

The New Orphic Review

Editor-in-Chief
Ernest Hekkanen

Copy & Associate Editor
Margrith Schraner

Managing Editor
Michael Connor

Nelson



Canada

Contents Copyright © *THE NEW ORPHIC REVIEW* for the authors
First North American Serial Rights Reserved

ISSN 1480-5243

The New Orphic Review, a journal devoted to publishing fiction, poetry, reviews and essays, is published two times per year by New Orphic Publishers. The review accepts no financial assistance from government sources, but will accept advertising.

EDITORIAL AND BUSINESS OFFICE:

The New Orphic Review, 706 Mill Street, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada, V1L 4S5. Tel: (250) 354-0494. Please make sure all inquires and manuscripts are accompanied by an SASE and that the return postage is Canadian. Manuscripts with insufficient return postage will be held for one month and then discarded.

Payment to contributors is one copy of the issue in which the author's work appears. *The New Orphic Review* purchases First North American Serial Rights only.

Opinions expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of *The New Orphic Review*.

SUBSCRIPTIONS PER YEAR (2 ISSUES)

Individuals Canada	\$30 (CAD)	Institutions Canada	\$35 (CAD)
USA	\$30 (USD)	USA	\$35 (USD)

Individual issues \$17.50 CAD or USD as applicable.

ADVERTISEMENTS (BLACK & WHITE CAMERA-READY ONLY):

Full pages:	Half pages:
\$150 CAD, \$150 USD	\$75 CAD, \$75 USD

Subscriptions and advertisements should be sent to the above address. Make cheques payable to *The New Orphic Review*.

Contents

Volume 12 Number 2 Fall 2009

Ernest Hekkanen	4	<i>Story Autopsy</i>
Tim Strutz	7	<i>5:37</i>
Margrith Schraner	19	<i>The Mouse Who Celebrated Spring</i>
Ian Adam	22	<i>Two Poems</i>
Sandra Hartline	28	<i>Crocodile</i>
Jonathan Marplot	32	<i>Lost and Harrowing</i>
Louis E. Bourgeois	35	<i>Prologue to The Narrative of Johnny Randolph</i>
Nancy White	43	<i>Four Poems</i>
Ivor C Treby	47	<i>Four Poems</i>
Paul J. Healy	51	<i>Four Poems</i>
Ross Klatte	53	<i>Trees Made of Glass</i>
Maureen Egan	59	<i>Four Poems</i>
Susan L. Ferraro	63	<i>An Experiment</i>
Jill Mandrake	68	<i>Four from the Funhouse</i>
Jon Wesick	70	<i>Three Poems</i>
Louis E. Bourgeois	73	<i>The Coward</i>
Ernest Hekkanen	77	<i>The Successor</i>

Visit Our Website

www3.telus.net/neworphicpublishers-hekkanen

ERNEST HEKKANEN is the author of 40 books. The most recent are *Wintering Over: Poems Strewn on Snow*, *Of a Fire Beyond the Hills*, *Shadows on a Cave Wall*, *Kafka: The Master of Yesno* and *The Life of Bartholomew G. Hekkanen* is listed in the *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* and *Contemporary Authors* in the United States. He is the subject of Margrith Schraner's critical study, *The Reluctant Author: The Life and Literature of Ernest Hekkanen*.

Story Autopsy

Ernest Hekkanen

FOR THE PAST four months, I have been busy compiling *The Collected Short Stories of Ernest Hekkanen: Naturalistic, Modern Gothic, Surreal & Postmodern*, a two-volume set that spans forty years of short story writing and which, in its combined length, will be approximately 880 pages. Not one of the 73 stories in the compilation has escaped editing, and a few of them have received extensive tinkering. On occasion, what I have perceived as my glaring incompetence has made me writhe within my skin, and on other occasions, I have thought: "Damn, but that's a fine short story. I wonder why it was never picked up by a magazine."

Nearly every story in the compilation has revived memories having to do with when and where it was written. Nearly every story has acted as a window onto my life at a particular time and place, and what I have glimpsed has not always made me feel very comfortable. Indeed, most of the stories have revived memories that are faintly painful, which leads me to suspect that I might have written them as a way of dealing with events in my life—that I fled into the realm of my imagination to find refuge there. Nearly all of the stories contain details I have observed, witnessed or experienced, but most of those details have been thrown together as though in a salad of dreams.

I should tell you that I very rarely dream or, at least, I very rarely remember my dreams. I have contended, over the years, that I very rarely dream because, for me, writing fiction is a kind of lucid dreaming that exhausts the mechanism responsible for producing dreams. Indeed, it is when I'm in between fiction projects that I am more likely to dream, and then, on occasion, with regard to some of them, I think: "If only I could capture that on paper, I'd have a nice little story, there." However, in the end, such stories are very rarely faithful to the original dreams, which end up being rearranged the same way events, situations and details get

rearranged when they are turned into stories.

The selection process that the mind automatically engages in has led me to believe that we remember events and details very inaccurately, due to an overburden of storylines interwoven in our heads from the time we are born and which any new information must be braided into, possibly because it is important to our survival to have a fictional through-line we can hang on to—rather like a rope tow, perhaps—but I wouldn't bet my life on it. I simply offer it up for discussion.

The last story in this issue of *The New Orphic Review* is a case in point. "The Successor" was initially written in 1980, when I was living in Port Moody, British Columbia, with my former wife and children. I had created an office in the basement of the house, and there I would peck out stories at an old Underwood typewriter, usually between three and seven in the morning, before heading off to work at a die-casting foundry. I hated the work I was doing at the foundry, and so I decided to go back to university to obtain an M.F.A. in creative writing. To make it possible to get as many bursaries, fellowships and scholarships as I could possibly obtain, I decided to apply for Canadian citizenship and so I had to subject myself to that process, which included going before a citizenship judge and answering a series of questions. I didn't anticipate any obstacles to getting my citizenship because I had lived in Canada for eleven years and was pretty familiar with my adopted country. Also, I was of the opinion that the authorities weren't about to deny citizenship to an individual whose children were born in the country. I didn't study for the citizenship exam and, at one point during the quiz, when I was asked to supply the date of confederation, I admitted, quite frankly, that I didn't know the exact date, but that it was somewhere around the third quarter of the 1800s. "Could you be a little more specific?" the citizenship judge asked me. "Remember, not too long ago, we held our centenary here in Canada." "Was it 1876?" I asked her. "How would you like to reverse the last two digits of that number?" she told me. "1867," I rejoined. "Bingo, you got it," she congratulated me, and miraculously my citizenship was approved.

Not long after being quizzed by the citizenship judge, I had a dream in which I was forced to answer questions in front of a tribunal and, in the dark of the basement of our Port Moody home, in the light of the angle-arm lamp that shone upon my Underwood, I started work on "The Successor." During the course of writing it, I recalled other interrogations I had undergone, ones linked to acquiring immigrant status in Canada and, before that, the tribunal I had faced in Everett, Washington—at my draft board, when I had applied for conscientious objector status. I hadn't expected to acquire conscientious objector status; after all, I wasn't of the Quaker faith or any other religious tradition opposed to war. I simply objected to the Vietnam War, and the atrocities being perpetrated on our behalf. I remember at one point during the tribunal one of my three

interrogators asking me how I would change America if I had the power to do so, and I gave him my opinion that some houses are so full of rot all you can do is burn them to the ground—an answer that was met with some vehemence on the part of my interrogators, as I recall.

In the opening scene of “The Successor,” the protagonist is dumped like so much cargo onto the tarmac of an airstrip and subsequently undergoes a process of extreme disorientation, followed by a process of reorientation. In many regards, the dumping of the protagonist on the tarmac echoed the way I had felt upon being dumped by a friend on Main Street in Vancouver, British Columbia, after being transported across the border into Canada in 1969, as well as the subsequent reorientation that took place as I learned to adapt to my new country—a process that continues to this day, by the way. “The Successor” might also be read as an extended metaphor for: brainwashing, the Stockholm syndrome, the mental state of a paranoid schizophrenic or, perhaps, the natural rise and decline of individuals in society. Back when I wrote the story, magic realism had come into vogue in Canada. I had already published several stories in this vein, among them “The Fatal Error” and “The Bather.” Thus, the magic realism movement could also be viewed as part of the hidden infrastructure of the story.

Did I say that stories are a salad of dreams, details, experiences and impressions?

While compiling *The Collected Short Stories of Ernest Hekkanen*, it occurred to me that a thorough examination of each story’s contents might be an interesting way to organize an autobiography—one that would rely upon association rather than upon the arc one’s life takes from beginning to end. It would be comparable to examining the constituent parts of a dream in order to discover where they come from, how they are assembled and possibly why the pieces have fallen together in the manner that they have. We might even refer to this process as *story divination* or *story autopsy*.

Bearing this in mind, I wonder what we might glean upon examining the contents of the current issue of *The New Orphic Review*.

TIM STRUTZ is a writer, expressionist artist and environmentalist living in the heart of the magnificent rust belt of the Midwestern United States. He has been previously published in *The New Orphic Review* and is now working on two novels.

5:37

Tim Strutz

OFFICER WILLIAM “Boa” Johnson stood passively on the sizzling black asphalt of the busy street next to the driver’s door of the rusty and faded blue Pontiac. Invisible clouds of noxious searing fumes that billowed from the coughing, overheated engine combined with the sweltering afternoon heat and wafted across the policeman’s sweaty pink face while salty whitish droplets gathered at his chin and fell to the pavement. His chest felt like the surface of mercury inside the smothering body armor that all patrol officers were required to wear while on duty. Johnson wanted desperately to move back to the comforting coolness of his air-conditioned squad car, but, in the patient style he was known for, simply waited instead while the violator gave him a piece of his mind.

“Man, don’t you got nothing better to do than hassle regular folk trying to make a living?” said the offending driver, a tanned, muscular middle-aged man with a fierce black mustache and wildly combed hair. “I mean, shit, I works every god damn day. I can’t afford no ticket!” His voice carried the venom that typically was meted out to those officers who issue traffic citations to residents from the rough-and-tumble streets of the inner city. The fact that Officer Johnson had afforded the violator the monumental break of citing him for only the seat-belt violation, rather than the much more serious infraction of twenty over the speed limit and tailgating apparently mattered not to the irate man. Johnson was sorely tempted to take the ticket back and reissue it with the charge amended to reckless driving, but thought better. He didn’t really want a fist fight at this point in his career—he was up for promotion to detective.

“Look, Mr. Casters, you *do* realize that I could have cited you for the moving violations. I mean, you are getting a pretty big break here. The seat-belt ticket doesn’t even carry any points.” Johnson was trying his best to sound sincere despite the ragged heat that ate away at his brain

cells and at the part of him that had real sympathy for decent poor folks.

“Shit, man, you just look for the first Hispanic dude you find so you can screw ‘em over. You’re just like every other Nazi driving around out here. Just wait, someday you’ll get what’s coming to you.” The driver’s face was twisted in anger, his mouth an inverted U. For a brief moment the officer had a comic vision of lightning bolts flying off the pointy mustache to strike him down on the roadway.

“Please drive safely, Mr. Casters,” Johnson said in parting. He knew better than to offer the time-honored phrase of *have a nice day*. That particular admonition had recently been deemed to be politically incorrect if given to a traffic violator who had been cited rather than merely warned; apparently it was demeaning somehow.

As Officer Johnson gratefully drove from the scene and recovered in the chilly air of his squad car, he casually wondered whether a formal complaint would be forthcoming from Mr. Casters. Johnson really had no idea that the man was Hispanic until the driver mentioned it. Sure, his skin was a little on the dark side, but based on his last name and physical appearance, the driver could have been Italian or French or Arabic or... anything. The officer was constantly amazed at the ploys that people utilized when confronted with the realities of daily law enforcement; the “cards” that they pulled. *You stopped me because I’m black, or because I’m young, or because I’m Arabic, or...;* the list grew each year like Jack’s beanstalk.

Johnson’s radio crackled on the car-to-car channel: “Hey, Boa, you OK man?” inquired Rick Childress, his old partner working over on the quieter west side. Since Johnson was working the car by himself, Childress would keep a close eye on him. A patrol car staffed by two officers was considered safer, but an astonishing series of recent jury awards in wrongful death lawsuits had devastated the city and the police department budget, resulting in some police personnel being reassigned to work the streets alone.

“Yeah, I’m fine, Rick. Thanks for checking in. I was just going to clear,” replied Johnson into the mic.

He radioed clear with headquarters and continued the routine patrol that had become second nature over countless minutes and hours and days and years. Johnson laughed to himself for the thousandth time as he thought about how he had earned the nickname “Boa.” It had been many years ago and was the very first plain-clothes assignment for an athletic, handsome, fresh-faced rookie officer by the name of William Eric Johnson. The plan had been simple enough: Put a purse that was borrowed from the police property room on the dash board of an abandoned car from the impound lot and park the vehicle at a location where larceny was rampant. The purse, of course, had to be a large one, so any potential thieves in the area could see it, and the car window was left conspicuously and

conveniently open. After the bait car had been parked, his partner had said, “Hey, Will, I forgot to put the ten dollar bill in the purse. You know the courts; they require an established value if there is a theft. Can you sneak in there and put the money inside that purse?” When Johnson walked down and naively opened that big brown purse he got the surprise of his life when a hissing and very unhappy jumbo rat snake that had been “borrowed” from the animal shelter literally flew out and the young officer discovered how difficult it can be to try to flee backwards through a car window while yelling “SON OF A BITCH.” The laughter from almost half of the dayshift hidden nearby had reverberated across the parking lot that day.

Officer Johnson veered off the main drag and onto a side street that promised a quieter environment. As he casually drove past the ancient but neatly kept tiny bungalows, he glanced at his wristwatch: 4:05 p.m.—three hours into his shift and he had already written his ticket for the day. Now he could relax, and if he was lucky enough to avoid handling a rush-hour traffic accident, he could do some of the stuff he really enjoyed—chatting with some of the old Poles and Italians who would be out sweeping their immaculate sidewalks and tending to the astonishingly lush vegetable gardens that seemed to deny the harsh environment of the old city center. Up ahead, he saw Mrs. Smolinski sweeping a white concrete driveway that was already clean enough to each lunch from. The old widow had turned ninety just a few weeks ago, and Officer Johnson had been delighted to receive an invitation to attend the celebration party given by her neighbors and the few relatives who could bother to attend.

As he pulled his cruiser to the curb and exited, the stoop-shouldered woman with the skeletal body looked up and squinted through her impossibly thick eyeglasses, causing her immense bushy black eyebrows to tilt dangerously. The lines set deeply into her face seemed to soften as she recognized the red-haired patrolman that had worked her neighborhood for so many years, and her thin pale lips broke into a wide grin as she began to wave her arms the way a little child would.

“How are you today, Mrs. Smolinski?” Johnson said loudly so that she could hear him.

“Officer Johnson, Officer Johnson! Oh, so good to see you!” Despite having lived more than a half century in the United States, her Polish accent was still very heavy, and it seemed to the officer that it somehow suited her. “You will come in; I have some cookies I just make,” she declared with mock authority.

Officer Johnson was just sinking his teeth into the third delicious chocolate chip cookie and listening to the delightful old lady talk about her newest rose bush when the call came out over his portable radio: “Car B-2, Car B-2, respond to 40th and Brisbane, there’s a 4-12, rescue

responding; at 1625 hours.”

Johnson acknowledged the call and said to his beaming host, “Sorry, Mrs. Smolinski, I have to run. Duty calls. Thanks for the cookies; they were great as always.” He then hustled out the door toward the old police cruiser that had seen better days and had only remained in service due to budget constraints. As he pulled away from the curb, he glanced back to see the old lady standing on the stoop of her house, cheerfully waving a plastic bag of chocolate chip cookies.

* * *

Attorney Jerry Ferger was like a coiled spring as he leaned forward toward his prey from the edge of his leather chair in a scene that was somewhat reminiscent of a jungle cat preparing to launch an ambush at the local watering hole. His soft, chubby face with its pink cheeks and sagging jowls would have given him a benign appearance if not for the smoldering and overlarge amber eyes that bored into family members and staff as easily as any of his numerous legal opponents. There were very few people that were not intimidated by that piercing predatory gaze, and the city attorney and public works administrator sitting across the table from him were no exception.

“Look, Mr. Ferger, the city has acknowledged the tragic nature of the loss of Mr. Greene and the fact that a city-owned property was involved. We have already offered to assist Mrs. Greene, and her children, I might add, with counseling and other support as necessary to get by during this difficult period, and that includes financial assistance,” said the city attorney. Some months ago, an unemployed ex-con by the name of Willis Greene had wandered over to the abandoned house next door to his dilapidated rental property and had fallen through some rotted floorboards into the basement, breaking his neck.

“Well, that’s just god damn generous of you, isn’t it?” Ferger sneered. “A woman loses her husband and the father of her children, and you guys pay for the fucking counseling. I’m really impressed,” Ferger continued. The public works administrator, a skinny bean-counter type in horn-rimmed glasses and ill-fitting cheap suit, began to squirm in his seat. He had never dealt with Ferger before, but knew of his reputation for making millions at the expense of almost every city in the region. Attorney Ferger, who was wearing his usual five-thousand dollar, custom-tailored Armani pinstripe, savored the administrator’s discomfiture.

“Look, Mr. Ferger, there’s no need for that tone. This is just a preliminary discussion meeting. Why don’t you save some hot air for the trial?” said the city attorney, who had dealt with Ferger many times and knew that nothing would be accomplished at a meeting like this, since much more time would be needed for the famous liability lawyer to posture for the public.

“Well, MR. CITY ATTORNEY, let me tell you something. I am going

to eat you guys alive at the trial. Yeah, you to, Mr. Public Works. The city should have torn down that house years ago. The vigilant and heroic actions of Mr. Greene were the only thing that prevented that house and the whole neighborhood from being burned by vandals months ago. That's what he was doing, checking on suspicious activity, when he fell through the floor to his death." Ferger knew by now that in reality Willis Greene had been using the derelict house to consume the dope he did not want to share with his wife and on that fateful day had just missed shooting some high-powered junk into his arm when the floorboards gave way. Ferger planned to turn the Greene death into an exposé on the dangers posed by the numerous abandoned houses that plagued a city that was unable to fund their demolition.

That is, of course, unless the city was willing to cough up some serious money to make it all go away.

"Look, we all feel bad about what happened to Mr. Greene, but, well, are you aware that the police found some narcotics in his possession at the time of his death?" said the city attorney, a distinguished-looking man with thinning silver hair and matching full beard. "It seems possible that Mr. Greene might have been doing something in that house other than checking on suspicious intruders."

