

HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

Issue #74

Spring 2013



THE HIRAM POETRY REVIEW

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Issue No. 74

Spring 2013

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Cover Photo: "Reading with the Stomach" from the book entitled *Aus überfinnllicher Sphäre (From the extrasensory sphere)* published in 1921 by G.W. Gesmann. "Reading with the stomach" has no specific photo credit, but "probably dates back to late Victorian times."

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EDITOR'S NOTE

At the *Hiram Poetry Review* we are joyfully old school in our submission process. We like the slush pile. Three readers, not including myself, read each submission. Thus each batch of poems gets a thorough vetting. This editorial mode helps us stay true to the HPR's mission: to discover the best unknown poets in America.

As always, I am grateful for my talented and diligent readers who help identify witty, distinctive and heroic poetry. Issue #74 proves that poetry is alive and well in America (and in Mexico). Please see ex-pat Stephen Brown's virtuosic avant-garde piece, "Mexico City Pyschogeography." For those interested in the nostalgic power of muscle cars, check out Susan Wedmore's poem, "Barracuda: An Ode." If you prefer un-hinged power in a rather raw state, brace yourself for Edward Bynum's "A Glimpse of the Old Religion."

Thanks for reading.

Willard Greenwood
Editor, HPR

Barbara Tramonte

LA VIDA

Living with midriff bulge?
Eating hamburgers
or sodden pizza crusts?
Lying on paper lined
leatherettes
at the doctor's office?

How many people
stuck their finger up your vagina?

Make deadlines
rush home
tend children.

All digits on keys
pecking like dirty pigeons to
tell the story of Aunt Ida,
my cousin Mimi, my first reptilian pet
from the Berkshires.
(She shriveled in a bucket.)

I may never stop these stories
spread by a lizard's tongue
to locate
how the wind blows
or when to varnish
the loom.

Daniel Morris

SHALL I AGREE TO FORGIVE MY INNER WARREN ZEVON?

If I *do* decide to forgive, I promise never again
To shut the door on him, even as he mopes like
The emotionally-stunted 17-year old boyish man he'll
Always be, at least for me. Clean the basement, command
Brothers in Recovery. Survivors Sit. Wait. Watch Shame

Transform to Grace, Eros to Agape.

When I built
Beneath the ground for mate in putting others
Through their changes, "Like a Waring Blender,"
My carpentry was seriously flawed. Sure,
I'd built foundations with back doors, which
Locked, but I'd "accidentally" left frames down
To tempt a peek at storms from time to time.
I'd wave with longing at his lovely whip and screw,
My heart's desires, too.

After thorough renovation,
I now quite easily can see my inner Warren
Through a window with a safety lock. It opens,
But also shuts at my discretion. Why look, he's staring
Back at me. Tenderly? Hell no! Resentfully! See him there,
A Translucent Werewolf. Unwilling, as on the bloody cover
Of *Excitable Boy*, to adjust his specks to absorb
The antiseptic light of Truth. Obsessed, he wrings hands
With antiseptic soap 7 times per hour, folds and unfolds
Starved gray Calvin Klein tees, searches for a long lost
Quarter to rinse out stains in the unit with the lucky number.

Poor poor pitiful he still can't believe it's death
To hide in the past, even though I plead it's best
To come out with me. O Warren, how exhausting
Running from your life can be. But no.

Warren continues to romanticize
The night he stuck between floors in Hollywood's Hawaiian
Hilton elevator with the chick he termed The Porny Neighbor.
And how she said, "Warren, what do we do?"
And how he said, "How do I know, look at me, I am
Freaking out just like you!!!" And how he became
Silent and rolled up in a ball, and the elevator
Began to move again.

“You did that,” she is saying.
“What a guy! What a God!” Sadly, (in the language of Recovery)
Warren Zevon, MY Warren Zevon cannot follow the program’s
Simple Advice. He’s too in love with memory.
Such power! You, who was overpowered,
Rather than overcome, by the desire to speak when no one spoke to you.
You, who never realized the cause of suffering was hope.
You, who thought he was messiah because he made others ripe for pity.
You, who changed basically decent weaker chumps
Like me, (see you Got me playing blame games again)
An accomplice to the pleasure you found in poisoning others
By poisoning us. Why couldn’t you have been more like
‘Trane when he jumped with Monk in ’57 after Miles fired him for junk?
When he had his spiritual transformation before liver cancer got him in
the end?
Huh Warren, huh? Why couldn’t you have been more about awakening?
Look at me. Still stuffy with resentments, at who? O Warren, you dog,
Always getting what you wanted out of my life in the end.

Stephen Brown

8. TIANGUIS EL CHOPO

1. a broke redneon rheostat in the beerhall barsign

pages turning pages in the sidedoor crossdraft, a tall thin mulatto girl in bellbot-toms walkingby lookingover her shoulder said to me thru her hair, pinche gringo, then bellied up to the wood & bitch'd

out the bartender for ten-minutes. one thing, then the next, but so that it all seems so seamless, so obvious & so seethru: time & place get repurposed w/ time, & the commonplace becomes pointless.

believing i am myself when i am not is not believing in but sticking to the thing that follows the next. the raised dust champagne's in the shuttered air. it's always 1thing, then the next, & there's no exit.

as a ray of raiseddust champagne's in the shutteredair one thing, & then the next, and there's no exit

2. the revolution repurposed & the specious present

one thing, & then the next, and there's no exit then outside alongside, & in. maderoom for soup kitchen down-the-block waitingline by waitingin line at a spot repurposed as a placename metrostation.

barred doorframes w/ fly-pocked boarded windows & stormwater overflow asphalt plum on a painted concrete &

One thing, then the next, but so that it all seems so seamless, so obvious and so seethru; down and outside it at the bar London Beer hall with a lit ray of raised dust rushingin on in-between the ygriega slingshot peacesign of streettree tree-limbs, and the dust and the lightshafts they champagne in the shuttered air, cometail, then detourn: like solar bottles in a cardboard basement.

