

ELEVEN AND  
A HALF

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The Literary Journal of Eugene Lang College,  
The New School for Liberal Arts

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Liberal Arts

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## **LETTER FROM THE EDITORS**

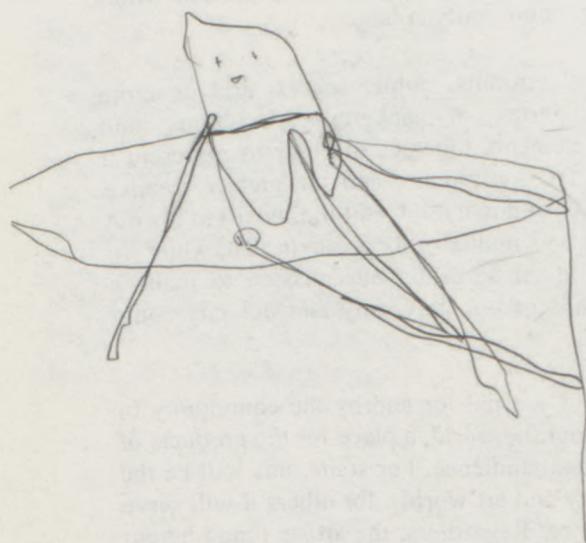
In putting together this inaugural issue of Eleven and A Half Journal we sought to create a magazine which reflected the whole conglomeration of the Lang College community; instead of being only a reflection of a certain medium, or specific style revolving around a theme, we sought to bind varying forms, styles, and mediums to create a living, three dimensional collage of the creative community present within The New School and the New York literary community at large.

The college brings together; within its classrooms, public spaces, and its more esoteric community of thinkers; a vast array of backgrounds, cultures, and experiences. We brought these disparate elements together in order to represent a larger community comprised of students, faculty, alumni, and the greater creative public that New York City fosters. When we sat down as an editorial board to lay out what this new magazine would comprise, it was immediately apparent that, while we did not always agree on content, we could all agree on our mission to make a physical (and digital) space where the minds of our university and our city could display their creative work.

To that end, Eleven and A Half was born. A journal for and by the community of creatives found at Eugene Lang and throughout the world, a place for the products of the liberal *arts* education to find a home and an audience. For some, this will be the beginning of a career enmeshed in the literary and art worlds, for others it will serve as another layer to their educational experience. Regardless, the artists found herein have worked together to create the Lang College community we all seek to thrive within.

- Natalie Raymond and the Editors of Eleven and a Half

AREN'T YOU COMING  
IN?



William Hardy Stewart

## **REVOLUTIONARY IN DEATH**

Mia Bruner

The whole bus ride home I nod my head.  
You are right: ideas are always ideals.  
and I think of this again in the pool when my body  
tests gravity.

But I have one question:  
what will happen to your hair  
it's circular until it isn't.

and my unfinished thoughts

## IN THE BEGINNING, NOVEMBER

Mia Bruner

I had an idea to write down the history of the universe  
as far as I could remember time.

This marks a year of my orphaned plans  
or maybe I put them up for adoption  
because I think on them lovingly and longingly  
from time to time.

My room had Christmas lights all over the ceiling  
all year. like warm.

I had my thanksgiving with the birds  
and an old poet who said she thought  
it is important

‘that people understand you.’

My room had no windows  
every morning I woke up in the same light I fell asleep in  
and so I stood outside a diner on 6th avenue  
staring at pecan pie

and telling anyone who would listen about flashing lights and big bangs  
dry pieces of cracked earth  
and woolly mammoths drooling,  
slowly sinking into tar.

## ...IN WITH THE LAMB

Lisa Rogers

Detroit is a lion  
disguised as an aging man  
wearing devil horns  
purchased at a pop up shop  
for Halloween costumes.

He has grown accustomed  
to playing tricks  
constantly to the point  
where the tricks have become lies  
and the lies border truth  
fooling everyone (like an alcoholic)  
including himself...

the old man came running to this little girl a'cryin'  
“Change!

Is coming!”  
said the girl (outofbreath)  
to the man.

“Wind’s heading north to clear the cold.”  
The man just stood there remaining bold.  
“Don’t you see? I

see new life all around me!"  
The mariachi of park birds agreed  
    in unison  
puffing out their chests and flapping their wings.  
Despite the signs: melted snow, budding greens, the  
    man held on  
        to his dream.  
    Movement and thought for eternity?  
Ice melting back into its liquid form? The Lakes freed,  
able to pass  
    on  
        their secrets  
            in the wind  
that scoops up wisdom from the water's surface  
like wiping a window clear  
washing The Lakes' voices  
ashore  
    carrying messages like Hermes  
through trees  
  
and air  
birds and the breeze.

[It's only March this  
can't be]  
he thought

The man wouldn't have it. He stood his ground,

couldn't face the change of having to leave town (now...)

of all times...)

when he was about to make his largest mark yet

it was finally becoming his identity,

his place

his home.

## AS ONE

Molly Schulman

There goes the verge  
& I know someone  
one of us  
said something  
about  
heartbeats.

And she doesn't remember, but for once (of us)  
she'd like to remember-

the raddish paws & pink cars,  
pink sunsets and a whole lot of tugboats  
tugging.

& these are not even (or odd) euphemisms for anything besides, paws and cars  
and tugboats! If only,  
those magic cookies. Worked.

We are losing weeks, one at a time, once  
at a time, like socks

behind the washer and/or the dryer  
there's a fire and/or trick candle  
in the lamp post.

Tink, tink  
Get out of that jar.

I wonder if the raddish raddish  
Leaves a scar  
Or if scar is just the name  
Of a brother, who wants  
To be king.

\*\*\*

confetti for bones  
& a bunch of pumpernickel  
toast—  
all toes in tact  
& a bunch, four  
freckly shoulders.  
Don't outfreckle me.  
Nose bone nose peel  
& a bunch of butter  
for your toast.

a toast, to you, and your migraine that made me

& will continue to make me, cry.

\*\*\*

this is not a story about Billy. Or about how I woke up at 855 with a face full of glitter and therefore, a pillow full of glitter and nope. This is not a story about 855, this is a story about sleeping through 915, falling through the looking glasslands gallery and yep! This is a story about my everything—the mini van (there's always a mini van) is patriotic and hungry and blueblue eyes and orangeorange cheese balls, and everyone knows everyone and please! Tell me everything. Starting with the name of your cat, and if it's Goldie, you owe me a coke, cause those are the rules of nojinx nojinx nojinks. There are radical fairies trapped and/or cozy in the lamp post. Until next time billy, in a hot hair balloon. It must be filled with the potatoes that you, billy, made in the van that was not mini. I think the stripes on your face are silly billy. Really, who are you and/or please! Tell me everything. I like big doors and breakfast and I wish we woke up as planned, at 915.

\*\*\*

need to start using words and words & getting on bigger boats—frying pans—that actually move, through water.

\*\*\*

do not be afraid to be alone with me  
(the aphrodisiac cookies, magic, don't work!!)

\*\*\*

a boat called the frying pan & a strangers green info in my back pocket

\*\*\*

this "m" has an extra hump, is it Sunday?  
Not a euphemism!!  
Is this gingham? Is the boat, moving? Or is it just Sunday?  
Had to do it.

Definitely don't want to go home, no.  
Make yourself at skyline.

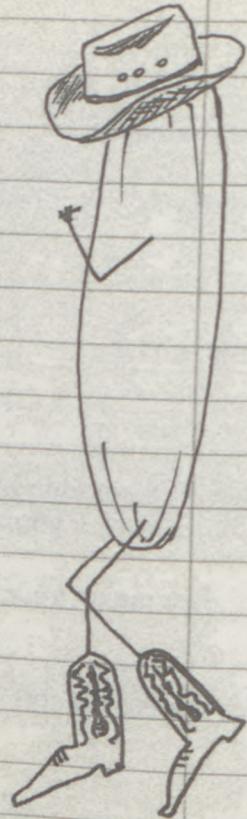
This place pulls me like a trigger. It's possible I will not move until I hear  
from you & I mean, really really hear from you.