Ferger's reptilian eyes bored into the city attorney. The public works administrator suddenly decided to stare downward at his lap. There was a momentary silence and the air in the room seemed to grow as thick as the atmosphere of Jupiter. Ferger glanced at his gold Rolex: ten after four—time to quit talking with these cretins and plan his next move. And it was time perhaps to set up the press conference and bring the "grieving widow" and her five blubbering children in front of the television cameras to demonstrate the callous and destructive nature of the city that had caused the death of an innocent citizen. Ferger made a mental note to step up efforts to hire a "keeper" for Mrs. Greene, to get her back into drug rehabilitation and off the streets where she tended to ply one of the world's oldest professions in order to make ends meet.

"Is there anything else you *gentlemen* want to discuss?" said Ferger.

The public works administrator swiveled his head toward the city attorney while preparing to propel himself from his chair. The city attorney's face formed a scowl that was accentuated by the beard that suddenly seemed gray and chalky. He said, flatly, "We'll see you at discovery, I guess."

As attorney Jerry Ferger strode from his office and squeezed his rotund, soft body into the custom red Corvette, his mind raced with the possibilities of the day: the new accounts that his infamy had drawn to the firm; the various schemes that he would deploy in the upcoming weeks against the cities that he had targeted; the contract attorneys in his office that he was going to let go for their failure to produce. Mostly, however, he thought

about the wild sexual escapades he would be having later this evening with the high-priced Britney Spears lookalike from the escort service with which he had a trusted relationship. The attorney had secretly rented an apartment on the east side last year for activities of this nature. Feger called his wife's cell phone to remind her that he would be working late, then shifted into first gear and roared from the parking lot. He had a reservation at Maxim's for 4:30 to meet with a hot prospect to replace the contract attorney he had fired last week, and he knew they would keep his regular table no matter how late he was. The attorney tossed an antacid pill into his mouth; his upper stomach seemed to be acting up lately; then he popped the clutch and rocketed into the fast lane of the roadway.

* * *

Rachael Richards was engaged in an immense struggle to open eyelids that felt as if they were constructed of thick lead. Hazy diffused light, almost overwhelming in its unexpected whiteness, banged into the slow-motion movie screen of her consciousness, like a pulsing beacon in a fog. The abstract vibrating spiral of the hospital space began to eventually slow and the terminal cancer patient began to comprehend the all-too-familiar surroundings of her room in the hospice ward. The steel industrial-looking clock on the wall directly opposite her bed looked incongruous next to the flowery wallpaper and the paper angels that someone had stuck to the ceiling. The impassive timepiece, indicating that it was now 4:15 in the afternoon, somehow seemed larger than usual. She did not miss the irony of the set-up: *time was short now*. A couple of figures moved forward into her field of view—familiar faces but slightly blurred, like a home movie slightly out of focus.

"Rachael, Rachael, can you hear me?" said the tall, thin man who had been holding the patient's tiny hand for the past several hours. His kind, moist blue eyes were turned down at the corners and his lips trembled slightly as he unsuccessfully tried to form a smile.

"Bob? Is... it... you?" Rachael whispered.

"Yes, honey, it's me. I'm here. *I love you.*" Bob Richards was immensely relieved that his wife, his soulmate and the love of his life, was able to summon the strength for what would probably be their final encounter in this life. Kim Werther, the hospice nurse, an incredible woman of vast knowledge and patience and wisdom, had suggested to him only an hour ago that Rachael was very close to slipping away and would not likely regain consciousness. Family and friends had already said their final good-byes and waited nervously in the visitors' lounge.

Kim lovingly stroked Rachael's arm and asked, "Rachael, how are you feeling?"

"I... I... I'm... ok for... now."

"Good. I am going to step into the hallway. I'll be nearby if you need

anything,” said the hospice nurse whose deep brown eyes always seemed to smile.

For some reason, it had been important to Rachael that she would spend her last moments alone with Bob. But it made sense—she had always been a very private person. As he gazed lovingly at his wife of twenty-five years, Bob’s heart fluttered as her eyes closed briefly and he had the stabbing thought that she was gone, but the eyes opened with a start and her voice strengthened as she said, “What about... Johnny? Is... he... coming?”

Their only child, John Richards, was a down-and-out drug addict who lived in a dilapidated, roach-infested apartment in the old city center. The dehumanizing effect of the addiction had caused a painful severance of the family relationship years ago. The simple but agonizing fact was that they had lost their little boy, their only child, the only person in the world they had loved more than each other, to a disease that was more horrible and invasive than the liver cancer that could ravage a body but not touch a spirit. The loss had scarred Bob and Rachael, but in the odd way that good and evil seem to coexist, had brought them even closer together.

“I’ve got calls in to everyone close to him, honey. But I don’t know if he will make it. I’m sorry.” Bob could feel his chest tighten in pain. He really did not know if he could go on with life after Rachael passed. To lose their son was bad enough, but now....

“It’s... ok. I’m just....” Rachael grimaced momentarily, then continued, “I’m just... glad... you are... here. I... *love you.*” Rachael’s sensuous thick lips formed a real smile, a smile that radiated nothing but the pure energy of love. The disease had ravaged her looks—the thick, long brown hair was now cut severely short and the natural beauty of her oval face had given way to a pale, almost skeletal look, eyes sunken and ringed in dark circles. But those lips, the full ample lips that he had kissed countless times over the years—they had not changed in the slightest. Bob felt his heart and soul being warmed, the way you were warmed by a late summer morning. He returned the smile and they waited as the silent hands of the clock moved inexorably forward: 4:22 p.m.

* * *

Officer William Johnson stood next to the open rear end of the rescue unit while a heavily tattooed man sat in the rear on a bench, rubbing his neck and complaining about the “injuries” he had received in the minor fender bender. “*My neck: I can’t move. I need a fucking doctor!*” The medics from the fire department gave him the obligatory check-over while their tired faces told of bored and frustrated civil servants that would prefer to deal with real injuries rather than someone attempting to prepare for a lawsuit.

“Yeah, we have to take him, if he insists on going. You’ll have to get

his information at the Oakdale ER,” said the senior medic sourly to the policeman.

As Johnson got back into his patrol vehicle, he was startled by a loud bang of a man’s forehead striking the Plexiglas divider that protected him from a surly prisoner by the name of John Richards who was sitting handcuffed in his back seat.

“Listen, you asshole. I told you I got to get to the hospital right now. My mom is dying of cancer,” said the emaciated addict as he launched a glob of frothy spittle that landed on the glass directly behind the officer’s head.

“Look, you had better settle your ass down or I am going to have to come back there and settle it for you. And believe me—you won’t like it,” said Johnson as his face began to redden. The officer was immensely tired of dealing with the ignorant, violent drug addicts who sucked the life out of the people around them and out of the legal system and out of a society that seemed to tolerate them. For addicts like Mr. Richards, who was now thrashing in the back seat, lying seemed to be a way of life. The crap about his mother dying in the hospital was undoubtedly a ploy to escape from the current circumstances that included driving with a suspended license, causing a traffic accident, and being a fugitive with a felony warrant for drug possession. Even if the story was true, Johnson knew he had no choice in the matter: you just can’t let a criminal walk away from the scene, dying mother or not.

“Look, Richards, settle down! If what you say is true, I will bring it to the attention of someone at the county jail. I’m sure they could make arrangements, you know, for you to get to the hospital.”

The prisoner did indeed settle down and said, flatly, “Fuck you.”

As the backup car arrived on the scene to follow him to county lockup, he radioed in: “Cars B-2 and B-6 responding to county with a prisoner, mileage nine-six, five oh five point nine, time 1655 hours.”

* * *

Attorney Jerry Ferger nodded brusquely at Adolpho, the maitre d’ at Maxim’s, as he strode arrogantly to his regular table twenty minutes late for the reservation. It had become a game with Ferger to see if he could rile the restaurant employee enough to change the blank expression on his handsome brown face, but the man was seemingly an expert in disguising his true feelings about the wealthy customers who regularly spent lavish sums in the establishment. Waiting nervously at the choice reserved corner table was an immaculately dressed young man who looked every bit the up-and-coming attorney that he was. As Ferger approached, the man shot out of his chair and offered his hand.

“Mr. Ferger, it’s an honor to finally meet you in person,” the young attorney said, beaming. His bright blue eyes were wide with an admiration that bordered on awe.

Although he was always flattered by this kind of attention, Ferger was immediately put off. He preferred attorneys that held a high opinion of themselves—“saucy” as he called it—because they always seemed to be more amenable to the predatory type of law that the liability lawyer specialized in.

“Please sit down. It’s... ah... Ron, isn’t it? Why don’t we have a drink before we order?” Ferger said. He then snapped his fingers in the air like he was some kind of Russian czar and a waiter in a starched white uniform hustled over.

“A double Scotch on the rocks, and whatever my friend here is having,” barked Ferger.

“The same for me, but a single, please.”

When the young man said the word “please,” it grated on Ferger and he was tempted to write the prospect off altogether.

After some small talk about the guy’s background—the usual stuff, Ivy League, of course—Feger got around to the hard and cold facts: “Look, Ron, you know what I do; what I’m all about. I need someone I can count on to cut the opposition to pieces. If you’re in this business to help the little guy or make the world some kind of better place—go work for the DA’s office or something. I need someone who can cut the nuts off the opposition and anyone else that gets in the way, for that matter.” As Ferger said this, he noticed a sharp pain in his right shoulder. He grimaced slightly; then it passed. He took a swig of his drink, thinking he would have to start working out as he used to when he was a young attorney like the man sitting across from him.

The young attorney then launched into a flowery speech about what a great member of the team he would become if he was only given a chance while Ferger was thinking to himself, *blah, blah, blah*. Ferger made no attempt to disguise his glance at the heavy, solid gold wristwatch that told him it was now 5:20 p.m. In just another hour or so he would be rid of this starry-eyed loser and frolicking with Britney Spears.

* * *

Rachael Richards seemed to defy the odds as she drifted in and out of sleep, but it was clear that her time was close. The moments of waking were becoming increasingly shorter and she could now no longer speak. The hospice nurse, Kim, had waited patiently nearby, quietly checking on the welfare of everyone involved. Bob found her presence to be much more supportive than the morose family members who paced nervously in the waiting room. She seemed so, well, *comfortable* around death, and he found it oddly reassuring. As tears flowed down Bob’s anguished face and onto the white cotton comforter covering his wife’s emaciated body, he glanced at the clock: 5:23 p.m.

Incredibly, Rachael seemed awake again. The light seemed to be moving out of her brown eyes and her voice was gone, but her lips were

forming words: *Find... our... son.*

* * *

Officer William “Boa” Johnson waited for the heavy afternoon traffic to clear, then pulled into the right lane and sped away from the old county lockup building. Johnson detested the old jail facility with its peeling green paint and cockroaches and filth and stench. His prisoner, Mr. Richards, had offered no additional violence and had been oddly silent throughout the booking-in procedure. As he accelerated, Johnson formulated a plan where he would head back to Oakdale Hospital to get the other driver’s information then head straight to the Big Truck Restaurant to meet his old partner for the meat loaf special, when a commotion of some type on the sidewalk a half block ahead caught his eye. As the officer pulled to the curb and radioed in the possible disturbance, he saw a tall, bearded, stick-like figure dressed in filthy rags waving and cussing at pedestrians like the madman he undoubtedly was. Johnson had the sinking feeling that the rest of his evening would be tied up on the lengthy commitment of another of the homeless mental patients that society saw fit to allow to wander the streets and raise havoc.

“Sir, sir, please step this way,” said the officer in the authoritarian voice he always utilized when in a potentially difficult situation. Johnson had decided to try to calm the guy down a little while he waited for backup.

One of the pedestrians nearby, a frowning blond in a black business suit, began to harangue Officer Johnson. “Look, officer, I pay taxes so I don’t have to be bothered by *people* like this. This is the second time today I have been harassed by a bum and I am going to call the mayor’s office and complain....”

Officer Johnson then turned his head to speak to the woman, at which time the tall homeless man reached into the pocket of the greasy, sweat-stained overcoat he was wearing and retrieved the snub-nosed .38 pistol he had found several days earlier in an overgrown alley and pointed it at the officer and pulled the trigger causing a loud *crack*. Officer Johnson heard a loud *pop* as the bullet crashed into his neck, destroying part of his spinal cord and carotid artery, then his surroundings and time itself seemed to stand completely still like one of the old-fashioned photographs with the bright flash and he could see with utter clarity every pore and every freckle and every line in the skin of the face of the shocked businesswoman who stood staring at him wide-eyed and it was as if he were looking at her through a tunnel then there was a blaring sound of every musical instrument conceivable all at once and he knew absolutely that he had been shot and he had a sudden longing to hug the beautiful earth and then in slow motion the earth accommodated him and gently pulled him straight downward and he slowly, slowly crumpled onto the buttery soft sidewalk and his wristwatch smashed face downward and the hands of the watch were embedded into the face with the time frozen

at 5:37 and the cushiony sidewalk lovingly cupped Johnson's face and the tunnel of his vision turned red then brown then black then white and the sidewalk turned into a field of fragrant wildflowers of yellow and blue and purple and his two teenaged daughters who were somehow little girls again were sitting next to him smiling and each holding one of his hands and he felt something like a wind except that it not only swirled around him but through him and the wind was love and fulfillment and contentment and *he* was the wind and the clouds and the sunlight....

* * *

As attorney Jerry Ferger placed his drink on the tablecloth, he wondered why he was sweating so profusely in the air-conditioned room. He then suddenly felt an intense pressure in the center of his chest. The young attorney seated in front of him stopped talking and said, "Mr. Ferger, are you all right?"

Ferger was feeling the fear rise as fast as the constriction in his chest as he realized *he was having a coronary*. "No, you asshole, I think I'm having a heart attack. Call someone. GET ME SOME FUCKING HELP."

A commotion started as the young attorney shouted for help with a panicked look on his face and the staff scurried around and the wealthy patrons seated nearby moved quickly away from Ferger's table as if he was a plague carrier and stood like statues lining the walls of the room. Several of the restaurant customers pulled cell phones from their pockets and began to make excited calls and some even recorded the scene for posterity. Ferger was breathing heavily now and was red-faced and was vomiting down the front of his custom suit and thinking *no, no, no fucking way, I get a checkup once a year and I'm in good god damn shape and this cannot be happening, I'll sue the fucking doctor and where is the fucking help...?*

In the meantime, the restaurant staff had called 9-11 to report the heart attack in progress and central dispatch found that all six of the city's EMS units were tied up and unavailable; one was heading toward the county lockup for an attempted suicide, two were tied up with "neck injury" auto accidents, two units were busy with drug overdose cases, and the last was broken down on the road due to an overheated engine that should have been replaced last year but was not, due to budget problems. A private ambulance was then called, but it would certainly take extra time to get there.

As Ferger went into full cardiac arrest, the famous amber and white eyeballs threatened to burst from his scarlet face, then rolled upward and he started gurgling and the die-hard last of the restaurant patrons quickly exited and the young attorney stood horror-struck nearby and glanced at his wristwatch that said 5:37 and he wondered where the damn ambulance could be and then Ferger felt the lights of the room begin to swirl and there was a loud roar like a jet engine and the swirling lights turned crimson

then green then black and Ferger heard the noxious grunting of a pig then demonic laughter from somewhere behind him and above him and below him and he was angry as all hell and as soon as he found that laughing asshole he would—then the lights went out completely and he felt himself falling into an abyss.

* * *

Rachael Richards floated in the bright and fragrant hospital room next to tiny, smiling angels that happily danced and whirled next to her as she looked down upon herself lying in the brilliant white bed where her husband Bob was caressing her face and neck. She noticed that Bob had a kind of glow about him, sort of a lovely sea blue. That kind and beautiful person, Kim, who during the ordeal had become so much more than a friend, was hovering near the doorway with a sad little smile on her face, and it seemed to Rachael that Kim was looking right at her, not at the still figure on the bed. Kim's glow was orange, a brilliant orange. Rachael felt at ease, completely at ease, as she inhaled the scent of lilac and rose and pine and everything beautiful and the light of the room seemed to dissolve into every color of the rainbow and each had its own unique aroma and incredible globes of light seemed to float around her and caress her and gently nudge her to move upward, upward, but first she wanted to touch Bob one more time and the ocean blue energy of her spirit joined with the energy that was Bob, and then she gave in to the gentle tug of the loving globes that now moved within the essence of her being and moved her toward the beckoning light above...and with a knowing nod, the hospice nurse moved forward with love and compassion to console and to counsel and to finish the process under the watchful face of the steel, industrial-looking clock that read 5:37.

MARGRITH SCHRANER is the Associate Editor of *The New Orphic Review*. The following story began as a 30-minute writing exercise. Thanks to Maureen Mahoney for being part of the writing group of two at the Dominion Café in April, and to Natalie Goldberg for her *Wild Mind*.

