English Department at CSU, Chico. She teaches courses in American literature and culture, and her research interests involve the study of food and literature.

Suzan Jantz

Suzan will graduate from CSU, Chico, in spring 2006, with a major in English, a creative writing minor, and a certificate in literary editing and publishing. Her work has appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Suisun Valley Review*, *The Rectangle*, *The Studium*, and *Watershed*. She especially thanks Professors Jeanne E. Clark, Rob Davidson, and Carole Simmons Oles for opening doors; also, Elizabyth Hiscox for the start; and many creative writing classmates and friends for invaluable support. Suzan says, "See you at Whiskeytown."

Bill Kelvin

Bill has been writing creatively since grade school. His poetry has appeared in *Wild Humboldt Quarterly* and a "Poets Against the War" compilation. He is a former *Chico Enterprise-Record* reporter, and is currently a CSU, Chico, graduate student in communication studies. He is looking to pursue a career in freelance journalism and screenwriting.

Kathleen Kirby

Kathleen lives in south Chico near the railroad with her two animal companions, Coal Miner and Dexter. She grows grapes, tomatoes, and roses; enjoys old movies and the Argentine Tango; and counts Rush Limbaugh among the great minds of the twentieth century.

M. Jay Livingston

After his education at The High School of Music and Art, and Kenyon College as an English major, Jay worked as a writer/director for CBS Television in Los Angeles, McCann Erickson in San Francisco, and Eastman Kodak in Rochester. He has published two novels: his first, *The Prodigy*, was published by Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, and his second, *The Synapse Function*, was published by Signet (NAL). A third, *The Dolphin Crucible*, is currently under submission. Two of his short stories, "And Whose Little Baby Are You?" and "How Does Your Garden Grow," were published in the spring 2005 issue of *Watershed*.

Shaun McClusky

Shaun is a geology major with a passion for bad movies, and hopes to one day mesh these two interests into the world's worst rock video.

Phil Morris

Phil was born in Palo Alto, California, in the fabulous '50s. He is a returning student, seeking the degree that eluded him for all these years.

Héctor Nájera

Héctor Nájera was born in Oaxaca, Mexico, on November 19, 1987. He lived there until his father's death. When he was seven he moved to Puebla and later to the United States. Héctor was in English-learning programs from fifth to seventh grades. He was placed in mainstream classes during eighth grade. He is now a first-year history major at CSU, Chico, and intends to teach.

Elliott Park

Elliott is an English major at CSU, Chico. He is currently learning Japanese and intends to go to Japan after he graduates in order to see what's going on.

RENGA - Erik Armstrong, Heather Fisher, Mark Haunschild, Nathaniel Millard, Sarah Pape

The writers live, teach, and write—often together—in Chico, California.

Jeremy Rich

Jeremy grew up in the Chico area and graduated with a BA in English education from CSU, Chico. He then spent three years teaching English abroad in South Korea, the Czech Republic, and Mexico. He is now back at Chico State and enrolled in the teaching credential program. He says he enjoys writing, reading, playing music, and sports.

Marilyn Ringer

This year, Marilyn's poem "Island Cemetery" was selected for publication in *The Art of Monhegan Island*, edited by Carl Little and published by Down East Press. Several of her poems have been chosen as monthly selections on the Poet's Cove website. Her poem "River" is featured in "Chico Poets, a Calendar for 2005," by Bear Star Press. She says her friends have started to accuse her of being a "bi-regional" poet, but she thinks she just needs to travel more. Marilyn considers herself lucky to be able to live and work in two such beautiful places.

Shannon Rooney

Shannon graduated from CSU, Chico, in 2003, with an MA in interdisciplinary studies in English and education. She thinks John Tarrant pretty well sums things up when he writes, "If you are happy right now, then you're in love with the world—and that's enlightenment. When we stop making this moment 'wrong,' then, that's enlightenment."

Alex Jay Schneider

Known to his friends and family as Alex Jay, he was born in Anchorage, Alaska, and shortly thereafter moved to Fort Bragg, California, where he grew up. He has been attending CSU, Chico, for three years and is looking forward to graduating

with a degree in graphic design. Always interested in drawing, he is excited to be pushing his art to new levels in photo and computer-aided design.

Ernst Schoen-René

Ernst is completing a 35-year teaching career at CSU, Chico.

Linda Serrato

Linda lives in Chico with her daughter, Adele, and their two dogs. She is a CSU, Chico, alumna and is now teaching third grade at Rosedale Elementary School. She says that in her spare time, she tries to figure out how to have more spare time.

Neal Soldofsky

Neal is ... right behind you!

J.F. Spillane

J.F. is currently a student in the English education program at CSU, Chico. Her only prior publishing experience was in her fifth grade Christmas newsletter, and unfortunately, with no remaining copies, her early work is lost to posterity. She divides her time between doing schoolwork and watching Home and Garden Television with an eye toward redecorating the world. "After all," she says, "a stylish world is a peaceful world."

Mary Wurlitzer

Mary is a senior in the art department, focusing in art studio with a split in photography and glass. She has been in the Chico area with her husband for over twenty years, but she grew up in the Red Bluff area. Her parents moved there from New York, which is where she was born. With the help of two chocolate poodles, "kids," Mary and her husband have enjoyed kayaking the Northern California waters, hiking the Sierras, and visiting the Pacific Ocean. Travel and snow skiing also work into her enjoyment of life.

CSU, Chico, literary magazine