Then outside alongside, and in: maderoom for the blind-man caning my shinblade, the warm amniotic fluid in the staircase stairwell that slushed my converse lowcuts, you do well what you do often, walking here half cut on eggshells and cornhusks, an absurd theatre of alternating bricabrac being resold inside tarped abdominal walls that wall you in-with no exit, maruchan downstairs on credit.

And there's no exit, and the scene inout in front was, desconsaldo, and the somewhat topless girl stirred the pigskin with a certain withlessness, her sharp dark eyes

4. playingchess on a huacal in a squattor's oneroom

where what's preserved gets repurposed, or rigged; seeing a penrose tribar in rustedout & unfinished building rebar walking by it, down along the street then beside it, down outside alongside makingroom

cigarettesmoke souring on yellowed curtains inlight as a ray of raiseddust champagne's in the shutteredair down the street & then alongside it, reiterating it at a spot repurposed as a placename metrostation.

a mulatto darkgirl on a blue pawnshop tenspeed w/ a yellowbandana in her backpocket urolagnia, & w/ a certain pornographic hauteur, looking-over her shoulder said to me thru her hair: pinche fuck,

dicelo a tu mama cabron no se te para el pito! en tepito, playingchess outside a squattor's 1-room

5. at a soupkitchen block waitingline watiing-in-line

standingthere filmmaking in the neardeath clearlight waiting-in-line doingtime, shelling pistachio's, my fingertips mouthed then a roach to dry bloodbrown like cockroach shells bellyup on boarded manholes

standingthere suspended, blues-ludge of sky slowing in spots of sluiced terracotta where the sun stopped in midbreath as if being glassblown, in buildingglass

asphalt curb yellowed w/
oakleaves at a spot repurposed
as a placename metrostation.

& **there's no exit, & the scene**
in out in front **was**, descon-
saldo, & **there** were tits all
over that building in billboard
totaltheatre, which b came
a placename in the justpast
where the revolution was re-
purposed

just as revelation was once in
icon totaltheatre at a soup-
kitchen block waitingline
watiing in line

3. hijacking paddleboats w/
waterpistol pricing-guns

alcohol & optimism on hot
dark prairie nights inside **the**
bubble, in a pair of brogues i
was told, **here & there as an**
exit, carrying it for cases of
homesick, or as a justpast that
seems so seamlessly half**present**

if i could necker the scene the
scene would slip the oldman
caning my shinblade would
be a scene seen overagain in a
hysteresis lag, **lagging** behind
what i see now **will** be **repur-**
posed w/ placenames

girls in palmfrond grass-skirts
in the flow reenact billboard
scenes so that it all seems so
themesong totaltheatre, as
hackers hijack jacaranda it's
always **one thing, & then the**
next, and there's no exit

alcohol & optimism on hot
dark prairie nights inside **the**
bubble, at the crossroads; i am
a **crossroads**

threw eye lights at a noobject
noone could name, and under
the elm in a baquet strung with
tinsel two women transmitted
thought to punch cards, **beside**
stacked pallets, and the **bill-**
board 1800 number dialed out
to nowhere.

And my name it came here by
boat, and your name it was on
a different one, and the walk
under bridges is uterine and
homesick, with no exit, **inside**
the/yr bubble, which is done in
the shape of a boat but a boat
you cannot board, and you
have no papers nor piecharts
to solve it, the word boat, and
where you last boarded one,
nor to which why playing the
acoustic hasn't saved us, nor
these grasslands

And I will have such a busy
day, such a long go of it this
one, installing dimmer switch-
es on streetlights, scrambling
radiosignals, switching bus
route maps and timetables,
hijacking paddleboats with
water pistols, rewriting **statue**
inscriptions with sex **crimes**
hatecrimes, re-negotiating
nonnegotiables w/ **hashoiled**
hotknives butter knives sew-
ingpins, remembering a now

now happening.

then reappearing bloodbrown
in the sky like a scab.

& **i will have such a busy day**,
such a long go of it **this** one,
installing dimmerswitches on
streetlights, scrambling radio-
signals, **switching** busroute
maps & timetables, remember-
ing a **now now** happening

& how **i now** feel i will have felt
then, waiting-in-line beside a
fucked streetdog w/ a **dilating**
asshole " " " ?

6. **from here to there and from**
now to nowhere

the tensions & contentions you
tend to try & transcend stand-
ingthere waiting-in-line & do-
ingtime on closed **circuit** w/ a
sort of savant autism in head-
phone totaltheatre reorders
the order in the things you

thought you knew, on a park-
bench on churchgrounds in a
justpast that seems so seamles-
sly half**present** where **the things**
you saw you see again thinking
debuilding on a plonk arm-
chair in rushhour traffic

one thing, & then the next, and
there's no exit even though the
origins of the order have ended
the things you said you saw
you'll see **overagain** when the
order's reordered in newspaper
totaltheatre

standingthere suspended, **at**
the crossroads from here to
there and from now to no-
where

Bill Edmonson

STEELHEAD JOE

--ON THE KLAMATH RIVER

Late October
After the first hard rain
Colors the river
Chinook begin their run from the Pacific
Shadowed by steelhead keen as those
Who shadowed settlers' wagon trains
Up under a bridge guarded by four stone grizzlies
Around a couple of bends to where you waited:
A dozen or so men and a twelve-year old boy
Working the green riffle
Through an early steam of mist