The Mouse Who Celebrated Spring

Margrith Schraner

IT'S FOUR O'CLOCK in the afternoon and I've only got thirty minutes to tell you what happened yesterday afternoon, my dear Karli. With a large cup of my favorite *yerba maté* at my elbow—vanilla chai, the type I always order—the writing will be relatively easy, provided I don't let my pen run ahead of me. What I'm about to tell you happened at sundown, just outside our living room. Ernest was standing at the window, looking out onto the street—he may have been closing the shades, I'm not sure—when he told me, “Hey, there's a mouse out there, I think.” I could see it plainly, this animal, which he later came to think might be a small rat. It was the animal's profile, its pointy nose—a small snout, in fact—which made me surmise it was a mole. Be that as it may, the most deliciously odd and absurd little detail about it was its shadow; I was reminded of it just now, watching the shadow glide alongside my hand as I write this letter to you—the shadow appearing exaggerated, due to the sunshine streaming toward me through the café window. The shadow of the mouse or small rat out in the street was exaggerated too, its shape backlit by the setting sun. And now, in retrospect, I'm quite certain that, yes, indeed, it was a mole, something that Ernest adamantly disputes, due to how fast it was running. I remember that sunshine was flooding the street and the pavement was mottled with shadows, webbed with bizarre contortions of branches, from the bare trees lining our street. I watched the shadows of the telephone poles grow more and more elongated as I stood beside Ernest at the window, transfixed, watching the mellow light mingling with the texture of the asphalt, blending in with the wetness left behind by the street-cleaning machine that had gone by earlier in the afternoon, and it was this wetness, I think, that might have attracted the small, furry, dark animal in the first place, might have drawn it out of its hiding place in celebration of spring. I watched it running rather quickly, up and down

at first, then back and forth across the street, and finally it started running in circles—it's hard to describe the movement, except by a single word, which might have to be 'erratic'—yes, write that in bold and italicize it—*erratic*, uncommonly so, begging the question, *Whither thou goest?* I wondered why it was running like that. Was it looking for something to eat? Later on, Ernest said it was a small rat, the type that had once strolled across our East End living-room floor, back in Vancouver, the young rats unafraid and undaunted, claiming their perfect right to be among us, up from the sewers, I guess. This small rat was looking for food, it seemed to me, out there on the incline of Mill Street; however the street was bare and there was no food to be had—not that I could see, anyway. It was supertime, almost, a cold March afternoon, so what was that small, dark, furry creature doing out there, running in circles, out in the open in our street, shortly before sunset? I became a bit worried, watching it run around and around so frantically, chasing its own tail, so to speak. I was quite anxious, to tell you the truth, thinking it might have been poisoned, or perhaps diseased. Then, quite suddenly, it ran—or rather it shot, straight out into the intersection. I saw a car coming; the tires just barely missed hitting the little creature. I was terrified; I hate to admit it. The mouse should have feared for its life, out there in the open—*sans* refuge, *sans* protection—'exposed' may be a better word; yes, written in bold—*exposed* to the elements. I imagined the myriad misfortunes that might befall it, countless unwholesome influences—the possibilities are endless. An easygoing bluegrass tune has suddenly drifted into these fear-filled recollections—it's more like a jig, actually, from the café speakers overhead—and the country dance seems to be having a mollifying effect, assuaging my fears somewhat, enough for me to continue with the story. The mouse-like creature has not, so far, been hit by any cars coming up the street: suffice it to say it is alive and well. I see it running around in circles, fast and furious, like a windup toy. It is making me cringe. Clearly, the mouse is courting disaster; all kinds of harm might descend on it. You know me: the slightest possibility of violence tends to accelerate my pulse rate. I'm not sure what to tell you next. The sequence of events has suddenly become muddled. I feel totally discombobulated. All of a sudden, there are only ten minutes left to go on my watch before I have to leave the café. I clearly remember how I turned away repeating the question; I asked tremulously whether the mouse was still alive. I heard Ernest say 'yes,' but in an unusually calm, collected manner, which put me on high alert. And then—or rather, now, at this particular juncture in the story—he reported that two cars had just gone by, each one missing the tiny furry creature by a whisker. Fortunately, it was still alive. The mouse was further down the street now, he said. It had moved on, but was less than a quarter of a block away. He laughed suddenly. He said it was amusing—in fact, it was like watching a silent movie—the antics of a waltzing mouse,

he said, one that seemed to be dancing with the probability of death. I ought to come to the window and see for myself. Really, it was quite entertaining: Baudelaire, the mouse, was engaged in celebrating spring; he seemed to be dancing, rather drunkenly, in the last, glorious rays of the setting sun. The light, too, seemed most unusual—extraordinarily sensual, he said. It was all so romantic when seen from this angle. Again, he laughed. A sudden breeze had stirred up the dead leaves in the street, filling the air with whirligigs. The leaves were just beginning to settle when he spotted it—witnessed the crow swooping down and plucking Baudelaire clean off the street. You mean the little creature is no more? I ventured to ask, stricken with fear. I was too shaken to fully comprehend. I finally heard him say something about the crow; it had now flown up into the maple tree across the street. The mouse must have been ailing, infected with a disease, perhaps, to have been out there in the first place; it wasn't customary at all for such small creatures to be running around in the open for such a long time. But now Baudelaire had become the crow's supper, simple as that. Nature is just what it is—cruel, isn't it? Would you want to be turned into someone's supper? What kind of supper is that for someone to be partaking of, anyway? What kind of ending is that—to die at sunset, willy-nilly—dead, just like that, from one moment to the next, in the midst of celebrating the arrival of spring? And if, indeed, the furry creature was poisoned or had rabies, which is what Ernest seems to imply, then its illness would already have been passed on, along the food chain, to the crow. So, why am I writing about this to you, my dearest niece? I think it's because I wanted to shed some light on how things arise, abide and fall away. I've only got a minute left, and I'm nearly at my wits' end. It's almost four-thirty—my cup is empty and I've reached the bottom of the page—but I'm at the point in the story where I can't stop the course of events. I've run outside, to the maple tree across the street. I see the crow sitting on the lowest branch, and I'm shouting—*yelling* might be a more suitable word, here—I'm yelling up into the tree, commanding that the crow drop the mouse. The crow hardly pays me any attention; already, it's gone back to its supper. I have less than fifteen seconds left on my watch and must leave you now, but very briefly, before I drop this letter into the mailbox at the corner, let me share with you the final question I've been brought up against: What do you suppose is going to happen next, now that the mouse's head has been left lying there, its eyes wide open, in the burgeoning grass of spring?

IAN ADAM'S background is Western Canadian. He has served on the Executives of the Writers Guild of Alberta and the League of Canadian Poets. He taught for many years at the University of Calgary, and now works as a full-time writer and consultant. His most recent book of poetry is *The Nomadic Marchesa* (Touchwood Press), and his writing has been published in numerous magazines and anthologies. He lives in Calgary.

Ian Adams / Two Poems

Xaymaca

1. Ship

the cruise ship called at Ocho Rios.

my wife is in the photograph, the ship
is steaming away to the right of her shoulder,
heading towards the harbour
as she poses in the warm Caribbean sea.

behind me as I snap the picture
Dunn's River waterfall,
jammed with people
climbing the ledges up its 600 feet,
holding hands in chains.

"What did you think of Jamaica," asked Linda Cameron.

the ship was enormous in the harbour
a hotel containing the vacationers
whose vacation was the ship.
it squatted, the ship, white,
like an angel
food cake. it crushed the harbour
sweetly. inside were the rituals
of captivity.

in Ocho Rios the human chains
climbing the waterfall,
in the town market

chains of those
too poor to ever leave the island
selling to cruise ship vacationers,
captive of the tour.

the tourists see those living off tourism,
the locals see the tourists.

it's all authentic.

2. Gallery

“What do you think of it here,” asked Claire Harris.

in Kingston,
in the National Gallery, Edna Manley's
“The Sun Goes Down” is a magnificence,
neither head nor star
a brown humanoid sun whose face
is both rays and night,
ours
and not ours.

Manley,
strong as Henry Moore
or Giacometti
but too female,
too Jamaican,
for fame.

a mobile also there, unauthored,
grit dirt floor cig-butt littered
leads counter-clockwise
through corrugated iron panel walls
covered with torn posters
and graffiti
(“lie down girl me stick it in”)
to a dead body
and cast-off bottles lying in rubbish:
a vicious spiral.

thirty percent of Kingston population

is squatters.
a spray-paint sign
on a shanty town wall reads
“MAN WHO STEAL HERE, HIM GET
HEAD CHOP OFF.”

3. Transitive

“Don’t you always see me laughing?”
says Eduardo the driver,
as we plan the excursion to Ocho Rios.

he gives jolly comments
on points of interest
all along the way:

Spanish Town, with the oldest Cathedral
in the New World;
the bridge built by captive Arawak labour
before the extermination of the people;
INCO’s bauxite mines
and their tailings, all red flayed earth;
the ramshackle concessions at the high point
on Faith Road, where we stop,
order peppery snacks:
then on, through
Fern Gulley, the ferns largely obliterated
by automobile fumes, to Ocho -

4. Historic

it began with the sugar cane
which grew
thick, fibrous, higher than the men

who harvested it. they were
captive to a money chain. they were
caught in a circle.
they were
crushed by the sweetness
that fed an empire’s
sweet tooth. oh

sweet sweet tooth.

Matthew “Monk” Lewis
18th Century English
author and slave-owner
wrote a story about Jamaica,
“The Isle of Devils.” the devils
are blacks. his blacks.
they are not
plantation owners.
history has ironized his story.

Lewis dies of yellow fever
en route to England.
buried at sea
his body does not sink,
is last seen
floating back to Jamaica. Lewis
circles back
involuntary Jamaican.
it was the devil done it
ironizing the story.

5. Vortices

the cruise ship has circled
into the harbour.
it has ironized our story
that we are travelers, not tourists,
voyageurs, not voyeurs.
we cruise the scenes,
telling our stories,
writing poems.

Eduardo has smoked ganga at Ocho,
I can see it in his eyes.
he drives silently and viciously
as we circle back
to our Kingston hotel
called the Pegasus,
from which we can take flight.

Food Chain Reaction

it is a predictable performance,
this single file family of mergansers, the crested red
head of the mother, iridescent green of the father,
the string of ducklings following like a tail,
all moving rapidly along
the west shore of a mountain lake, a parade for
the gawking eyes of summer residents from decks
of cottages lined with early summer ease, watching

them dive now, with precision, one sudden submersion or two
or several, beside or under the docks, leaving
only faint ripples, to emerge on
this side of the lake that provides passage for the river,
negotiating upstream,

not in any water ballet, no, nor
any Houdini disappearing and escape act, only a

simple foraging of waters for nourishment, insects or
minnows, or whatever else makes for
duck feast or duck luck;

when eruption intervenes with
honks of alarm, a
barrage of flapping and
explosion of flight, turmoil
ascendant in a panicky brief journey
to the shore, all fifteen of them now
looking at the lake, their body language
anxious.

“It must be the otters,” I say, even as
we look over waters
from which nothing emerges, as we
wait expectantly. as we
wait
and wait

for those torpedoes of the deep,

to come out with graceful motion
water slipping off their sides
these two,
male and female,
sliding up from the surface
to rest on a nearby dock
sleek in shining fur,

at leisure, they
nuzzle, preen and groom
soak up sun and time

“they are so cute,” says a seven-year old
as his father gingerly moves their boat
from the adjacent dock,

and otters turn their heads at once
in quiet alert
for they know there are
predators
other
than those who like minnows
than those who like
baby ducks.

SANDRA HARTLINE has lived in Canada since 1969, and in Nelson, B.C. since 1981. She recently completed a novella about traveling America in the 1950s, *The Way We Were Then*; and is completing a picaresque and historical novel, *Muck Creek*.

Crocodile

Sandra Hartline

ON HOT NIGHTS Kenneth and his parents lay on the sleeping porch under mosquito nets, listening to lizards on the stuccoed walls.

"To-kai! To-kai!" Over and over.

Kenneth could hear the heavy steps of the Indian nightwatchman, as he walked all around the compound, carrying a spear. The watchman spoke no English, not a single word.

Kenneth slept with his parents on the porch. He could hear them murmuring, their voices intermittent against the steady hum of the mosquitoes. And sometimes he could hear the sound of his own heartbeat, measured against all the other sounds.

"To-kai! To-kai!"

Something was in the water. Something swam past Mr. Chakri's elegant patio near Prakanom Road, under the wide bridge over which cars traveled to the Drakes' large and airy house. Something swam through the narrow place under the footbridge connecting the Drakes with Mr. Li. Round and round it swam, past Mr. Li's house, past Madame Lenoir's white bungalow shaded by flowering mango trees, past the house where Mr. Chakri's grandson was carried by servants. Something swam by the gardener's house, silent in the heat, and then past Mr. Marshall's big house near the road. Where had it come from? Nobody knew. Silently, silently it swam just beneath the green and brown water of the *klong*.

"Maybe it will swim away," said Mr. Li, who was originally from China. Mr. Li liked to sit outside in his garden in the evenings and listen to opera music and smoke. He never went near the *klong*.

Captain Drake telephoned Mr. Chakri, who owned the compound. "This is not too serious," said Mr. Chakri. He himself had not seen anything.

But the servants were worried. The Drakes' Number One Girl had

seen it, and so had Mr. Chakri's grandson, who, after all, was only two years old. What would happen if he fell in?

Mr. Chakri was worried for a different reason. It was only July, but he had heard that crocodiles can go without food for long periods. What if a crocodile was still around for his big New Year's Eve party, when he traditionally floated a naked woman across the lighted *klong* on a raft, to the delight of the social elite of Bangkok?

On Tuesday afternoon, Kenneth went to the Sports Club with his mother, who was teaching him to swim. Madame Lenoir was there, feeding biscuits to her pug, eating lime sherbet and chatting with the waiters and guests in English, French, German, Czech and Thai. On this particular Tuesday, everyone at the Sports Club was talking about a creature swimming in the Chakri *klong*.

"A crocodile—it can snap you in two!" Madame Lenoir said, snapping the fingers of her left hand for emphasis. Nobody knew for sure whether there was a M. Lenoir, but Madame did wear a little ring there.

"But I *like* crocodiles!" Kenneth exclaimed, for something interesting to say.

"You better stay away from the water," Kenneth's mother told him. She meant the *klong* winding by their house, not the Sports Club pool where she was teaching him to swim. This was good news to Kenneth, who had no desire to go anywhere near any body of water, absolutely none. A pale, morose little boy, he hated his swimming lessons, and didn't like going out in his father's leaky rowboat that so often tipped over and there he'd be, up to his neck in green slime with Mr. Chakri's gardeners killing themselves laughing.

* * *

Mornings he went to school. A Thai chauffeur picked him up in a white Plymouth. They drove slowly through Convent Road, past the Church of England and the ambassador's house. The chauffeur prided himself on being a slow driver, and never went beyond twenty-five miles an hour. Sometimes they spotted a wooden bus overturned in the *klong*. Kenneth imagined people getting wet, covered with it, that stinky stuff.

School was a building like a church hall, with a verandah and no glass in the windows—just wooden shutters. You could hear the rain pounding against the shutters. All the teachers spoke English. Kenneth's teacher was Mrs. Marshall, from Baltimore. Her husband was the doctor.

Long ago, Mrs. Marshall said, giant lizards called monosaurs swam in the sea. "It's a monosaur lizard in the *klong*," she told Kenneth. "I don't know how it got there, but it's probably harmless."

Kenneth shook his head. "Nope," he said. "It's a crocodile. My father is going to shoot it."

* * *

It was Dr. Marshall who had given Kevin the rowboat. The *klong* was

shallow and cool, and smelled just like the jar Kenneth kept frogs in. When the boat tipped over, Kenneth had to go into the washroom and pour clean water over himself from a big stone tub. Now the Number One Girl said there was something in the *klong*.

“*Yah lin nam*,” she said, gesturing with her hands. Don’t go near the water.

* * *

Madame Lenoir had lived in Bangkok since the end of the war. She had stayed on as a kind of hostess with the French Embassy, organizing parties, boating excursions and forays into the jungle as far south as the Malay Peninsula.

Many of the young men from the Alliance Française visited Madame Lenoir, who served sherry and excellent lemon cakes, but in the end she sent them all away. Madame had a secret she kept from everybody except Dr. Marshall, who came to see her every Thursday.

“Maybe I should go back to Lyon,” Madame said sadly. The disease was spreading deep inside her. She would be sorry to give up all the young men, the mango trees, dancing at the Embassy. She would be unhappy to say goodbye to Dr. Marshall, who was kind.

“Yes,” said Dr. Marshall. They sat in the shade of the mango trees and drank squashes, and he held her hand.

“Before you go, Hélène, I would like to give you a present.”

* * *

Mrs. Drake said the heat made her sick. “Nothing you can do in this gaddam heat.” She lay in her room with her eyes closed.

Downstairs, Kenneth waited for the Number One Girl to bring in his supper. He was alone, and wished he had something to say. Sometimes he would point to something, a flower on the table perhaps, and ask the Number One Girl for the words. *Mai dauk*, she would say, smiling. I don’t understand.

Captain Drake came into the room, dressed in his uniform. “I’m going now,” he said. “Would you like anything?”

Idly, Kenneth wondered what crocodiles ate.

Across the *klong*, Mr. Li was listening to an aria from *Don Giovanni*, played as usual at top volume. Mr. Chakri’s gardeners came rumbling across the bridge, pushing a wheelbarrow filled with spades, rakes and a push lawnmower. They disliked working in the middle of the day.

“Lazy good-for-nothings,” said Captain Drake, watching from the balcony as the gardeners crossed the bridge over the *klong*. “With Janet upstairs they probably won’t do any work at all. Probably just here to get drunk with the cook!”

“Can I play with them?” Kenneth asked.

His father looked at him. “Do your homework for Mrs. Marshall, or you’ll get beans for supper.”

“Our cook doesn’t know how to make beans!”

“Well, she can open a can. We get lots of those from the Army store.”

Kenneth sighed and opened his school exercise book. About Bangkok, he felt the same way his mother did—“never any fun around here.” Up on the walls, he heard the tiny lizards begin their evening chant.

“*To-kai! To-kai!*”

* * *

They didn’t hear the shot at all, only the scream. Kenneth’s mother ran downstairs in her cotton slip and began shrieking. Mr. Li turned off his phonograph. The Drakes’ cook ran out from the servant’s bungalow, covering her ears, and raced across the *klong* in the direction of the scream. She was back very soon after. Then Captain Drake, who understood Thai, told his son Dr. Marshall had shot the crocodile, who had been eating Madame Lenoir’s pug.

* * *

It was a juicy scandal. Why had Dr. Marshall been at Madame Lenoir’s house at that time of day? Apparently he had been making a number of house calls. Unperturbed, Dr. Marshall made arrangements for Madame to have a traveling bag made of crocodile skin, with shoes to match. Mrs. Marshall taught at the school as usual, with a set face. After a while Madame Lenoir went home to France, Mr. Li turned up his phonograph again, Kenneth Drake went out in the rowboat and everything settled down.

All the same, Kenneth missed the crocodile. He wished it had remained in the water, swimming vigorously, creeping out on its wide scaly claws to bask luxuriously in the sun, flashing its sharp teeth. That summer, he went with the Scouts all the way to Patani and camped on the beach not far from the jungle, but he saw no crocodiles.

JONATHAN MARPLOT was born in Vancouver, and lived in East Vancouver for the first four years of his life. He's been precariously attending post secondary school for networking and writing purposes, and is attending UBC this Fall. For the last three years he has been hermetically working on prose and poetry. He has recently moved back to East Vancouver where he's trying to take on a more serious role in writing and publishing.

Jonathan Marplot / Lost and Harrowing

Were we there forever, walking between the invisible
Lines that were laid, like the dead, so that we might
Not stumble, upwards or downwards, but with necks
Bent towards the burnt grass, filled with blooming
Buttercups. The sun and moon rotated around the
Flat fields by gorges, canyons, rivers, valleys, all
Circular and formulating again, again, thrusts of
Land towards the heirloom above, that was given
To the Olympians, but they wasted away, just like
All human, all too human thoughts become real,
They became real as we did, but upon a history,
A myth of histories, which alighted in the skies
With thunder-tempers, vindictive heirs, uproarious
Rams, wild smithies, maligned lusts, and the
Sweet old drama between the hierarchical touch,
Surrender, and kissing birth of what occurs
Between us; we, all, for those gods are our dramas.

