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Poetry & Prose

The Revolutionary
Raymond Fraser

My cousin's family
had a bathroom
in their house
all chrome and tile
and pink and blue
so luxurious were
their lives

My cousin's friends
were rich as well
They asked
my sister once
how our father
earned his bread

He's a janitor she said
She was innocent that way
Oh said they
giving us — what?
No look really
just not knowing
what to say
while I stood
furiously ashamed
hating them

And then there came the day
the Revolution came to town
and I rode in on Main Street
and tore their city down
wiped it from the map
like so much bourgeois crap
sitting on my throne
my fur-lined toilet seat

After Opaque Visibility
M.J. Golias

Like waiting for the dead to return
wearing the clothes they were buried in
I left cheese and baguettes for my missing hero and heroine.

There is always a need.

My hero has eaten the last of the figs,
backed into the tree with his Benz — he left
no note for me.

There is always a need.

My heroine — well, she had wings (which she had hid from me).
She is now a star in Italian films — she left
no note for me.

There is always a need.

There was a need pulling at the hairs on my arms.
I glimpsed empires

while hero and heroine spoke of fleeing to Europe
with leftover drachmas in their pockets —
I was invited. I was invited
to alter myself like a loose suit — become anyone else
even a heroine

someone's heroine

speaking empires and audible whispers.

(My mouth now sewn shut like the dead's.)

There will always be a need.

Self Portrait with Forecast
Jeff Schiff

You have a wife an appealing babe adjusting to the face of corporeal
treachery still no one's afterthought two children: one rasping at those
outskirts that fail now to fascinate or lure & another whose penance
(when generous you call it succor) is common distance: a furlong for every
indigestible antipathy & a mutt-Dalmatian who trotted recently into the dangling
biscuit of your kindness & kinged you by utter mistake There is a job: yada yada:
trespasses tortured diplomacies all the piddliness and rigmarole you'd expect from
insufficient recompense but there are laurel saplings too: strivers oily green & sunfuddled
& quirky hedges that demand your focus or deliberation or depth of faith or
some such amalgamated pretense multiplying as they do at some encroaching edge

Bullets or Glass
Nicole Pakan

they wind through the morning
alleys, the steady squeak

pause

squeak of pursuance, bottle
clink, labels unravelling, glue

unclung to side
ground off by friction or

nervous fingers
again

The Hack's Progress
James Romanow

You know sir, you have a lovely office. These books, these chairs. The very essence of a man of your standing. Have I told you that before? I am so happy to have been chosen by you over the rest of those candidates. Knowing as you do, that I am a little different from most. Why thank you, I would like a cognac. It is so *you* to have crystal in your office. Rosenthal isn't it?

Pardon? You want to know how I came to get a degree? Why I returned to school? Of course what you are really asking is why I abandoned my writing. Yes, I can see how you might. Most professionals lack your sensitivity for the arts; no one else has thought to ask that question before. I suppose they are disconcerted by my former career. Make yourself comfortable sir, and I will tell you.

In your experience people are undone by drink, or greed, or lechery. I was seduced by Art. With a capital A. You may not realize this but lives are lost to Art. It nearly cost me mine.

I can see by your raised eyebrow, you think I exaggerate. But I do not. What I say is true. It was art. Or if you prefer naivete. I was foolish enough to believe my professors. Foolish enough to believe in the dream. Foolish enough to believe in myself.

I can see you don't believe me. I will have to explain. Allow me to fetch you another cognac. Comfortable? Ashtray empty? The background material will take a moment or two.

As we cheerfully bugger our way into another millennia, you and I both know the world is falling apart. We see this everyday. Even from such a graceful bunker as this you cannot help but notice the squalor that threatens us. When I grew up, I believed all that nonsense about a meritocracy and upward mobility.

I was innocent.

I didn't notice that the majority of medical students were the sons and daughters of doctors, or that to attend a prestigious school usually required a father as alumni.

You smile of course. This is not news to you. You hired me because of my marks and background. A "good fit" I suppose you call it. Sorry sir, bad joke. But you will admit it helped that Uncle Richard used to be a senior partner.

It began in school. As you know I attended your alma mater, a fine university, with a superlative faculty. I remember drinking in the firm round vowels and clean consonants of Professor Davis's pronouncements: "The novel is dead." His lectures flew from his neatly goateed chin directly into my brain. I had no need of notes. He made it all so clear. So very clear.

I still remember, that first Christmas party. I remember Professor Davis's hand, casually dropping to my right buttock. Naif that I was, it struck me as poignant. I, the novice, could provide solace to a man trapped in a marriage that was a lie! It seemed so little to give, so cruel to refuse. You understand sir. If anyone can, you must.

It was later that I discovered the highway down which the good professor drove me was a tollway without an exit. A top grade, an A given to award my insight, my sensitivity - and yes a certain earthy willingness to oblige - that very grade could be withdrawn as quickly a limp penis.

I persevered however, bending over, allowing my row to be hoed. For at the end of it all I would receive a first class degree from a first class institution.

You are silent now sir. Not shocked I trust. Not a man of the world such as yourself. You see, I was willing to give anything for the leisure to polish my writing. It is that same drive that you have hired after all. You know I will apply it to fill the august coffers of Haye, Jackings and Billings. And of course your and my pockets.

But to return to my story. Life outside university became difficult. The opportunities for money to pay the rent, to buy the groceries, were limited. Even those moments with Professor Davis were not, I discovered, rare gems, chosen carefully and seldom given. I discovered from friends in my graduate seminar, that I was not alone. The professor was an equal opportunity marker. He enjoyed himself with abandon amongst the men and women that enlisted in his seminar. Indeed if Sylvie Fresh is to be believed, Doctor Davis was even willing to include her golden retriever in his generosity.

Perhaps it was due to a presbyterian value system, perhaps just better taste in wine. Or perhaps my nerves could no longer stand the constant importuning of art magazines and publishers. I decided it was no sin to print books on less than vellum. I broadened the scope of my search to include all manner of publishers. I begged for work from paperback publishers of all stripes, even those that sold only by mail order. I had hoped my experiences at the feet of Professor Davis might translate into coin. Again I was wrong; what had seemed exotic to me, such publishers found dull, even trite.

I sank to a new low and attempted to get into print in the newspapers - they laughed at my opinions. Time after time I faced rejection from overfed editors with no concerns except invitations to the trendiest restaurant openings.

I gave in to fate. I attempted to replicate my success with Professor Davis. As you know sir I do have something to offer. I was only rejected when my guess about the man behind the desk was wrong. Finally, an editor with a large publisher took pity upon my state. I remember his explanation well.

"You must face facts. You are not a novelist. At best you qualify as hack."

You could hear the distaste he felt just mouthing the word. He suggested he might find a way to publish a murder mystery. Small thanks for an afternoon that his colleagues would doubtless learn to envy over cocktails. But enough to infuse me again with hope.

I turned into my chrysalis. Scorning the cafes and taverns where I had previously spent my time, I laboured over my computer; and when I needed money, over a bar counter. After two years my opus was complete. I submitted it for publication. You can guess the response I received.

"Sorry. Not quite what we're after."

"No."

"We regret that our schedule is complete at this time."

"No thank you."

"Unfortunately the enclosed manuscript titled Bloody Ivy does not meet our criteria."

"Go Away."

My brain dulled by rejection, I sought out Professor Davis. Perhaps he could advise me. I found him at a party given for new students to meet alumni. As usual he was near the drinks table with his left hand pointing out exotic wines to a pretty young student. His right, I noted with a pang of jealousy was pressed against the small of her back.

"Professor Davis? You remember me?"

His eyes were blank, due to drink I imagine.

"I have a novel." I plunged on. "I need some critical input."

"Piss off. We're busy." The student, a callow undergrad with crooked teeth, giggled at this commanding show of wit.

I walked home to save bus fare. I was in a stupor. I could sink no lower. What could be wrong with my novel? My opus, banging against my leg in a cheap plastic grocery bag, I wandered the streets trying to imagine what my problem was. In the solitude of my putrid apartment, I shed my clothes and prepared for bed.