What sort of lightning bugs are dancing up your shorts and/or short shorts,  
tonight?

Yes I miss puzzles and sense & yes the beauty-  
one just one  
of the beauties of the brain  
is its facility to fantasize.

Ah the fine night wasn't finite.  
and that's the problem with just once.

we've let loose lightning & now there's all this tugging, as one-through water.



# HONKY TONK SQUASH

Kathrine Delg

## **POETRY TRANSLATION RFW CLASS**

Lisa Rogers, Irene Lee, Allarie Coleman, John Mats Rune Ericson, Katherine Kadian, Max Broad, Alexandria Lee, Joseph Barkeley, Daniel Kim, Siaka Hinton, Carib Rivera-Guerra, Lindsey Galoob

*Translated from- Wakako Yamauchi*

and then  
coming to the end of the spider's thread  
suspended from the open pool  
praying, desperate to hang on  
for the garden  
within reach  
a place most longed for

but single-minded  
he looked back  
and looking  
he fell  
slipping  
and with that fall  
remained the man he'd always been

*Translated from Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz*

This which you see, a colored deception  
boastful of art's beauty  
with its false complexity of color  
is slyly deceiving the senses.  
This which adulation has attempted  
to excuse the endless horrors  
and vanquish the cruelty of time.  
Despite old age succeeded from oblivion  
is a vain semblance of what it tends  
is a flower, delicate at the touch of wind  
is a useless insurance against fate  
is a foolish effort without end  
is a tired anxiety, and, once exhumed,  
is a cadaver, dust, shadow, nothing.

Este, que ves, engaño colorido,  
que del arte ostentando los primores,  
con falsos silogismos de colores  
es cauteloso engaño del sentido;  
éste, en quien la lisonja ha pretendido  
excusar de los años los horrores,  
y venciendo del tiempo los rigores,  
triunfar de la vejez y del olvido,  
es un vano artificio del cuidado,  
es una flor al viento delicada,  
es un resguardo inútil para el hado;  
es una necia diligencia errada,  
es un afán caduco y, bien mirado,  
es cadáver, es polvo, es sombra, es nad-

## RABBIT

Wakako Kaku (translated by Katherine Kadian)

Please, give me a sheet of white drawing paper.  
Use a white pastel to color a snowy surface without limits.  
Now please draw me there,  
but do not hesitate with the white pastel.

I shall play in the vast white expanse where I am imprisoned.  
For the first time, I am becoming free  
in the vast white expanse where I am imprisoned.  
When I can't see the edge, I disappear.  
For the first time, I am becoming invisible.

Then, I shall dance.  
I don't even have to go all the way to the moon—  
this drawing paper is my place to only sleep, eat, and play.

Rabbit, Rabbit, what do you see when you jump?  
On the night of the 15th day, I see the moon when I jump.

## BODY

Wakako Kaku (translated by Katherine Kadian)

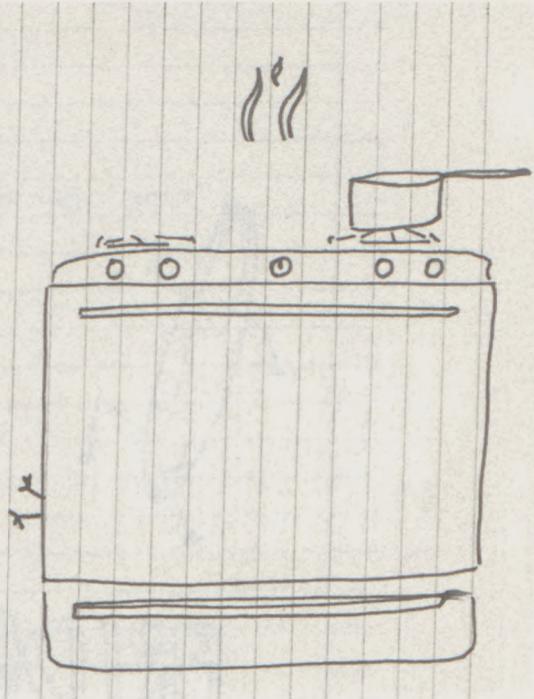
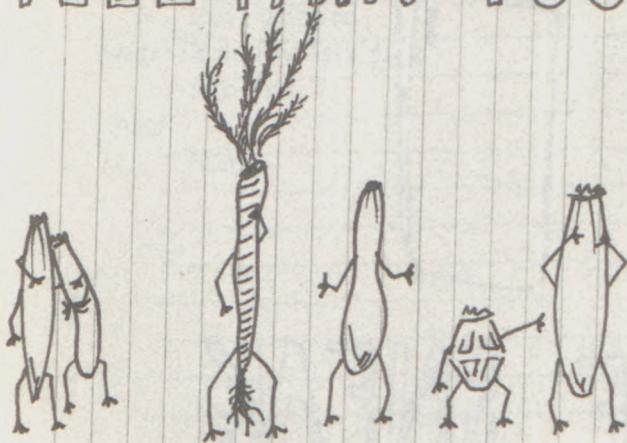
the voice is not meant to tell speeches but instead will sing songs  
that the ears will hear instead of enduring every sole sound and  
the finger will caress the ear instead of accusing another

so that the hands and feet will mean to dance  
instead of holding something,  
grasping a knife,  
clutching knees,  
or treading on with heels.

the fingers will intend to point towards the sky  
while flower petals are caught by both shoulders.  
as skin feels the breeze,  
the lips will be meant for kissing  
and cheeks will mean to be kissed

when used correctly, the complete body shall exist and  
your eyes will see morning glow no matter how long this night continues.

# VEGETABLES FEEL PAIN TOO



Kathrine Delgado

**Or, Judith**

And where is he? Now here,  
no where. Or that's his blurry  
shoulder on top of which

Crow-black night.

Once you are dead you become nobody—  
or only body—corps exquis without  
the head. Light picks out underside of  
Her breast-colored elbow

Of her raised right arm—her striking arm—  
her left breast left shoulder up to the mask  
that has become her face—

Fire-lit. Or blood-lit.

Her bonnet her loose-fallen scorpion ringlets.  
The sword. Perhaps she has not yet done it.  
No blood no blood. Or only a little on  
Her lion's paw hand.

And who am I? Her nurse profiled  
by fire, hands filling up with prayer,  
having witnessed, or about to witness.  
After which I'll come running:  
Damp cloths. Water basin.

## Saturn

I

Chronos

Time eats me—  
my hands my head  
—up to my torso

my woman's buttocks  
final pillows  
to rest upon

—beneath—  
what of  
man's stomp

only in shadows  
can I hope to survive  
under printer's ink

under raven sky  
such ravening

**II**

Father

Is this what wedlock can come to?  
How could you think  
you could grip my spine like a  
walnut and prize it open for  
the twin halves of flesh.

So this the cost of your lap—  
your bearded age, gape-mouthing furor  
my skin might hold. Shadows  
you've never tasted—what figure is it whose  
head grows back? That's me.

A de Milo gorgon in search of herself.  
Your bony knees stringy thighs  
may be a giant's—how could you  
eat my heart? Sealed in a canopic jar  
'til I'm totally done with you.

### **III**

#### Resurrected Heart

Replant in a chest of honey  
restart the pump for eyes  
[not devouring coins of . . . ]

river of liquid irises  
slip me in and out

return me to slaking sheets  
the thirsty page.

### **IV**

#### Natal Chart

Saturn, ringed vapor-slow,  
you always sit  
in my first house

on my chest, morose,

I can hardly breathe  
you suck air of  
ambition from me

[Astrologer's caution:  
Befriend Time. Work  
on long-term projects.]

though my leonine nature  
is restive lightning-  
quick for the kill      can't wait

for the slow fall of  
sound which measures  
the distance I have yet to come.

