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From the Editor #13

I thought this might be a good time to have a look at the Statistically Improbable Phrases of the holy books of three major world religions. No offense if I don't get to your personal favorite.

In case you haven't run across the phrase "statistically improbable phrases" (which, of course, IS a statistically improbable phrase), know that it is a system developed by Amazon.com to compare some of the books they index and find phrases in each that are the most unlikely to be found in any other book indexed. I'm not sure how useful it is, but it does create some interesting results. Let's have a look at three pretty important books.

The Holy Qu'ran (translated by Allamah Nooruddin and Abdul Mannan)

exact right path
 woeful punishment
 purifying dues
 human being like yourselves
 punishment overtook
 fiery natured
 cried lies
 observe prayer
 plain warner
 water from the clouds
 disbelieving people
 perfect praise
 raised couches
 sperm drop
 wrongdoing people
 protecting friend
 associated partners
 grievous punishment
 firm mountains
 cannot frustrate

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previous scriptures
day woe
excellent deeds
vie one
believing women

Here we have an edition of the *Torah* (Henry Holt and Co.; 1st American Ed edition, 1997)

thy valuation
lobe above the liver
one silver dish
fine flour mingled with oil
puttest thy hand
skilfully woven band
one young bullock
stranger that sojourneth
two sockets under one board
weight thereof
furniture thereof
thou shalt overlay
unclean unto
golden pan
covereth the inwards
fine twined linen
two sockets under another board
thou shalt rejoice
blood thereof
skillful workman
fifth part thereof
whosoever toucheth
thou shalt set
shalt present
hath sinned

And, finally, these are from *The Jerusalem Bible*, a popular translation of the scriptures employed by Christians (Old Testament and New Testament.)

golden bowl weighing ten shekels
accompanying oblation
appeasing fragrance
five male yearling lambs
stout fighting men
perpetual holocaust
silver bowl weighing
sackcloth round
crimson stuffs
fourteen yearling lambs
angel emptied
communion sacrifice
capitals surmounting
sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels
filthy practices
purple stuffs
perpetual law
twined linen
ash containers
violet shade
fatty mass
silver sockets
sprinkling bowls
eternal sovereignty
incense boats

You know, I've got a master's degree in theology and I've taken world religion courses. How did I miss these gems? Does it strike you as odd that a software system pulled out this beautiful stuff? Why do you suppose the most statistically improbable phrases are almost all beautiful? ("associated partners" is an exception I guess. I think that's what they call employees at WalMart.)

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Taking three consecutive phrases from the Qu'ran list you get:

*firm mountains
cannot frustrate
previous scriptures*

Like much scripture--and much poetry--I have no idea what it means but it strikes me as profoundly true anyway, even consisting, as it does, of three disjointed phrases.

From *The Jerusalem Bible*:

*crimson stuffs
fourteen yearling lambs
angel emptied*

I don't remember if the angel was emptied or if the angel emptied something but, either way, "angel emptied" may be the title of your next book.

I hope you enjoy Issue 13 of Right Hand Pointing. As a reminder, we're still reading for Issue 14, Very Short Poetry. For this issue, we're only taking poems coming in at 50 words or less.

Happy New Year! I'm off to admire the sprinkling bowl weighing seventy shekels I got for Christmas.

Dale

Sandra Agricola

Puzzle Ball

You are in receipt of a puzzle ball. I found and purchased this item for you in Venezuela on my trip in May. As you may recall, I was there to study the criminal justice system of that country. This puzzle ball is not only a fun souvenir, but the means of existence for many incarcerated Venezuelans. There is a trick to putting it together if you should take it apart. Good luck trying to figure it out. If you find that you are not able to put it together on your own, please visit for a lesson! I would love to show you how!

Stella Brice

**I
PERSEPHONE
QUEEN OF THE UNDERWORLD
SPEAK FROM BELOW**

Of his awful
rooster pushing under
my skin & the

Dead seeping into the
royal marriage chamber.

I palpate my king's head that is
hard as a spike

But it is my own.