I had once been proud of my body, my carefully groomed hair, my muscles well toned from exercise. Now there was a growing belly, and flaccid skin, green white under the bilious fluorescent light. My hair cropped short for convenience and price, no longer looked even avant garde. I know it is hard for you to believe having seen me more recently but it is true. I had let myself go.

After that dreadful night I determined I would not give up yet. I would try one more avenue. I would find critical help. I returned to the editor that had inventoried my talents. For several afternoons of sport involving a vibrator, silk scarves and a quantity of relaxants, he agreed to read and critique it. Sir. Are you alright? You look quite pale. Here. Have another splash of this excellent cognac. I can guess what you are worried about. Don't. I gave the firm's insurance agent my blood test results before signing the contract, and an excellent contract it was. Most generous.

That afternoon began as always. The meeting in the hotel room - he could not bear the squalor of my apartment - the initial scuffle followed by a more leisurely encounter to satisfy his perverse pleasure. Finally, leaning against the bedstead, released from his bonds, he lit one of the tacky little cigarillos he affected. You have no idea how relieved I was on learning that you were a cigar smoker, to find you knew the value of a good Cuban, sir.

"You know" the editor told me. "it isn't as bad as I feared. I think mostly it's just missing the personal touch, the passion of it all. The crime itself is almost executed by remote control. We get no feeling for the agony of the victim, for the anger of the murderer."

I could not believe what I was hearing. I looked up from folding the aviator scarf into my gym bag. There, he sat, as smug and self satisfied as all the rest of them, content with his six figure job, his wife and child, his little liaisons. "Liaisons". That was how he referred to me. I remember

coiling the scarf slowly around my fingers, the fabric still damp with his exudations. I tried to form a coherent response.

"There, there, my little hack. You'll be better for such honest criticism."

I pivoted, throwing my legs over his chest, and looped the scarf over his head. He chuckled imagining the new pleasures he was about to experience, as I wrapped the scarf around his throat twice.

I still remember that small crease of uncertainty that formed on his forehead, just over that repulsive face-wide eyebrow of his.

"They say when you die the orgasm is the best ever." I said. He grasped my wrists but he was already too late.

I jerked my arms apart. Hard. Little hack indeed! I outweighed him by at least twenty pounds. Those hours spent at the gym were not completely lost. It was all over surprisingly quickly. Alas! Although he achieved a certain rigidity, he died without that ultimate experience.

I unclenched my jaw and began to get dressed. Passion. Anger. None of these bureaucrats know the meaning of either word. They are cushioned from such sensations, hidden as they are in the suburbs. They get all sensations as voyeurs, by watching us, the maggots the scum, the impoverished artists as we struggle, as we actually *do*.

I thrust my things into my bag and, after wiping down the room, I left. I knew enough of the editor's habits to know I was safe. He no longer bragged of our encounters because his wife threatened not just divorce but financial humiliation if he cheated again. She was rather like your wife when you stop and think about it.

Sir! Are you alright? Oh dear! You've splashed some on your desk. Let me get that. We wouldn't want the cognac to strip the lacquer off this fine desk. A Phyfe isn't it? I'm afraid the leather may need refinishing.

Now where was I? Oh yes, you were upset because of my little crime. Have no fear sir. My research into crime technique had paid off. I was never suspected, never even questioned.

Now you see how I was driven to this end. I have no regret. There is no hope for a mere hack, but there are other opportunities. As you know, I had no trouble successfully navigating the perils of a joint law-business degree, and I cannot tell you how grateful I am to you for offering me a place here. Of course my experience with the publishing industry can only help us in our suit to pry open the copyright act. Clearly the widows and families of authors have no right to such properties. Great Art belongs to the world. I am sure our publisher clients will find me sufficiently aggressive.

Ah, I see I told you too much. Nosir if I were you I'd put that phone down. What if our private little job interview became public? Not even the mahogany panelling of this office could protect you from the tabloids.

No evidence? Sir, I see you have underestimated me. Allow me to play something for you. I took the precaution of recording my job interviews so I could review the questions at my leisure.

Yessir, my briefcase was wearing a wire. Extraordinary how good the mikes are these days isn't it?

I believe if you check your criminal law you will find some aspects of our little encounter are an offense in this jurisdiction. Of course I would have to claim duress but as you know the courts view job interviews as just such a situation. I made rather a study of the precedents. I am sure you have no need of my research. You know I am right.

Oh dear. You are quite pale again. Don't worry sir. There are only a half dozen copies of the interview extant, and they are all in secure locations. Periodically I like to listen to it, for my own enjoyment. It really was quite romantic the way you set forth your proposal sir. You have no idea how entertaining you are sir when in the throes of passion. True, you are not quite as inventive as some members of the artistic community. But you are charming in your own way. Healthy. Straightforward in your needs. And of course there is always your lovely clear baritone.

Now sir there's no need for that kind of language. I can see where these little revelations may have startled you a bit but don't worry. I think the murder of that editor cured me of my remaining ideals. From now on I shall follow in your august footsteps! I shall be a normal member of society! A fine upstanding member of the bar! And, of course, a credit to Haye, Jackings and Billings.

I promise.

A Smiling Phiz for Hindlegs
Tom Tracey

After the birth of rose in May,
grimly glad fleckering harp-souled Anna
scaled the horse and tore desire
from a flesh of chestnut's pith;
swung the knotted heart of kith
& dashed her flail at brother Big's,
He still bellowing in the furnace
of that dead-end lovely dog day,
burnished in the memory
like a gloating shirt of skin:
"Let me take your Head off, sis!"
(thereabouts the gist of Him)
"I am tired of all sings,
want to slip off into God"
as needle to a magnet drawn
in rose & gold of twilit din.
Great tree-climber, high magician,
tall above all moss & harping,
jack-knife-whittling, hale halloing,
never was a man so smiling;
hailstorm voice from sky descending:
"Mercy me, was ever man so pelted!"
who beat the dragooned thistles there with sticks.

Erich Reichmann
Brad Congdon

Even Erich Reichmann was once a child. It is an idea I grapple with even now, so many years later. Back then, it was not a thought that ever crossed my mind. In fact, I did not like to think of Reichmann at all.

When I did, it was usually when I was on the streets, at night. Such thoughts always hurried me home, where I felt safe from him. Only once did I hear his name spoken within our walls, when mama said of him, quite unbidden: "That boy, he looks like he is made out of nails." An accurate description; Reichmann was a hard man, all corded muscle and scar tissue.

A feared street-brawler, Reichmann held our little neighbourhood in the palms of his cold, brutal hands. Surely his life of crime started in some schoolyard, where he must have terrorized the other children as soon as the teachers turned their backs. I knew him as an angry young man who drunkenly stalked our streets at night, muttering to himself, most often brandishing a straight razor, swinging at shadows. It was then, at night, when he was least dangerous, for though he was quick to anger his drunken limbs were slow and pendulous. Easy to avoid. In the light of day, Reichmann spent his time stealing from the local shops, or breaking into people's houses. Those who angered him when he was sober were less likely to escape unharmed. Many were there whose scars proved that crossing Erich Reichmann was a dangerous thing. It was said that he'd even killed, once or twice. This was done out of anger, and never for money; the bodies were found with wallets still stuffed to overflowing with *Rentenmarks*.

I was twelve years old when the Weimar introduced the *Rentenmark* to replace the *Papiermark*. One *Rentenmark* equalled one trillion *Papiermarks* – it sounds like an astronomical sum! Both were totally useless. That winter we burned money in our little stove. It was cheaper than wood. I tell you this, so you will understand why my brother and I were so eager to take a job from Max Kolb, the baker's son. Kolb could offer us something better than *Rentenmarks*; he offered us bread, one loaf each! All we needed to do, according to Kolb, was go out into the woods, a mile out of town, to a spot which I knew. There we would dig.

How big of a hole?