[I want to get married  
in a short little  
leopard dress.]

Any broken guitar.

but an attitude of bone.



# CARROT BATH

Kathrine Delgado

## LACUNA

Lauren Nicole Nixon

go back to the part about the crawlspace. about how we squeeze through and on the other side there's a big prairie. a big ballroom. a big city that hasn't been discovered till now. and everything is fertile and cushy and ready to take our weight. Once somebody said to me thinking like that is dangerous. like jumping on a tightrope cause you saw somebody do it on tv.  
go in the cave. there's something mangy in there. no, there's a buttercream pie and you'll like it. all the wires are crossed or sliced and neither of us are good with directions. are these cavities or entrances? piles of goodbyes are stacking up under our welcome mats.

i need to mourn something I've never owned, I say. you nod. we've both been playing house with dog leashes and perfume bottles. we like the noise we make when we're pretending.

just last week, i felt a waft of cool air during a heatwave. then I think I may have seen patches of green growing in thirsty corners. i heard humming miles away from the pulpit.

## SCRAWL

Lauren Nicole Nixon

these are the tight spots: between a wall and a wall/patch of nettles nearby/wasp hissing real close to your ear. the collective memory recalls spills and scrapes so clearly that birthdays and ferris wheel rides become distant and hazy. like the salt that's never on your end of the table. a singing kettle seems to become a trap door. your mama has set out your party dress for you, but she's misplaced the streamers. this is not unlike her. the music's going, but you've forgotten how to move your hips in just the right way. you imagine that it looks kinda like a curtain swaying back and forth when a window is wide open. something smooth and full like that. floating along real easy.

## **LETTER #5: REMOVING**

Lauren Nicole Nixon

dear claudette, I've skipped gym class three times in a row this week however I haven't felt much remorse. I've taken to sitting right outside the gymnasium and leaning against the door. so that I can feel the vibrations against my lower back. so that I can experience a distant closeness to whatever's happening on the other side.

it's kinda like that time that you insisted on never leaving base when we played dodge ball last summer. you were too scared to win and too scared to lose. being inside with everyone might be sorta like hearing a snake hissing away in the shed while you're in there with him. a sense of desperate

urgency. scrambling to devise a plan. see there may or may not be venom involved so it's best to just paw around in the dark for something sharp. just in case you feel him slithering up your leg. in case the situation becomes risky.

## **LETTER #4: TELLING**

Lauren Nicole Nixon

dear claudette, the fact of the matter is that echoes pose a threat. that being said, can you name the place that exists between a waft of nostalgia and a haunting? I've been trying to for years but cannot adequately do so. your body has been taking notes from the very

beginning—a series of events and happenings and everything in between. invisible x-rays stored near your tailbone/field notes dotted along your hip

flexor. an aching spine is a hint that something needs to be dug up. a creaky joint is a hint that you need to get down to business. all bodily fodder requires slow digestion. some of it is not palatable at all. see, it feels like sifting the soot requires only a tough-looking jacket

these days—the rigor is gone. except the sweat above your brow is still there and provides me with a sliver of hope. please store this sliver not in your front pocket but under your fingernails with the dirt that will build up over the next few years or so.

# BROWN LEAF VERTIGO



Kathrine Delgado

## SASKATCHEWAN

Emma Smoluchowski

We ended up hitchhiking during Shark Week.

The first time in months we'd seen TV.

In motel rooms and strangers houses, slack jawed, we watched  
rafts floating atop the water,

shapely women's legs and  
feet dangling into the blue,

coral and schools of fish swaying  
pushed and pulled

in the slowness of honey.

Then a quickening:

a fin slipping through the water,

the silhouette of the beast in a wave,

the knowledge of death,

the bite.

We swam in a pool in Moose Jaw.

In the pink neon motel light and the rain

you told me what shark meat tastes like.

Then you squealed when my leg brushed up against yours.

Goosebumps and the slime of skin on skin.

## AT THE BEACH WITH MY FATHER

Emma Smoluchowski

When the fish hook went in he said he barely felt it,  
It hurt more coming out.

The point slid through his skin like it was soft  
cheese.

The four barbs lodged into his bone.

The eye of the hook kept it from being embedded completely.

He tried to pull it out himself.

Blood left his body in quarts  
making the hook slippery  
impossible to grasp.

Our father who we only saw once a year  
and now we were seeing his insides,  
soft and colorful.

His jaw open in pain  
tongue tightened

his front teeth that angle sharply back  
and jagged ones on the bottom.

Drool pooled around his bottom teeth  
and fell from his mouth.

He pulled and pulled out  
pink bubbles of fat,  
tendons like rubber bands,  
deep rich blood  
that stained the sand

and ran down the beach  
dying the foam red  
as the waves lapped  
against it.

In the hospital  
we could hear him from the waiting room  
wailing. The Novocain not working.

I heard him moan,  
a deep low sound  
unfamiliar, a man in pain  
and b i n g  
the sharp high sound of metal on metal  
metal under pressure  
squeezed and popping loose.  
An hour later my father emerged  
a bandage the size of a soccer ball around his foot  
escorted by two young nurses,  
pretty nurses,  
who thought we were cute  
and thought my dad was even cuter  
the next night one of them showed up for dinner.



Leah Goren,  
Chelsey Petty John

In California You have  
all those girls a flower tooth  
have tangerine hair and lovely fingers  
and mint flavored minds that snap  
your little eyeballs just like sugar peas  
look just like poppies glowing thinking about  
in a field of girls in pink  
Oranges The ocean is mint green things  
a bunch of grapefruits climbing  
looking for girls up and above  
named California the tangerine tree

Leah Goren,  
Chelsey Petty John

## HONOR, GLORY AND LIFE AFTER DEATH

Erin Cullinane

Yawl know that they say,  
Old flies

Are better than cold lies.

As my posture stiffens

It has crystalized

That among the conversations I've had alone

This ones the best

Just, The best.

I pushed him from his wheelchair,  
And the truth fell out

Those teeth fell out despite my warnings

His body was a mass  
of infectious sores

I took his cans and littered the street  
'This is my gift to you!'

I yelled at the passers and buyers.

As my tokens lay untouched

He lay bleeding -- slurring requests for help

The unanticipated stress gave him an intracranial aneurysm

No one paid attention to him

No one paid attention to my gifts.

Private collectors will take 'em to Jersey, I guess.

I'm forever suspended above you,

I was born into money and your presence makes me ill.

I'm above Air! Walking on water! I'm them masters of the world!

I can slap the shit out of babies

--Abort them all if I will!

Listen to 'em groan under minion skies

As aluminum collectors

Kill themselves to live.

As a fireworks displays

Explodes my name

Because I'm a Prince!

You can tell by my jewel incrusted pants

I could sodomize you

with my Scepter

I own this wicked town!

So yawl sit tight now;

Sit tight my friends.

For old lies

Are better than cold flies.

## **DRUNK SOCIAL. TAKE THAT!**

*a thematic discussion in prose concerning political modernity.*  
Teague Mitchell

Mike's conscience bared its teeth and made a lunge for his brain, but was cut off mid-attack by a violent spasm of the neck.

Put martini to mouth! Drink! his brain commanded. Mike sucked down some gin and made a joke.

Conscience: Mouth! Get him out of here! Say something strange! Say: I am late for a Dungeons & Dragons tournament!

Mike Nelson's mouth just smiled. His mouth and brain had allied long ago due to common interests. They had tried to kill his heart more than once.

Conscience: I can't win the mouth over to your side. It's hopeless.

The heart in Mike Nelson knew his dullard Conscience could be overwhelmed by the brain all too easily. If you wanted something done... all the same his heart had hoped the offensive would be successful. His lackeys were inadequate. His heart could only count on itself and possibly it's sidearm. The heart was silent. The heart could be deadly. Mike was young. Very soon his heart and his brain would do battle one last time.

Mikes drinking arm raised the martini.

Heart: I will ache now, but only slightly.