He appeared later alone on the opposite side
Slight stooped leathered as sourdough
Motions mosey and strange:
His fly rod held no reel
The only one you'd ever see
Strapped to the waist by a leather belt
So after a cast—whisper of line
Fine as a strand of spider web
—he seemed to wind *himself* up
And the steelhead? Wild under there
To volunteer he played each lovingly and long
All brilliant leaps and dashes
Until exhausted it glided white-bellied in
Dipping his basined hands he made a cradle
Gave time to let it right itself and slip away

From your bank: spinners salmon eggs
Ferocious orange flatfish with its treble-treble hooks
Craftsmen proud to take home meat
To fry or bake in onion and mayonnaise

Something in that morning has graveled you for years
Seeing him there his grace and sweat-
stained hat stopped your hands
Though part of you crossed over on that day
You knew you'd never be Steelhead Joe
Knew whatever you'd finally do
Would be out of hunger

Jesse DeLong

THE SUN IS A BLISTER ON THE SKY

Let us see what this feels like, this blind point of hunger.
At the center is a cold, original pleasure.
Bird and I, tourists of June, toting oversized umbrellas
to see what it feels like. This blind point. Hunger
is simply to nub bone-near in flesh, but feel younger
than the one you run shadowed in the sun beside. Bird
measuring what the blind point feels like. Let's hunger
originally. Cold in the sun—the center of pleasure.

Jesse DeLong

ALGAE DRIPPING FROM HIS HAT, FACE SOAKED TO
HIDE THAT HE HAD BEEN CRYING, THE ADMIRAL
PULLS SEVERAL PIECES OF FOLDED-UP PAPER FROM
THE BREAST POCKET OF HIS SHIRT. HE LAYS THEM
OUT, AS IF MAPS TO A PLACE HE COULD NEVER
EMOTIONALLY AFFORD TO TRAVEL, NEAR THE
HEATER.

I have not forgotten the mazepine or the pressed violets.
The garden in Bessemer where he strolled into the lake fully clothed.
The Admiral, waking with minnows in his beard, wrote triolets
I have not forgotten. The mazepine, he said, at the present, violates
what's defined in this light. The window where a hummingbird pilots,
he hid the curtains over. His shirt from the night before had begun to
mold.
I have not forgotten, he said, voice wet gunpowder, the present, violent
as it is.
Bird had removed all the rocks. Fully clothed, into the lake, again, he
strolled.

Peter Imsdahl

NEIGHBOR GIRL

This morning nothing happened that doesn't usually.
I had put some of my children on the bus,
when I heard the cries from next door.
I still had milk on the burner, but her whacking drew me.
Turns out, this was the morning chosen
for the slaughtering of her geese.
So, as I peered over the blackberry grove,
she chased them round the pen.
Catching one, she rapped him with a stumpy baseball bat,
struck hard enough to still the flapping, the complaining.
Then sliced open a throbbing neck vein,
let run all the morning's sanguine plans.
A warm streaming of good port from a white wine skin.

Time conscious, she snapped the neck, then laid him
in a wheelbarrow with the others, draping his head
over the edge, which gave him a last look
at a day never quite so upside down as just now.

Some, some continued to run, or at least thought so.
but mostly there were no heroics. None presumed
to be Zeus. Though, as she held them
between her strong thighs before knocking them senseless,
who's to say a little freedom of thought would have hurt?

Later, she carted their bodies back to the house,
their dripping heads swinging heavy, back and forth,
from the lip of the wheelbarrow that was not glazed
and that asked only to be filled with the flesh
we had waited all summer for.

John Edward Keough

SO RUDE THE FLOWERS THAT GROW AND DO NOT GROW BEAUTIFUL

She said she was a wallflower in high school, and I understand
because much hasn't changed.

It's two o'clock in the morning, the bartenders are getting
antsy, and a bit short.

Her friend, much easier on the eyes, is on the floor of the
bathroom with a biker way, way past his prime.

I am old again.

She is all that's left and it's about my time.

I make a show to find my keys and ask her if she needs
a ride home.

One glance at the bathroom, and back to me.

The shade of flower that she was blooms in the night.

I'm only embarrassed in public and happy in the early light.

I am free again.

She said she was a wildflower in college, and I understand
because much hasn't changed.

Edward Bruce Bynum

A GLIMPSE OF THE OLD RELIGION

I won't drink too much wine today,
It opens rivers in me flowing down
Into the center of the earth. I have been there before.
There are rock statues, carvings, mythical beasts
Who once lived in my grandfather's dreams, dreams he inherited
From guardians stretching back centuries, before slavery,
The pyramids still on the architect's table.
That summer when the oceans received their seven names
The oldest of the old took a walk by mountains boarding the desert.
He had seen the meteors coming, knew
Another race was emerging. He called the poets together.
He asked the star charters and the riders of dark beasts to
Assemble under the midnight sky.
Standing before them he did not edit his soul.
He told them of the new race coming, of the ones still living
Like small embryos in the stomach of the wind
Who would sweep up the escarpment,
Eat the secret wisdom in the book of relics.
Therefore it needed to go underground, below the tortoise,
Below the snake, below the long necked swans
Dipping beneath the dark waters, the dark mirrors where the flowing spice
Lives within the innermost caverns of the skull.
The book would be dissembled, rewritten in blood, then put
Into small canals, into dark extensions on the cave walls
Where the inward sea curves
In saline ambitions
Holding the stars and constellations in the same vibratory arc.
Here it would be safe. Here no one could touch it
Whose hands had not been washed in selflessness and beauty.
When the ocean of men was full of light,
When the secret fire of women flowed in even the most primitive heart,
Then the oral radiance of the fathomless ones would break forth again.
Everyone agreed. Even the dead marked their approval,
Restraining the howl of the terrified dogs.
From time to time a wanderer would be sent out
To see if the air, the scent of jasmine, was strong enough to hold
The arms, the sexual rain of this new race. The birds would know.
The fish and the higher mammals would be aware
A different virility had moved up the land, mastered the air,
Assumed position in the animal thigh, the progression toward light.
The feral cats would be angry.
Those who died cold and alone would be angry.