"Deep enough to stand in," Max Kolb said. "Wide enough to lie down in." I understood.

The hole was to be dug before sunrise. Josef was only nine then, but he knew the value of food. He did not complain when I woke him so early. We found the shovel – there was only one to share between us – and crept out of the house, careful not to wake mama and papa. Only, when we stepped outside, we discovered a sky full of ominous clouds. We grabbed my father's umbrella, the one with the brass handle shaped like a duck's head, the one he cared for so much.

It was still dark when we reached the stated spot. The clouds continued to loom threateningly, but not a drop had fallen. Immediately we set to digging; I went first, and when I tired, Josef took over, but never for long.

"Albrecht," Josef finally asked, "what sort of bread will it be?"

"Don't be stupid," I replied. I said this often to Josef. Kolb promised it would not be that disgusting fake stuff some were baking – half bread, half glue and sawdust. "He is a baker's son," I explained. "It will be baker's bread." This seemed good enough for Josef.

"Why didn't the baker's son dig this hole himself?" Josef asked, without much of a pause since his last question.

"He has something better to do," I said. "Enough questions."

Josef nodded, and was silent for a moment. He looked up at the sky, probably wondering if the rain would come. Then he began to sing. It was an old song that mother used to sing to me. She sang it now to Josef, since I was too old for such songs. His shrill, child's voice seemed too cutting for the work at hand.

"Quiet!" I hissed. I handed him the shovel, hoping that he'd hush if kept busy. For the next while, we worked with only the sounds of the rustling leaves and the chirps of a few curious birds to break the stillness around us.

Kolb entered the woods shortly after the sun made its appearance. With him was a man I had never seen before, a silent man with a ragged beard and a serious expression. Between them they led a mule. The mule was pulling a cart; in the cart, tied down with cord, was a heap of bloody sheets. They'd made no effort to hide it.

Kolb and his friend did not complain that the hole was not as big as specified. Instead, they busied themselves with unloading the cart, cutting away the cord with a familiar razor. The two men grunted as they heaved the mass of bloody sheets onto their shoulders. Of course it was a body – I had known immediately, or perhaps even before they'd arrived. Why else the hole? Then the two men walked over to the mouth of our shallow grave and threw their burden in, just like that.

"Bury him," Kolb said, slouching back towards the cart. "Your bread will be waiting for you at home." His silent friend lit a cigarette, clutching it awkwardly in his hand as he looked Josef and me in the eye. His knuckles were badly bruised.

But I did not pay attention to Kolb or his friend for long. You see, when they had tossed the body into our little hole, the face had come uncovered, and now it was staring up at me.

"Albrecht," Josef whispered to me, once the two men had gone. I had not even noticed their exit. "That's Erich Reichmann!" Of course I knew it was.

He was looking at all the blood. "They stabbed him a million times!"

"Don't be stupid! Maybe six or seven!"

"Albrecht," Josef asked, after what seemed like a long stretch of silence, "why aren't we digging?"

Why not? In fact, I was horrified of Reichmann, even then. I wanted nothing more than to run. But what then? No bread, that's for sure. And my brother, little Josef, he would think me a coward.

I started to rake the soil onto Reichmann's body, hoping to get it over and done with, but Josef, stupid boy, had lain papa's umbrella – the one with the brass handle shaped like a duck's head, the one he cared for so much – at the mouth of the grave. One careless swing of my shovel, and in it went.

"Albrecht!" Josef gasped in horror, watching as the umbrella fell.

I stopped dead.

The umbrella had landed next to Erich Reichmann's uncovered face. The duck's bill was touching his sunken cheek, as though kissing him.

"Leave it!" Josef pleaded, eyes frantic.

"Don't be stupid!" I shot back without even looking his way. I took a deep breath. I considered the umbrella, the body.

With my courage gathered, I slid down into the grave.

"It's not so bad!" I said, showing Josef that I was not afraid. One foot was braced against the loose, earthen wall of the grave, the other planted between the body's legs. I feared that my foot would slip on the sheets, and I would fall. The thought terrified me.

"Albrecht! Get out of there!"

I inched toward the umbrella, testing each step on the bloody sheets, fearing that I'd stumble on them or on the loose soil. I tried to keep my eyes locked on papa's umbrella, but they kept rebelling, shifting instead to the face that had terrorized my neighbourhood for so long. Slowly, I reached for the umbrella, my heart in my throat. I almost had it!

And Erich Reichmann coughed.

Already I was scrambling out of the hole, my frenzied movements causing little avalanches of soil. Josef grabbed my arm, pulled me up.

Then Reichmann coughed again. Blood came out of his mouth, and his eyes opened slightly. He saw us – *he saw us*! Josef clasped at my arms, and I at his. Reichmann's lips moved, but no words came out, only a rasping, desolate sound.

Josef's watery blue eyes were filled with fright. What to do?

"Dig!" I yelled. With shovel, with hands, we forced the soil back into the hole, covering up Erich Reichmann – starting with his face, so he would stare at us no more. We worked in a fury, gasping and straining but never once stopping, finally patting the soil flat with our palms when it was done.

And then we ran.

Papa never asked us what happened to his umbrella. It wasn't until years later that I realized that he must have thought we had traded it to Max Kolb for those two loaves of bread he found on the doorstep that morning. A prudent man, he must have accepted it as a fair trade.

Back then, though, I never thought of my father's reaction. I did not care. All I thought of, for days, for months, were Reichmann's pleading eyes – and some nights, when I slept, I dreamt of Erich Reichmann arriving on our doorstep, his clothing soiled and bloody, clutching my father's umbrella in his cold, brutal hands.

The Census
Raymond Fraser

I was home but nobody came
nobody at the door
with pad and pencil to take my name
and ask those questions I'd heard they asked
and were you working and what you made
and what you paid
for your apartment
and if you had a toilet
was there hot water in your tap
and what was your nationality

I was going to say occupation poet income nothing
but nobody came
with pad and pencil to take my name
(Chatham, 1961)

Watching Westerns
Michael Baker

In "Red River," near Abilene,
Monty tells the Chicago moneyman,
"The cattle ain't exactly housebroken,"
and everyone hoots and hollers
except me, a second banana, yelling
at other manics that despair has many names
but no primetime show, begging Monty
to suck out all of the arrow's poison, ranting
slap me, slug me and tell me about Roy Rogers
and Mad Cow Disease. These are tough times
but nothing, not even God, makes John Wayne flinch.
He is angry and he is drunk. Monty shanghaied
his cattle. He looks like he wants to kill me.
That snapped twig I just heard
is probably the newspaper boy.

Some scenes are not for naïve viewers.
I sit near the wall, mattress propped
against the window, worrying that the four men
in black hats are just joshing,
that Gary Cooper will be OK,
that Grace's farewell train
would go that more goddamn fast.

There's no real bliss in the West.
Sons slay fathers; Indians always
aim too high; only the landscape has logic.
A lovesick cowpoke yodels, Trigger
sends smoke signals to the Apaches,
and I quit gambling, refusing
to raise a perfect stranger
my new set of false teeth. The cattle,
all but one thousand, get to Kansas City
and are sold. Drinks and hugs
for everyone! No one, however,
can hear the Princess's train
and on Hoboken's west side
near my ten by ten territory
teenage girls in halters
in droves walk by, waving,
ready to serve and obey
this month's lawman, who unfairly
avoids fame from his onrushing death.

Halloween Blind Date
Katherine Hüsler

Rain pats the windows of the Greyhound. The shadow of the pen
hovers on the gleaming rubber floor. I am warm. Outside
in the dark, red lights, racing

white lines. The shadow of the pen hovers above
me when we walk across the street and you pull
my neck. We hit heads. *Hi buddy,*

this feels good. When I hover above you, the shadow delineates
the contours of your breasts. I take off your shirt and the pen
gets lost in ebony skin, in its glare. My head gets lost

in the long grace of your fingers. I'm a sailor
and you are my captain, the best
looking person on the Titanic. *Sit on my lap*,

you say. Your best friend Oscar Wilde plunges on top
of me and we tumble on the floor. Take my hand,
you dance better than me, you are the lead. You claim

that you only appreciate women bent over
with a bag on their head. I exhale, request paper
instead of plastic. Tonight I follow

a shadow; it hovers between three shining gravestones
in an ill-lit front yard. Three skinny kids dressed in white
and charcoal lie in the grass. I am drunk and balance

on the edge of the sidewalk. The world
is quiet. There's no more moaning. There's no moon. You tug
at my blazer until I close my eyes and topple into darkness.