All this agony trapped in stone
I claim
part mine

In a way that the rank
emerald of my mother's world
would never be

Her place
is rich.

& My taste
is thinned.

I am used to gray flowers.

Up there is
too much teeming

Too much sap.

Stella Brice

She Is a Maid

A maid in a wrinkled smock
wheels out a black garbage can
higher
than her head.

Her face
a rictus
of fatigue.

She works up in the ass
of rich-house hell that
she enters in the morning
through the alley.

She fears

She has become
the maid
who empties
the garbage.

That this is no longer a role--
the mask
clamps down in gluey
fusion with her skin.

It is crawling upon her,
the knowledge:
what
she does
is what
she is.

Rohith Sundararaman

The Picture

I was throwing away junk
when I found a picture of you
taken under the midnight sky.
We can see a single star above
you but the moment doesn't show
how the clouds had rolled in
like a galloping herd of wild buffaloes
and swept away the splintered horizon.
All it shows is you wrapped
in a blanket of dark and a trace
of the universe glinting
from your lips.

Noah Falck

Monday Morning Replica

The front window exposes all I have.
The hallway hides patiently.

Hardwood floor whines as people drive-by
beating the neighborhood with basslines.

I stand up straight each morning
and look around at the imperfections.

In my three previous dreams
I almost had all your clothes off,
stuck on the buttonfly.

Now I'm walking with gum on my shoe.
When someone says good morning
I grow cold inside out

as if in a snowstorm
where everyone's nipples
standout like city capitals on a map.

Tony Lamont

Cotard's Delusion

In Cotard's Delusion, say some experts, the inner voice gets switched off. The little stream of subvocal speech that keeps talking to you as you do things. The one that says, I don't know why I am doing this, It's the inner consciousness that maintains the illusion that there's someone at home. If a stroke or a tumor inhibits whichever part of the brain controls this, then only the transient thought saying, this is what I am doing, exists. There is no background commentary. The coupling between thought and feeling about the thought is lost. In a sense, cogito ergo sum is lost. Instead, it becomes I do not think, therefore I am not. The clinical syndrome manifests as a person who believes he is actually dead. That inner voice seems to control the sense of feeling and reality as a person.

Now to change tack slightly, the whole point of writing--a novel, a poem, a letter--is to take charge of the voice in someone else's head for a short period of time.

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This is what I'm doing now. My words are taking possession of the language circuits of your brain and I am transiently your inner voice. In a way, that means I have become you, or you me, for a few minutes. The action of reading my words blurs the boundaries of reality. Writing is primitive virtual reality.

TJ Rivard

Chalk Drawings

"Your daughter excels," Ms. Finkle said. "Your daughter knows her numbers from one to a hundred. She adds with ease. Watch." Ms. Finkle's hips turned the undersized chair toward Fran. Her hands, dusted in chalk, rested on her knees. "Fran: eight plus six."

"Fourteen."

"Five plus seven."

"Twelve."

"See? A whiz. A very unusual child for her age."

She touched Fran's chin with the tips of her fingers as if she had invented her.

I smiled. "I was always good in math, but I veered away from it."

The teacher looked startled, patted my knee, left the white shadow of her palm behind. "We don't always go with our strength," she said, then looked back to Fran. "She's good in art too. Look at that." She pointed her dusty finger at the mobiles dancing down from the ceiling. "There's you and Fran." I looked at the mobile. Fran and I spun in orbit around each other. Ms. Finkle looked at me -- sorry for my loss.

"Now, watch this," she said. Read." She held up flash cards.

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"Purple. Monkey. Sunshine. Lamp," Fran read.

I looked at the teacher. The teacher looked at Fran, her chalked hand pressed down on Fran's shoulder, her index finger flicking nervously against my daughter's neck. "Look again. Start over."

"Lamp," Fran said.

Ms. Finkle sat back. She tapped the card, leaving white dust on the last letter. "Is that a 'p'?"

Fran nodded.