Lyn Lifshin

MY MOTHER AND I WERE

the closest, but we
had the most violent
fights: clawing and
screaming down the long
dark hall with peeling
Chinese red figures,
I hit her in the car. No
man's ever slapped
me, my father never
lifted a belt but my
mother and I hurled
fists and words at each
other. Last week Esther
said you mean you
really said fuck off to
your mother in public?
In the apartment the
doors were dark and
thick when they slammed.
I told her things I
knew she'd hate: about
the night in the motel
when it almost happened
and how I sneaked out
of the sorority house.
She called me slut
all the way up rt 7,
told my uncles not to
give me a car. I
sharpened my claws on
her until they were
too sharp to use. Each
time we leave each other
it hurts, but before that
there's the broken nails,
the things we can't say
to anybody else

Arthur D. Mathews, Jr.

IF I HAD NEVER BEEN BORN

I often wonder, if I had never been born,
What would happen? Also what would
Life be like? I would have not even a care,
And of these worlds I'd be totally unaware.
I would not know of love.
My life would be complete.
I would not have to worry about getting any
Sleep, or what to eat,
But had I never been born I'd know
Nothing, I wouldn't have feelings nor
With anyone would I have dealings.
I wouldn't know of the suns or moons
Nor would I know morning from noon
But had I never been born
I'd know nothing about nothing
But that is all well and okay
Because had I never, ever been born
Then it really wouldn't matter
Anyway no date.

Arthur D. Mathews, Jr.

SKY OVERHEAD

The sky does not, will not end
Stars that shine bright in the night
We cannot touch ever
A sky overhead need be...
 Free to always be sky, no why?
Henceforth and furthermore more sky
The sky was long before you or i
 Overhead never dead
Truth be said sky overhead is never dead
 Anytime's sky time
Endless more so than thoughts of
Mankind sky
Eyes see it all
 Never once to fall
It's no lie no why?
 Overhead is always sky.

Arthur D. Mathews Jr.

SKY SAID MORE SKY

Be, we alive or be we dead
 The sky remains as it always is...
 Overhead, spread far and wide
Although many have died and many
More will die, dreams to the sky will
Never die,
The sky is never shy to be the sky,
Underneath the infinite endless sky,
Many dreams materialize,
 Thoughts can occur at any size.
Realize at any size,
 There will certainly be much
 Sky overhead
 Be we alive or be, we, dead,
Truer words could not be said.

Michael B. McMahon

HARRY TRUMAN

*One defiant old-timer, Harry Truman, 83, said he would stick it out.
... Time Magazine, April 7, 1980*

Anchor stowed, we drift a current that chucks
the ribs of our boat. Running lights, red and
green, writhe on night water like neon snakes,
semaphores on a mountain lake that rile
a beaver smacking the dark with his tail.
Fly rod in hand, I've squandered twilight fixed
on the stump of St. Helens, on scabbed remains
of a blasted roof soiled with gauze of old snow.

Earth hissed and forests fell like scythed grain,
a jet stream gagged on molten ash
and a grizzled loner named Truman opted
for early cremation. What were your thoughts,
old man, as you tossed in your bunk of tremors,
feeling earth heave, magma shifting under
your bones after a million years?
What was it like when your well water boiled,
firs vented gas that stunk of rotten eggs?
When mortar cracked, jammed your windows,
did table crumbs dance? You must have known
life without that summit would never be
the same with hoards of pilgrims wending by
your cabin, bumper-to-bumper, gaping
at the caldera through coin-slot skulls, parking
in lots replanted with meters. Rooted
to the still point they called ground zero, you
stubbornly chose to remain, and you do.

Howard Winn

ALASKAN POET
(FOUND IN AN OBIT)

He knew
more
about his
sled dogs
than he
did
about any
of his
five wives.

Christopher Lee Miles

FOR MANLEY

Last time I saw you, you had no legs.
Gangrene and grit at the knees, father spit.
Your brown head hairless, a smooth chicken egg
Speckled with islands. Your eyes, two smudge-spots.

Nurse wheeled you in a torn-open cloth-box
From the toilet to the mattress. To the grave
In Iowa, where I stood in rain-soaked socks
Under a green tent, wasps in the dense hive

Of my head. Earth opened its mouth, a hanged
Tongue on taut-steel cables was leavened in
Like bread. I followed father's instructions

To be respectful and keep my head down.
When it came time to hold your brother's hand
The roof was gone. I couldn't lift it up.

Judith Saunders

SPRING PROCESSIONAL

Past winding rows of condominiums
two women walk in June's fresh light,
gait deliberate, posture almost ceremonial,
hands supporting streaks of vivid green
embellishing their chests, living regalia:
iguanas clinging to shirts and shoulders,
all scales and spines and dignity.

The patient passengers hang their talks
straight down in the sun, black-striped
thermometers testing its warmth,
on this slow, easy ride to solstice.

Carrie Shipers

THE NOTION OF DOG

I worry about my dignity and Dog says *yes*
to licking paws and penis, scratching an itch
because he can, *yes* to peeing on piles of leaves,
the neighbors' tomato plants, sidewalk
when it snows. I worry about my weight
and Dog says *yes* to food he finds
in the grass, pizza crusts and chicken wings,
donuts with one bite gone. I worry
about causing scenes and Dog says *yes*
to sniffing strangers' feet, barking at dogs
he doesn't know, tugging his leash
toward what he needs to see. I worry
about working hard enough and Dog
says *yes* to chasing birds he'll never catch,
yes to napping in the afternoon, herding me
toward bed because he's tired. Because Dog
says *yes* he brings me grace, a world
where abundance is expected and received.