You Know Too Much About Flying Saucers
Jéanpaul Ferro

I dreamed a hole through her head, where blue
cathoray spilled out over space and time,

ten seconds of my stare, my eyes pretending to look
at the red Coca-Cola sign flashing up behind her head,
blinking on and off in reds and whites over and over:
Drink Coke — You Dope!

People say we are like Siamese twins, but really
we are more like Tiananmen Square, 1989;
six murdered sextuplets on a Sunday;

You're crazy. We can't be together, she says — this is
every time right before we go and remarry down in old
Mexico;

I love the crazy flashing skies over Acapulco, an
emerald stain the way George Stevens got to do it
on film,

both of us with bare feet, dancing under moonlight,
over broken bottles of glass, arms flailing, waving madly;

every day another séance to stop the Nuclear bombs,
all night long as we pray against the missiles landing
in someone else's backyard —

wet and on fire; a wave, ten thousand surfers going out
from the storm atop another tsunami; I can taste it! I can bury it
in the morning with my foot down to the floorboard;

water, napalm, flying about; I will fly; sea turtles flowing
in my veins to the other side of the earth; my mouth: it's
got a direct line to Jehovah's red ear, splitting my own
chest open to get down to that vodka with a straw;

swinging, dancing, spinning, tango atop the cobblestones,
both of us shivering along the gold spires, our souls being
pushed up hard against doors, in heavenly colors, azure-blue,
emerald, until we are falling one thousand years into the future —

down to the ghost of your words as they whisper out to me:
"*divided together; and so we fall apart.*"

God's Fingers
Graham Jensen

God's fingers fan out, dangle and
freeze! as icicles, as nice as seconds
between sleep and something still
deeper, steeped until the slow caves of thought
submerge in ice.
Do not be afraid, be a child instead and
reach! for substance, for fear embodied boldly
in a point made sharply still
spreading, the miracle of earth's blood bolted
to a roof.
Such miracles do distend, do beg, portend
plenty! for when they fall, the shatter is a cool
and violent glimpse of love;
in the pieces rest a thousand pierced reflections
melting, minders of the miracle remaining —
of the hanging that was done!

Mona Lisa 1998
Dave Margoshes
(for Jennifer Sloan)

Beneath soft hair and the smooth curve
of temple, the devious brain ticks, a grid
of steel enmeshing thought. Behind
serene eyes, a rusted coil pulsing
with the sad echo of motion. Behind
the fine curved nose, a mouse trap
waiting to spring. And the smile, ah,
beneath that smile — glittering teeth
pronouncing your name.

Non-Fiction

Visibly Vulnerable
Lisa McNally

She turns from the bar and spots them talking, animated. She attaches herself to the nearest group, feigning quiet interest in their words, and watches. The one she loves puts her hand on the other's arm as she mutters a confidence. A friendly intimacy — they're just friends, have been for years. They're laughing now, swaying closer (too close?) and then away again. They were always so close — She stops herself; *enough of this ridiculous paranoia*. She loves her. Sophie. Sophie who's not so sure, needs more time, couldn't possibly commit right now, with everything so tricky, *you know how it is*. But they'll find each other later, a little drunk. They'll leave together hand in hand, walking back to Sophie's — a destination they've agreed upon without mention. They'll have sex. Tomorrow morning, groggily hung over, they'll play it down, as always. Another drunken slip. But secretly she'd hoped, this time, maybe — Stupid of her to forget; it's agreed: they remain a sort-of, occasional, maybe-maybe-not couple. That's how it works; she knows by now. Or she should — pesky hope still seduces her. Why does she fall for it when she knows it's wrong?

She's staring — has anyone noticed? No, they're all immersed in their own conversations. She feels far away. Brief panic makes a decision — she crosses the room. The one she doesn't love smiles, infuriatingly knowing, but Sophie spots someone that-a-way and, she's sorry, but she really must — She's gone. Flitting away on a social demand. *Nothing personal, just coincidence*, she tells herself painfully. She can hear Sophie later, casual, asking *Did you see? Neil was there. I spotted him and had to say hello — haven't seen him for ages*. An alibi? And a test. The account can't be contradicted. She saw the hurt, but she didn't mean it, she says. *You thought I did that to upset you, on purpose?* A pathetic, too-sensitive interpretation. Convenient. The one she doesn't love shifts awkwardly. *She doesn't know what to say; wishes we wouldn't play out our desire quite so publicly, save our dramas. What am I meant to do? Apologize?*

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12/03/2009

I sit at my computer and absent-mindedly navigate *The Guardian's* website, filling time. A headline catches my eye; I click on it and read: "one of the first women to live openly as a lesbian in Kwa Thema," South Africa, "brutally beaten," "raped and killed." I shiver at this too-close, too-distant news. A well-read copy of Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* sits by my keyboard and a page of halfthoughts, scrawled at random, on the public and the private. I imagine a woman, her face grim as she hears the news of a death. She didn't know the woman well, but respected her. She shakes her head, disgusted. Bitterly, she thinks, *they killed her. And why? Because they couldn't bear to hear of her desire, our desire. Cowards. But they won't win — we'll speak louder, together, until everyone hears. We owe her that much. She died for speaking this desire; she died so that it might be spoken*. Furious, she thinks, *no more silence*. I construct this picture from echoes; I see crowds and shouting and the volatile force of a fledgling politics, a liberation movement dizzy with — my eyes drift across my notes — the "potency, magnetism, and promise of gay self-disclosure." Under this phrase, an arrow points to cautionary words, also Sedgwick's: by "glamorizing" the closet we risk "presenting as inevitable or somehow valuable its exactions, its deformations, its disempowerment and sheer pain." Somewhere within its logic a woman in South Africa died. I return to the article, scrolling down

the page: "since then a tide of violence against lesbians in South Africa has continued to rise." I picture another woman, sitting with her arms wrapped around her legs, hugging them to her chest. She's afraid. *I don't want to die. They'd kill us all, until the desire died. And then what? Better to guard this desire, protect it from harm*. She thinks of those she loves, whose deaths she couldn't bear. *Be careful — please. Look after the desire we love — keep it close*. I hug myself. *Keep it safe*.

But then they'll say it never existed, I frown.

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Sophie's ex — or is she? It's complex; I forget the latest developments — is watching, intensely. She's making me nervous, a bit. I've heard the tales. Gossip moves quickly: who's fallen for whom, who's losing who, the dissymmetries and the injustices. So we all see her hope and her disappointment. Covertly, in tentative glimpses which keep us marginal, uninvolved. Officially, we haven't witnessed a thing. But they must sense those semi-glances. Does it make a difference to the desire, I wonder? Do the spectators skew the performance? We don't merely observe from a distance, of course — we know when to step aside, understanding who's to be left alone with whom. Well, everyone else seems to know; I usually wreck this elegant choreography. The too-subtle politics confound me and I mostly wish for genuine ignorance of the complexities. She's nice, the ex, and no one deserves to be messed around like that, but it's nothing to do with me; if she could just direct her gaze elsewhere I'd really be very grateful.

No? Alright then, keep looking. We both know she's there. I laugh a little longer than necessary, as if that might drown out her gaze. I feel as though I'm playing for an audience. Or that I've landed a bit part in a play Sophie directs. After all, it's Sophie, not me, who might want to make her jealous. It worked, if that was the aim — here she comes, finally. I smile and step back, admitting her into the conversation with a *we were just saying*, but no one's listening. Sophie's diving off, extricating herself from an encounter she'd rather avoid. The ex looks morose while I reject apologetic words; 'I'm sure she didn't mean...' would only make it worse. I try to conjure a light remark as the silence stretches.