"No." Ms. Finkle's hand shook. "No. It's a 'b.'" She looked at me as if this was my doing. She put the flash card in front of Fran and stood, almost knocking over the chair. Her hair brushed a family of five, dangling from the ceiling. I stood with her. "No matter," she said. "She's ready. I've never had a student so ready." Ms. Finkle smiled. I smiled. A stick child nested in her hair. She shook my hand. Chalk puffed out around our grip. A phantom breeze caught the mobile of Fran and me, bobbing us back and forth in the cloud of dust that filled the room. Fran sank into her chair, white specks salting the back of her head while she picked at the paper corner of the flash card.

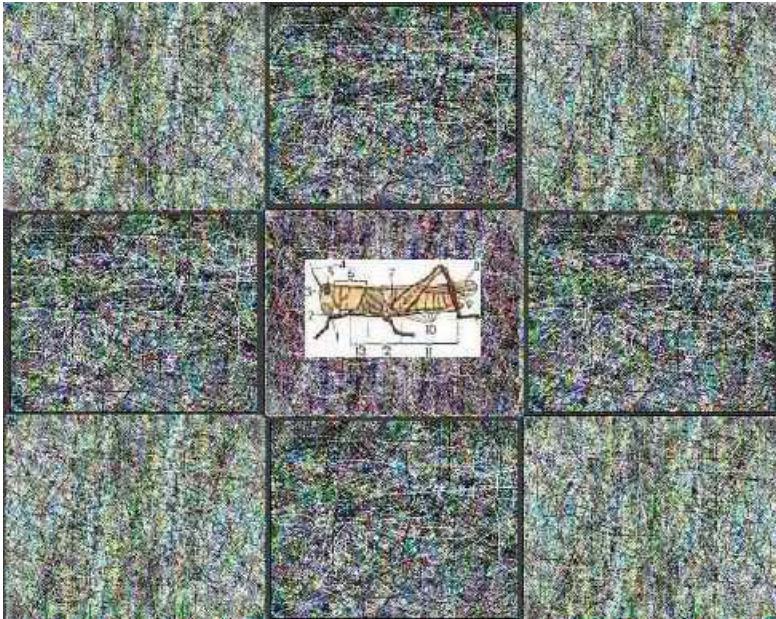
Peter Schwartz

Empress



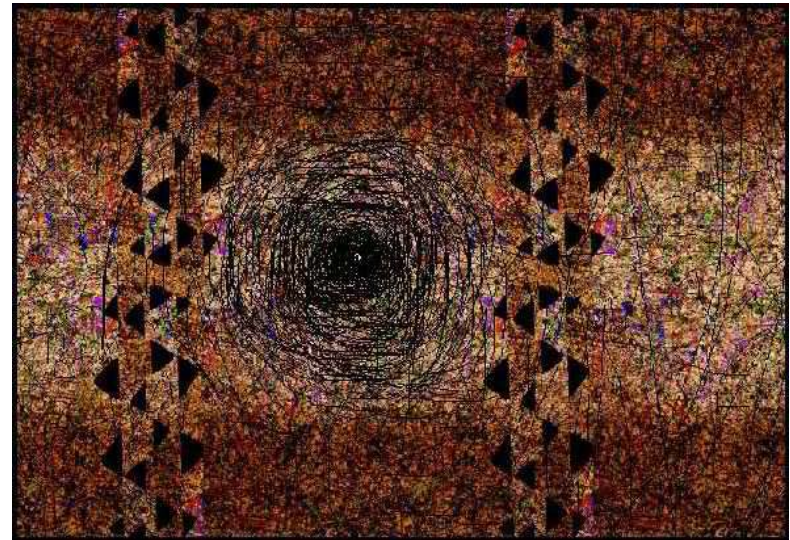
Peter Schwartz

Anatomy of a Grasshopper



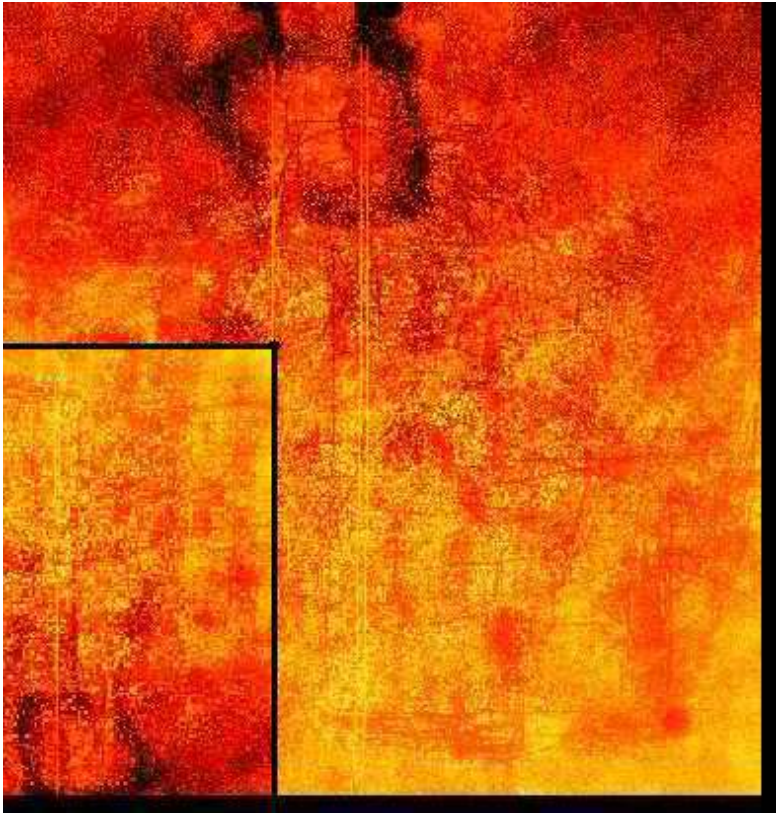
Peter Schwartz

The Art of Paranoia



Peter Schwartz

Pryomania, a Study on the Nature of Burning



Allan Peterson

Definition

A noise came and someone said helicopter
but it was a tear really
a tear in the fabric of the sky so it was defined
finally as a cloth
a threadbare night sky dropped over everything
unlighted
though dawn showed how fragile it was
the whole sky
beautifully woven and holding our breaths for us

Allan Peterson

Hard Times

Thanksgiving and transient asters
of north wind bloom on aluminum
as sea gulls plunder mergansers
I had been watching accidentals
and the wood that turns liquid
and the anxious copper-covered wren
Machinery is no metaphor for this
nor scapula nor a trace of chains
In hard times we simply acknowledge
each relentless hour has sixty teeth

Allan Peterson

Some Among the More

Some among the more ventriloquistic