Elias Simpson

nothing to do

perhaps the birds have eaten all the peas
so I go and look. sure enough: 20 foot bird
devouring the backyard. I opt
to go save coffee from the stove,
remember playing chess in college,
always losing. like all men I claim, how
one lives matters most. the bird munches
house, baby and all. I know I should have tried
tying its legs together. Hemingway
always died. surely I, too, have to suffer.

when I realize no thing happening
the faucet squirts from its head.
startled, I check the peas again:
20 feet tall and devouring the backyard.
I clutch my bat and strike the stalks.
I think, I am in love, and stop.
the peas nibble on a bird nest.
unlike women I believe if you want something
done right avoid doing it yourself
at all costs. my face is covered
in rosy sweat and vine juice.
with no backyard I sleep
medium. there is only one way to die:
slowly, down the stairs into oblivion,
more desperate with every board to live.

Will Wells

SMASHING GLASS IN HOBO-TOWN, JULY 1963

In weeds between the river and the tracks
a row of shanties straggled parallel,
contrived from boxes and dismembered crates.
Companies of passed-out bums lay sprawled,
clutching their guts like the dead at Gettysburg.

Craig's brother, all of twelve, gave the command
and led a charge of ten-year olds. We snatched
the empty flasks that glinted full of dawn
and flung them like grenades, exploding dreams,
the salvaged last reprieves from boxcar straw.

Reluctant warrior, I hung back to watch
those crumpled forms reanimate, roused
from stupor to resume their truncheoned lives,
one more indignity that riled them
into action. We ran; they stumbled after.

One came close to catching me, his blasted
stare supplying nightmare's standard issue.
Thus I surrendered sleep for spoiling his,
my shoulder throbbing where he almost grabbed,
my face red-badged with panic's powder burns.

Some wounds don't heal, and civil wars go on.
When Craig shipped home from Nam, addicted,
his brother was the cop who made the bust.
The fall of empires and the faults of men
are chronicled by gleaming shards of glass.

Spencer Smith

WRINKLE IN A BEDSHEET

This small wave locked in
incipient beach crash,
aspiring to tsunamidom

amid cotton currents,
presses a curved pathway
across slumbering skin,

a fresh furrow
disturbing earthly flesh and
raising ragged wyvern tingles

wing-brushing over meadows
of hairgrass and pale moonpores,
a soundless howl

quaking awake kneehills and
hiphollows well before
dawnlight spills into view.

Brady Rhoades

1968

with thanks to Buddy Wakefield...

The folks return from drinking blinkers and red hooks at Gold Dust Lounge in Union Square. Mother wears a nipped-waist skirt and cat's-eye glasses, dad's in a skinny tie and square-toed loafers, their colleagues, vitiating Nixon, pour from decanters and at five I get the urge for change but forty four years later they know better, I know better, we don't talk politics, war, social shifts ... it's about oxygen tanks and low-sodium diets because those pickled revolutionaries and their son, who's just trying to get by, sense after decades of upheaval, election let-downs and personal loss we're coping with what Teddy Roosevelt observed in his day: "There are certain hideous sights which once seen can never be erased from the mental retina" and I wish a Steinem-esque woman or one of those men who could win a war and also fix the Ford would walk in but instead I declare "Forgiveness is the release of all hope for a better past," "Onward" mother says, father nods, we all half-believe and it's just enough.

Ann Robinson

COUNTING HOOPS

The boy across the street plays
basketball at midnight.
Through the hooped moon
the ball rises, dips
into the net.

Such a small boy,
such a tightfisted moon.
His father dying
in a wheelchair by the window.

His mother asleep on the couch,
the TV light bluing the window.

The boy racks up points.
I will not yell out my window;
three months of this incessant pounding,
my fingers trembling
around coffee cups.
I've begun to memorize patterns,
hating sounds that dip
and dribble; I sleep to the pulse
of his scores and misses.

This morning a vast absence
of sound, the lights all off, cars gone.
In the brief seconds after dreams,
when I didn't know where I was,
I knew a difference.

Julie Marie Wade

MR. CLEAN

Middle age lumbers on—a big yellow dog—
haggard nafs;
mirage of the Fortune Five Hundred

Late night lifting at the 24-Hour Fitness Club:
*I see a man, strapping,
Paul Bunyan resurrected
with a dark cheek & a streak of
sweat tracing the line of bilateral symmetry
down his body
solar plexus personified*

What we don't tell our mothers...

About the L.A. Connection and the last “nice girl”
who was your lover's second cousin
twice removed

*I never stay long at parties unless
a producer's around, a couple porn flicks in
my younger days before steroids bought
stamina & fucking turned
futile again*

So when the job & it's not your dream but so what?
You're a homo from Ohio—not Vin Diesel
(not bad either)

At least it'll keep you in currency till the next “big break” breaks over
your head & the Joe Montana dreams resurface

Touchdown! Touchdown! just waiting for someone to score

How you always want to touch him when you're down...

Now the barber shaves your head
clean again, *no more peach fuzz* & smiles beside your naked scalp

[Flex.] [Flush.] [Flex.] [Flush.]

Fuck the Brawny paper towel man they think is so robust!

With any luck, you'll meet a nice suburban wife—sweet talk & small:

“What? No girlfriend waiting in the wings?”

Shake your head, sigh; decide (this once) to let her buy you dinner.