Stone Walls and Molassess
Jael Richardson

All too many of those who live in affluent America ignore those who exist in poor America; in doing so, the affluent Americans will eventually have to face themselves with the question that Eichmann chose to ignore: How responsible am I for the well-being of my fellows? To ignore evil is to become an accomplice to it. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Borders both define and separate. In St. Louis, a river separates the city's affluent neighbourhoods from East St. Louis, Missouri's crime-ridden and poverty-stricken black community. In Chicago, busy main streets and the L-Train maintain a divide between uptown and downtown, a distinction which aids in the eruption of a deadly riot in 1968. In New York, rivers form islands that distinguish upscale Manhattan from the less prestigious districts—Harlem, Brooklyn, the Bronx.

In Ohio a set of train tracks and a hill separate the black community in the North End from Portsmouth's white residents. This is where my father grows up as civil disorder escalates across the nation.

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Junior steps out of his house as the sun rises on a crisp fall day. A chill wind sweeps through and the remaining summer leaves tremble and grip the branches with fervent hopelessness. Junior shivers. He lifts his head and moves his coat zipper to the edge, extending the collar. He rests his chin against the polyester fabric to lock in the warmth. Junior curls his shoulders toward his chest and stuffs his hands in the pockets of his worn-in jeans as he moves through the complex. He walks past Al and Lee Bass's home, and then the Battles'. Both of the houses are quiet and settled—it's early for a Saturday and the projects are asleep. He makes his way to the edge of the North End in search of something to do. The young boy drags his feet along the ground; his movement makes a noise that grates and scratches as he walks down the road towards the rocky tracks. There are no cars and no trains this morning. It is still and quiet; Junior can see and hear his breath. The rhythm of his breathing slows when he stops at the side of the train tracks. The tracks are filled with stones of various shapes and sizes. Junior buries the toe of his white runners in the ground, shifting the rocks. He bends over and examines the selection. His long fingers manoeuvre the stones in search of the perfect launch device. He picks one that's smooth and oblong, tosses it gently in the air, and watches it return to his hand. He manipulates it with his finger and adjusts his grip. The boy considers how far he can throw it. He turns to his left and identifies the perfect target—an abandoned home that's completely run down. The windows are shattered, the front porch slants, and the roof boasts massive gaping holes. He considers the optimal distance to challenge his arm. He moves a few paces back, shuffles to the right, and turns to face his target when he hears a faint, familiar whistle. The train. An idea surfaces and a smile spreads slowly across the young boy's face. He leans over to grab a few more rocks. He holds his right hand up against his body and gathers rocks with his left. He hears the whistle again, louder this time. The train is coming. When he collects a sufficient amount of stones, he crosses the tracks. He turns and faces the North End and his target. The horn sounds as the train clambers into Portsmouth. Junior examines the stones and selects the rock for his first launch. He looks at the abandoned building and assesses the distance. About twenty strides. His adrenaline rises as the train curls around the corner and comes into view full of fury and smoke. Junior takes in a breath and establishes his position. The train screams through the young boy from the North End. It's angry and unstoppable—driven towards an unknown destination. It gets closer. The boy watches and waits. His heart

leaps with eagerness; his body is poised for battle. The train is about to pass in front of him. He draws his arm back and the first train car passes. He throws. Thud. It hits the side of the second car. Too slow. The second car passes. He throws. Thud. He hits the third car. He lets thefourth pass, frustrated. Junior breathes deeply and narrows his eyes into focus letting the fifth car streak by. He throws. The rock sails towards the side of the abandoned building and connects with the remaining wood siding. BANG! *Success*. Junior, pleased with his aim, shakes his fists in delight. But he doesn't pause long because the train continues to press forward. Junior draws out another stone from his collection and resumes throwing. Another car passes. BANG! Another: BANG! Junior hits the abandoned building for the last time that day when he slides the final stone between a train car and the caboose.

Junior visits the train tracks often after that day. He selects the rocks, holds them in his hand, and waits for the train to roll through the North End. He learns to tune out the noise of the train and focus so that his timing and aim are perfect. He learns to anticipate the moving cars until he hits the abandoned building with every single throw.

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The Moynihan Report, 1965: Urbanization. Country life and city life are profoundly different. The gradual shift of American society from a rural to an urban basis over the past century and a half has caused abundant strains, many of which are still much in evidence. When this shift occurs suddenly, drastically, in one or two generations, the effect is immensely disruptive of traditional social patterns. It was this abrupt transition that produced the wild Irish slums of the 19th Century Northeast. Drunkenness, crime, corruption, discrimination, family disorganization, and juvenile delinquency were the routine of that era. In our own time, the same sudden transition produced the Negro slum – different from, but hardly better than its predecessors, and fundamentally the result of the same process.

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On our tour of the North End, my father pulls into a lot a few meters away from his childhood home – a strip of town homes that compile one section of the projects. He walks toward a fence that outlines the field in the government-housing complex and leans on it. My brother and I stand next to him and wait. We watch as a rich set of laugh lines appear all over his face. "Do you want to know how I learned to run?" We nod. North End stories are filled with excitement and adventure and we're standing in the middle of where it all took place. I'm euphoric. "Larry and Lee were the big guys and they used to play a game of chase at night. They would chase us through the projects, past clotheslines and garbage cans." He pauses and the laugh lines deepen. "If they caught you, they got to pound your legs and give you a charley horse. It was like tag. The big guys chased the little guys. That's how I learned to run."

I had a charley horse once – in my right calf. It felt like my lower leg muscle was cinched in a vice that would not release its hold. The pressure was so intense, it spread to the rest of my body and I could hardly breathe. It was horrible. The North End version of tag doesn't seem fun, but my father is smiling as he remembers.

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My father's North End childhood games: June Bug Kites, Popsicle Stick Races, and the Famous Bean Shooter Wars.

June Bug Kites: Catch a June bug. Tie the June bug's legs up with string and let the June bug fly around in circles. See whose bug is the fastest. My father makes a buzzing sound and uses his finger to illustrate June bugs flying around on strings. He moves his June-bug finger towards my ear until I swat it away in irritation. My father thinks this is hilarious.

Popsicle Stick Races: A Rainy Day Activity. Each participant takes a popsicle stick and places it in the street water that collects on a rainy day. The first popsicle stick to manoeuvre down the street and into the sewer wins.

The Famous Bean Shooter Wars: The participants go to Mrs. Ramsey's and purchase a nickel's worth of pinto beans. They build a shooter from found materials and shoot the pinto beans, like machine guns, at the other participants. "Stevie Battle could hit you with a bean shooter once and just knock you over," my father tells me. Stevie Battle is Cathleen Battle's brother. Cathleen is Portsmouth's most famous citizens – an internationally renowned opera singer born in Portsmouth's North End. There must be something in the Battle lungs.

I ask my mother if she played games like this. My father laughs. "Your mother was rich." I look at my mother. She shrugs and reluctantly responds, "I played hopscotch and I skipped. I rode my bikes like the other kids in the neighbourhood."

My mother grew up in Toledo, Ohio (a virtual metropolis when compared to Portsmouth) on the nice side of town, to parents who both had university degrees and full-time jobs with benefits—a principal and a social worker. She was a latchkey kid before it was popular.

My mother is fair, like her father. He dies when I am four, but I remember he looked like Colonel Saunders, the KFC icon.

"Are you mixed?" This is what people ask me all too regularly. Translation: *Is one of your parent's white*?

"No."

"You must be mixed with something." I don't reply, because it's not a question. They continue.

"Your parents are both black?"

"Yes." To explain my appearance – my loose curls and light brown shade, I add, "My mother is very fair."

"So she's mixed?"

I debate whether to let this go on, whether to walk away. I engage the inquisitor, because I was never very good at holding my tongue. "My grandfather is mixed. My grandmother is black, so my mother is three-quarters black. My father is black."