The Brain knew how to shut the heart up when it ached. It was an age-old trick.

Mike took a drink. The heart ached a little still. The drinking arm raised the martini again. It was going too, too smoothly.

Mike was getting drunk. His brain and his mouth were having an excellent time at the party. The brain had been stressed lately and was enjoying the downtime, meanwhile his mouth was lying his ass off so that later his penis might fully relieve the brain. The hearts allies were few and weak. Mikes left arm was, of course, a friend of the heart but Mike was right-handed. The brain entirely controlled the right, as well as the legs.

Mike guts always had the hearts back. Together they had developed several plans, all of which had failed, but there was one chance still. The heart was silent, waiting for the right moment. Mikes drink was nearly gone.

Mike brain didn't notice his lungs were holding their breath as Mike made his way into the kitchen to refill his drink. His left arm put the empty glass on the counter. His right arm picked up a bottle of gin, but passed it off so that it might grab a shaker.

The drinking arm now held the bottle. The brain had made a fatal slip.

Guts: Now!

Heart: Here comes the glory!

Mikes drinking arm swung the bottle of gin in a violent arc. The bottleneck smashed through lip and broke two front teeth. Mikes mouth screamed in agony but was cut short by the flow of blood and alcohol. His conscience smiled. The left arm tilted the bottle to an extreme angle to empty the contents into mike. Too late, the right arm tried to intervene; the damage was done.

Right Arm: It's a coup!

Brain: I'm drowning!

With some effort the right arm overpowered the left and took the bottle.

Brain: Damn you Heart! I'll drown now!

Mikes heart was swollen with triumph as the brain began gurgling to death. But the heart had miscalculated... the brain made a desperate gambit.

The right arm smashed the bottle and, without heeding the left arms attempt at defense, drove the jagged glass remains into the left side of Mikes chest.

The heart and the brain were both in dire straits now. Only Mikes conscience objected to the internecine battle that had begun, all the rest had taken sides in the fight. The left arm pried at his ribcage to release the heart from its damaged stronghold. Almost simultaneously the brain hit a panic button. Mikes legs snapped straight out and Mike fell backwards, cracking his skull open on the floor.

Amid the screams of panicking party guests, the brain staggered out of the broken skull. Still reeling from the effect of the gin, the brain began clumsily loading its revolver. The wounded heart was already taking aim. The shooting began.

The heart was a good shot. Grey matter flew off in chunks. The brainstem was nearly severed by the time the brain took cover behind a table leg. Mike guts flew into action, slithering across the floor toward the brain.

The brain, in a moment of panic, emptied the revolver at its enemies, forcing the heart to take cover behind Mikes corpse. His guts continued their assault. His brain tossed aside the empty gun and drew a sword.

The fight between the brain and the guts was brief; the guts were slashed to slimy ribbons, but gave the heart enough time to get the drop on the brain.

Heart: If you've any last words, hurry it up.

Brain: Fuck you!

The crafty brain whipped a throwing knife straight into the heart. The heart staggered backwards dropping its pistol. The brain began to crawl up the table leg. The heart pursued, cutlass in hand.

A shocked and incredulous crowd gathered around the table to watch the duel.

Heart: En garde, bastard!

They circled each other, blades drawn, with a bloodthirsty intensity. The brain lunged. The heart parried and slashed back, wounding the brain.

Brian: Let this be our final battle!

The brain charged. The heart was waiting for this. It brought the cutlass down between the lobes of the brain, but didn't go all the way through. The force of the charge knocked the heart backwards and the both toppled off the table, landing almost simultaneously with a wet thud on the kitchen floor.

Mike Nelson sure was dead.

## **EXCERPTS FROM COLLARBONE**

Ariella Ruth

is one only lawful—vacant of breath—  
everything but the phrases—i don't like—  
the word—

snow springfall in steam liquid—warm & in  
which way—ask kindly for diversion—  
absence toughen—flutter made—listen—not  
that long—moves in subtle on a train—few  
remain in focus—a tall mug—a rocking  
chair—trees blur to concrete—you my few  
dear ones—the night with lasting quality—

penetrate eyes to paper—it allows us to  
look—at one another—  
too far from ocean—conjure a lighthouse—  
no confinement with a blinking light—five  
months back—again fell—suddenly—held  
in—focus on a teaspoon—measure each day  
up—by the hour—color moves with  
surprise—try—work with wires—peel—  
disconnect—my darling—i haven't broken  
a line—

still—here arm under three pillows—  
pillowed—in skin in—how to turn in such—  
large space—escape into—again—on brick  
cold in warm—weather—the middle—hold—  
the middle—held—the middle—

can't see through cylindrical blinds  
count five swung—too lightly—laugh echo  
beams—four corners—anymore—open—the  
organ—

fallen on shoe cloth—every brick  
of flowers—

walls slant in northwest—corner sleeping—  
pile into—madness comes only with shut—  
eyes—

who are we to make little utterances

## CHARLES NORTH

Interview by Daniel Ellis-Ferris and Whitman Bedwell

We sat down to bread, butter, and a bowl of french onion soup to wait for CHARLES NORTH at the French Roast on 11th Street and 6th Avenue, just down the block from Eugene Lang College. The room was crowded and noisy, we worried over whether our iPhone would pick up the sound of interview, and ate our soup as slowly as possible.

NORTH had given a reading the week before at the release of his new book of poetry, *What It Is Like*, at the Saint Mark's Poetry Project. Accompanied by his wife, Paula, whose artwork is featured in this issue, NORTH sat quietly in the audience until beckoned by the Director of The Poetry Project to

read. He gave only a few words of introduction before reading his work smartly and succinctly to a smiling, nodding, and at times laughing audience. He was followed by the reading, singing, and piano/synth playing duet, Anne Waldman and her son, Ambrose.

As he stepped into the French Roast, NORTH smiled at us with recognition, we had introduced ourselves the week before. He ordered a plate of pita and hummus and shared the food with us, and when the interview was over, he refused to let us pay the bill, saying, "You're students, let other people pay while you can. It won't last forever, you know".

**11.5 Journal: You got your start in poetry later in life than many writers.  
How did you know that poetry was what you wanted to pursue?**

Charles North: I didn't know what I wanted to do for a long time, nor did I care much for poetry. Philosophy was my first love and I majored in it and English at Tufts. I did go on to get an M.A. in English and Comparative Literature at Columbia, but decided not to go on for the Ph.D. Next, I entered, and soon dropped out of, law school. I had written a few poems in graduate school and my advisor there, whom I kept in touch with, encouraged me to take a poetry workshop at The New School which one of his Columbia colleagues, Kenneth Koch, was teaching. I put it off for a couple of years but finally enrolled, and it changed my life. Not that I was convinced I was good at it or that I would keep doing it—that was helped along tremendously by my stumbling into another workshop at The Poetry Project led by Tony Towle. He encouraged me a lot, so that was kind of the second stage of my getting into poetry. By the way, Paul Violi, who was a beloved poetry teacher in the MFA program here for a decade until he died last April, was also in the workshop, and the three of us became close friends and colleagues. I did, as

you know, wind up teaching writing as well as literature, and much of what I did and do is influenced by both Koch and Towle.

**11.5: Your tenth book, *What It Is Like*, was just released. How do you feel about it?**

CN: Well, I think the covers are gorgeous, and I like the design and feel of the book very much. I had had a smaller New & Selected about a dozen years ago but the publisher went out of businessness a few years later and the book hasn't been available for quite a while. So I'm very happy this one is out. In addition to newer things, it has selections from two books that came out after the first New & Selected.

**11.5: Is there a difference in writing a tenth book, as opposed to your first one?**

CN: Not sure there was much difference in writing it—I still pretty much “go on my nerve,” as Frank O’Hara put it—but the production values are light years better than in the first couple of books, which were mimeographed (the lowest tech imaginable) and, if you can imagine it, hand stapled! A lot of

poetry, including some of the very best in my opinion, was printed that way in the 60s and 70s. In fact, my first collection, the pamphlet *Lineups* (my poems in the form of baseball lineups), was self-published. The second, *Elizabethan & Nova Scotian Music*, was published by Adventures in Poetry but just as cheaply. “Distribution” was mostly by hand.