Suellen Wedmore

BARRACUDA: AN ODE

to a car, that is. Not the fish
with the fang-like teeth, but
to a brittle-topped '68 Plymouth
convertible, its once Kelley blue
enameled body now the color
of a mud-stirred pond,
its roof cracked & peeled
as a century-old painting.
You can see it in my barn now:
dusty, greasy, rusty—or is that
my youth hunkered there
like a hibernating bear?
Every now and then I lift the door,
sneak in, & run my hands across
the pitted hood. A new valve job,
a set of tires, & a coat of paint
& it could be humming again,
and I, 18 years old and free,
cruising the streets, top down,
friends waving as I park
in front of the local hangout
& saunter up to the marble counter
with stools the right height & spin,
& I'm greeted with admiring grins
while the car glimmers outside.
Touch it now. Can you sense
that other life beneath the hood?
Days without budgets, contracts,
& child care, when doctors
were visited only for affirmation
(of course you're fit enough
to cartwheel onto the cheering squad,
to jump hurdles, to swing a bat &
boot a ball out of the field).
Some car! If I could rev the
383 Super Commando engine now,
you would hear it: immortality
one tank of gas away.

Richard Kostelanetz

EXCERPTS FROM WHY POEMS

an Y one

e Y e

ichth Y osaurus

pa Y da Y

wa Y ward

Mark Wisniewski

TO BUKOWSKI, #5

it was bring-your-own but I hadn't known that
I was about to open the refrigerator door when a middle-aged
woman punched me in the abdomen

"excuse me?" I said & she kneed my crotch

I walked into the bathroom
closed the door & got my
wind back

then returned
to the refrigerator

the woman was now drinking
water with other people drinking water

"he deceived Lars into publishing Bukowski under Dori's name"
she told them quietly "he's a maniac"

"Bukowski's the ultimate maniac" a man with a goatee said

"Bukowski's incredibly sexist" a woman said

"not to mention uneven" said a man
wearing a nametag: JIM VAN
KLUGEN

I opened the refrigerator door
no alcohol was inside
just bean sprouts
bottled water &
suppositories

I left the refrigerator door open
walked out of the kitchen
down a tile hall
& out the front door

then closed that door silently--as you
might have--&

facing the street

heard the lock click

“at least *one* maniac’s
gone for good” Jim Van Klugen yelled from behind the door

& everyone
inside the house cheered

REVIEW

Charles Parsons

Almost Invisible

Mark Strand

Random House Digital, Inc. 2012?

“Cockeyed Transcendence”

Consider for a moment blind women operating a brothel or a nameless prince from a nameless country whose monstrous sex organ sends a reporter diving from a moving car or a set of gallows in a garden or a social worker’s conversation with a monkey or a woman with short legs and huge mittened hands hounding a cigar smoking, black umbrella brandishing man along a beach. These situations and subjects are all features in Mark Strand’s latest work, *Almost Invisible*. The book has forty-seven pages, including forty-six poems, all prose with the exception of “Poem of the Spanish Poet,” the only piece that lends itself to a second page and the only to feature both prose and what one might observe as poetry, rhymed verse, chiasmic in nature. An entire book composed of prose poems (or almost entire) should not be a great surprise to someone who has followed Strand’s work. He began occupying himself with prose in *The Moment* (1978). This latest effort is an extension of this interest with the intent, it appears, to render compressed and fragmentary pieces, paying regard and offering scrutiny on the subject of identification with perhaps the greatest comment throughout given to the strangeness of maintaining a consistent narrative when confronting age, loss, and death.

Almost Invisible permeates with dark humor, but not necessarily black comedy. The tragedy seems to carry more weight than the farce, and the jests are contrived in sadness and absurdity. The speakers in the book face similar dilemmas: what they observe has no meaning. There are no words to articulate the longing they feel or to replicate poetry they have written. While in the past, they might have done something; in the present there is no action to take. Invoking titles such as “Hermetic Melancholy,” possibility appears to be sealed tight

Quite often, the assertions Strand’s speakers make are paradoxical. Rather than reveal hurt or revel in despair, they hide behind coy assertions, seeming without care or beyond feeling. These are retired men. Couples facing the future of absent lovers. Often they are people without names or countries. They are people caught in between. The cursory attitude of the speaker “In the Afterlife” begins, “She stood beside

me for years, or was it a moment? I cannot remember. Maybe I loved her, maybe I didn't." When lines like these are found in the writings of a young person, they heighten the sense that the writer or speaker is seeking a level of gravitas not yet established due to the lack of experience. While it may seem flippant to say one cannot remember how long he or she stayed with a lover, more often or not, it is a sign of shallowness, not significance. But, in this piece, avoidance is key. There is an allusive grief. This speaker goes on to address the reader or a particular individual whose "moments are gone" and who "drifts like smoke in the afterlife." The speaker asks to be told "something" or "anything." Despite all the practice and familiarity signified by living nearly an entire life, the speaker appears to still be searching; he or she has yet to grasp a significant truth.

The world Strand provides us, however nonstandard, is more complex and contradictory than an atheism or nihilism that life lacks all meaning or the end of life is completely devoid of intricacy. The speakers in these pieces are reverberating in fatalism while, at the same time, proposing "new eternity" and communication with people dead. The senselessness of life becomes only more bizarre and empty in the afterlife. If day-to-day activity can exist without sex, an afterlife can exist without it while at the same time providing perverse reminders, such as the testicles swinging "dreamily" like chandeliers from the clouds of heaven in "Dream Testicles, Vanished Vaginas."