"So you are mixed."

This debate recurs with friends and strangers, especially when they meet my mother. At first, I harass her about her own family. "So is grandpa half white? Are his parents both black or are they mixed?" She doesn't understand the questions. Where she grew up, people didn't draw graphs to confirm or deny being black. If you were willing to admit it (assuming they couldn't

tell), that was enough. I change my approach when my mother gets frustrated with the repetition of doubt. I avoid the debate altogether. I change my response to the first question in the inquisition. *Yes, I'm mixed*.

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Washington, DC, 1964: The Civil Rights Act. President Lyndon Johnson signs the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination of all kinds based on race, colour, religion, or national origin. The law also provides the federal government with the power to enforce desegregation.

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On the morning of our second day in Portsmouth, we pull into the marshalling lot to check in at the homecoming parade. The marshalling area is located in a parking lot that surrounds a complex of buildings and fields. The lot is large with flat, mud floors. The area where the floats are lined up is sandwiched between a baseball diamond and an imposing stone wall; cars, horses, and participants are bustling between the structures. At the back of the lot, opposite the entrance, a grassy hill rises at the height of the stone wall obstructing the view beyond the marshalling grounds. The result is an unbearable heat compounded by the inescapable sun. The air is stagnant because the lot is like the bottom of a bowl – the high structures and grassy hill impede any kind of relief.

My father parks the car on the thin stretch of grass that surrounds the stone wall. He walks over to a lady with a clipboard as the rest of us unload and gather items from the car—water bottles, nuts, a few portable toys for my nephew. My father returns and instructs us to follow him. We plunge deeper into the crowded array of floats, towards the back of the assembly, towards the hill. We find the car that my father will ride in—"CHUCK EALEY" is printed in large capital letters on each side. My father's marked convertible is positioned behind Notre Dame's Greek mythology float; a giant eight-foot high bust of a Greek Warrior forms the front. Holly, the school's homecoming queen, sits toward the back of the float in a chariot. A warriorboy and an entourage of would-be queens attend her—togas, leafy headdresses and all. I notice the Portsmouth West float behind us. Their queen dons mini-shorts and a firefighter costume and poses with a fake hose in front of a paper maché brick wall. Although the Notre Dame float is far more elaborate and thought provoking, the firefighter's float will win a prize. Holly, the togas and the Greek bust will leave the homecoming parade empty-handed.

The coordinators advise us to wait by the float. "The parade will be starting soon," they tell us. They don't know my father. He has never been good at waiting – at least not in one place. Soon after we arrive at our designated modern chariot, my father instructs us to leave our belongings in the car and we obey. He leads us towards the steep grassy hill at the end of the lot. When we reach the base of the hill, my brother and his son meander up quickly, excited at the prospect of adventure. My mother follows, taking the obstacle on with ease. My father waits and extends a hand to his pregnant daughter. I laugh at my father's offer but I gratefully accept the help. I place my hand in his massive palm and lumber up slowly as my father steadies me all the way to the top. I note for the first time that the change in my body has also changed my father—it is both awkward and endearing. I see the tenderness of the father of my younger years, the one I rejected when I became a teenager. Perhaps he sees a change in me that has nothing to do with my physical state. Perhaps this is an olive branch.

I reach the top of the hill and find myself overlooking a majestic view – a stretch of nature's most comforting creations. The area beyond where I stand is free of the ruins caused by collections of

manmade structures. A rushing river moves quickly below, lined by a stretch of lush, green trees. The trees bend and curve towards the water, searching for refreshment in the reach of their branches. The river is wide, but I can see the other side. Far down the river I can make out a white bridge. My father points at the water and then gestures towards the other side. "That's the Scioto River. And that's Kentucky." My nephew, a curious four-year-old, taps my father's knee: "Where? Where, Papa? I can't see Kin-tucky." My father grabs Asher under his arms with both hands, lifts him in the air, and places the little boy with his son's face on his right shoulder. Asher explores Kentucky and the Scioto River from his new position. I turn my eyes downward and glare at the rushing river.

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From the South to the North, 1810-1850: The Underground Railroad. Over thirty thousand people escape slavery when they flee plantations in the South. They travel north along the Scioto River through Portsmouth onto Detroit and into Canada.

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The first thing that comes to mind as I look at the Scioto River: Eugene McKinley. I think of my father's cousin struggling to stay above water on a hot summer day because he was too dark to swim at Dreamland, Portsmouth's fenced-in pool marked: "For Card Holding Members Only". The second thing that comes to mind as I look at the Scioto River: The Legendary Unmarked Railroad. I look at the banks, the trees that line the river forming a thick woodland along the sides. I think of slaves that made the journey north and stopped here for safety. I think of a group of escapees hiding down below and the babies who hid with their parents in the grass by the river. I wonder if their future brought the hope their parents longed for. I wonder if the journey brought the promise they dreamed about as they hovered by the river and anxiously waited for the safety of night to fall.

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New York, New York, 1964: The Harlem Riots. The New York City school board assigns summer remedial classes to a facility on the East Side of upscale Manhattan. The unfamiliar teenagers are harassed each day on their way to and from school. On July 18th, a building superintendent turns his hose on one "unruly" group and yells, "You dirty niggers! I'll wash the black off you!" A swarm of students grab bottles and trashcan lids to stave off the man's attack. One of the students is fifteen-year-old James Powell, a black student from Harlem. A white, off-duty police lieutenant responds to the commotion and shoots the young man down on the sidewalk of 76th Street. Harlem, a district once identified as the "Promised Land" by blacks who fled the South, responds in anger. The riot starts as a peaceful protest but escalates into disaster. It lasts two days, fuelled by the slogan "Burn, Baby, Burn!" The riot wreaks havoc on storefronts and decimates properties all over the city. Approximately five hundred people are injured, one dies, and four hundred are placed under arrest during the two-day Harlem Riots in 1964.

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I turn and look back at the lot where the homecoming parade route begins. From this vantage point, I can see the other side of the stone wall which forms a large oval structure that curves near the hill where I stand with my family and stretches towards the entrance of the lot where our car is parked. It's Municipal Stadium – the place where my father began his famous high

school football career as a varsity quarterback at Notre Dame High School. A plaque adhered to a post inside the stadium, which I see later reads: *In honour of Chuck Ealey. Football quarterback for Notre Dame H S and the University of Toledo where his 35-0 record stands to this day*.

Junior, Al Bass, Stevie Battle and a few other boys from the neighbourhood gather at the end of Municipal Stadium on the hill in the fall of 1961. The weather is perfect for the Saturday night game – calm, with a mild breeze. Police litter the surrounding property. They line the fields to ensure the safety of the students and families in attendance and to intimidate those who pose a threat. The boys hide in the shadows.

They have no money to get into the game, but they aren't frightened by the Portsmouth Police. They know exactly what to do. They wait to hear the announcer introduce the singing of the national anthem. Today's soloist: Cathleen Battle. Junior smiles at Stevie. The other boys snicker. Stevie scowls and rolls his eyes as his sister starts the anthem. *Oh say can you see*. The boys begin their ascent and crawl up the side of the stone wall. The stronger boys reach the top and help the smaller boys behind them. Portsmouth police officers stand at full attention—their right hand angled sharply across their brow. The anthem plays on. *By the dawn's early light*. Junior reaches the flat top of the wall and pauses for a moment to look down below. *What so proudly we hailed at the twilight's last gleaming?* The police cannot move; they can only watch, unable to stop the rebels who stare down at them boldly. *Through the perilous fight*. The song approaches its end and the boys leap into the stadium and disperse amongst the fans. *Oe'r the land of the free, and the home of the brave*. Cathleen finishes. The boys enjoy the Saturday night game amongst the more privileged residents of Portsmouth.

"The police got smarter though," my father recalls. "They started to spread molasses all over the top of the wall. But that didn't stop us. We just brought newspapers and placed them on our stomachs and on the wall so we wouldn't get stuck."