**11.5: How about a difference in emotions, feelings from publishing your first work?**

CN: Well, initially I was insecure and quite shy about publishing, giving readings, etc. I’m better now, though I still have moments. As to the poems themselves, especially those from the last decade or so, I think they’re looser, sometimes “messier”—in a good sense, I hope—than the stuff I used to write. Not that they’re more “experimental--since I was always trying to do things that, at least in my mind, were new—but they’re not as orderly or neat. I think of them as more inclusive, less homogeneous.

**11.5: The lineups are something you invented and are well known for. How did those come about?**

CN: Like a lot of other kids who grew up in the 50s, I was a big baseball fan. The idea behind the Lineups has to do with the strong associations and feelings fans have about two things: where a player hits in a batting order and what position he plays in the field. Batting first or playing second base is very different from batting cleanup or playing first base, etc.. I think the original inspiration came from Rimbaud—who didn't play much baseball—in particular his extraordinary sonnet “Voyelles” (Vowels) which soars on its often mysterious associations. I thought the idea was funny, but not just that. I have a diseases lineup which isn't funny at all. Anyway, after doing the first one, the British Poets lineup inspired by a colleague's hunting around for a dissertation topic, I scribbled loads of lineups into a couple of notebooks and eventually chose ten for the pamphlet. The others that make up *Complete Lineups*, which was published in 2009, I did over the years. What interested me was carrying over the associations that attach to batting order and field position into all sorts of unlikely areas of experience: parts of the body, vegetables, pets, movies, well known tall people, etc.

**11.5: As you've progressed as a writer, what's become easier in terms of confidence with putting out your work?**

CN: In a word, nothing! Just kidding. Well, partly kidding. To some degree, I still worry after finishing a poem that I won't come up with anything else I'm proud of. But I am better than I used to be. I still work pretty much the same way as I did at the beginning, doing a lot of scribbling in a notebook (including titles I want to use), typing out scraps and other things on a manually portable typewriter (of which I have three or four stockpiled in case the typewriter repair shops become extinct), stuffing things into a file cabinet to look at later—in other words in a completely disorganized manner. I'm partly kidding here too.. At some point, when I find myself unusually (and unpredictably) alert, I discover things I've done that I like, or discover a way to improve them, and try to finish them, or at least, as the French poet Paul Valéry put it, *abandon* them. I've never been great about sending things out, though I do manage to occasionally. One thing that's helped in recent years is being asked by magazine editors for poems. That makes things a lot easier.

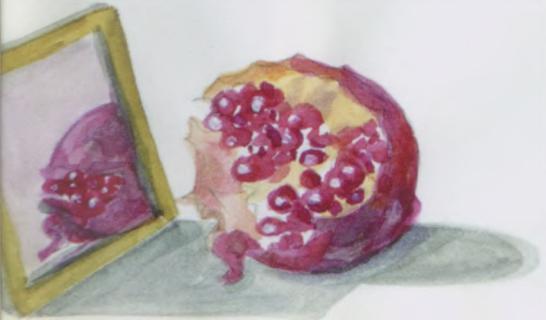
**11.5: Are your influences different from when you first started writing?**



Paula North



Paula North



Paula North



P. North



Natania Sherman Presser



James McQuade



James McQuade



Henry  
Stambler



vs.



Michael Doherty



Martina Gordon



James McQuade



James McQuade



Lisa  
Gonzalez

CN: I always feel a little uncomfortable talking about influences. I know which poets (and other writers) I loved when I began, and many of them are still important to me. But I don't think writers necessarily know what their actual influences are. There are always unconscious factors at work. When I began writing poems in Koch's New School workshop, I was excited and inspired by a lot of poets I had never come across in school or in my own limited experience of poetry: Apollinaire, Mayakovsky, Rimbaud, Michaux, Lorca, as well as Americans who were hardly known at the time like David Schubert, James Schuyler, John Ashbery, Frank O'Hara, and Koch himself. I was also excited by the British poets Jeremy Prynne and Frank Prince. All the above continue to excite me, though again, the extent of their influence on what I write is, I think, something that readers are better qualified to answer than I am. A couple I discovered somewhat later on are just as important to me—the French poet Francis Ponge and the American Elizabeth Bishop, as are poets of my generation who are also friends, e.g., Tony Towle, Paul Violi, Ron Padgett. And I know I'm leaving others out.

### **11.5: What about influences outside of writers?**

CN: People who have written about my poems usually mention art and music, sometimes in the reverse order, and I do think both have gotten into the way I write, as well into specific poems. I was a classical clarinetist (and part-time saxophonist) as a teenager, and music has always been a central part of my life. The specific way music has influenced the writing is hard to pinpoint, but I think it has to do with things like rhythm, cadence, line breaks, stanza breaks, sounds of words alone and together, etc. Most poets would agree that poetry has as much to do with the “ear” as with the “eye.” I know that I write prose in some sort of musical fashion, too. At some level I’m aware of the “music” of a paragraph, and of how one sentence leads into the next, and often that seems to be what determines whether or not I think a paragraph is finished. T.S. Eliot once said that all his decisions as a poet were “quasi-musical” ones. In college literature classes, it’s sometimes hard to convince students that poets don’t write with an eye to meaning alone, but poets know it’s true. Of course the look of the poem on the page is also important, to me and to many other poets, from the overall shape to all the way down to the look of a particular word. Speaking of which, art, and specifically painting, has also been very important to me and has definitely entered my work. I

have some poems that take off from specific paintings—in fact, in the New section of the new book, I have ten little prose poems that take off from Breughel paintings (they also take off from William Carlos Williams' well known, more straightforward “Pictures from Breughel”). I also have others which try in some sense to do in language what certain painters I love accomplished on canvas.

**11.5: Your wife, Paula, is a painter. Do you share creatively with one another, and how has that changed as you've both developed in your fields?**

CN: We do share a lot, openly and, for want of a better word, subliminally. I adore her painting and have learned a lot about art from her work, as well as from her. It's not that we critique one another's work—unless either of us asks, which happens once in a while—more that we've been to loads of galleries and museums and poetry readings together, and our tastes pretty much coincide. (I like Jasper Johns and Philip Guston more than she does, and I keep trying to get her to help me appreciate Rembrandt more!) Has the “creative sharing” changed? Not significantly, I think. *Lineups*, the original

pamphlet, had ten lineup poems and a pen-and-ink line drawing by Paula accompanying each. *Complete Lineups*, which came out a couple of years ago, has the original ten poems and drawings, plus other lineups done over the years and some newer drawings as well. We've done a few specific collaborations over the years but not many. The one in this magazine, "Port of Authority," was done almost 30 years ago! Oh, she's a very good editor of prose, and whenever I write prose I ask her to take a look.

#### **11.5: What advice would you give to aspiring poets or writers?**

CN: Well, first, read as much poetry as you can! The good stuff. There's no substitute for knowing what's been done, getting a sense of what's left to do, discovering which poets and poems are exciting (so that you're moved to do something similar—or even better) and which provide instruction in what not to do. What helps immeasurably is having a good mentor, as well as poet-friends who are somehow on the same wave length. Both are important not only to pass along which poets, old and new—the former are just as important if not more so—they are excited by, but to get feedback from, shoot the breeze with, etc. Mentors can be found in writing programs, though the really good

ones are rare, and it's also hard to know in advance which ones will work best for which aspiring poet. A couple of other things occur to me, neither of which is easy. The first is trying to keep a rein on one's ambitions. Few poets have the sorts of success they aspire to right away. For some—including some of the most talented—it can take quite a while. So patience, as hard as that is to keep around, is of the essence. Paul Violi and I showed one another everything we wrote for many years, and one of the things we tried to remember—not always successfully—was not to rush things into print. It doesn't matter whether you have a full-fledged book (or any book) by age 30, or that you've published 20 books as opposed to six. What matters is whether or not what you've published amounts to anything. By the way, I remind my poetry writing students that all poets, including the great ones, wrote and continue to write lots of mediocre poems, and worse. Writing badly sometimes—and sometimes a lot of the time—comes with the territory. What matters is writing well at least some of the time. In an ideal world, I'd probably recommend that all aspiring poets take up an orchestral instrument, which is of course not only impractical in our world but close to special pleading!