may understand
the raftering loosestrife speaking
through my pillow
in the voice of dreams the string of muscles
in the hawk moth tongue
how words link to re-experience wave lengths
speak for stars and school desks
practice their scarred names and phrases

Allan Peterson

Welcome

Frightful we accept daily without a second thought
This is a second thought
The head of a lion attached to a metal pole a sign
of hospitality a ring
in its mouth painted black as we like our wildness
subservient and still

Aaron M. Hellem

Exaptation

Our hands, when there's no further use for the last two digits, will concretize into solid form, something with which to pound a tack when the hammer is in the other room. Something on which to strike a match. Our ears were once the serpent's jaw, and our eyes once the lizard's shield. What filled in the missing pieces when god extracted Adam's rib? Did Eve grow out from his side like a Chernobyl surprise? Was it really an apple or a ball of arsenic?

For want of a longer kairos, I develop a limp, a stutter, a smoking habit. She said that time was the moment of becoming: a present moment aggregate of past moments becoming a moment into the future.

I listen with the serpent's jaw: distended like a satellite dish. Somebody killed somebody else with the jaw bone of an ass, I said.

If time is in the moment of becoming, when does it flourish passed the participle and become? It's not that easy, she said. It surprises our expectations. Something unexpected and untimely disrupts our usual mundane course of action.

Like a dentist appointment, I offered.

A cigarette break, she replied.

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Happy hour.

Chest pains.

Nightmares.

Breaks.