The stadium wall is no longer flat at the top. It's lined with jagged, upright stones designed to keep misfits and delinquents from overcoming the stone divide.

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The Moynihan Report, 1965: Reconstruction. Emancipation gave the Negro liberty, but not equality. Life remained hazardous and marginal. Of the greatest importance, the Negro male... became an object of intense hostility, an attitude unquestionably based in some measure of fear. When Jim Crow made its appearance towards the end of the 19th century, it may be speculated that it was the Negro male who was most humiliated thereby; the male was more likely to use public facilities, which rapidly became segregated once the process began, and just as important, segregation, and the submissiveness it exacts, is surely more destructive to the male… Keeping the Negro "in his place" can be translated as keeping the Negro male in his place.

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"What were the police in Portsmouth like?" I ask.

"Racist. Without a question. They would let you kill each other but if you did anything around white people you were toast." When we visit my grandfather's burial site my father points at a row of houses outside the cemetery. "Once we had to hop over that fence. See it there?" We

look out the car window. "They were chasing us because we were messing around in the graveyard. I hid in those backyards— behind some lady's garage."

I'm curious. "You weren't allowed to be in the graveyard?"

My mother explains: "*They* weren't allowed to be in the graveyard."

"We were just being young kids and they thought because we were black kids, we were trying to create trouble." He shakes his head. "Before they even ask any questions, you were in trouble."

I think of the police that chased my father out of the graveyard and the ones who manned the stadium – protecting Portsmouth from Junior and his North End friends. I consider the irony. A decade later my father's name is commemoratively marked on the esteemed walls of the stadium they strove to secure.

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St. Augustine, Florida, 1964: The Lincolnville March. A Baptist preacher named Andrew Young organizes a march from St. Augustine's black community on advice from Dr. King when store owners in the area refuse to desegregate. The police, aware of the Lincolnville march and under orders from the Chief of Police, vacate the area where the march will take place. The following reports reach Young prior to the scheduled departure from Lincolnville: "White hoodlums wait near the Old Slave Market with clubs and guns"; "I saw a young boy sitting on the doorstep of a grocery store cleaning a shotgun of nearly his own length." Despite his fear, Young refuses to back down. As marchers gather at his church in Lincolnville, Young prays, "We ask you this evening for courage… Give us the strength of the prophets of old… but we would also pray, dear Father, for those who would stand between us and our freedom." Tears streak down Young's face as three hundred and fifty people march in columns and follow him out of the black neighbourhood. The march is silent – no songs or chants that could provoke hostility. The marchers walk into St. Augustine, past the Old Slave Market, and turn up King Street before they return safely to Lincolnville. A news reporter witnesses a white middle-aged man as he watches the march repeat over and over, "Oh these beautiful people." Some say the spectacle of Negro columns paralyzed the Klan ambushers with temporary awe, others shout of Daniel's deliverance from a den of lions.

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Fifty floats ahead of our car a jungle-themed float, laden with girls dressed in provocative Jane of the Jungle costumes, merges onto the parade route. The movement cues the next float in line and a domino effect begins. Float after float pulls out of the dirt lot and onto the road that takes the parade through neighbourhoods in Portsmouth en route to City Hall. My family quickly loads into the car with my father's famous name marked on the sides.

My father is often asked to be in parades. Typically on those occasions, my siblings and I take our position at one section of the route and wait for him to appear. My sister and brother instruct their children to keep an eye out for Papa—to shout as soon as he's into view. They wait anxiously. Eventually, after a series of other floats and famous locals drive by, his car comes into view, prompting my nephews to scream and cheer hysterically. My father waves and smiles at the crowd and my mother launches her provided stash of candy from the car. They both give a special wave and hello to their enthusiastic grandsons and their comparatively subdued children. We all wave back until they disappear from view. I have been *to* parades, but I have

never been *in* one. I was not prepared. I was not prepared for the elevated and unmerited position of grandeur.

It's our turn. My brother sits in the driver's seat and I adjust my leg room in my front row seat. My brother drives at a slow crawl and follows the Greek Warrior bust out of the lot and into Portsmouth's local streets. The first street we turn onto takes us through the middle of a quaint, residential neighbourhood. The houses on the street are old; some show their original grandeur and glory, complete with an American flag that waves at full mast. Many appear unliveable. The siding dangles across noticeable bare patches on the exterior walls. The lawns are untended and wild with weeds. The roofs suffer from weathering and rot. People line the sides of the road, a few feet away from the car. Some sit in the back of their trucks, perched in chairs or hanging off the end of the elevated truck bed. Sporadic navy blue shirts and lawn ornaments bear the slogan "Yes we can", but the people's eyes disagree. This is small town Ohio – blue collar, working class people on the brink of a detrimental recession. They relish few of the positive effects when the country experiences economic booms, but they feel its punches and rapid decline with vicious and imminent force.

Portsmouth's median income in 2007: $25,828. The state of Ohio's median income: $46,597.

Percentage of those who live below the poverty line in Portsmouth: 25, compared with 13% for the entire state.

Portsmouth's main industries: A prison and an atomic energy plant.

Our car creeps along and my father waves into the crowd. As we drive by, I hear men lean over and say to their sons, "That's Chuck Ealey. Best quarterback in college football. Went to Notre Dame." The young men nod complacently. They see me and I turn my head and pretend not to notice. I see the resentful wonder in their eyes. *But who is she?* The parade halts and our car comes to a stop in the middle of a stretch of road congested with women and children. No one waves and no one smiles. The women sit in lawn chairs; they fill the seats and the bearings suffer under the stress. The observers eat ice cream cones and consume hot dogs purchased at a nearby stand. Dirty children run barefoot between the floats and stop near our car. They beg for candy that we don't have and they don't need. They already exhibit the signs of obesity, having lived a life where pizza, Oreos, and fast food are more practical than available alternatives. A young blond girl, age three, stands a few feet away. She wears an oversized white-t-shirt with dirty handprints on the front; her filled diaper sags between her legs. My arm rests on the side of the car as I tap the top of the convertible. I notice the innate gesture and pull my arm into the vehicle. I cross it on my left hand and place it in my lap. I wish for the Notre Dame chariot ahead to lurch forward and resume its route. I try to avoid the stares. I hear the second hand on my watch tick incessantly. Finally, the Notre Dame float heaves and wobbles forward. Our car follows it down the street as it heads towards downtown Portsmouth. We pass run-down commercial buildings and a few apartment buildings where observers dangle from the balconies. Here they wave back. On these streets the adults and children look at us with longing and hope, with spite and delight, and the mixture is overwhelming.

My father worked hard to sit in a Corvette with his name on the sides. He made his way to university with the aim of his arm and the speed of his feet and then paid my way too. I am grateful and envious and ashamed. Hot tears form behind my sunglasses and threaten to fall into view. *I should not be here*. I should be standing in my place at the side of the road – an unknown observer who waves as important people drive by.

Reviews

John Livingstone Clark — *"Man Reading 'Woman Reading in Bath'"*
Ole Schenk

Clark's ninth book closely dialogues with the poetic vision of Anne Szumigalski, unfolding an elegy of personal friendship through shared questions. Most of the collection's poems take their titles from a single line or word from Szumigalski's poem "Woman Reading in Bath." Clark often returns to the same line and selects different words, thus sustaining a richly nuanced poetic dialogue.

"Man Reading 'Woman Reading in Bath'" begins with twenty-five pages of "ghazals," a couplet form originating in ancient Persia and growing in popularity among Canadian poets. Clark's ghazals ignite sudden insights. His couplets combine familiar images from the Saskatchewan landscape or rural prairie life with painful emotions, exemplified in "river valleys embracing the plains- / the heart quickly broken," and "tiger lilies like a mind's last thought-/ who knows where beauty travels?" Other ghazals combine internal reflection and violent natural images, as in "sparrows tear through a spider's web – / chaos and rain–." Human judgment, "chaos," describes the torn web even as the rain drops fly in the sparrow's wake: nature and beauty fuse in a single moment of tearing action. Clark's "Faltering Ghazals" provides a fitting prelude to the lyric dialogue with Szumigalski. The ghazals leap, follow, and drift between interconnected thoughts, drawing the reader into a dance and weaving together images and insight.