What is noteworthy in these writings is the lack of redeeming elements. Outside of the characters, which have intriguing absurd qualities, the reader continues to search for a meaning less than plain. It stands to reason that if existence is complex, so must be outlook, point-of-view and perspective. Some character along the way must evoke hope and possibility. For this reason, *Almost Invisible* is at its best in the particularly poignant "The Students of the Ineffable":

What I am about to say happened years ago. I had rented a house by the sea. Each night I sat on the porch and wished for some surge of feeling, some firelit stream of sound to lead me away from all that I had known. But one night, I climbed the hill behind the house and looked down on a small dirt road where I was surprised to see long lines of people shuffling into the distance. Their difficult breathing and their coughing were probably caused by the cloud of dust their march had created. "Who are you and why is this happening?" I asked one of them. "We are believers and must keep going," and then he added, "our work is important and concerns the self." "But all your dust is darkening the stars," I said. "Nay, nay," he said, "we are only passing through, the stars will return."

The speaker here shares in the same condition of many of the speakers throughout the book because what he or she hopes to find or conjure is illusive and unresolved. While the speaker appears to be a believer in the Wordsworthian sublime, the piece implies that all people are “believers” of some sort, and that credence is necessary to drive and inform the self (not to mention the interpretation and classification of others). The piece shares in the incongruous nature of truth. As definitions abound and descend, the meaning differs for the participants and the observers. The situation here implies that what makes up most of life is ephemeral, and that its passing might mark the return of the infinite spectacle, albeit in a different context. The stars. The cosmos. In other words, though the speaker cannot conjure up feeling out of the natural world, the romanticism of it will return when those present have passed. The speaker here is trapped in an existence absent of remarkable feeling, but the reader senses that there may be more missing from the speaker (and all forthcoming speakers) than from existence itself.

Though the book is playful, one cannot help but wonder if it was intentionally written to be so woebegone, and if not, what precipitated it? Why are the speakers in *Almost Invisible* searching for or reducing all to plainness, expressing changing taste or the lack of desire for poetry or pleasure, hurrying on the absence of self, emptying out the myths that have sustained personal narratives to examine what is left once those inventions have been stripped away? Maybe, at a certain point, acknowledging the receding self, pointing out that if the heart is empty, at least that emptiness has the power to grow, displays that decay functions as a kind of cockeyed transcendence—as outlandish and gloomy as the characters professing it. Or maybe not.

Noting that Strand has more books behind him than one might imagine he has yet to write, this stage of his career is possibly the answer. He is approaching eighty years of age, and it has been six years between his last book *Man and Camel* (2006) and this latest collection. Before that, there was the experimental *Chicken, Shadow, Moon & more* and the collaborative “89 Lines” (1999). Shortly before that the Pulitzer prize winning *Blizzard of One* (1998). All of Strand’s newer work seems to bend in directions less conventional than straight forward poetry, and one gets the feeling that Strand has little interest in competing with his award winning effort.

The phrasing of the title of this current work is also curious. It conjures up the feeling of having little significance, or suggests that it exists only as a particle redeemed and visible against the void. Physically, *Almost Invisible* is a slight book and barely detectable on a bookshelf filled with volumes. After reading it, one might doubt that it will have any forth-

right impact on this history of poetry or that it will cause any noticeable change in poetry as an art form. This is not to devalue the book because the lack of such impact is not unusual. The majority of poetry books published today share, approximately, the amount of pages found in *Almost Invisible*, and, canonically speaking, are not likely to linger into antiquity (just pick up a review copy of poetry books from ten years ago. Many of those titles will not be in print today). In addition one might refer to the status of poetry itself as an “almost invisible” art form to a well-adjusted American whose choice for diversion on a given night will probably not involve any written word and who, when surveyed, would be hard pressed to name even the U.S. poet laureate, let alone a working poet in a fifty-mile radius. But one might stress that working poets are resigned to being “almost invisible.” It is poets who are most aware, however, that even a single poem (hardly visible in a stack of paper, let alone a whole book) can carry substantial meaning and feeling. For example, a sonnet makes up only on a portion of one page, yet it evokes the lasting power of voices such as Shakespeare, Keats, Hopkins, et al.

When reading *Almost Invisible*, it is important to distinguish it for what it is, and not to dwell on what it is not. Perhaps the most significant reason to read it is to see how Strand is operating currently. Whenever we go to the work of Strand, Merwin, Levine, Charles Wright, Simic, Baraka, Williams, Pastan, Ashbery, Bly or any of those writers whose early work distinguished them from the masses and who have had long and illustrious careers, and whose writing continues in our present decade, we have the opportunity to see how they function in or out of context with much of poetry today. For better or worse, however, we cannot help but compare what is published in 2012 with what came in 1964. With such reading comes the chance to revisit themes from the past, and maybe find that the writer has something new for us too. One of the final pieces in Strand’s latest work is “Not to Miss the Great Thing.” In it, the speaker is resigned: “A cold rain fell on all the houses but his. Suddenly it stopped, and he walked out into the yellow light. Maybe it’s come, he thought, maybe this is it, maybe this is all it is.” To suggest, at the end of the volume, that “what you get is what you get,” conjures up the voices of most of the speakers that have come before in this collection. So it is that we have to keep reading poets like Strand because we should be ashamed to miss another great thing. Even if that thing barely exists, is “almost invisible.”

CONTRIBUTOR'S NOTES

Edward Bruce Bynum is a clinical psychologist and director of Behavioral Medicine at the University of Massachusetts Health Services/CCPH in Amherst. He is the author of several texts in Psychology, including *Dark Light Consciousness*. He won the Naomi Long Madgett poetry prize for his book *Chronicles of the Pig and Other Delusions*. He received the Abe Maslow Award from the American Psychological Association.

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Bill Edmonson has poems in *Confrontation*, *The Hollins Critic*, *Field*, *Fugue*, and *Bayou*. His first Collection "Whatever It Takes To Make Us Feel Alive" will be published by FutureCycle Press later this year.

Peter Imsdahl has published poems in *The Iowa Review*, *Plains Song Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Fiddlehead*, and elsewhere. For a time he was a gravedigger for a small fieldstone church near the Baltic, but is now teaching at Kiel University and looking for a publisher for his novel.