Bubbles.

It exists in the disappearance of things, she said. She seemed sad to say it, sad when she said it, sad long after she said it. We see things always in the moment of their vanishing, she lamented. I'd heard that before, somewhere at sometime.

It's out of necessity I listen with my serpent's jaw rather than swallow rodents whole, I told her.

Perhaps it depends on the exaptation of our hat holders to hold more than hats and do more than chew food and butt the sides of our lovers. Unless, of course, it's not a participle at all, but a gerund, too. Could it be a gerund, too? I asked her.

She shook her head finally. It is not a thing itself, she said. Person, place, or otherwise.

Becoming, defiant of any specified place until it becomes, had become, became.

For how long? she asked.

As far back as I can recall, I said. My shoddy memory with holes in it like the inside of Adam's chest. Perhaps it's the appendix that will one day calcify in order to protect a more delicate organ in need of protection from a world that changes to kill us.

For want of a longer kairos, we sprout the wings of crows.

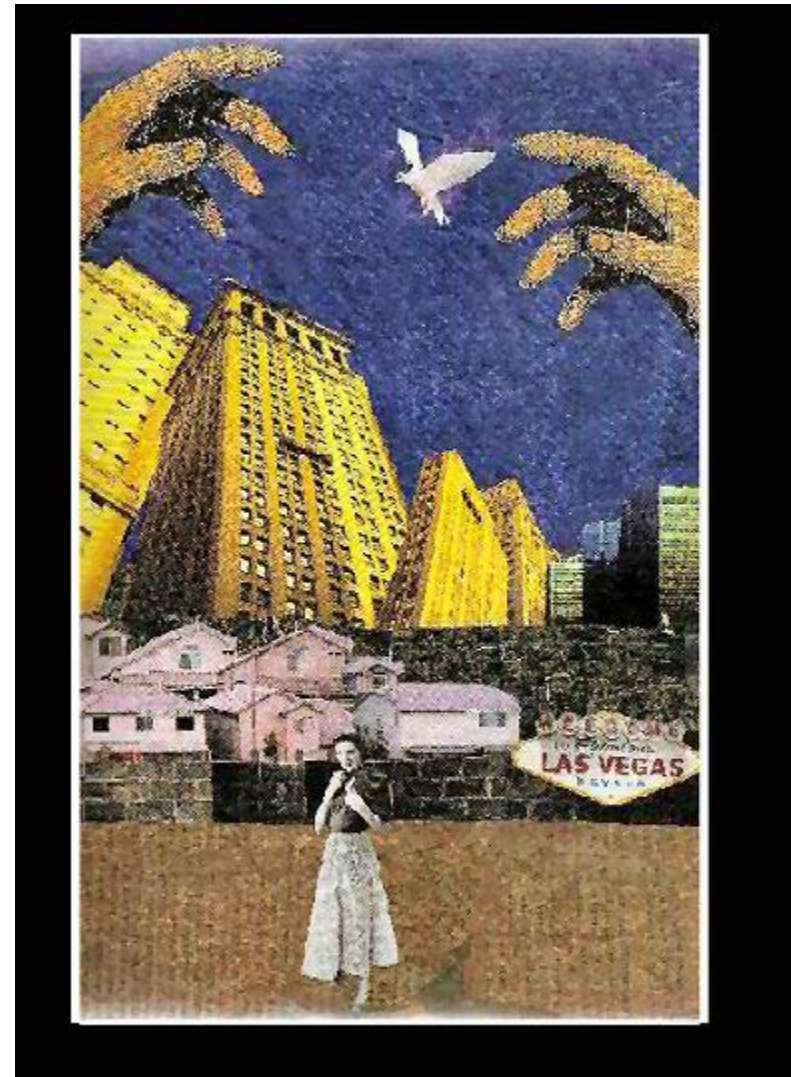
Christine Stoddard

Nippon Ga Suki Desu



Christine Stoddard

Las Vegas



Christine Stoddard

Pythons Are Always Hungry



Colin Fleming

Requisitions, amidships

I need you to do something for me. And realise that by 'me', I mean no one, single entity, but rather that I beseech you on behalf of--everything. I do not make this request of self-immolation--we both know the terms--without my own despair and regret, and my own constant pain, nor do I fail to understand that what has ever been meant by the act, in any previous gesture or metaphor, in no way speaks to what I ask of you here, or is anything but misleading. This is the one gesture.