On a field that is not Elysian I sit with these gods
And cry out, berating the universe, asking Pan
To fart, and speaking so loquacious that in our
Intuitions, without thoughts, all reason, joy, and
Madness pass between, sunburnt mouths, to be
Eaten, in the ears of our friends, who are here.
By the fire, that rises, monkeys climbing, in
Such sparkling red lines that upwards run, I see
A motion most patterned throughout the universe,
I see my brothers and sisters around me, blonde
Smiles, laughing curls, strong hands clapping
Humour, long embraces for jocularity, and
Amidst this, a libation coating the inside of our
Minds, delineating poison to each part, each

Muscle, each coil of brain. What are we but
The continuous madness, the Dionysian spirit
Upwelling towards our eyes, that shroud with
Fear, paranoia, seeing girlfriends with boyfriends,
Seeing handshakes behind backs, with words
Like whispers, and hatred for all that I cannot
Understand, which is the bustle between us, the
Play-written lives, screens through scenes and
With all intoxication, the cheeks that are glow,
And the wombs warm, and blue eye bright,
Maybe kiss from a wholesome, someone, some
Thing longed for before the end of the sojourn
In a long field, in another country, waiting to
Be excommunicated for crimes against humanity.

Upon a caravan of cars, bikes, boats, baths, and
A great long busted Camper, rickety but safe,
Took such a race of Vikings towards a festival
On a hillside, much like Sisyphus's, where near
The bottom a great concert of bands, collected
For entertainment and celebration, poured out
The notes that are immaterial but for the ear
So real it causes a sensation, permanent, on
The mind, memories of classical tenors'
Electric explosions, and smooth ghostly
Voices. These nearby cannot quit the Vikings,
Who with scimitar and garrulous bravado tear
Apart the supposed tranquility around us, other
Waylaid guests of a campsite, upon a hill, to
The west of something, east of something,
North of something, south of something.
But in the center, where there can be nothing,
Is the soul. If something is taken apart
Minutia by minutia, dismantling an object
Living or dead, round, square, oblong; then
In that center, one could continue to
Dismantle into eternity, waiting to grasp
Onto some fruition to a material recollection,
Something tangible, which a soul is not. Not
By the senses alone, each one separate from
The other, but if each sense is shown how to
Use the other, and experience sight through
Sound, or taste through touch, or any through
Any other, why; the tangerines, the sunsets,

The locomotives, the crying children, the
Verdant pine, the lips of goodbye, the
Embrace of hello, would all be much too
Much, too much, to ever bear, without death
Nearing in such rapidity, that light itself
Would be eclipsed by the terror, of how
Anything fully realized would become
Absolutely nothing. A void of emptiness.
And this is where I lost it, my self, my I.
The questions, that somber in the night with
Owls' eyes and crows' beaks, and wolves'
Hearts, they do not remember who they bite,
For it is their unconscious nature to chew;
And, if these questions return to us in old age,
Will we remember by our pasts, why we
Held out our hands and took wrong or did it.
Forgot us we did, we forgot us in the past,
For we were not the past, and only ever
This present that is a continuous action.
But, somewhere behind the gulf of shame,
Like tunnels running forever into the center
Of the earth, there was a peaceful recollection
That survival was not the endpoint, but there
Was, on top of waves and new days, a bright
Flowery bird bursting forward beyond the
Raping Vikings, and the Dramatic gods, and
The turmoil between each and everyone. It
Rose once, and forever because once, and we
Knew that, by scorched touch or simple embrace,
We left something behind, that day, we left
Something so dear to us that we cannot forget.
It will resound in my soul until I die. All those
Who spoke and felt it, were there, on the hills
With Sisyphus, and their boulders grew as the
Waning sky passed into blackness, and beneath
Those ancient stars we left something, but, since
We can never dismantle it to the core, without
Losing our minds, what we lost, will stay there
Forever, invisible, painful, and mourning; silently
Between weak laughter and tired, waning eyes.

LOUIS E. BOURGEOIS is an adjunct instructor of English at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. He is the editor of *Complete with Missing Parts: Interviews with the Avant-Garde*, and the author of *The Animal: Prose Poetics* (BlazeVOX books, 2008). As the editor of VOX PRESS, he will soon be taking command of the forthcoming interview magazine *Wolf Table*. His collection of aphorisms, *Hosanna*, will be released this fall by Xenos Books.

Prologue to The Narrative of Johnny Randolph

Louis E. Bourgeois

Editors' Note:

The following narrative was found among the intellectual papers of John Randolph, a former slave of John Randolph of Roanoke. John Randolph of Roanoke taught “Johnny” how to read and write, a crime in the antebellum South that was technically punishable by death. It is not known how well versed Johnny was in the classics. We conjecture that he knew a smattering of Latin and French, probably in the same desultory manner as his master.

Throughout Randolph’s life, Johnny was perhaps his closest companion. When he was fifteen years old, Randolph inherited Johnny who was then about ten years old. Essentially, the two grew up together at Randolph’s plantations Bizarre and Roanoke. Only scant records exist of their early years, but it is our view that their relationship, though cordial at times, grew as formal as any master/slave relationship found in antebellum Southside Virginia.

Whether slave or freeman, anyone who was to serve John Randolph of Roanoke, perhaps the most literary minded spokesman of the antebellum South, would have to be quite learned to do so effectively. The following narrative begins with Johnny’s reaction to the death of John Randolph of Roanoke at the City Hotel in downtown Philadelphia on May 24, 1833.

—The Editors

City Hotel. May 25, 1833

My master died yesterday. I am weak from the events that have culminated in his death. Although I am weak and saddened, I find it necessary to

portray his demise, which was his life, in a string of stories. The whole of this writing might prove to be less worthy and noble than his life, which was lived *ad absurdum, ad infinitum*, and I along with him.

My reasoning is such that I have to conclude that I am a miserable wreck without my master, although I never truly knew him. No man knew him, only one knew him, and she died years ago. Those are his words, not mine. His mother was a true *f eminine  ternelle*. I never knew her, but he talked about her without end. When she died, a part of him died, and I think he spent his whole life under her shadow. My master's life was ruled by the eternal feminine, his mother's memory, in which the end result was that he could not live in the present, nor consider the future, except as a negative force. He was a true *necromantia edere revesci*, one who feeds off the dead.

On Monday, May 20th, he and I boarded the Montezuma, which was harbored at Delaware City bound for England, where my master was to partake in the Royal Court's Midnight Eve celebrations. As is well known, these celebrations allow American politicians and government officials of every rank to mingle with British Royal Society, by which my master had been all but fully accepted. He never felt at home except in England, although his earliest memories were of himself and his mother running from British Tories during the early years of the War of Independence. Benedict Arnold was the leader of the Tory army that burned down my master's childhood home at Cawsons along the Appomattox River where it flows into the James. My master would never stand for England's intervention into American affairs; he did in fact believe in America, regardless of what the papers have said about him recently; but England, I believe, was emblematic of that thing in him which was his mother. Not merely her memory. In his mind, England represented class permanence and agrarian utopianism, the *maternus patria*. It was from the English point of view that my master misunderstood America, and, in turn, America misunderstood him. He will never see England again, and undoubtedly neither will I.

We were on board the ship for about an hour when I first noticed that all was not well with my master. These symptoms, if I may call them such, were not at all uncommon to his nature, but they seemed to have accelerated at a rapid pace on board the ship. My master had been sick for a long time, about ten years, and I have been witness to many examples of his *dementia sensus*. Ten years is a long time to gradually dispense with the lungs. Consequently, in the end, the lungs took his mind, and the lungs and the mind worked together to take the body of my master who was alive only yesterday.

On board the ship, my master's language began to deteriorate. I had just served him tea, which he said gave him great relief, but his doctors had warned against its consumption. He asked me for a kerchief to cover

his mouth during his all but perpetual cough, then he laid the kerchief on the table at which he stood rather than sat.

The kerchief was covered in blood. My master gave me a look of desperation such as I had never seen before from him, although sickness of one form or another had followed him throughout his life and mine. After a minute or two, his spirits seemed to rise slightly and he managed to shriek out in his sonorously beautiful and terrible voice that he would like for me to obtain for him, at all costs, a turtle in a box. After giving this command, he then, for the first time since we had boarded the ship, sat down at the table, which was at the stern of the ship facing Delaware Bay. His request for a turtle in a box slightly alarmed me. I did not ever remember seeing any turtles in my life except in sketchbooks of *natura anima*. At this request, and given the outward intensity of his physical sickness, I realized that his mind was slowly leaving his body, or perhaps it was his soul. Through much effort, and after nearly a half-hour of searching, I obtained for him not a turtle in a box, as he indeed most certainly wanted, judging from the intonation of his voice, but instead I obtained for him a leaf in a box. I presented the box to him and said, "Master, I have arrived with what you asked for, to employ for whatever purposes you might see fit." I was quite anxious, for I did not know if his command was not somehow to be taken literally, or perhaps it was the case that I misheard him. He opened the box and took out the leaf and handled it gently. Indeed, it seemed to give him a certain amount of satisfaction, as if he had been put in contact with something quite familiar. Perhaps some odd toy he had and then lost during childhood. He carefully put the leaf back in the box and closed the lid. He looked up from where he sat and said, "Sir, you are the nonpareil. Not one person in a million could have tamed the creature to be so relaxed. Your accomplishment shall not soon be forgotten, and on our return from London I shall obtain for you an immense collection of these creatures, so that you may share them with your people." At the time these words gave me great relief, for I had disobeyed him without consequence, but now as I think back on that day, which was only four or five days ago, but what feels like twenty years ago, I believe I was secretly, in my mind, sick at heart, for his display of *insania* at this moment did not seem connected to anything other than being truly sick, *in eius sanguis*.

* * *

Once, many years ago, while I was reading late one night, I heard a horse's hooves going round and round the house. I could not see from the window of my room, for the night did not shine with either star or moon. This rotation went on for about one quarter of an hour before I took my lamp and proceeded to the front lawns, at the risk of severe punishment for

disregarding my curfew. I stood at the entrance of the house for only a moment before I heard the horse come round again, and incrementally, as the voice came toward me, I could hear my master repeating wildly, “Macbeth hath murdered sleep, thus Cawdor shall sleep no more! Randolph hath murdered sleep! Thus Roanoke shall sleep no more! All hath an end. The way is narrow but the gate is wide. Adieu! Adieu! Adieu! Farewell old world! Macbeth hath murdered sleep! Macbeth hath murdered sleep! *Parturiant montes, nascetur ridiculus mus! Et memoria tenere poeta, post equitem sedet atra cura!*”

I held the lamp above my head and as the horse came near I shouted, “Master! Master!” But his voice trailed away as the horse proceeded in its orbit. I could still hear him shouting the same words, “Macbeth hath murdered sleep! Macbeth hath murdered sleep!” From the back of the house, I heard an explosion of pistol shots, he often carried up to four pistols at a time, and as he made his way round again, I could hear him laughing a shrill laugh, which surprised me. I did not remember ever hearing him laugh, not even when we were children.

I was quite fearful of the lashing that might ensue for leaving the house after dark. I had never received a lashing before, but I had never disobeyed a direct rule, which was the only time my master seemed to use physical punishment. My master never whipped a slave if a mistake was made, although my master’s vituperation could sting as bad as any whip. But conscious disobedience of a rule regardless of the circumstances that might arise to justify the breaking of that rule was grounds for, as he once stated it, “a bloodletting,” *sanguis vuleris*.

When he made his way yet again to the front of the house, I shouted as loud as I could, “Master, Stop! Master, Stop!” Somehow through the intensity of the riding and laughter, he heard me. Perhaps he had finally taken notice of my lamp, for I could hear the horse whine and move slowly toward me. I could barely make out the trace of horse and rider as they came closer. In all likelihood, the only thing my master could see was my lamp. It must have appeared suspended in mid-air, like some angel without head or wings. The closer the horse moved toward me, the more my hands shook, until I dropped the lamp onto the ground where it instantly burst into several small flames, which were extinguished as quickly as they came into existence, for the night was humid and the grass was damp.

It was then that my master spoke in his shrill voice, the effect of it was such that I felt a clink with the density of a nickel drop to the bottom of my heart. He said, “What new devil are you, sirrah? What creator sent you to visit me on this wonderful night of laughter and mirrors? Show yourself so that I may bow to thee. There is no need to present a false face, for I have faces enough appearing in view of my mind’s eye. *Haud ignota loquor, et, Je frémis comme je commence à comprendre ce que*

c'est.”

I wanted to say to him, *ces visions comme ça*, but instead said in a tone of voice all too confident, “It is me, Master. It is I, John, Johnny, Master. Your servant and friend.” As soon as I said this, fear hit me like a bullet in the chest. The fear came from not knowing if I had overstepped my limits by calling him friend, even though I had before when we were younger; and he even appeared at least somewhat pleased that I had called him such.

I could not see my master nor could he see me. The only visible objects were fireflies, and from the corner of my eye I caught sight of a distant candle from a top room of the house where no one was supposed to be at this hour of night. I could feel the horse’s breath on my face. My master was all too silent but I could hear him. For even at the young age of thirty-five, he must have been afflicted with the disease, because every time he breathed I could hear an internal cough deep-seated in his lungs. The cough sounded like a cross between a wheeze and a hiss, a kind of arrogant but painful moan. He said, “He that calls me master should go in great fear of being called slave. Perhaps I should call you serpent, for every slave is a serpent in disguise, seeking to destroy he who tamed him, *homo homini lupus*, or should I say, *hunc tu caveto, celui qui à la lumière montre des signes de haine pour sa mère*. That you call me friend is no great favor to the friend. For, the friend calls friend ‘friend’ because he seeks his death. A good friend knows that the air is not clean with a friend in sight. I beg your pardon, sir, *idem velle atque idem nolle ea demum firma amicitia est*, but if you are Johnny my servant, how can you call me friend? You cannot deem yourself a friend of mine, for only I can say when you are to be friend. You are always slave but you cannot always be friend. Do not confuse this issue, sir. No two men are created equal, a slave constitutes a slave, but a friend is in the mind of the maker. I can give you the seven realms of Hell in the original tongue, but you, sir, cannot give me an iota of friendship without my dispensation. Ah, see how I slowly return to consciousness, like a Yankee from honesty! *Personne ne suit un chemin obscur pour toujours et tu, Monsieur, m’a aidé à trouver la lumière*.

When he finished speaking, he told me to climb upon the horse. Because of the extremity of darkness, I had a rather difficult time mounting the horse. My hand would slip from the bare back of the horse and I would fall to the ground. The horse had not a saddle, for my master’s saddle was in repair, and the only saddle he thought fit to use was an English saddle that was imported directly into his hands from London. After the third fall, my master, who was not possessed with too much virility of body, grabbed me by the pantaloons. His meager strength was barely enough to settle me properly on the horse in back of him.

I began to feel a great anxiety concerning the lamp I had let slip from

my hand. However, I considered the accident as a possible means for reconciling my previous transgression of leaving the house after my curfew. I knew from experiences past that my master often became quite contented with a slave if the slave took it upon his own to compensate his actions before scolding was administered. Before my master clicked his heels to set the horse in motion, I attained enough courage, a courage that was quite tinged with both hope and dread, to say to him, "Master, the lamp. I shall do anything within my abilities to make amends for the broken lamp. The breaking of the lamp, Master, was an act that I will not recover from all too soon, *lacrimae rerum*. I would request the hardest punishment possible from which I may recover." After I said these words, I knew I had again made a mistake by not only saying what I said, but by speaking in the first place. I had misinterpreted my master's mood. Although my instincts had told me not to speak, my mind wouldn't listen. It seemed as if I had no choice in the matter, as if somehow or another I had been preordained to make great mistakes on this night. My master replied, in a not too angry but firm tone, "You, sir, who has said too much already, should not concern yourself with the lamp that was. The fact that the lamp is broken on the ground, broken by your own will, constitutes a severe moral decrepitude which I was not aware existed in you. I thought I had taught you more than enough about the nature of decadence, but no, you, sir, demanded that the lamp should be broken upon the ground, as a reminder, obviously, of your fragmented mind that I have for years been trying to mend. I tell you, sir, the burden of proof lies heavily upon you, and you, sir, have not paid close enough attention to details concerning this matter. You have a moral responsibility to that lamp and to me. *Nemo repente fit turpissimus*. Yet, I will, because I am kind, reeducate you once again. I have spent my whole life doing so and you still make the same mistakes." After he was through, my master clicked his heels and we dashed toward the western end of the estate where the millhouse and the library exist side by side overlooking the slave quarters.

A few moments later we arrived at the library. He told me to go inside and light the reading room. It was quite dark and I could not see to walk. The night was exceptionally quiet and the only sound was that of a dog barking somewhere among the slave quarters, which in those days were located at the bottom of the valley. I stumbled on the corner stone of the building but caught my balance in time without falling down, but after I reached the stairs I stumbled yet again and this time fell into the door which burst open with the impact of my body. My master, who I supposed was still on the horse, said, "Sir, one more crash of that magnitude and you'll wake the chickens from their indomitably hostile sleep. That is a responsibility I'll naturally assume you cannot bear." Although knowing better than to speak at all, yet knowing also that silence might be a mistake, I said, "I shall be silent from this moment on master, *sub specie*

alternitatis.” Even this seemed like too much said. I was caught in a bind that was common for most slaves. I somehow had always avoided these situations. My master replied, “Sir, I will place great trust in your earnest intentions of lighting the room. But for the love of Heaven, sir, do hurry! For the time that is now so propitious waits upon us like an aged heir waits for ripe reward.”

In the darkness, I felt for the flint that I knew to be on the mantel. While I felt for the flint, I thought, Chickens? He is worried about the chickens? What would it matter if the chickens did wake? To whom would it matter if the chickens did wake? Sinful for a slave to be thinking this way. But my mind is beyond, with no will of my own, my mind is beyond expectations.

After lighting several of the lamps throughout the room, I took notice that my master was standing at the threshold of the open door. He stood rather hunched, for his height was quite near seven feet. He would not come into the room. I could not make any particular sense of his disposition. There seemed to be no entailed reason why he should remain slightly hunched at the threshold of the door. He stood and watched me with those small dark eyes of his, standing, as he was, dressed in his buff and blue, and to my surprise his long blue-black hair was not clipped at the back as it normally was and had been on the horse. When I was on the horse with him I had not felt any strands of hair at his waist side, and surely would have, for I had held onto his waist as we rode from the front lawn to the library. His hair was of such a length that had it been let loose as it now was I would have felt the uncoiled locks rub against my hands.