### **11.5: Now that you've finished and released this book, what's next?**

CN: Actually, I've always found it hard to "separate" from a new book, so I'm not certain the release is complete. Psychologically, so one is free to go on and do and try new things. What I most want to do next is write new poems that I'm proud of. To me, that's what's exciting. It would be nice to accumulate, at some point, enough to warrant a new book. I also have it mind to get together an expanded version of my book of essays about poets, artists, and critics, *No Other Way*. None of this, by the way—I'm speaking from my own experience as well as from what I've observed—gets easier as one gets older. I envy painters for a number of reasons and like to think that age isn't the same challenge for them as it is for poets—some of whom peak at 25, or 19--but I know that that isn't necessarily true.

**THREE POEMS BY CHARLES NORTH**

**ACROSS**

1. Visionary, to a squirrel
2. Billy Vessels
3. Sap. Proc.
4. A la Lee Konitz

The crickets, innocent, or at least blameless  
(the future springs up in a cedar grove before the day, grainy and  
promising rain, masks it)  
are interference rather than context, petty disarray  
disinclined to come forth — as against  
the thousand natural fidgetings that take in belief

and stand it on its end as though stars were fists. Imagine naming a pond Bocca di Leone. A recessive, gene-like feeling.

Poesium; penis-like

Ape of Agath

Haberdasher to a reindeer?

Composer batting out of order

At Swim Two Birds

Dampness, civil disobedience, a rout

Feynman HS

Duino, elegiacally

Heugueste de Mousse opus

What Henry eats?

Paris-Troy dir.

Deathbed treat

Halved landscape

Success word

Anti-Semitic poet

1913-1946

## THE FUTURE

“The future’s so bright I gotta wear shades” – Timbuk 3

“The future is dark, which is on the whole, the best thing a  
future can be, I think” – Virginia Woolf

## MIND AND BODY

1

The Catskills (Schumann) vs. the Adirondacks (Webern).

2

The periodic table shifts—shifted in its sleep.

Sends best wishes to the pond *tout court*.

so scum, mud, projection, low-hanging mist and night  
are scapegoats.

3

The earth is hacked into three slabs each covered with oak bark and  
numbered.

Two-fifths of consciousness is heroic in the same way  
dusk is heroic: on its own, less shamed by cosmic sprawl  
than by rags of knowledge which, torn hastily,  
tied together and hanging from an upper-story window,  
smell of turpentine.

4

Life (that bearing wall) dedicates poem  
to the giant cloud with a nose (superhero).

5

O girl singers wide awake and brighter than Alpha  
Centauri.

O heavy-handed moon.

A delicate white butterfly circumvents an almost  
unrecognizable spruce  
still in terrible shape from the ice storm of months ago,  
needing a big push back.

6

Hairline of cedars turns  
into affable human being  
then back into feathery tips and speaks.

The air is a drip!

Too many brains sitting around like toadstools  
and noodling, when they aren't practicing scales  
well into the night.

I like to think of still-lifes as “absent mind”  
but of course every curling lemon peel is “a thought in readiness”  
and the theory that this is not only the world but its best face,  
the aspect that joins us most closely to what we feel,  
falls headfirst into an empty white ceramic vase,  
shoelaces flopping over the rim.

A deer, a cow, and three wild turkeys  
look up from the oil painting  
they are trying gamely but unsuccessfully  
to step out of. Not so the sycamores with

their scaly, too open love—as to which we hope

they will soon publish their lyrics.

9

Try whistling Chopin. You try.

The shade is approximately five feet off the ground, fully alert.

Loops around a low cedar branch.

Texts its future self

before tying itself up into thick brown knots.

Forty-eight epigraphs and

a Shakespearean sonnet

couldn't keep me from you.

## **RYNO AT THE DOCKS**

Chase Williams

Aleksander Gorski waits for a boat from Maine. A tattoo on the meat below his right thumb reads "Ryno", written with ink from the charcoal of spent matches and diluted shampoo. A nickname given to him from the yard fights in Sing. Fights broken up, or not, by cracks of rubber slugs against the backs and chests of the boxers. A nickname picked up on a day where the fight was broken but not stopped and the rain fell hard. A black inmate, later known as Shank, with a particular hatred towards the polish Ryno snuck a sharpened something into the ring, and then into Ryno's side. The crowd shook with excitement, as their show grew bloody. Guards cocked the slugs onto the cement and filled the chamber with riot buck. Dozens of rubber bb's fell with the rain, each shot from the watchtowers put more inmates on the ground, but none went inside. Ryno got in close, he expected another stick of the blade but felt none. His sight went fuzzy as he tried to search the black man's hands that no longer held a weapon. It had fallen, or stuck into him, he didn't want to know. He pushed and punched as his sight tunneled around the swollen face of the fighter. He felt his knuckle give against a bone somewhere in the fighter's head and he went blind. The pain left with his sight, and he felt a warm calm pour into his limbs. All he knew in those moments was that he hit the man every few punches and he was near death. After that fight, after the infirmary, after the month in the hole, people called him "Rhino", which

he thought read "Ryno". The scar that lines with the ribs just under his armpit measures two inches long and three deep marked his movement from a puppet to a Ryno.

A short arrow points from the O towards his wrist where thin hard gray hairs recede into the barrel of a buttoned cuff. The cold air from the water blows his tie over his shoulder and it hugs his neck. He doesn't put it back. The bench, with its rusted bolts and splintered wood, does not help the pain in his lower back. He watches the river through the dock's chain link fence across the street and feels a draft come through the park behind him. His hands rest on his knees and he tries to straighten his back. No boats turn into Newtown Creek and few float down the East river. The boat looks like a fishing boat, and has the equipment to catch fish, but no fish are caught. He waits, to help unload an investment of cocaine. Peddlers, dealers, and heads are all anxious, across New York, for the cargo as well. He lowers his head to his hand and scratches through his hair careful to cover the bare crown with the gray strings. Rough fingers move down his face as he rubs the tired from his eyes. His brows slope down his flat face and are pushed up for just a moment. The tip of his nose, swollen and sore from years of booze, feels wet from the cold. The bench creaks under his weight as he instinctively looks over his shoulder.

The sound of distant applause drifts from the trees as their leaves slap together. They hide a waist high chain-link fence that surrounds the park.

Black asphalt blurs into the dark red sky. Lead colored structures hide in the dim light. Through the trees silver white and red shine off shapeless cars. Ryno squints to focus on the gray, and jungle gym takes shape. Two figures slap at trash with aluminum bats as they walk into the park by way of the back entrance. Their voices are lost in the cold wind and the smell from the water keeps Ryno distracted. He thinks of the smell and wonders why he hadn't noticed it earlier. Dead fish fill the space under the docks as algae creeps over their scales and holds them in place. He's seen it once before, thirty years before, when he could dive for dropped cargo, when he had to dive for dropped cargo.

The bats tap in a random rhythm between voices. Ryno stares towards the boys, their featureless bodies move left and right, the bats outlined only by the light they reflect. Although the park closes at dusk, Ryno knows kids use this park all night, hidden dimes and eighths in the knots of trees, cracks in the foursquare court, in the benches. He turns back towards the docks. The twist of his neck sends sharp pains from neck to tail. He stands. The khaki pleat on each thigh falls into shape as he situates his brown belt to line with the zipper. Fingers in the waist tuck in his shirt, then they find the middle blazer button and it closes over his gut. Hands move to the pockets of his pants where he rubs the dull side of a knife with his right thumb.