I know what is coming. I knew it tonight walking around in this ridiculous heat, absolutely possessed, in a frenzy; I know what devils jerk the strings. I know exactly the expressions of that particular one and how the shapes move around his mouth. I know what hours he keeps, and what hours he prefers. You ask me to return to the void.

I ask you to return to the void.

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But have we ever really left? And you do not merely ask me to return, to the one void, the one true void, and that I have created, to map or carve out more blackness. Quite apart from this blasphemous cartography, you ask me to be the void, to inhabit it insofar as I can exist. And you ask me, out of these horrors, for what, otherwise, would be the bother, to fashion life.

As would you, as it can be no other way. The thing must be finished.

And where will you be sat when horrors never quelled rear up with yet greater intensity, where will you be amidst the blood and vomit and visitations? Where will you be as I shake and scream?

I will be by your side.

It is not enough.

I would never pretend that it would be.

And yet you call me back to--what should I call it? Should I even provide names for rudiments so belaboured of physical conceptions--size, height, heft, all the hues a mind can imagine--that their very rootedness in this world threatens abstraction in another, were it not the poet's world--where that piece of sailcloth you now bid me return to is no more composed of cross-stitches and hems than strung together by my own lacerations, no more dotted with colours than constellations.

You need not shake the canvas at me.

You call me back to an evil work. And what if some good comes of it? What manner of "good" could that possibly be? The good of a requiem? A requiem's requiem--an apocalypse's apocalypse. It is all so soiled, so sick, and still I have looked upon it, always at night, with you ever-intoning in my ear, and insisted it was some grand, peaceable gesture, and once or twice, you lusty interloper, I even thought it an act of love. I shall pay for that, I imagine. I have known I have been heading this way for some time.

And so it is agreed--

I did not say that.

Let us drink--not to health, but still a toast.

Gather the malted. (Surely you have a bottle left). A toast to intentions, to honor, to curses and miracles, to the indomitable spirit that makes from death, life. To faith.

To faith. Boyo.

I could play you in with some entrance music.

That is not funny.

Wit is not my specialty.

You lie, sir.

(together): Let us proceed.

Corey Mesler

Ghost Rain Day

The rain is sleepy, its
song softer
than the side of Chloe's neck.
The house resists
betterment. It leans a little
just as I once
leant to kiss her before bed.
The rain, Chloe,
the house. These are ways to
speak of other things,
the ones we do not waken, the
ones that spook us.

Corey Mesler

My John Lennon Period

I dressed in white. I
listened to the piano as if
it could bring him back.
In his voice I found tears.
In his voice truth.
I woke at all hours to
hear her whispering his name.
I lay on the sidewalk,
my head in a stain,
and let the people step over me.
They were all going
somewhere else. They couldn't
know that I was in
my John Lennon Period.

Corey Mesler

The Trick He Said Is Not Minding

Instead of your finger in the fire
it's your progress. One
foot in front of the other.
Instead of stillness there is the
heart, engaging like
a small motor. Instead of the
mantra an alphabet that
keeps expanding, until it is a
staircase out of absurdity.
Instead of the trick another magic,
one that opens like a face,
that takes the mind where it
wants to wander, and it does,
it wants, everlastingly, to wander.

Louise Norlie

Dilation

(Dedicated to Childhood Role Models now Incarcerated)

we see it written all over his face—sawdust, whimpers,
wet tracks of tears. his bent elbows are handles; he is
lifted at will.

here was one who was more than a god to us. we chased
marbles down escalators at the merest scatter of his
hands. the artery which ran from his tear duct to the
cornea—it kinked like a polygraph needle. how close we
had come to grasping that line, feeling its pulse.

now he is trapped, but everywhere, and a voice says on
the radio that he is faster than ever, spanning from end
to end in seconds.

the camera focuses. millions cannot tell before from
after, but the line has gone flat.