My master would not come into the room. With hidden irritation, or so it seemed, I said, “Master, the room is well lighted, you may enter as you will.” Still at the door in his awkward position, he said, “My good sir, do you expect me to enter this room with such an object as that in my presence? I dare say, sir, that you are in need of spectacles and I shall obtain for you a pair at the nearest opportunity.” He said these words as he pointed his long slender finger at the middle of the floor. There was to my perception no tangible object there, not even a rug, for I myself had sent the rug to Roanoke City a few days earlier to be cleaned. I began to yield a slight sweat on my brow and my fingers tingled with a rather uncomfortable sensation. My heart began to beat quicker and quicker with every breath I took, for I could not make sense of the situation as it formed itself around me with every word spoken by my master. Nor did I know what to do, for his speech had become so erratic and seemingly nonsensical, yet authoritative, that I felt as if every move I might make would be a wrong move, especially the act of doing nothing at all. Not knowing what he would do next, I finally said, with a strange mixture of hopelessness and irritation, “Master, the object shall be removed as you desire, but will you not advise me as to where it should be disposed?” He

pointed to an open valise where several articles of clothes had been folded and piled one upon the other. He said, "Put it in there and handle it with great care, for if it is broken it cannot be replaced and if it is broken not even Mother will forgive me. *De nihilo nihilum, in nihilum nil posse revert.*"

Given these instructions, I now felt a slight sense of relief. I had been given a means by which I might perform some action, no matter how absurd. I walked a few steps to the middle of the floor and bent down to pick up the imaginary object. I formed my hands in such a way as to gesticulate a vase that I had imagined to be handed down from generation to generation, stretching back to the first Randolph at the dawn of colonial America. I slowly walked to the valise and placed the conceived object on top of the folded clothes. I carefully closed the door of the valise and turned to my master and said in a not too confident, or personal tone, "Madame Randolph may now rest easy at her leisure knowing her item of affection has been carefully preserved." After I said this, he finally moved away from the threshold of the door and extended to his full length. From where he was, and from the particular angle where I stood, I had come to know what is truly meant by the phrase The Legs of John Randolph, a sort of *metonymia* that had risen to legendary usage even before my master had entered Congress at the young age of twenty-five. His legs seemed to begin almost at the chest, which was barely a foot wide. His arms, as they hung down unabated, never seemed to end, or so I thought on that night in the reading room. On that night, he appeared to me as some sort of *une bête fou*, approximating a cross between a giant heron and the largest of lizards. And with his hair down as it was, and even before the lashings began across my bare back with my master's horsewhip, I realized why he was Master and I was Slave. I realized all too well that there can be no true friendship between a master and slave, as he was so indelibly teaching me on that starless and moonless well-lighted night.

NANCY WHITE'S first book, *Sun, Moon, Salt*, won the Washington Prize for Poetry. Further poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *FIELD*, *Harpur Palate*, *Ploughshares*, *Seneca Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, and others. She teaches at Adirondack Community College in upstate New York, is Associate Editor at *The Sow's Ear Poetry Review*, and serves as editor for *The Word Works* in D.C.

Nancy White / Four Poems

You Cannot Say

where it came from cannot
remember a name a
destination no

fork in the road no mainsail
or oily skidmark or
original sin

but it asks
for nothing eats nothing
marks no territory performs

for no one
buried or bare it waits
intangible massive silent shrill it

moves under your hands
your breath your
glance shifts

its tint the thin
membrane no eyes
with which to study accuse claim

it waits is waiting
for a word before the lid for
you to say yes I know you mine

Passing the Church Marquis

Jonesy's up with the bucket
of black plastic letters, the topic:
God's unfailing love.

Sunday Joann brought the twins.
How clear the sky finally looked
to them! Jonesy's wondering

why they weren't wearing
the good shoes he gave. Where
did the good shoes go? How

can she still look nervous
when he loves her? And her
children too, those eyes. His ladder

bows, the wind sways
the bucket. He drops the V.
There's only the one.

They Ask You About Middle Age

First the engorgement of modest
success. Then birth, the prizing away of ripened
favorites which sank

down the channel in a clotting mass.
And just loneliness. The one who said all things had
meaning turned like a bulldog

and bit. No exit but exit.
Honesty expensive now! Starch of complacency:
grateful for waiting,

for rooms, a sandwich, forced
hot air. Then the remarkable silence—vibrant, black
outer space, where we live—

made it hard to turn back.
Soft, barely believable mornings (and other sweet
fruits) do grow.

Second Coming: 1999

We are Americans! ShriII as gulls,
cutting up and screaming when we win.
Our heaven is hot, white, perpetual,
how could we be the ones skittering
slick to hell? So we shed stuff—
the barn out back full of cast-off
axles and flashing motes, last year's blunt
bull-dozer blooming rust and poison paint-
shards. Hey, you're smart to get out of the way.

IVOR C TREBY was born in Plymouth UK but has lived in London for most of his life. He has over 300 poems in print, has been published fairly widely in the UK, North America and elsewhere, given readings in London, Houston, Rotterdam, and across Australia, and believes passionately that form and metre are still of the essence of poetry. He has written five books on the life and works of the Victorian dual poet Michael Field.

Ivor C Treby / Four Poems

Awareness of the Sea

The deaf man does not hear the surge,
but sees the long comb
glaucous, refringent
break on the shore

The blind man knows salt on his lips
sees with the wind's eye
hears in the waves a raw clamour
of shipwreck and Tritons

The man with no tongue
feels ocean's tumult and battery,
cannot taste brine
though the breakers roll and engulf him

The drowned man
tangled in bladderwrack
hears not, nor sees, nor feels,
rides idly a hammock of stars

Second Tenor

How pitiful the lover's stead!

(Much like a bird in sleek black coat
With bobbing head and yellow bill
Who pleads for crumbs before he'll sing.)

In Opera we know him well.
Before he'll sing we guess his fate:
His lady's heartless, breaks her word.

In sleek black coat, with silver plate,
A waiter in a grand hotel
Not more contemptuous at his ring.

His love burns as a flaming brand:
She spurns him on a minor note
And squawks, and preens, much like a bird.

He is undaunted, thinks no ill,
A child's pet mouse who pleads for crumbs;
Obsequious as a tradesman, comes

With yellow bill and bobbing head,
Still deferential, cap in hand.
Credits at last his suit must fail.

He shoots himself. She takes the veil.

A Bright Child's Lexicon

A is for Amadou, easy to light

N is a Noctuid, flying by night

B is a Bhaji (you'll eat more than one)

O is an Orrery, planets and sun

C is for Cacodyl, smells very bad,

P is a Patricide, murders his dad

D is a Dachshund, a dog it would please

To find **Q** for Quincunx, a group of five trees

E, the Eumenides, a kind sort of Furies

R, a Recorder for crown courts and juries

F is Fortuitous, purely by chance

Learns **S**, a Schottische, is a polka-like dance

G are Galoshes, not worn when it's fine, a

T tries a Tangram, a puzzle from China

H owns to Hubris, a cardinal sin

U is the Umlaut, much heard in Berlin

I is an Inuit, lives where it's cold,

V, the Virago, does nothing but scold

J is a Jorum we fill from a flagon

W's a Wyvem, a winged snake-cum-dragon

K, tiny Krill mighty whales like for tea

X, the strong Xylem that hold up the tree

L, a Laryngoscope, looks down your throat

Y, long lost Yesteryears, times now remote

M are all Matelots, jolly jack-tars

Z, a high Ziggurat, climbs to the stars

Untitled

A cut-glass English accent
I heard this day relate
how she and a companion
had walked down to the Tate,
and there they saw a canvas
in sapphire blue and rose
(the artist is not famous,
a name that no-one knows).

This painting with some others
had chanced to catch her eye,
it was, she said, so charming
it made her want to cry;
I could not help but listen,
so cold her voice, so loud,
there in a racking Tube train
it reached me through the crowd.

I marvelled that the artist
in hunger, cold and pain,
should spark this sudden insight,
had laboured not in vain:
no other person heard her
alone with their desires
their heads yet bowed and nodded,
their ears all filled with wires.

PAUL J. HEALY'S poems have appeared in previous issues of *The New Orphic Review*, *JAMA (The Journal of the American Medical Association)*, *The Neovictorian / Cochlea*, *Horsefly* and *Bellowing Ark*.

Paul J. Healy / Four Poems

Spray River

A squalling of silent snow,
swirling into grey
evening cinders.

The smoke and the snow are one,
as are the avalanche heavy heights

lost in the great grey whiteness
of frost-riven firs.
And this frying pan

where the larch and the valley oak
live without envy, pig iron black,
smeared with fat.

Visitation

Hums the red reality machine,
the brain dull and peevish.
I saw T.S. Eliot in a dream
scratching on the dusty window.

Why Eliot? Who knows? I had seen his name
in a magazine and that must have been enough...
he was tapping with his knuckles on the glass
behind him there was fog or a yellowish gas.

The Adhikarin

- *The cause of suffering is ignorant craving (trsna).*-
second of the "Four Noble Truths"

The way the kerosene blew
back in the driver's face
like a vat of possessed blood,
(you don't get paid enough for this I said,)
burning his eyes and staining the snow red...

Gandhi's father died while he was having sex in the other room;
shame became the springboard of asceticism.
It is unbearable to contain the flood,
but without a dam there is no other way
to back up a lake.

auto-da-fé

The Chimera burns
and her lion's flesh
sizzles down like common fats...

Her fabulous upsweeping wings,
twin pinions of celestial hues,
sear off like the pin feathers of a chicken.

You could hear the constant clamoring
of the horde outside the gates. They demanded
the Chimera be handed over and brought to justice.

Her breasts dripped milk roped to the stake,
as in a twilight of roses,
then withered in flame to applause and laughter.

ROSS KLATTE, born in Minneapolis and raised on a family farm in Minnesota, emigrated with his wife to Canada in 1971 and settled with her outside Nelson, B.C., where they still live. He is the author of *Leaving the Farm* (2007), a memoir of his boyhood that began as the prize-winning essay in the CBC Literary Competition for 1990. Currently he is writing a novel about back-to-the-land hippies in British Columbia at the end of the Sixties.

Trees Made of Glass

Ross Klatte

THE DAY WAS white, misty, ghostly almost, with ice on all the trees so that they seemed made of glass. It was a phenomenon known as freezing fog, Margaret knew, and had created some sort of Viking nether world that she saw, suddenly, as the perfect setting for a ballet.

“Judith!”

“Yes, Margaret?”

Judith came out of her bedroom, where she’d been watching a soap opera on television. She was much thinner than Margaret, and looked older, though she was years younger.

“I’d like my glasses, *please*.” There was no need to be unpleasant. Margaret knew that, and hated herself for it. “And that fool magazine of yours on the table.”

It was a women’s magazine—Judith subscribed to it, ostensibly for its recipes—and Margaret flipped disdainfully through its glossy pages, full of slick advertisements and “inspiring” articles and stories; full of glossy, beautiful women and sleek, incredibly handsome men, all young, all splendidly equipped for life. The entire production gave her an image of a young couple on a cliff above a crashing sea, the woman’s long hair flying in the wind, the man’s muscular arms around her.

“Judith!”

“Yes, dear?”

“I’d like my coffee now. *Please*.” Again, there was no need to be so vile. Yet Judith’s patience, her infuriating sweetness, compelled it.

“Careful,” Judith told her. “It’s hot, dear.”

Of course she spilled some coffee on her lap as she brought the cup shakily to her lips, its hotness burning through her dress and settling in her crotch where it warmed it as if she’d peed herself—as she did on occasion.

“Dammit!” she cried.

“You all right, dear?” Judith called from the kitchen.

“Yes, goddamnit. I spilled on myself.”

“Oh. Sorry.”

“Sorry for what?” Margaret snapped. “Sorry it didn’t happen to you?”

She stared out at the clump of trees beyond the yard that was like a glass forest looking ready to shatter. The weight of the ice, in fact, had broken some branches and, in a flash of inspiration, she saw that as a metaphor of the beauty and fragility of love, love broken by its own, enclosing weight. That might be the theme of her ballet.

She saw the Prince come springing out of the glass forest and the Peasant Girl whirling out of the mist to meet him. Ballet was so unreal yet so exquisite, so artificial, so disciplined. It was taking earthbound, heavy flesh, the human, sweating body, and making of it something light and lovely, seemingly free of gravity, something fine and balanced and perfect.

“Lunchtime!” Judith called, causing Margaret to realize she’d been dozing. Now she would have to struggle out of her chair and labor into the kitchen.

“Let me help you, Margaret.” Judith was there beside her.

“I can walk, I can walk,” Margaret insisted.

She raised herself, took her bearings, then waddled painfully into the kitchen and collapsed into her chair at the table. They were having yesterday’s leftovers—or was it Wednesday’s?—roast beef and potatoes, with bread and gravy. Margaret poked at her meat with her knife and fork.

“Let me cut it for you, dear.”

“I can manage, I can manage,” said Margaret.

She stabbed a piece of bread and popped it into her mouth. Then she sliced, with difficulty, through the beef. The beef wasn’t tender, and she had difficulty chewing it with her dentures.

“See?” she said, glaring at her sister.

“I see,” said Judith.

Judith rose from her chair and went to the sink. She felt older than Margaret, felt that her life, like Margaret’s, was over. Her children were all married and moved away. She was a nurse now to her older sister in this house that had been her and her husband’s; her dear husband, now dead and gone, whom she missed. She missed him so, and it was sad to remember him, to remember his hands and his powerful arms and, yes, the hard, powerful look of his erection, which used to excite her; sad to recall how he had sickened and died. It was sad to look through her high school annual and see that girl looking out at her from her graduation picture. My God, had that pretty—even beautiful—young woman ever been *her*?

“Ready for more coffee?” she said to Margaret.

“Nope. I’ll go back to my chair now.”

“Let me help you.”

“Nope. I used to walk three miles to school, I guess I can walk to my chair.”

“I walked to that school, too,” Judith said. “We both walked to school when we was girls.”

“Were. *Were*,” corrected Margaret.

She raised herself slowly and leaned against the table. “It was that drafty old school,” she said. “And then teaching all those years in that same school when half the time there was no heat in the place.” She let go of the table and started painfully across the kitchen. “So now the arthritis has got me.”

“Let me help you, Margaret.”

“Nope. I’m all right, I tell you.”

She worked her way into the living room and collapsed into her chair by the window. She closed her eyes. And at once she began to dream, to drift, to soar out of her body, to sail above the bleak expanse of her past life. She could see her life now almost as though it had happened to someone else, *almost*. There were things about it that still infuriated her. Her plainness, for one thing, added to her chubbiness as a girl and then as a young woman that had caused her to be called “Puppy.”

Puppy. They’d started calling her that in grade school, in the one-room country school she’d attended as a fat little girl. Puppy because she was roly-poly and forever chasing around the swings and teeter-totter at recess; Puppy for another reason, later. But that wasn’t nice. It wasn’t respectful! They called her Puppy (sometimes to her face!) as the plump young woman who, after teaching all week in that same, one-room school she and Judith attended as kids, had willed herself to all the dances and picnics, on all the hay rides and other gatherings, where young people met. Yet nothing pretty had come of it. Unlike Judith, relaxed in her beauty, around whom the boys used to gather like bees to honey, Margaret had been too intense, too eager, too homely, *too pitiable*. She was pitied! She could see that now. She could see it then. She could never have been popular—except with certain boys. With certain boys she had been extremely popular, but you gave them what they wanted, she remembered bitterly, you gave them everything and then, after they’d told their friends about you, you gave their friends everything, too.

She remembered that first time, the time that became, after all these years, the sum of all those other times, all that writhing and raw excitement and ultimate disappointment. She remembered his new Ford coupe and his oily hair and the smell of whisky on his breath. “Lay back,” he’d said, and then, perhaps nervously, cleared his throat. “It’s all right, little puppy.” And he’d pushed her back against the car seat with the door open and her

legs hanging down so he could get up on the running board and lift her skirt and pull her pants off. He was a boy whose face was as soft as a girl's, and he had breathed heavily into her ear and lain heavily upon her and she had felt such a longing, such an awful yearning, for something more.

She thought of the child, the baby she might have had, the pregnancy she bore alone, without telling anyone, without telling even the boy she had thought might be the father. Would *anyone* have married her? You were supposed to marry the girl in those days. She should have told her father, who surely would have had the boy—the boy she would have named—make an honest woman of her. That's how it was put in those days. Anyway, she'd miscarried. Wasn't that convenient? Wasn't that a relief? No, it wasn't. It wasn't! It was just another disappointment, another failure, another case of life having gypped her. Angry tears suddenly burned in her eyes, but she wiped them angrily away. It was pathetic, that's all it was; it was just pathetic. It was humiliating!

She stirred in her chair, and stared out the window at the white, unreal world. The trees were so still and the house so hushed, she noticed now. Judith must be taking her nap. It was as if the world, this house, had ceased to breathe. All life seemed to have stopped, all color save that ghostly white and those crystalline trees outside had vanished, and she wanted life to stir again, she wanted color, she wanted things to breathe.

Judith came out of her bedroom, with sleep still in her eyes, and sat on the couch. She grasped her rosary, the beads wrapped around her slender fingers.

"You and that rosary," Margaret snorted. "You'll be mumbling over those silly beads when your mind's just a senile blank!"

Judith sighed, and said, "Isn't it time for your nap, dear?"

"Nope. I'll sleep plenty, by and by. So will you, dear sister."

"Oh Margaret," Judith sighed and said. "Does it please you to be so morbid?"

"Just facing facts," Margaret told her, "which is more than you ever do."

"I do *so* face facts. I just try to keep my spirits up, is all."

"Well, I keep my spirits up, too," Margaret said. "'Old age should rage at close of day,' as the poet says."

"Oh, yes, that poem you made me listen to the other day, on that recording you have? By what's-his-name? 'Do not go gentle into that good night.' Well, I *will* go gentle, just as Charlie did. And I expect we'll be together again."

"Don't count on it," Margaret said. "Your husband's *gone*. And so will you be, and so will I, soon enough. One simply ceases to exist."

"I cannot believe that."

"Ah well. Did you notice how odd the trees look?" Margaret asked,

changing the subject. They took turns at it, Judith had noticed. “So lovely. Like trees of glass.”

“They look *dead* to me,” Judith said.

“Now who’s being morbid? No, they don’t look dead, exactly. They just look—not alive, I guess. They’re like creations.”

“Trees *are* creations,” Judith said. “They’re God’s creations, like we are.”

“Sure,” said Margaret. “We’re all God’s creations, including the halt and the lame.”

“Want some tea?” Judith asked brightly. It was her turn to change the subject.

“Not especially. I suppose I should have some, though. It might loosen my bowels.”

“Oh, are you constipated again? Have some prunes with your tea.”

“No! And forget the tea. I’ve changed my mind.”

“Suit yourself,” Judith said.

“That’s exactly what I’ll do,” Margaret said. “Suit myself.”

“It’ll be suppertime soon. Maybe after you—”

“No! I don’t feel like eating anymore. I can’t shit! You understand? I’m completely bugged up and you’d have me keep stuffing myself!”

“Well, I’m starting supper. And by the time it’s ready, I’m sure you’ll settle down and be ready to eat.”

“I won’t, I tell you. I’m not going to eat.”

But she knew she would. She was hungry, in fact. She was bilious and bloated and she was hungry! So she would eat her supper, all right, and afterwards try to sleep tonight, though she hadn’t been able to lately, and tomorrow she’d sit again in this chair, in this comfortable goddamn chair, after all, and stare at the trees made of glass and at the misty whiteness outside. Maybe that would change. That certainly would change. Maybe the sun would come out tomorrow and melt the ice on the trees, or maybe it would turn cold again, or maybe it would snow. She hated winter. She longed for spring. She’d hated teaching, too, all those cold winters in that one-room country school when she used to look at those young faces staring up at her from the rows of desks with the urge to shout at them, destroy their looks of freshness and sweet youth.