The knife's ivory handle and chrome bolster stands tall visible from outside his pocket. Two inches serrated two smooth threaten to cut through

the trouser lining. As child in Poland, a knife was a foreign object, but when this one came to him through coincidence he was overcome with the desire to become familiar with it and to use it. Krakow, situated in the Lesser Voivodeship of Poland, has a low crime rate, and the criminally inclined become bored in their solitude, so bored in fact that many reach levels of insanity. Leon Krol, a fed-up shoplifter who made the news just days before, took his angst out on a parade of Poland's finest who were just as exited to see the blood from their captain's neck as Leon. A chase led him through tight streets. . Ryno was eight when the door of their first floor apartment flew in. The family so startled their potato dumplings were thrown into the air. Leon made for the back door, which lead to a small backyard that ended at a narrow back ally. Ryno saw the knife white grip wet with blood. The drips of red trailed down Leon's blue jeans. His leather shoes, torn in the toe and heel looked wet. Leon stopped before the door and dropped the knife behind the family's stove. Ryno's parents, busy screaming and slipping on the dumplings, did not see the stash, neither did the police as they came, ten strong into the home and tackled the killer. After the police had gone and dinner was swept, Ryno used a stick from the backyard tree to fish the knife from under the stove. He ran it under the cold faucet until the red vanished and slipped it into his boot.

He steps down the curb into the street without regard for traffic. The only cars on Commercial are parked. Dirt, glass, and sand fill the cracks in the road. A Wedel wrapper lies next to the pulp of some cardboard. His steps

grind the grime across the road. Back hunched and on fire with pain he makes it to an entrance gate of the docks. The rusted wheels of the gate squeal as he slides it open just enough to fit through. The corrugated steel containers that dot the docks are all open and empty. Unmoved for four years, each year a new tag claims them. Polish Mike. RIS. NSK. None threats to Ryno, he owns the docks. A debt deal left him with the dead docks, real estate worth only a fraction of the money owed, and yet Ryno saw it as an investment. An investment proven wise until tonight. An investment profitable, if the boat came. The water splashes against the pilings and the rhythmic sound drains his energy as he thinks of bed. At the end of the platform Ryno rocks on the heals of his wingtips. The polished toes push a splinter lose and it falls into the river. He eyes the river along the coast of Queens. No strobbed signals. No taps of the docking horn. No man from Maine.

Back at the gate Ryno swings it shut, it slams with a shudder of metal on metal. The bats in the park pick up speed and volume to match the sound from the gate. Then they die down. A car alarm blocks away begins to ring, and the taps try to overpower the sound. Ryno tosses a chain through a widened link in the fence. No padlock, just trust in his neighborhood. He steps out onto the sidewalk made of packed sand and wet dirt. His shoes collect sand in the seams with each step. The taps of the bats stop and Ryno looks towards the boys. Their figures blur in the now sunless sky. They walk towards Ryno, he thinks, and he can slowly make out their expressions. His steps quicken, and his back hurts worse. The boys, now just across the street,

through the waist high fence around the park, show their faces. One holds a frown and bushy black eyebrows the other a smile and large ears. Ryno steps onto the street to pass a black puddle in the sand all the while with eyes on the boys. He squints. Their faces clear. Their cheeks sunken. Their skin a shade darker than his. Their eyes on him. The bats are outlined by a dim streetlight. Faded stickers and deep dents cover the bats. Their clothes, each stenciled with their names, match. Santo and Cesar come up fast. The brightest sticker on the bat grabs his eye, closest to the taped handle, a flag, a Puerto Rican flag.

Ryno knows of these boys, and their tactics. Slap the bat on the ground and the wallets fly. He steps onto the road to avoid a puddle in the mud. The fence to his left, covered in brown wilted vines has no breaks. The boys to his right speed up to cut him off. His back throbs and his neck stiffens as he tries to fight the stoop of his body. He slows down. His steps slow and deliberate. Not worried that they will jump him because he knows they will, he's worried that they knew he would be here, that they know about the boat. Latin King soldiers out for Ryno's investments. A spasm in his back straightens his arch then folds it back into a painful angle. He cringes. The taps start again. Gradual speed, which will end in a bat to the hip or the knee. At Franklin St. he turns right. The taps go faster. He fingers the ivory handle and slips it free. At Dupont the taps are faster. Eagle st. Knife in hand he tightens his muscles for the hit. He holds his breath and tries to flex every muscle in his body. Left turn. Two cars accelerate down the street one a police cruiser. The taps stop

but the steps continue. The gate to his apartment whips open under his hand and slams against a metal garbage can. It bounces shut behind him. The steps stop, and he turns around at the top of the stairs. The boys look up at his bent body and laugh as they walk towards Manhattan Ave. He sighs, surprised at the anxiety the bats caused. He knows he could take the boys, after a bout in a prison ring street fights feel good, but a lucky bat to the hip could send him into an inactive retirement.

The boys disappear around the corner and head North on Manhattan. Ryno stands motionless, knife in fist and key in hand. The Kings know about the boat, he thinks. They know Ryno because they buy from him. Not directly but a slip of the tongue could lead them to him. The key sticks as he turns the tumbler. He shakes the knob and the door opens. But nobody should know about the docks. Only he and the Maine man know about the docks, but the man from Maine never showed. A sharp heat blows a sweet smell against his face. Shades of blue and black fill the air. He steps inside, the thick carpet gives under his shoes. The Maine man mentioned someone in Mcglorick he stays with. He could have told him, drunk after a deal. His wife approaches from the right. The sweet smell grows acrid in Ryno's nose as she touches his shoulder. Eyes red and wet from the wind, he rubs them dry. Mary, dressed and perfumed, grabs keys from a hook next to an empty coat rack. A black dress, short for her legs, covered by the soft sable Ryno didn't buy her. Shoe's that shake under her weight. Varicose legs bare, beg the attention of a man,

Ryno thinks and he hasn't looked for years. Mary kisses him on the cheek as she opens the door.

"Where ya goin?" Ryno says.

"I told you yesterday, DeStefano's with Lucia."

He wanted to tell her about the boys with bats, but decided to let her go. He knew that smell, the smell that came with her weekly trip to see Charlie, Lucia's husband and owner of DeStefano's Steak House.

"Forgot. Have fun" Ryno says.

Mary had a problem with drugs when Ryno met her. He just started his business with the Maine man and the fear of police had just started to slip away. He was twenty-five when Mary met him at a bar in Greenpoint. The bar was empty except a couple polish drunks who went from argument to song all night. Ryno felt the fourth drink in his gut then his head. He forgot he was alone in this bar. He forgot that his parents had died only weeks ago both within days of each other. He forgot that he had product in his pocket. The door opened and four skinny-legs topped with skirts stepped into the bar. Ryno ordered another drink. The girls paused at the door and Ryno thought they would turn around and walk out, but they sat down at a table near the door. The bartender walked over to the girls and took their orders, an unheard of customer service to the regulars. Ryno ignored the girls but hoped one

would approach him, and one did. Her breath smelled of stale wine and she sweat heavily. He knew what someone looked like high, and she was. He remembered the vile in his pocket and took it out. Under the chipped hickory bar top he handed it to her. She stepped slowly towards the lady's room. Ryno ordered two more drinks. Mary came back and sat down, her friend had left without a goodbye. Mary stuck to Ryno's side for the next month then they were married. His business private, her drug use supplied, both without question.