John N. Tieman

Yes, We're Going to the Hills

yes, we're going to the hills. There's a village there
there's a window made from red clay. Yes, we've
gun powder in our pockets. A will was written there
in the sparkling jaundice of wrists + cut necks.
Keep the fat in your stomach, we're going.

We're climbing the rocks
with the reptiles.

The sun is at the top,
burning the trees,

browning skin.



Gary J. Whitehead

Beach Combing

The sun warms oval stones.
Waves ruffle their plumage.
All along the shore's edge
fledglings step into their bones.

My love bends her two legs,
picks shells, bits of old hulls.
Desire sails far on swells
and crashes into its eggs.

Gary J. Whitehead

Prayer

Out of the mouth of brain,
because more is a must,
and up from dust
and centuries,

we demand the deaf one
listen, or else we talk
like a wall clock
forgotten

in a move, in a room full
of sunlight through
which a single
fruit fly passes.

Gary J. Whitehead

Refuge

Wind rocks the rocker
and its barred shadow,
invisible, restless widow
shooing the fox sparrow
out of the roses. Not a

thing here opens without
it closes: this door,
these wings in me, nor
what I wish to see more
clearly now the fog's rolled out.

Things close because they must,
and there's a word for it:
we forget and we forget
that we are vined and florid,
too, and there is wind in us.

So what if the day is dying.
Each night makes orphans anew.
Some other eye opens onto
a dim vista. A star blinks blue.
Now the hungry bird is crying.

Gary J. Whitehead

Walnuts

The promise waits—split in two—
the way a brain is. And I crack into
the time when you and I broke a whole
bowl down to shells and dust. Like this,
I said, like the earth will be, and you said
nothing of moons or of what cowards
people nevertheless grow into when
they lock the last of themselves
into such darkness.

John Grey

My Father the Inventor

Ten dozen
of them
in a box in the garage...
not one order...
and to think
the nation never
would have had to
pick up dog poop
with their hands again
had they only known
the man I knew...
the one who kissed my cheek
in lieu of any labor-saving alternative.

John Grey

We Noise-Makers

Thank God
the drummer next door
has finished practice.
And the couple on the other side
are through arguing.
The guy at the back
is done with mowing his lawn.
So now it's my turn, everyone.
I'm sitting in the soft chair.
I sip coffee.
I turn the pages of a book.
Take that, neighborhood.



Contributors

Speak my language.--Laurie Anderson

Sandra Agricola is the author of two collections of poetry, *Master Bedroom Poems* and *White Mercedes*. A chapbook, *Yellow*, is available from Mercy Seat Press. Her poems have appeared in *The Georgia Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Awakenings Review*, *The Ohio Review*, and elsewhere. She lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

Stella Brice received her degree in English Lit. from Rice University; & has worked, variously, as housecleaner, tarot reader & performance artist. Her writing has appeared or is forthcoming in *Frank*, *Total Abandon*, *Fine Madness*, *Southern Poetry Review*, the anthology of border poetry *Tierra Cruzada/Crossed Land* & many others. She is a winner of the John Z. Bennet Prize & is co-editor of the literary journal *Art Club*. Her first collection of poems *Green Lion* was released in the spring of 2005.

Rohith Sundararaman lives in Bombay, India. His work has appeared in *eclectica*, *elimae*, *edifice wrecked*, *GUD* and elsewhere. He is 22 years old and is studying to enter the

corporate world. (We have time to talk him out of it.)

Noah Falck teaches Language and Thought at Northridge Local Schools. His poems appear or are forthcoming in journals such as *Gulf Coast*, *LIT*, *Combatives*, *Bat City Review*, *H. NGM. N.*, *Absent*, *The Bedside Guide to No Tell Motel – Second Floor*, and others. He lives in Dayton, Ohio.