Abruptly, she had to struggle out of her chair and toddle into the bathroom. The sound of the flushing toilet brought Judith out of the kitchen.

“Oh good. You’ve gone! Feel better, Margaret? You ready to eat now, dear?”

“*Yaas*,” Margaret said, and she grunted into the kitchen and sat down heavily at the table.

“You know, dear,” Judith said, smiling, as she began to serve her sister, “you and me, we ain’t getting any younger. And there’s not a thing we

The New Orphic Review

can do about it, not a bless-ed thing. So we might as well be nice to each other. We might as well get along.”

And Margaret, gazing with angry sorrow on her sister’s withered beauty, felt like weeping finally. She said softly, “You look so tired, Judith. Are you well?”

MAUREEN EGAN is a BC-based freelance editor who credits the network of stunningly gifted poets from the Pacific to the Rockies with her poetic reawakening. As a result of this invaluable source of inspiration and encouragement, many of her poems have been read (out loud!) at writers' events around the province; still others have been published in both print and online literary periodicals.

Maureen Egan / Four Poems

it sounds like

The underbelly of a sub—
marine life revving November's lament
of decomposition, nordic and murky
while mountain ranges wring free
rivers rush-rolling writhing
 through offshore machines
 drilling, slow motion
 our livelong daylight.

Beaks of rain masquerade slicks
of over-consumption, all slop, sick
with sign-of-the-cross checking us in
to the boards of execs whose monuments
to mayhem, murder, Walmartization
 flourish under a global cloud
 covering dimness and denial
 in this monied millennium.

When it sounds like luminaries revelling
in our ruin—ravens mocking, *kurrekking*
from junkyard umbrellas—only then
can we know a fine leavening of mores.
And when murmurs from the rear-view
 mirror reveal our cruel reversal
 in a terrible confluence echoing
 overcast EarthOceanSky—

Maybe then we'll hear grieving from Heaven.

Jeopardy

Who are the city planners?
What are the engineers' markups?
Where do the live streams flow?
Where will the raw sewage run?

When did developers survey the land?
Who was excluded from the process?
Who were the public voices?
Who vowed accountability?

What, officially, were the promises made?
Why would Corporate not vote for the incumbent?
What was it—six months prior to voting day?
How soon thereafter did destruction begin?

Who are the schoolkids, hiding behind hedges?
Where is the corner now staked, roped off, mined?
What is our right to claim what remains?
Wasn't that once our public school, too?

Wherefore the Arts? How many are Left?

Political Purpose—an Oxymoron

Empty employment promises
suffocate matchbox pockets, caskets
and coffers reek sulphurous homelessness—
nowhere for pets to board, to kennel—

too bored to file income, lackeys pay
for recess, shunning audits scheduled for justice.
Decompressed, bistro biscotti and sawdust
composts *non compos mentis* into grounds

moist and coarse. Just a three-hour tour—
ground and loam, dew and damp—in summer
shine springs to a blue-green sweltering
air mass, an altar of freshet swirls and gurgles

the riverview evensong—lush, throaty
and strangled—no longer weighed down
by thick swallowed speeches in tongues
that warble strange praise to climate changelings.

Small Town Council Autonomy

Royal village councillors kneel knightly
to pray for across-the-track
minded homeless. Stippled fingers fold
in steeples, while developers bulldoze.

Extinction of Arts a top priority, numbered
payoffs in hand, they'll see to their mandate—
to the sinking of shapeshifting colourwheels
real, ethereal lyricality Davy Jonesing.

Mouths foam in a rage of quicksand effluents
that deaden our once mighty rivers. Mayor
this mayor that mayor drools over carrion—
carry on killing culture—with slash-and-burn

while the Right writes off arteries
of local idealism with a gritty refrain:
Get the bootstrappers young. Kick 'em
when they're down; before their downtown

buggies transport them elsewhere. But
not in this NIMBY ruled, eastside vaginalia
regulated municipality steeped in budget
margins bleeding eastside sidebar vagrancy.

SUSAN L. FERRARO'S articles and essays have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Times Magazine*, *Poets & Writers*, *GQ*, *Americana* and other publications. She has published two books of nonfiction, *Sweet Talk: The Language of Love* and *Remembrance of Things Fast*. She lives in Copperopolis, California, an old mining town.

An Experiment

Susan L. Ferraro

AS AN EXPERIMENT—a distraction—Patty decides to stop talking for a while. They are in the car, driving home from Sonora, and she wants to see how long it will take Ron to say something. To start a conversation. To make a comment. She wants to see if he will notice the silence and, if he does, what he will do about it. Not another word, not for at least a while. She will refrain, as the road uncurls, from commenting, thinking out loud, wondering. She will wait and see how long, how fucking long it takes, before Ron speaks. See how long it will be before he needs to connect, or at least *affirm* connection.

The road from Sonora is narrow: it climbs blind curves, springs down short, straight stretches. It shoots past cattle ranches and planted fields and twenty-or forty-acre homesteads. It's repaved what seems like every year because the truck people drive too fast, bang holes in it. The season is not officially spring, not quite, but this is California: last week the slope that rises up to Table Mountain—a gargantuan pumice stone, flinty gray and pocked on top—was drab dirt, but now it is green, velvet-looking in the distance. And the poppies are coming on too, great orange-gold legions fanning out across the meadows, delicate and fragile each blossom in itself but reckless, wild, irresistibly alive in these massed thousands upon thousands, powerful and beautiful, a rash of fecundity.

They change the look of things. They charge the air. They distract.

He's at the wheel—even better looking with the touch of gray at his temples, his skin tanned, his face calm. He's wearing jeans and a blue shirt rolled up at the sleeves and open at the throat. He's got his waterproof watch on because he's swimming these days, and it has a gizmo that counts laps—a little button that he clicks each time he gets to the end of the pool—so he can concentrate on his stroke. Even here, halfway retired, he wears formal, lace-up leather shoes. He is not, she thinks, and she is

oddly grateful, a sneaker kind of guy. His wedding ring glints in the sun as they go around a curve.

She takes a sip of iced tea, the diet kind, officially healthy enough but sweetened with something scientists will probably discover is bad for you, deadly even, but that will be then and maybe she'll be dead already so it won't matter. She crosses her arms, a hand across each breast. Maybe she'll die in a car crash, always a possibility on these roads. Last week, on this very highway, in the space of seven hours, three crashes and five people. Or she could have a heart attack: happens to people all the time. Or a fit of apoplexy, a case of fatal frustration because her husband never talks to her. She has actually said to him, not so long ago (and it is possible she has said this more than once), Humans have the ability to speak, to communicate. It is a survival skill, a gift. It is social. It is fun. Why don't you try it sometime?

And he has replied, when he has replied, Let me know when you need me for this conversation. Or, I do talk, I'm talking right now. Or, I have nothing interesting to say. Or, You're bored, aren't you? You just want to have a fight, don't you?

Which is not fair. She doesn't want to fight. She loves him. He loves her. He is a fascinating man, smart and accomplished. But she wants evidence of—life. Proof. That they are in this day together. Look around! she wants to shout. Tell me what you see!

Printed inside the cap from the tea, which is no longer iced but warm because time is action and action has consequences, are snippets of information meant to amuse. Animal facts are popular. Such as, A pigeon's feathers weigh more than its bones. Such as, Elephants can swim twenty miles a day. She spots the cap for the tea she drank on the way to Sonora at the bottom of the cup holder. It says Beavers were once the size of bears.

Did you know that beavers were once the size of bears?

Damn. She's not supposed to speak. But it doesn't matter. He doesn't answer. Is it possible, even though she can hear herself just fine, that her voice doesn't reach him?

Isn't that interesting? she says, a little louder, thinking, Well, since I forgot to not talk, I might as well give it the college try.

He shrugs.

I mean, they'd have awfully big teeth, wouldn't they?

I guess, he says.

Me too, she says, thinking, Big enough to snap a man's neck. She sighs, drops her hands to her lap. She should have kept her mouth shut. For a moment she imagines a prehistoric world filled with enormous beavers, towering begonias, lavender as high as cornstalks, grapes the size of cantaloupes, dinosaurs looming, and Cro-Magnon grandpas running like hell.

What's happening—what has happened—is not news: husbands, even husbands who love wives very much, who are devoted and true and good, tend to tune out. And, with Ron, there is always the matter of topic: she likes to wonder what if. He calls this, or he used to, in the early days before he gave up trying to figure her out, talking hypotheticals. He doesn't like hypotheticals. The night they met, at a friend's party, she'd asked him something—about a movie, about what he would have done if he'd been the hero—and he'd refused to answer, said I don't like hypotheticals. Now, since she has already broken her silence, she decides to skip the windup and go straight to the pitch.

Why don't you like hypotheticals?

He shoots her a sideways glance.

They require energy, he says.

But sex requires energy and you like sex.

Yes. He draws it out. *Yessssss*, a slow hiss that means I will humor you but know, at least, that we have covered this before (and it's silly) (and a waste of time).

Yessssss, he says, but sex is more fun.

Can't argue with that, she says. She dedicates a pause to judicious consideration.

But, she says, aren't hypotheticals useful?

I mean, she says (thinking as the words slip past her teeth, This is idiotic), don't they help you think through possibilities? Options?

Silence. He won't play. And she, looking at the poppies, the stupid poppies, sees that, though gorgeous, they are also truly garish against the green, decides that Kentucky blue grass that was really blue, or even turquoise, would look better with orange. If such a thing were possible. Which it isn't.

The experiment: since he didn't know about it, she can try again. She takes a deep breath. She presses her lips together, hugs her chest.

Silence is interesting. Nice. It is, she comprehends with soft gratitude, relaxing. No wonder he likes it. Make no mistake, there's a danger to it, a threat. Not talking means not trying to engage, giving up. But the truth, and there's nothing hypothetical about it, is that she can pretty much guess what's on his mind (besides sex, which she suspects is mostly knee-jerk male stuff, although you can never be sure—Lesson #2 on Men, Never Underestimate Testosterone; Lesson #1 on Men, They Are Different in every way imaginable, so whatever you assume they think is only hypothetical). Right now he's probably thinking about how the car runs, when it's due for a tune-up. About paint peeling off the deck, how he'll have to sand, patch, caulk, and prime. About thieving CEOs and crybaby millionaires. So, yes, they don't need words. Not so much, anyway.

And the day they are speeding through, sixty miles an hour into the sunset, a mile a minute: it's lovely at every turn, irreplaceable. There are

small vineyards, as they zip along, gnarly vines not yet leafed out but marching arm in arm, thirty or fifty abreast, up and over low rises, reappearing in the distance to climb the next hill, just as confident but smaller. There are cows at pasture, and calves of different sizes, and here and there a few horses standing side by side in silent, deep ease. It is astonishing, but unless the cows are fenced, they graze everywhere the grass grows, right up the green sides of Table Mountain—perched there, above, like goats the size of sofas, feet braced, indifferent to gravity, cumbersome, sublime. Like marriage itself if you want to go all abstract. And the oaks—what is wrong with her, that she is so moved, so close to tears?—scrub oaks that this morning were inscrutably, tenaciously gray are popping tiny green leaves. And there, beyond the poppies, fields skimmed with tiny pink and white flowers, a blush of Indian hawthorn beside a ranch fence, clusters of purple lupine and yellow mustard weed, a glimpse, as they fly past, of bluebells near a fallen tree, a volunteer lily—yellow again!—bobbing in the breeze. The flowers that will blossom later, the wild daisies, the sweet peas: will there be red clematis, too, the color of blood, and honeysuckle? Even the grass at the edge of the road, rough stuff destined to grow long and go to seed, to bleach blond and glisten with fragile, pointy husks that crack open in the sun, even it, at this moment, is damply green, spiky, insistent.

It is possible, she thinks, to know what is coming and still exult.

They are going too fast to have the windows open, but she reaches up and flicks the button for the sunroof. Light fills the car, sun on her head, heat slipping around her, warming her bones. She thinks about their children, their goodness, young still but adult enough to make it on their own if need be, their stubborn refusal to learn from her mistakes (which she has lavishly, passionately laid before them, particularly her rash tendency to jump to conclusions). They have ignored her and yet, despite themselves, grown close, something else she has always told them to do. For that she is grateful.

Retirement: impossibly early for Ron even if he still consults, early for her, too, since when he left the city she did too. And it's been—good. He was sick of bosses. Her job was—too much and not enough. Her blood pressure (a passing flutter of mortality, nothing to worry about) settled right down the day she left. She's come to accept, as her work pals have grown distant, that what Ron had said all along—Office is not family! You are looking for love in all the wrong places!—is true, absolutely.

It would be nice, of course, if he liked to talk. Once in a while.

Talking to yourself is possible but also can make you crazy.

Boy, Ron says.

What? Listening to the road, the air whistling past, she almost doesn't hear him.

He clears his throat the way people do when they have been quiet for

a long time.

Boy, he says again, those cows just eat all day long.

Well. She stretches her neck in the heat, looks around. Well, they're big animals.

You can say that again, Ron says.

I'll pass, she says, thinking, Rule #3 about Men: The subject of eating is never far from their thoughts. Thinking, That was what, five minutes before he spoke? Seven? Not bad.

What's so funny? he says.

It's a good thing you're so handsome, she says.

You're crazy, he says.

He reaches over, takes her hand, presses her knuckles to his lips.

She smiles, refolds her hand over her breast, over the knot beneath the skin that blossoms there. Something new. Surely no more than a centimeter, if it is what it might be, but sprung hard in place, rooted, unmoving. She will call about it, make an appointment. But not on a day when what-ifs still hold ground. Not when there is time, still, to race along the roads. Not now. Not yet.

JILL MANDRAKE writes short fiction and shorter poems, and also writes new-vaudeville songs with her musical group, Sister DJ's Radio Band. This band is an offshoot from her Vancouver Cooperative Radio days. Her work has previously appeared in *The New Orphic Review*. She occasionally writes reviews for *Geist*.

Jill Mandrake / Four from the Funhouse

the green stool café went belly up

cereal sprinkled with nutmeg and sugar
jam and radio tunes
bacon and omelettes and nuts-to-you butter
i miss the greasy spoon

i wish i'd taken a photo back then
of the neon that spelled out green stool
i would have sent it to "what's my sign"
in the *national lampoon*

today's newspaper
can last us all week, are you
still chopping down trees?

the ice cream man sped
by so quick, couldn't catch up
to buy a drumstick

it's been ages since
i've seen a cigarette butt
floating in the can

Much like in Woody Allen's *Zelig*, JON WESICK'S face appears in many photographs from Zen centers, martial arts dojos, nuclear physics labs, and cities all over the world. He hopes that he's passed on some of what he's learned in the almost two hundred poems he's published in journals like *Pearl*, *Pudding*, and *Slipstream*. His poem "Bread and Circuses" won second place in the 2007 African American Writers and Artists contest.

Jon Wesick / Three Poems

Nowhere to Soar

The lockstep machinery of commerce crawls
over the concrete rash that covers this planet's skin.
Only the freeway offers the space I need.
Wedge knees to chest in the sailplane's cockpit
I feel the towline jerk, as the red Datsun takes up the slack.
Sudden as a summer thunderstorm a wall of brake lights
appears ahead. The Datsun swerves for an open exit
and drags me around a banked two hundred seventy degree
turn. Fiberglass wings lift the glider's body off the asphalt.
I slip beneath an overpass. The Datsun brakes at a red
light. I yank the towline release and climb to eight feet.
Desperate for speed and altitude I approach the intersection
and pray for a gap in cross traffic.

2004/IV/12

The Emotional Condom™

protects your fragile ego
from
 heartbreak
 anxiety
 despair.

Installation is simple.
Just drill a 3/16" hole in your skull.
Then insert the foil packet.
The Emotional Condom™
self deploys
coating your brain's limbic system
with an impermeable barrier.

Once in place
The Emotional Condom™ repels bad feelings
like latex repels spirochetes
without dulling the sensations of
 joy
 affection
 pride.

Available in regular, lubricated, and ribbed
The Emotional Condom™ sold only in drugstores.*

*Anesthesia and electric drill not included.

2008/XII

Reciprocity—A Journal of Mutual Benefit

E-mail: *editor@corruptpoem.com*. Web site: *www.corruptpoem.com*.
Established 2007.

Contact: Jon Wesick and Jim Babwe editors.

Magazine Needs In a cynical effort to get their poems published Jon Wesick and Jim Babwe formed *Reciprocity* to publish poems from other editors who will return the favor. To give an air of legitimacy *Reciprocity* features a random selection of poems from writers who do not edit poetry magazines. Has published poetry by Ganesha Lightwave, Rodney Scow, Neil Gumwinder, Akimbo Bustamante, and Ishmael von Heidrick-Barnes.

How to Submit Submit 3-5 poems pasted in the body of your e-mail. Cover letter should clearly state how you will benefit the editors. Considers simultaneous submissions and previously published work. Responds in 2 weeks. Never comments on rejected manuscripts. “Hell, we don’t read the poems. We just slap them on our website.”

2007/XI/3

LOUIS E. BOURGEOIS (see page 35 for more details) was the Featured Poet in Vol. 8, No. 2 of *The New Orphic Review*.

The Coward

Louis E. Bourgeois

And he just smoked my eyelids and punched my cigarette...

—Bob Dylan

OUTSIDE THE WINDOW was a procession of Mardi Gras going on: huge papier maché faces from Anne Boleyn to Nixon, screaming topless women with tattooed breasts, a boa constrictor wrapped around a hippie's neck, adultery in a second room flat, hand-clapping, a lot of green stuff, heavy jars of whiskey, a dozen real Indians...

Inside the house, Lucas and Kramer were not looking out the window. Lucas turned down the television and said, "Throw all the cats back in the boat." He made himself comfortable in the worn plaid chair and stared tight-faced at the television, as if he were trying to ward off some unaccountable fix on his mouth. On the television, the two of them were watching what was going on out in the street. Kramer had an awful grin on his face because Jim Beam wouldn't stop burning at his stomach. This was due to the fact that, during Fat Tuesday, Kramer made no apologies for taking big sucking gulps. Kramer sprawled out on the bird brown ripped up sofa and said, "How is the value of cat quantified anyway? Is a cat intrinsically worse off than a dog? Or does it have something to do with how a cat perceives life, thus making cats so detestable?"

Lucas, in a low voice, said, "Cats are God's children."

There wasn't anything left between Lucas and Kramer. This was due to the fact that Lucas still worked at the banana loading dock and continued his weekly consumption of acid every Friday night. Kramer didn't do that anymore, as if he just found out it was illegal. And not only did Kramer go off and get a college degree, but he was to be married in a week, and in a month's time, he and his wife were to settle down in the subdivisions of Metairie. Kramer's visits to Lucas had dwindled over the

years until they became something of a duty, done only for some distant respect for childhood.