Two thematic images predominate in the book's second section: the self floating alone at sea, and a mythopoetic confrontation of a bathing woman with the god of patriarchal monotheism. Explicating Szumigalski's first line, "I am alone swimming on the dark sea," the first third of the dialogue considers the self as both present and alien. Alone in the overwhelming space of open ocean, Clark's speaker asks a question insistent as the waves, "Who is swimming?" Even as the self considers its utter solitude, however, the body insists on the physical fact of its continued movement: "stroke after stroke - / aorta pumping its own / sanguinary cheer –." Thus the self moves from the despairing search for identity to the "encouragement" that "still the heart pumps out its own," as the body provides rhythm and "direction immaterial." The self, swimming alone, finds vitality in the relations of language, thought, body, and the openness of the sea. This conversation breeds transformation: as the speaker now imagines himself a manta ray, "gliding seas with great wings," the self's indeterminacy comes again into the foreground, "honestly was I ever a man?" Only the facts of the ocean tide remain constant to the self floating alone toward death.

Secondly, the series of lyrics turn to the central encounter of Szumigalski's poem: her speaker describes the collapse of God, who first looms up before her "clutching the slippery wet sides" of the tub on his "stick legs like a fat bird," before flopping down "gasping and stranded," a feast for crabs and birds. Clark's speaker expands upon Szumigalski's lines and images, celebrating the fall of the "One and Only God," who thought he could "carry himself erect" in "a world of water / in a universe shaped for floating." Simultaneous with the fallen patriarch, the first poems that represent Szumigalski's own voice appear, as the lonely male floater hears her voice declare "I am swimming." The final poems thus express a redemptive solidarity between swimmers even in a sea of unanswered questions. Clark's speaker proclaims that "a woman's body is a rich coral reef," and listens to the wisdom of the great female swimmer, the "crone," far ahead of him. The most beautiful poem in the series is the last, where the woman poet-prophet directly addresses herself together with the male swimmer:

You will never be given

a second chance—

and now we go! she cries

over the swells

legless weightless

clouds in a saffron sky

Spiritual life and physical existence blend into one. Patriarchal monotheism fades before the richness of duality birthed through the differences of woman and man, sea and sky, body and language, distance and intimacy. Clark's is a gentle poetic vision, fleshing out the verbs of floating and drifting, meandering with the tugs of sea currents and expanding slow healing reveries. At times, the gentleness approaches a quiet acceptance of oblivion, or the latitude of free floating endorphins (or "en/dolphins"). Other times, the poems achieve excruciating honesty and the pain of spiritual depth. Either way, Clark reaches out to his intended reader, never basking in his own profundity or distancing his reader with an overuse of allusion. Clark's poetic dance drifts with beauty and insight.

Breaking the Cycle of Innocence in Michael Kenyon's The Beautiful Children
Jonathan Sherman

Michael Kenyon's *The Beautiful Children* captures madness in both literary form and content, creating a visceral experience that both tantalizes and disturbs the reader. With short, stream-of-consciousness prose decorated in poetic flourishes, Kenyon bombards the reader with images and unsettling language that destabilizes the typical beauty of romantic description. This is not a love story, but it reads like one in all its insanity and confusion.

The plot of the novel centres on Sapporo, a man who wakes a hospitalized amnesiac. Unable to remember his former life, wife, or family, Sapporo quickly deteriorates, wandering though a magic-realist landscape of stray children, snow capped mountains, and seemingly ubiquitous eggs. With the repetition of plot from both Sapporo and his first son Starling's perspectives, the reader is subjected to the madness of a circular, continual tragedy of deplorable parenting, violence, and delinquent street children.

To facilitate the destabilization of common human behaviour, Kenyon turns to the animal world. Sapporo is described in animalistic terms as he traipses across the landscape: a "hunter" (58) eating eggs and growing "paws" (55). Children are constantly compared to birds and eggs are symbols of innocence. It appears that once the "birds" are released into the world (once they are hatched) they become corruptible, just as the innocence of children is at risk once they are born. One consequence of Kenyon's comparison of children to animals, however, is that it promotes the primitivism of these children and works against the reader's sympathies toward young characters. The children's innocence is damaged by an animalistic juxtaposition in contrast to Thistledown's description of *The Beautiful Children* as an "elegy upon innocence."

Kenyon's description of the street gang resembles the sporadic motion of a flock of birds as they weave and dip between the horizon (or perhaps a more juvenile gang of "droogs"). The "gang of birds" (69) is not innocent in action: the children kill, rape, deal and use drugs, are prostitutes and thieves. While these actions are necessary for the children to survive without parental support, more attention is placed by Kenyon on the ferocious nature of these children than creating sympathy in the reader's mind for their abandonment. In effect, these are not beautiful children at all, rather a depiction of children abused by the absence of parental guidance.

It is dangerous, of course, to view *The Beautiful Children* (or any fictional literature for that matter) as a parental guidebook; however, in portraying the complex relationship between children and adults, it is difficult to ignore Kenyon's advocacy for the presence of parents in the lives of children. When Sapporo is present with his son's "arms holding the bat got stronger every time we played and he seldom missed the ball" (29) the value of parental involvement is clear. In the parent's absence Starling is left to run rampant in the streets, drawn into prostitution and thievery to survive. The physicality of the characters is enforced through the direct discussion of how the body changes in relation to intimate contact of loved ones. Just as the text threads a course through the abstract and the physical affecting the reader's body in stomach turning child abuse details, such as child pornography (84), the characters themselves experience the world's intensity through the body as they "vomit and shit at the same time" (60) or "flapped and soared over the city, dealing and holding and shooting up" (83). This is a physical book, one that attempts to bridge the mind and body of the reader to that of the characters with substantial success.

Although the novel threatens toward a clichéd cyclical resolution, Kenyon resists this temptation and breaks the pattern. It is in this breaking of the cyclical convention that Kenyon finds his

greatest innovation in the text, refusing to allow the reader a settled conclusion. If the reader is in search of closure in Kenyon's novel, it may be a futile affair. *The Beautiful Children* is not a book that breeds contentment or resolution once the final words are read. It is a struggle through imagery and disturbing content, a journey that may end in missed opportunity - but it is a valuable journey nonetheless.

Contributors

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Dave Margoshes is a fiction writer and poet who lives in Regina. His poetry and stories are widely published in Canadian literary magazines. His new book of poetry, *The Horse Knows the Way*, came out last fall. "Mona Lisa 1998" is part of another collection, *Dimensions of an Orchard*, to be published in 2010. Another book of poetry, *Purity of Absence*, came out in 2001. A story collection, *Bix's Trumpet and Other Stories*, won Book of the Year at the 2007 Saskatchewan Book Awards.

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Contributions:
God's Fingers -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

Jael Richardson
Contributions:
Stone Walls and Molassess -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

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Contributions:
Breaking the Cycle of Innocence in Michael Kenyon's *The Beautiful Children* --Issue Number 4, May 2010

James Romanow
Contributions:
The Hack's Progress -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

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After Opaque Visibility -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

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Ole Schenk
Ole Schenk lives in Saskatoon and works on completing his M.A. thesis in English, on historical fiction and hermeneutics. He is passionate about literature in all its genres. Ole enjoys animated dialogue, continental philosophy, jogging by the river, playing guitar with friends who will sing with him, and preaching occasionally in church.

Contributions:
John Livingstone Clark — *"Man Reading 'Woman Reading in Bath'"* -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

Raymond Fraser

Contributions:
The Census -- Issue Number 4, May 2010
The Revolutionary -- Issue Number 4, May 2010

Tom Tracey
Contributions:
A Smiling Phiz for Hindlegs -- Issue Number 4, May 2010