John Edward Keough is an Irish poet native to Boston, Massachusetts. He is currently serving time in a Massachusetts prison for being a criminal. Having learned a few lessons, he is finally trying to live up to the potential many frustrated teachers saw. His influences are Charles Bukowski, Billy Collins, Czeslaw Milosz, Nikki Giovanni, Heather McHugh, and the Bible. He is humbled that God would grace him with someone to fall in love with his poetry. This is print debut.

Richard Kostelanetz Individual entries on Richard Kostelanetz's work in several fields appear in various editions of *Readers Guide to Twentieth-Century Writers*, *Merriam-Webster Encyclopedia of Literature*, *Contemporary Poets*, *Contemporary Novelists*, *Postmodern Fiction*, *Webster's Dictionary of American Writers*, *The HarperCollins Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*, *Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians*, *Directory of American Scholars*, *Who's Who in America*, *Who's Who in the World*, *Who's Who in American Art*, *NNDB.com*, *Wikipedia.com*, and *Britannica.com*, among other distinguished directories. Otherwise, he survives in New York, where he was born, unemployed and thus overworked.

Lyn Lifshin has written over 120 books and has edited four anthologies. Her website is lynlifshin.com.

Michael B. McMahon “After years of part-time teaching in local universities, I’ve recently dropped out to better focus on circling geese, the rumble of passing trains, and the clatter of my own dusty lingo.” Michael B. McMahon has previously been published in *The Hiram Poetry Review*, in addition to several magazines such as *Notre Dame Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, and *Seneca Review*. His translation of Jesús Serra’s book of poems, *Páramos en la Memoria*, was published by the University of the Andes Press.

Arthur D. Mathews Jr. was born on September 30th 1965, to parents Mr. Arthur D. Mathews Sr. and Mrs. Ruth Mathews. He was born at Lansley Air Force base in Hampton, Virginia. He graduated in Hartford, Connecticut in 1985. He took the G.E.D. and received a perfect score in Science, missed one or two in English, one or two in History, and just made it in Math. His father and mother used to write not for profit. His father used to sing while taping his voice in shower. He wrote his very first poem at the age of thirteen. He started writing seriously at the age of fifteen. Due to a bad incident in Ohio, his grandmother pushed him to read early, and read him Bible stories. He was published in black local newspapers, both in Ohio and in Sarasota, Florida. He went to Manatee Community College, located between Bradenton and Sarasota, Florida. He says, “When I write I put myself in another’s position to try to feel what another would feel.”

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Spencer Smith is a graduate of the University of Utah. He works in the corporate world to pay the family living expenses that poetry doesn't pay (all of them). His work has appeared (or is scheduled to appear) in over twenty literary magazines including *RATTLE*, *The Cape Rock*, and *SLANT*. Besides writing, he enjoys reading a broad spectrum of literature, playing guitar, and listening to an eclectic mix of music.

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Julie Marie Wade is the author of two collections of creative nonfiction, *Wishbone: A Memoir In Fractures* (Colgate University Press, 2010) and *Small Fires* (Sarabande Books, 2011) as well as the poetry chapbook *Without* (Finishing Line Press, 2010). "Mr. Clean" appears in her forthcoming poetry collection *Postage Due* (White Pine Press, 2013), winner of the Marie Alexander Poetry Series. Wade teaches in the creative writing program at Florida International University in Miami.

Suellen Wedmore Poet Laureate emerita for the small seaside town of Rockport, Massachusetts, Suellen Wedmore retired from working as a speech and language therapist to enter the M.F.A. program in poetry at New England College, graduating in 2004. Her work has appeared in *Apalachee Review*, *The Chaffin Journal*, *Cimarron Review*, *College English*, *Eclipse*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Harvard Review*, *The Ledge*, *The Louisville Review*, *The MacGuffin*, *Manorborn*, *New Verse News*, *Oyez Review*, *Phoebe*, *Poem*, and many others. Her chapbook *Deployed* won first place in the Grayson Books annual contest, and her chapbook *On*

Marriage and Other Parallel Universes was published in 2009 by Finishing Line Press. She was awarded first place in the *Writer's Digest* rhyming poetry contest, was an international winner in the 2006 *Atlanta Review* poetry contest, and in 2007 she was selected for a writing residency at Devil's Tower, Wyoming. Recently she was a winner in the Obama competition sponsored by *New Millennium Writings* and two of her poems were nominated for a Pushcart Prize

Will Wells' most recent book of poems, *Unsettled Accounts*, won the 2009 Hollis Summers Poetry Prize and was published in 2010 by Ohio University Press/Swallow Press. On this basis, Wells was selected to be a Walter E. Dakin Fellow in Poetry at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. Wells' next collection of poems, *Scraps and Damaged Lots* is nearing completion. He has poems forthcoming or in recent issues of *Image*, *Tampa Review*, *Birmingham Poetry review*, *Valparaiso Review*, *River Styx*, *Paper Nautilus*, *Chrysalis Reader* and *32 Poems*, among others. Wells first published a poem in *Hiram Poetry Review* back in 1979 and has contributed on multiple occasions since that time.

Howard Winn has most recently published poems and fiction in *Cutting Edgz*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Descant (Canada)*, *Cactus Heart*, *Main Street Rag*, *Caduceus*, *Burning Wood*, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *Borderlands*. His B.A. is from Vassar College. His Graduate degree is from the Writing Program at Stanford University. He is a State University of New York faculty member.

Mark Wisniewski second novel *Show Up, Look Good* was praise by Jonathan Lethem, Ben Fountain, Christine Sneed, and T.R. Hummel. His first novel, *Confessions of a Polish Used Car Salesman* went to a second printing.

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