Tony Lamont has published many scientific articles and is a prolific letter writer. This piece is from one of his letters. Previously occupied as a contracting builder in Central Africa he trained in medicine, specialized in radiology and now resides in Australia working with children. He thinks anyone over 16 years old borders on geriatric.

TJ Rivard has been previously published in *The Café Irreal*, *Oxford Magazine*, *the Eureka Literary Magazine*, *flashquake*, *SmokeLong Quarterly*, and *the Kentucky Poetry Review*. He has also been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Peter Schwartz is the associate art editor of *Mad Hatters' Review* and has about a hundred paintings published online. His work has appeared in several online galleries. His painting 'Terminal 4' is being projected onto two walls on Frinkle Street as part of an exhibition in York, UK. He is currently working on paintings to be shown in the future at the Amsterdam Whitney Gallery in Chelsea NYC.

Allan Peterson's work has appeared previously on *Right Hand Pointing* and he is the author of *Any Given Moment*, one of our web chapbooks. His new book, *All the Lavish in Common*, will be reviewed very positively

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by Stephen Burt in the *Yale Review*. He recently won the Muriel Craft Baily competition from The Comstock Review, judged by Thomas Lux.

Aaron M. Hellem attends the MFA Program for Writers and Poets at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. His short stories have been published most recently in *Ellipsis*, *Contrary Magazine*, *Carve Magazine*, and *Dandelion Magazine*; also, works are forthcoming in the *Pisgah Review* and the *Powhatan Review*.

Christine Stoddard is a DIY fairy-child from Bourgeois-ville, Virginia who loves listening to obscure indie music and collecting cicada moltings. Her favorite word is "imbue" and her least favorite food is mushroom pie---and, yes, that is actually a dish.

Colin Fleming's work has appeared in *Rolling Stone*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, *The Village Voice*, *Storyglossia*, *Metropolis*, and *Cineaste*, among other venues. He is wrapping up a novel.

Corey Mesler has published prose and/or poetry in *Turnrow*, *Adirondack Review*, *Paumanok Review*, *Yankee Pot Roast*, *Monday Night*, *Elimae*, *H_NGM_N*, *The American Drivel Review*, *Poet Lore*, *Forklift OH*, *Euphony*, *Rattle*, *Dacey Brown*, *Cordite*, *Cellar Door*, and others. His novel-in-dialogue, *Talk*, was published by Livingston Press in 2002 and was positively reviewed by Lee Smith, Robert Olen Butler, and John Grisham. His new novel, *We are Billion-Year-Old Carbon*, is also from Livingston Press. A poem, "Sweet Annie Divine," was chosen for Garrison Keillor's "The Writer's Almanac." He has been nominated for the Pushcart numerous times. With his wife,

he owns Burke's Book Store, one of the country's oldest (1875) independent bookstores.

Louise Norlie's fiction and non-fiction has appeared in numerous magazines, including *juked*, *edifice WRECKED*, *Bewildering Stories*, *Static Movement*, *The First Line*, *Long Story Short*, *elimae*, *the Angler*, and *Raging Face*. Her work is also forthcoming in *Breath & Shadow*, and *Mount Zion Speculative Fiction Review*.

John N. Tieman was born on a farm in Vermont. He touched electric fences like lovers, and talked to the animals. Years later, h was in New Jersey. He grew up with an intense fondness for drawing, painting, and music - to the point of being perceived as lazy or care-free. He is returning to college this fall to pursue a teaching career and so we wish him every success.

Gary Whitehead's first full-length book of poems, *The Velocity of Dust*, was published by Salmon Publishing in 2004. A third chapbook, *After the Drowning*, is just out from Finishing Line Press. Awards include a New York Foundation for the Arts Individual Artist's Fellowship in Poetry, the PEN Northwest Margery Davis Boyden Wilderness Writing Residency, and the Pearl Hogrefe Fellowship in Creative Writing at Iowa State University.

John Grey is an Australian born poet, playwright, musician. Latest book is *What Else Is There* from Main Street Rag. Recently in *Parting Gifts*, *Art Mag*, and *Chaffin Journal*. His work appears often in *Right Hand Pointing*.