Lucas, becoming rather nervous, said, "A cat is worth, at a minimum, ten dogs easily. I know you don't like cats anymore, but that's because you don't look at things like you used to. Dogs don't mind if you throw them overboard. They'll keep coming on back with a full grin, licking you all over while they're shivering from the wet. If you do that just once, perhaps twice, to a cat, he'll hate you for life. Cats are moral. Dogs are too stupid for that, always forgetting, forgiving, neglecting. They're always wet, too, a cat only gets wet once or twice."

Kramer, liking Lucas less and less, said, "Well, my dear old friend, maybe cats need to change their ways. More people like dogs because dogs are obedient. They savor love not morality. Cats need to loosen up."

Lucas often thought of hurting Kramer with a lead pipe. He had one too, he called it Itchy. But during Kramer's few visits nowadays, Lucas was overpowered by Kramer's presence. Kramer had gained so much more than Lucas in life that Kramer had a tyrant's rule over him. For instance, even though Kramer had told Lucas about the wedding, he had not mentioned if Lucas was invited. Lucas felt sick, sick, sick when Kramer said he was getting married, for Lucas was foolish enough to believe that a boyhood promise could be kept.

Kramer, with his insides burning, looked out the window and compared the parade outside to how it looked on the television screen. The camera held all the important context of Mardi Gras in the right perspective. It seemed to leave out anything mundane, superfluous, or disgusting. There was one important thing that Kramer had learned that he thought served him well, which was that you can never beat all the negative elements in life. Therefore, it was best to ignore what you could and hope that much of it wouldn't come your way.

Kramer said, "I agree that dogs can be a little stupid at times. I mean, they can be a little silly, but I still prefer them to cats. Cats are just too goddamned mean and selfish. They get lost in themselves without thinking about anybody's feelings."

Lucas said, "Oofish, Oofish, Oofish," a few times and then he said, "Maybe they don't want their own feelings hurt, so they just keep to themselves, because they're smart, they know how cruel everyone else can be. You know, Oofish, Oofish, Oofish, Oofish."

Kramer, thinking of his fiancée, smiled and chuckled like he was the most satisfied accountant in New Orleans. He said, "You know, this is the first time I've ever thought of cats as cowardly. Cats aren't noble or smart, they're cowards. Dogs are brave and honorable."

Lucas, grabbing at his eye, and dealing with a twinging lip, said, "Dogs are much bigger than the largest of cats."

Kramer laughed and laughed and kept thinking about how good it was going to feel when he got home to his soon-to-be wife.

Lucas kept messing with his eye and sweated a lot.

Outside the window, creatures of various types crawled under a street light.

About a hundred yards from the house, and barely out of the frame of the television, six New Orleans policemen were hand-cuffing several rowdy, immoral, calamitous people from St. Bernard Parish. The trouble-makers were exposing themselves and shouting Maurice! Maurice! for no apparent reason. The police had no objections to either act. What did the St. Bernardians in was when one of them begot a contemptuous finger gesture intended for an extremely oversized horse-riding New Orleans police officer. Before the hand-cuffing was finished, several St. Bernardians had broken ribs and black eyes. A couple of them had very bad headaches.

Not long after that, a bare-footed and shirtless ten-year-old boy from Kenner had his foot crushed by a tractor pulling a float. The name of the float was What God Has Wrought, which featured twenty of the blondest blondes in the country. They, the blondes, were known as the White Goddesses. Each blonde had in her possession some form of technology never before seen until the White Goddesses gave their performance.

Nobody knew how this float got into the Krew of Eros, but it was by far the most popular. The closest runner-up was a float called Paraguay. It was an alternative that everyone forgot about when What God Has Wrought made its way following.

The ten-year-old boy from Kenner acquired a permanent limp.

When Lucas and Kramer were growing up in the suburbs of Kenner they swore to be different from their parents. They were to be real individuals. Lucas and Kramer were from divorced families and out of defiance, promised, with blood from a needle, that they would never get married so as to stop the ugly flux of untruth. Kids from broken homes are often mad. When they were in high school, they still maintained this outlook on life and only went out with girls for ornamentation and primordial needs. They read only Existentialist literature and in their senior year started an underground press, but they were chided by their peers and got in trouble with the school and the cops.

Nothing had worked out. They were taught that it wasn't in their nature to change their environment. They were beaten down and told that somewhere in their education they had misinterpreted the signs of what a decent human being is according to the curriculum.

It wasn't quite midnight on Fat Tuesday. At about twenty minutes till, the crowds outside were getting displeased. People were becoming careless and rude. A fat woman with a neon head bow was so drunk that she slipped on a small rubber ball and broke her leg. She was stepped on

many, many times. Behind a dumpster a deranged man who had clear objectives, went beneath, between, and behind an unwilling and very conscious woman. Right before she got into this mess, she was looking for a corridor to the hotel. She missed it by what might have been miles. And Lucas had swallowed his last two hits of double-dipped coseismal acid. He sweated and sweated and sweated.

Kramer was indolently drunk; he turned from the television and caught sight of Lucas having a hard time with the acid. Lucas had been eating acid all day long. He made little birdie noises, and thought his hands were God's implements of creativity; then he started slapping himself.

Kramer said, "Another thing about cats, they can't be trained to do anything. That's why people hate them. They can't be taught to have any fun. They're so connected to their natural predisposition that it's sickening. Cats are the loneliest of all things, next to the South American sloth. I hate cats."

At midnight the crowds outside the window did not want Mardi Gras to be over and about twenty people decided they were not leaving the street, despite the police.

They were quite serious about it.

A black man from Algiers lost all his front teeth when he kicked the shin of a policeman's brown stallion—a nice magnificent three-year old. When the black man got off the ground, he was a rabid, toothless, black man from Algiers (whose ancestry included cowboys from California) with a long-handled knife with a thick blade. When the knife went in between the stallion's broad shoulders, a bovine, blonde-headed, New Orleans policeman from Bunkie, Louisiana (whose ancestry consisted of stump grinders and root diggers) knocked the man from Algiers out of consciousness forever and forever with his gun metal blue club.

During this event, Lucas watched from the window and cried, "Get all the cats back in the boat. Dogs will kill you." Lucas then sulked in the corner, trying really hard to thwart a bad acid trip, murmuring Oofish.

Kramer, reclining passively, and comfortably drunk out of his mind, watched all of this live on the television. The black man, in a body bag, was eventually carried off; passing right in front of the window that Kramer had his back turned to.

ERNEST HEKKANEN is Editor-in-Chief of *The New Orphic Review*.

The Successor

Ernest Hekkanen

THE FOLLOWING occurred at a remote outpost where I was being kept as a guest in the spring of a year that shall remain dateless, for no better reason than I cannot recall the date precisely—or even imprecisely, for that matter. I do remember that I was dumped, like a piece of luggage, from the cargo hatches of an airplane, and sustained a blow to my left temple; however, I do not recall why I was spilled on the tarmac like that. Nor do I recall what I might have left behind, because, no doubt, there must have been something. But I do recall my condition when I discovered myself lying there on the airstrip and, let me tell you, it was dire. Of the vast amount of luggage that fell around and on top of my body, not one piece belonged to me and, if any of it had, well, I certainly would not have been able to claim it, because I didn't have a baggage ticket or, for that matter, any personal identification that might have verified who I was—a man by the name of either Wilson Bryant or Bryant Wilson.

I was certain my full name incorporated the names of Wilson and Bryant, but I was uncertain whether I might have transposed them. I do not claim amnesia, as I do not remember ever having believed in that malady. The fault must have been due to simple mechanical failure, the type of failure to which the brain is made susceptible after endless hours of interrogation—for I had been barely ejected from the plane, when I was arrested by members of the local constabulary and subsequently slapped in prison.

Quite possibly, I was incarcerated for several weeks or months; but, then again, it might have been for only a few hours. It was difficult to say for sure, because I was kept in total darkness in my cell, and after being tossed there like a scrap of meat, I lost any sense of time. So, perhaps, I was there for only a few hours or a few days; however, if that is indeed the case, how am I to account for the considerable growth of beard I later found on my face? I do recall that my cell was eternally damp, eternally

chilly, and that the flagstones, if indeed that's what they were, were eternally uncomfortable; and that when I ate from the tray pushed through the slot in the door, I had to feel for the tasteless morsels and they always struck me as rather cold and slimy.

As I have already indicated, I might have been incarcerated in that dank, dark, smelly hole for only a few hours or days, because the next thing I knew, I was sitting in a room at a very long table. Several men were seated at the far end from me, and the light was so terribly intense, especially after my stay in total darkness, I had to squint to see anything at all. From what I could gather, I had landed in the midst of a tribunal and was the subject of considerable curiosity. I found this rather amazing, to tell you the truth, because I could not recall ever before having been the subject of anybody's curiosity. My being singled out in this fashion put me in something of a conundrum.

* * *

“Monsieur, I will once again ask you to steer away from clever answers. You are making light of our traditions and, worse, of our native intelligence, if you expect us to believe that you arrived here ignorant of who you are. We are not stupid, Monsieur, and you should not assume that we are.”

It would seem, judging from the way my interrogator spoke, that I had previously attended such tribunals—that, indeed, I had always been the subject of curiosity rather than someone who might himself be curious. From what I could ascertain—because, you see, the light was directed at me, not at them—the Chief Interrogator was a man of moderate build, with the usual sallow appearance, bulging eyes and belligerent manner of men who have spent their lives working in such a capacity. His fellow interrogators, who followed up with lines of questioning begun by him, had similar looks about them. These men could have been birthed from the same mold, except for minor differences in height of forehead, depth of eye sockets and tone of voice, all of which struck a familiar cord in me, for some reason.

My stay in total darkness had left me incapable of answering questions; for, in total darkness, the mind expands outwardly, beyond the physical limitations of the skull, until one seems to be the owner of a head the circumference of an extremely large and weighty squash, one which is unfocused and full of thoughts that might very well be seeds. The mind cannot concentrate sufficiently well to give a straightforward or succinct answer to any sort of question. Too many extraneous, although seemingly tangent and perhaps relevant thoughts enter simultaneously, allowing for too many variables in terms of response, and choosing between such variables becomes an act that one is incapable of. My interrogators must have understood my predicament, because they demonstrated much patience and repeated the opening statement several times.

“Monsieur, I will once again ask you to steer away from clever answers. You are making light of our traditions and, worse, of our native intelligence, if you expect us to believe that you arrived here ignorant of who you are. We are not stupid, Monsieur, and you should not assume that we are.”

I know, beyond a doubt, that my interrogators delivered the above statement three distinct and separate times, but I cannot remember whether it was during the same session or on different occasions; nor, indeed, can I remember whether a few minutes or a few months elapsed between statements, because my mind was still too unfocused to gather a proper sense of time. But gradually, with repetition, it occurred to me that I had to offer them some sort of explanation—that is to say, I could not remain silent forever. It took no little effort to move my tongue, which seemed to be a foreign object in the cavity of my mouth—no, in fact, an intruder. The sounds that escaped from me, but which came back to me as though over a great distance, made me wonder whether I might have suffered a debilitating stroke of some kind, for my speech was so thick, so slurred and so garbled, I could hardly understand what I was attempting to tell them; and then, of course, my actual utterance was so slow in coming out of my mouth, my thoughts outdistanced my tongue, and between the two—my thoughts and my tongue, I mean—I became confused, disoriented and frustrated. It was like having to learn to speak all over again, and so I was grateful for the patience that my interrogators were exhibiting; for, had they not been patient with me, I probably would have given up on the attempt to say anything at all.

* * *

“I, I, I . . . believe . . . ah, ah, no, ah . . . my tongue . . . won’t work . . . blow . . . up here . . . to my head . . . forgot . . . everything.”

Although what came out of my mouth hardly deserved to be praised, that is exactly what it got—praise. Anyway, I was pretty sure that my explanation, if it could be called that, had pleased my interrogators; for, instantly, they broke into a chorus of murmurs which sounded more positive than negative. Perhaps, they were relieved to discover that I could still ejaculate sounds, because sounds can always be improved upon, they can always be shaped and organized into a sequence of noises which will permit the transmission of ideas and thoughts to take place. Perhaps, they were pleased to see that the machinery in my head was still intact, although to what degree they had no way of knowing.

Another indication that they were pleased with my performance came when the Chief Interrogator rose from his seat at the far end of the table, came to the end of the table where I was seated and poured me a glass of water.

“Here, take a drink,” he said. “Let this water unclog the words in your throat,” and at that juncture, he rested his hand on my right shoulder, in

an almost fatherly fashion. In fact, this man might very well have been my father. He bore a striking resemblance to the man I had known in my youth. His nose, eyes, cheekbones, brows and chin—all of his combined features, in other words—indicated that he might very well have been my father; however, after so many months spent in total darkness, my mind was willing to accept just about anything, including a man masquerading as my father.

* * *

I was brought before the tribunal at least twenty times (although, once again, the actual number of times might have been greater or fewer than this) and the only details that changed, from one session to the next, were the number of interrogators and my treatment in between interrogations. I was forced to assume that I was answering their questions in the correct manner, because my living conditions began to improve. At first, the improvements were negligible: a little light was allowed into my cell, then a little more and a little more, until finally a switch was installed, allowing me to turn the light on and off at will. The same occurred with the temperature and humidity; the damp and the cold retreated and, at last, I was provided with a thermostat by which I could adjust the temperature to my liking. Invariably, such improvements were put in place while I was participating in a tribunal and were left for me to discover upon being returned to my cell. In due course, I began to look forward to being returned to my cell, so that I might find myself surprised by the unexpected improvements to my living conditions.

It seems to me now as though I was never in fact “returned” to my cell. That word evokes a very strong image, one which includes chains, handcuffs and armed guards. No, my captors were far too subtle for such things. They *escorted* me back to my cell, as if I were a dignitary of highest standing. Because of such treatment, I could not fail in my efforts to be of help. After all, why should one not trade consideration for consideration? Why should one not give favors for favors received?

After an indeterminate stay in my cell, I would be whisked back to the interrogation room. It was my impression that my interrogators never slept or took time away from their work, to relieve or to nourish themselves, as they always appeared to be quite tired—on the edge of total physical collapse, in fact. The interrogation room smelled as if it were being lived in on a continuous basis; it was redolent of cigarette smoke, flatulence, body odor and, if I identified it correctly, decomposition—as if a carcass had been tossed in one corner of the room and left there to rot. But the interrogation room didn’t seem to have any corners or, for that matter, walls, not from what I could see. However, the walls might have been well concealed. They might have been set back far beyond my immediate vicinity, somewhere off in the dark, where nothing could be distinguished, so that they appeared to be non-existent. I couldn’t tell for

sure.

Each time I was interrogated, the number of interrogators would increase by one. Originally, if I remember correctly, there were three interrogators, but now there were well over two dozen. Because of the number of interrogators, I was able to say, with relative confidence, that I had been interrogated between six and a dozen times, although, in the beginning, I might have been interrogated while only partly conscious and, therefore, the number of interrogators might very well have been greater. I believe this was being done in order to confuse or perhaps intimidate me—in hopes that it might encourage me to give correct answers—although, in my heart of hearts, I was doing everything in my power to do exactly that, namely give them correct answers. Indeed, things had now reached the point where I would readily admit that I was *him*.

“You are certain, beyond any doubt, that you are him?” the Chief Interrogator would ask me.

“Oh, yes, beyond any doubt whatsoever,” I would respond as quickly as possible. “In fact, I can’t conceive of myself *not* being him.”

It seemed innocent enough to admit that I was *him*, even though *his* identity had never been fully disclosed to me, at least not early on during the tribunals, and, of course, I *did* want to cooperate. It seemed to me, given the circumstances, that I had no other choice. After all, I was outnumbered; I was being held at an undisclosed location, for reasons that were never completely divulged to me and—in the beginning, anyway—my survival seemed to depend on my cooperating with the powers that be. At least, that was my impression.

* * *

One day—several months later, I believe—I was struck by the fact that the Chief Interrogator was not the Chief Interrogator at all, but rather a man who had ascended to that honorable position and who, admittedly, bore a striking resemblance to his predecessor. This discovery overwhelmed me with so much force I became quite emotional and demanded to know what had become of his predecessor, as I had come to have quite a boyish affection for that man, who had borne such a striking resemblance to my own father.

“I’m afraid he will no longer be able to question you,” I was told by the man who now filled the Chief Interrogator’s position.

“But why? He has always been available—until now, anyway—until you surreptitiously took his place and, unfortunately, I can’t say when that might have occurred.”

“I’m sorry,” the new Chief Interrogator told me, “but we’ll have to conduct these sessions without him. I’m sure he would have wanted it that way.”

“But this has reached the impossible point,” I responded. “I can’t answer questions that aren’t being asked by him. That’s simply

impossible.”

“Need I remind you, sir, that you’ve been doing exactly that for a very long time now, without any noticeable difficulty?”

“True, very true,” I had to admit. “But what has become of the Chief Interrogator, pray tell?”

The new Chief Interrogator gave an immense shrug. “What becomes of any of us?” he said with elaborate finality. “Our usefulness is used up. We cease to be of relevance.”

I was so overcome by grief I could not go on—not just then, anyway. My emotional reservoir had been sorely depleted; I was on the verge of a nervous collapse and, besides, the smell in the interrogation room had become so obnoxiously thick and sickening I could hardly breathe and trying to breathe less had produced a kind of dizziness in my head.

“I’m sorry,” I told the tribunal. “But I must ask you to postpone this particular session—until I have recovered from the sudden knowledge of the late Chief Interrogator’s demise. It is of no use trying to get me to answer any more questions today. I wouldn’t be able to do them justice.”

After much discussion, my interrogators decided, for the good of all, to postpone the session until the following day.

“Perhaps, it would be advisable to get some fresh air in here, too,” I told them. “I think we’re all suffering from some ill effects, due to this terrible odor.”

As I was telling them this, the odor seemed to become even heavier. I was afraid I might have to vomit and vomiting, I was afraid, would result in my losing all the many months of progress I had made. It seemed crucial for me to repair to my cell in order to collect my senses.

When my interrogators agreed to cut short the session, I rose from my chair in preparation of being escorted from the room. As I was turning to go, I noticed, lying in the corner (a corner I had not previously been aware of, by the way), a body in the advanced stages of decomposition. The body seemed, despite its decay, to be that of the former Chief Interrogator. When I stooped to investigate further, I noticed what seemed to be a bullet hole at the base of his skull.

Thinking I should make certain it was the body of the man I had come to have such a boyish affection for, I turned it over to glimpse the face. The body was in such an advanced state of decay, it broke open like an overripe fruit and from the abdominal cavity poured a horrible stench which I had to back away from. But even as I was backing away in haste and alarm, I noticed there was no longer any face—due to the force of the bullet which had come out on the other side.

* * *

After months, nay, years of questioning, do Chief Interrogators succumb to nervous tension and ask to be eliminated? This would seem to be the case. It would also seem to be the reason why so many interrogators

work here—to replace those who succumb to fatigue. For interrogators, contrary to popular belief, have a very definite life expectancy. They might appear to be indefatigable, like shoulders of rock which can endure countless beatings by waves, but, in fact, they aren't. At some juncture not yet known to us, the relentless task of asking the same questions over and over again will begin to test the strength of even the most stalwart interrogator and finally—irrevocably, perhaps—he will break down and ask to be eliminated.

This being the case, I now decided it was my duty to reward my interrogators with correct and prompt answers to the questions that they sent my way. Refusing to do so would make the Chief Interrogator's task endlessly boring, and soon the endless boredom would destroy him. Now, as soon as each session started, I no longer waited to be asked whether I was *him*. Instead, I readily admitted the fact—without any hesitation, without any reservation!

"Then you *are* him. You are the Successor we've been waiting for," the present Chief Interrogator said. "But why—why have you not made this admission before now?"

"Because, until now, I was uncertain whether or not you were who you claimed to be," I said, and here, I indicated not only the Chief Interrogator, but all of his Assistant Interrogators. By now, there were so many of them, they could have filled an entire auditorium. "As I'm sure you're all well aware of, the Successor mustn't divulge his identity to anyone who might be termed an outsider. I had to make certain I was among comrades. That was paramount!"

* * *

For some time now, upon entering the interrogation room, I have been treated less like a prisoner and more like a lecturer. The number of interrogators has risen astronomically and now there are enough of them to fill an entire stadium. I must raise my voice to be heard. The heads and shoulders of my interrogators seem to stretch to the horizon on every side of me—except at my back. At my back is the door by which I conduct my escape after each session. Sometimes, while I am speaking, I am possessed by the fear that the door might combine with the wall and cease to exist, but I resist turning around to look, and go on with my lecture. The sessions have, in every aspect, become exactly that: lectures. Every now and then, someone in the audience will ask me a question, but for the most part, I go on of my own free will. When, at last, my throat becomes too raw to speak any longer, I excuse myself and leave. Needless to say, the sessions have become much more taxing. I must now prepare myself for each session, in order to have something to confess. Sometimes I even have to resort to fictionalizing certain details.

By now, my cell has undergone so many transformations, it is impossible to think of it as a cell. I have only a vague memory of its

former harshness, because it is now equipped with just about every convenience one can imagine: a kitchenette and dining area, a bath and bedroom, a desk at which I spend innumerable hours signing papers and now, as of the last session, a window to look out of—although, of course, the window does not open.

The view from my window is both limited and limitless. I seem to be located several storeys above the ground. Stretching as far as the eye can see is a landscape vaguely reminiscent of a tundra. Dividing it exactly in half—provided, of course, that I am standing equidistant from each side of the window—is a dirt road that is heavily oiled and looks to be in good repair. At certain hours of the day, trucks of a military type will come down that road. By counting off the seconds (as of yet, I haven't been given a clock or wristwatch) I have determined that the distance to the horizon is about forty miles—provided, of course, that the trucks maintain a steady pace of sixty miles an hour. When the trucks reach the yard below my window, they stop. Two men in military uniforms get out of the cab and go around to the rear of the truck to let down the tailgate. Men in drab, dark attire jump down from the back. They walk in single file across the yard and head down into what seems to be a mine. I have determined that the shaft descends at a gradual angle into the earth, because the men do not bunch up as if they were waiting for an elevator to take them down a vertical shaft.

The entrance to the mine is filled with a remarkably intense light. The light is so bright, the men who go down into the mine must wear goggles or else go blind. I have deduced that the light is strong enough to cause blindness, because one self-willed individual tore the goggles from his face just as he was about to enter the shaft, whereupon he backed away from the mine very quickly and frantically and, pressing his hands to his eyes, proceeded to stumble, in a panic of blindness, off across the landscape. I watched him stagger farther and farther away from the site of the mine. All the while, he kept stumbling, getting back up on his feet and struggling blindly onward, alternately flailing his arms and pressing his hands to his eyes—until, quite predictably, he wandered out of view.

The entrance of the mine is made of concrete and resembles that of a bunker. The light streams forth every hour of every day, never decreasing in intensity. I never see the men return to the surface after having labored all day in the earth, and I never see the trucks cart them away; however, I am certain this must occur, because I see the same men arrive each morning, and have gotten quite used to them glancing up at me in the window. First, only one man deigned to glance at me; he nudged the man immediately in back of him, and the next day that man also looked at me in the window. The second fellow nudged the man in back of him and the next day, the third man in the line-up also looked at me. They seem to look at me with hatred in their eyes, but of this I can't be certain. This

procedure has continued, day after day, until now, thirty-nine of the ninety-nine men going down into the mine glance up at me in the window. This ritual, I will admit, disturbs me. I have decided to stop observing the men; I can't help but think that they are trying to tell me something. My mind has pondered the likelihood that they might be predecessors of mine and are, with that combined glance, trying to indicate what is in store for me at some future date.

Between sessions at the interrogation center, I am given papers to sign. These papers, without exception, are all the same—that is, they all say exactly the same thing. Plus, they all have a dotted line on which to scrawl my signature. But I have the distinct impression that the print on each successive batch of papers is getting fainter. Had I been allowed to keep some sheets from the previous batches, to compare them to the present ones, I am certain the print on the most recent sheets would prove to be fainter; either that, or my eyesight is beginning to fail. I have brought this situation to the attention of the man who brings the papers to be signed, only to have my concerns shrugged off as unimportant. Displeased with his attitude, I decided to broach the subject at the next tribunal. Indeed, I went so far as to demand an explanation as to why the print was getting fainter. Did we not have any quality control, I railed. My plea was met with silence. The heads and shoulders of those in the audience, although animated, although they appeared to be the heads and shoulders of living, breathing human beings, moved as if they were cleverly constructed parts of a monstrosly large machine. Like a fool, I had spent the whole of that session, and quite possibly many sessions prior to it, speaking as though my audience were capable of understanding.

* * *

Thus far, I have received thirty-nine batches of papers to sign. In each batch, there are ninety-nine sheets—in other words, as many sheets as there are men going down into the mine. Without exception, the words state the same thing: *I, the undersigned, hereby certify that the information contained in this document, or in any documents attached, is true, correct and complete in every respect and fully discloses all data relevant to the subject.* Oddly enough, now that I have stopped watching the men go down into the mine, the documents have stopped arriving at my door.

* * *

The other day, I was given to understand that my predecessor had disgraced himself quite badly. But I was also given to understand that he had nonetheless been a very efficient, capable man who had carried out his duties in the most exemplary fashion. This was related to me by the present Chief Interrogator, who, I might add, is several generations removed from the man who originally questioned me and who resembled my father to such a degree he could have been mistaken for him.

“In what manner did he disgrace himself?” I asked.

The Chief Interrogator reached into his pocket and brought out a rubber band, which he placed on my desk. “With this item, right here,” he said.

“But that is a rubber band,” I replied. “Surely, it is harmless?”

“Yes, alone and unacted upon, it is quite harmless. It is simply a rubber band. But your predecessor was in the habit of using it incorrectly—for a task it wasn’t designed for.”

“Surely, you’re joking,” I said, looking at the large rubber band on my desk. It looked rather flimsy.

“On the contrary, I am *not* joking,” he replied, and from his tone I was given to understand that we were discussing something of utmost gravity. “You see, because of this seemingly innocent device—and you must admit, on the surface, it seems quite innocent—your predecessor developed some rather bad habits.”

“Indeed! What exactly did he do?”

“Monsieur, he committed what might seem to be a rather trivial crime, but a crime which had far-reaching implications. You see, he began to indulge in the boyish pastime of making spit wads.”

“Spit wads!”

“Yes, to bring down flies with—”

I was about to reply that there weren’t any flies as far as *my* eye could see—that, indeed, I hadn’t spotted a single one since the time of my arrival—but just as I was about to tell him this, I noticed, out of the corner of my eye, a fly buzzing rather frantically against the window. For several days, I had refused to approach the window, or even to look in its direction, so I couldn’t have been expected to have seen the fly that was now so obviously there.

The current Chief Interrogator nodded at the rubber band on my desk. “Your predecessor became a very good marksman, judging from the number of dead flies later found in his office. But, unfortunately, he was in the habit of making spit wads out of paper torn from official documents—documents he was supposed to return to us, unblemished, except for his signature.”

“That might have been the habit of my predecessor, but it certainly won’t become my habit,” I told him. “And besides, if I were in the habit of killing flies, I would simply swat them.”

“With what?”

“With an object or perhaps my own hand.”

“Yes, well, we shall see, now, won’t we?” he said.

In his voice, I thought I detected a tone of challenge. He rose from the chair he was sitting on and unobtrusively left the room. I say ‘unobtrusively,’ because my eyes were downcast—staring at the rubber band, actually—and I failed to see him take his leave.

From that moment on, the number of flies have increased quite dramatically. Getting rid of them has become problematic. Upon

approaching the window with the purpose of putting an end to their lives, I invariably glance at the queue of men frozen in various postures that indicate they are about to enter the mine shaft that emits the blinding light. Invariably, they are stone-cold in their lack of animation, caught, as it were, looking up at me in the window. As soon as my gaze falls on them, they regain their mobility, slip the dark goggles over their eyes and file down into the mine—except for one man who removes his goggles and proceeds to stumble blindly off across the terrain.

Almost at once, the door to my office is flung back and a man enters with a stack of papers which he deposits on my desk. For a moment, he stands there as though contemplating a caged animal, then he winks at me and leaves by the door, which he slams shut with great finality. By now, the print on the documents has become so faint I can hardly read it.

Sometimes, out of frustration and annoyance, I feel like shouting: *Stop this experiment, stop it right now, I can't take any more*, but, of course, I can't do that, now, can I?

* * *

I have discovered only one way to keep the men from stepping down off the tailgate of the military truck and filing into the mine shaft. I must take an inordinate amount of time appending my signature to the documents lying on the desk in front of me. I labor on each letter of my name. Sometimes it takes me so long to complete the letter I am working on, I become uncertain which letter comes next and must begin all over again, tracing each letter in sequence until I arrive at the spot where I have left off. As with the names comprising my full name, I have become uncertain as to the order of the letters appearing in them; but as long as I am satisfied that I am appending my name, it is of little importance whether the letters reside in the correct order.

I wonder whether my predecessor might not have discovered the same trick. I have reason to believe that he might have done so, because the longer I take to sign my name, the more numerous become the flies buzzing against the window. I would not find it difficult to believe that each fly, in fact, represents a minute on the face of the clock, and that each minute I waste signing my name to the documents results in the total number of flies increasing by one. The only way to get rid of the flies is by approaching the window, whereupon the flies all disappear; but, of course, this requires me to glance down at the mine. When I follow through by taking these measures, the men in the line-up invariably look up at me in the window and then proceed to file down into the shaft. When I resist taking this course of action, I begin to ponder doing what my predecessor was well known for having done—namely, making small missiles out of official documents and bringing down the flies from afar; for I am certain, beyond any doubt, that if I choose to adopt this course of action, the missiles will prove to be infallibly accurate.

Which has left me in something of a quandary....

During the day, the flies confine themselves to the window, but at night, they buzz around my head in maddening confusion. I have attempted to leave the light on all night long, but once I have put down the pen that I use to sign the documents, and have left the desk to go lie down, the light is extinguished, independent of my own volition, whereupon I am assailed by countless flies. So, I have only two choices in the matter: remain at my desk all night long and go on signing my name to official documents, or suffer the noisome, nay, maddening effects of flies buzzing around my head.

Also, there is one other thing:—the ink in my pen is getting fainter and fainter, just like the print on the documents. This phenomenon is difficult to understand, for the pen looks to be quite full of ink in the transparent tube inside. There are occasions when I wonder whether or not the pen is drawing upon a reservoir of ink inside my arm and that perhaps it is my arm which is beginning to empty. When I put the pen down on the desk, my arm is inclined to float of its own accord, which seems to indicate that my arm is gradually getting lighter and hence becoming more buoyant. A doctor came by to examine me with regard to my complaint, only to suggest that it was quite normal for someone in my position to feel such sensations. Nevertheless, he proceeded to remove a syringe from his black bag and inject what seemed to be ink into my arm. I asked him whether he was in the habit of injecting people with black solution that looked like it might very well be ink, and he assured me that it was normal procedure, so what more can I say?

The sessions continue, unabated. By now I have become fairly certain that the heads and shoulders of those in the audience are grotesque mannequins composed of countless flies. I'm sure this is the case because the audience is now constantly abuzz.

Also, there is one more thing to report. While standing at the podium giving lectures, I feel more and more inclined to turn around to see if there is still a door at my back; for I fear, one day very soon now, I am going to turn around to leave, and the door will have disappeared from sight. In its place will be a dense cloud of swarming flies.

* * *

I am certain now that I am in decline, that my usefulness is rapidly coming to an end and that I am on my way to becoming a predecessor. It is my belief that my interrogators are now interrogating the man who will succeed me and who will just as infallibly carry out his duties, until he learns too late of his mistake. I believe the flies on the window and the flies in the audience actually conceal the decaying body of yours truly, at some unknown juncture in the indeterminate future.

Despite my efforts *not* to approach the window, I have done so on numerous occasions in order to clear it of flies, which, at night, disturb

me so profoundly I believe I might go mad. A total of seventy-three men look up at the window where I now stand. That glance is followed by them filing down into the shaft that emits the blinding light. If anything, the light has gotten more intense as I have gotten fainter from fatigue and confusion.

* * *

Despite my efforts not to approach the window, I have done so on numerous occasions in order to clear it of flies, which at night disturb me so profoundly I believe I might go mad. A total of eighty-seven men have now glanced at me in the window prior to filing down into the shaft that emits the blinding light. Each time I approach the window and look down at the men, the door to my office is flung back and a man enters with a fresh batch of documents for me to sign. By now, the print is so faint I have to squint in order to read it. Also, I feel as though I am getting fainter. The pen that is draining my arm is draining me of vitality. This is happening at such an accelerated pace, the doctor no longer arrives to give me injections.

This does not bode well, I fear.

* * *

I have come to think that my predicament is now quite hopeless. Five batches of documents are left to be signed. In a fit of despair and anguish, I have decided to finish signing them all in one go, if only to alleviate the stress of expectation. Because I am signing the documents one after another as fast as I can, the window remains clear of flies. Furthermore, I no longer feel compelled to stoop to the indignity of eradicating flies with spit wads, as my predecessor is reported to have done.

After each batch of documents has been signed, I race to the window to watch the men glance at me prior to filing down into the mine shaft. One man invariably rips his goggles off his face and stumbles blindly off across the terrain. The door to my office swings back, a man enters with a fresh batch of documents, and I immediately set to work scribbling my name on the dotted line—or, rather, I sit down to scribble what I think is my name, for I do not think it matters what I scribble any more, just as long as I scribble something and, of course, it has been a long time now, perhaps a number of years, since I've been able to make any sense of my own handwriting, and because I cannot make any sense of it, I no longer know what my real name might be or if, indeed, I had one to begin with, which is doubtful, given my current state of mind.

With each signature I scrawl on paper, I feel I am getting fainter, just like the print on the documents. I believe my arm is completely empty of inky fluids and it is only a matter of time before the pen runs out, too, as the ink in the well is barely perceptible down near the ballpoint tip. Now, it remains for only one man in the line-up to look up and acknowledge me—the last man in the last queue.

The New Orphic Review

* * *

It is only when I come to the last sheet of paper in the last batch of documents that my writing hand begins to tremble, for the print on this sheet has gotten so faint it no longer seems to exist. I am certain, when I append my name to the sheet of paper, that it will fly up at my face and I will go soaring through it as if it were an open window. Then, finding out that I am the last man in the queue about to enter the mine, I will tear off my goggles and, blinded, stumble off across an uncertain terrain, until I, too, have wandered out of view. But I am at ease with that eventuality; it will release me from the terrible anxiety I have been feeling for some time now.

Be part of the **New Orphic** adventure!

Subscribe to
The New Orphic Review

706 Mill Street
Nelson, British Columbia
Canada V1L 4S5

Tel: 250-354-0494

SUBSCRIPTION RATES:

ONE YEAR:

Individuals	Canada	\$30 (CAD)	Institutions	Canada	\$35 (CAD)
	USA	\$30 (USD)		USA	\$35 (USD)

TWO YEARS:

Individuals	Canada	\$60 (CAD)	Institutions	Canada	\$70 (CAD)
	USA	\$60 (CAD)		USA	\$70 (USD)

Yes, please sign me up for a subscription to ***The New Orphic Review***. I have enclosed a cheque of:

\$_____ for a one year subscription

\$_____ for a two year subscription

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Province/State _____

Country _____ Postal Code _____

Letter from Lubumbashi

by K.Linda Kivi

ISBN 978-1-894842-15-0

\$16.00

“*Letter from Lubumbashi* is the story of Joseph, a Congolese refugee, whose disturbing past unexpectedly comes to weigh upon him. Joseph’s internal struggle to make peace with the ghosts of war comes to contrast with his bucolic family life in Canada. It is a moving portrait of the haunting, lasting effects of war.

“*Letter from Lubumbashi..* is the tale of an African refugee, wrested from his village and his ambitious plans for the future thanks to the aftermath of European colonialist policies... The universal themes apply to any man raised to keep silent about war, stress, loss, most of all about fear and bravery... Th[is] novella packs an emotional wallop. It is written simply, with no excess, no bathos.”

Tõnu Naelapea, *Estonian Life*

“K.Linda Kivi began drafting *Letter from Lubumbashi* in 1997, during a trip to Africa. I can see how a carefully built work such as this could take ten or twelve years to complete... I agree that *Letter from Lubumbashi*, like several other contemporary works of its stature, ‘deserves much more attention than it has so far gotten.’”

Jill Mandrake, www.geist.com/blogs/jill

Star Seeds

by Sean Arthur Joyce

ISBN 978-1-894842-16-7

\$16.00

“A unique formalist in the best sense of that word, Sean Arthur Joyce combines his sense of what really matters to humanity on the largest possible scale—the macrocosm—with a startling precision, while drawing attention to the natural world, his spirit’s favorite locations, not just to landscapes, but also to some of our smaller fellow creatures, such as moths, crows, and cats—the microcosm.

“Joyce already possesses many of the poetic gifts that take a lifetime to master. His voice shows an innocence, a child-like openness to new wonders, a deep respect for the natural world. Joyce is certainly at home in the universe and he wants to remind us that we are, too.”

Steven Michael Berzensky, author of *The Names Leave the Stones*, *Variations on the Birth of Jacob* and *The Blue Pools of Paradise*.

To order either of these books, consult:

www3.telus.net/neworphicpublishers-hekkanen