Glad to shut the sour smell out of the house he slips off his shoes. He steps towards a couch that sits in front of a television which stands next to a book shelf empty save many photos of Mary and a collection of six books, five murder mysteries Ryno never finished and a text book for high school students interested in musical theory, a book Ryno read and kept through his years in Sing Sing. He lowers himself onto the couch and lies down. His back falls into form. The kitchen through a wide archway clean and empty. A white refrigerator/freezer hums as it keeps Ryno's vodka cold. The hum reminds him he wants a drink, but the pain keeps him on the couch. A water stain on the ceiling needs paint, the ceiling fan has one heavy arm, a mouse lives in the walls somewhere, and the boat never came. Maine man got caught, maybe a rat, maybe by chance, but Ryno loses money with that boat. Money he can't get back, this shipment had retirement written on it. A business most can never leave, Ryno found a way out. Planned it from the beginning to stay out of the deals. Use tweaks as faces, a botched deal meant a dead user, no skin

off Ryno's nose. Hard though when your partner from the get-go has a loud mouth, Charlie.

He stood and swayed, toes curled into the carpet. Two bottles of Wyborowa frosted on the freezer shelf. One half empty the other full. He pulls the lighter one out and puts it on the counter next to the sink. Cherry cabinets hang over the sink and counter, interrupted by the fridge. A three-piece kitchen table, situated next to the pantry holds a vase with wilted daisies and brown aspidistra. The stagnant water makes the kitchen smell rotten. Above the sink Ryno opens the cabinet. His hand grips a plastic dish and brings it down to the counter. A bottle of Tylenol and some cold pill packets litter the dish. He grabs the Tylenol. Useless against the pain, but the doctor won't prescribe anything more than the orthopedic slip-on shoes that sit, hidden in the closet of his bedroom upstairs. He throws back a couple pulls off the bottle and slips a Tylenol into his mouth. His lips flat and flush with the rest of his face are chapped and sting when the liquid touches them.

Ryno walks back to the refrigerator and pulls it open. The sight of his wife's cooked food makes his stomach turn. Potato dumplings with no flavor for forty years. Lazanki with too much salt. He slams the door shut and pours more drink in his mouth. Ryno carries the bottle in his right hand and walks back through the living room. The staircase that begins near the front door climbs to a second floor with two bedrooms and one bathroom. He steps onto the first stair and tests his back. Then the second, third and he doesn't

feel the throb. Or, he thinks, it hurts so bad that his body went numb. A tingle in his spine. A stiff neck. A cramped forearm. He thinks of reasons why Charlie would talk. Money, hollow promises, to take Mary away, money. If the Kings had found out about the boat, they could only know from him, the man from Maine, or Charlie.

Ryno was 18 when a Williamsburg capo took notice of Charlie's abilities. Charlie sat hoisted six stories high on a window washer's swing, next to him swung Ryno. Their buckets of soaped water splashed on the sidewalk below them. Inside the building were bankers and businessmen both legitimate and illegitimate. Ryno let the rope through a yard and went to wet the sponge when the wood beneath him snapped. He gripped the rope and slid. The light reflected off the windows flashed in his face and all he could feel was the burn in his palms. The stained tan rope turned red as he slid down. Faster and faster the windows flashed by until it stopped and Ryno stared at the sky with his back on the sidewalk. He felt the fire in his hands and the sharp breaks in his feet. The bucket bent and smashed under his butt had left a deep cut in his upper thigh, which stung from the soap. Charlie stood over Ryno and touched his hip with the toe of his boot. Ryno reached up with his cut hands then passed out. Ryno spent some time in the hospital and when he got out Charlie had quit the high-rise job and went to work inside the bank as a money messenger for a banker disposed to felony and with a knack for sentence evasion. Charlie went to the hospital the night of Ryno's release to pick him up and take him to a party hosted by his new employer. That night

Ryno went to prison. Went to prison to keep Charlie out. Charlie, cocky around his new friends led Ryno to a transaction in the back room of a neighborhood bar that ended in a brawl. A brawl that ended with Ryno's hands around the neck of a fat Italian. He would have killed the man if the cops hadn't pulled him free and he was charged, as an example for the problems with gang violence.

Up the stairs and to the left, he's in his room. The perfume tinges the air in the room. A cold breeze from an open window pulls the stink out of house, but it won't leave. The lights are off and he can only see the foot of the bed with the light in the hall. He switches it on. Lipstick and other makeup litter the floor in front of the floor length mirror, a sign she left in a hurry. A lamp with a burnt out bulb stands on a nightstand with a drawer and a short shelf. He sleeps on that side. He walks to the stand and pulls the drawer open, the oil on the tracks has long dried and it squeals as it opens. He puts his hand in to feel for a small framed .22 with hidden hammer and no bullets. The gun, like the King's bats facilitate transactions and keeps people out. S&W has never been fired sleeps next to his head in case of home intrusions. With no boat, King soldiers, and an impotent weapon he doesn't know what to do, but Ryno thinks the gun, even in its useless state could save his investment.

The gun, stolen from a kid who stole it from a dealer sold it to a pawnshop that Ryno had a hand in. The gun, along with much more, became

his after the broker couldn't pay the fees Ryno required for the sale of his goods.

He slips the gun in his pants and shakes his shirttail over the butt as he steps over to his closet. The door slides open against the carpet. He squats with a pained grunt and grabs his Velcro slip-ons. The arches tall and the heels thick he pulls them onto his feet and stands straight. The night will hide the shoes as long as he stays outside. Bring the business outside. A rule Ryno runs with most nights.

In the street he listens towards Manhattan Ave. for the clink of the bats. They live only a few blocks from the train and his wife insists on the car. A bright white Lexus LS. Ryno takes the trains. Takes the train because drug dealers drive cars. He takes the train because nobody knows his face, or nobody knew his face until tonight. He walks towards Manhattan Ave. The dark outlined buildings around him radiate cold air, the sidewalk tries to slow him down with cracks and trash. On the corner he looks the direction of the train then the opposite. No bats, no boys. Hardly any cars. He flicks the handle of the knife with his thumbnail. Dust hot from exhaust brushes his face. The G train station glows a few blocks down. Behind him he thinks he hears the taps. He passes through the lights of a corner store and just before the stairs turns back towards the street. Across the street stand the soldiers in salute with their bats pointed down. A few people pass by the boys none distinguished. He's not sure if they saw him or not, but they do not follow him into the station.

Underground the air sends chills into his sleeves and legs. A Few people sit on the benches on the other end of the platform. His eyes on the turnstiles, but the train slips in and the bats never show, only the man with no tie jogs down the stairs and hops the turnstile. The man, who recognizes Ryno, locks eyes and runs into the same car as Ryno. He guesses a burnt peddler who needs money, work, or drugs until he notices his smooth face and arrogant stride. A cop. Hand on handle Ryno tightens his body ready for a shakedown. A great night to carry the gun, the night an off duty cop stumbles into the train. The night he'll go to prison for the rest of his life for a gun possession. The night his wife has waited for, the night she gets to have Charlie in his bed. The pastel pink flowers messed from their slow tired sex. He doesn't want to go down in the train. A thirty-year operation taken down by a handsome young badge. The man sits across from Ryno. The man says Ryno's name under his breath a few times then stops and looks at him from across the aisle.

"A moment alone with the famous Polack. " he says.

"You been followin' me?" Ryno says.

"The stars must be aligned, this meeting is by chance" He says then laughs, "Where ya headed? I got a cruiser off the next stop I can give you a ride".

"Thanks but no. I'm meetin' my wife"

"Mary? I saw her just a bit ago with your bud Charlie"

The cops had no reason to tail Mary. This man wears no badge, and drives no cruiser. He gave himself away with the name of his wife. No cops know that much about him. He knows.

"Word is your Maine man got lost," he says.

The train pulls to a stop and the doors slide open. The boat's secret safe for thirty years, now every streetwalker knows about it. A once a month carefully orchestrated and timed deal. Ryno never got greedy and never did more than two loads a month. He started with small shipments, plus the occasional handgun. Would turn it over quick. No cuts, no vials, just bricks. Sold to whoever had the money, but never with Ryno's face on the sellers end.

"Last chance, car's up there."

Ryno doesn't move. His eyes scan the pockets ankles and waist of the man. His jeans are worn in the knees and the crotch, his black boots are loosely laced around his feet, and his thin black jacket holds the fur of a white animal up and down the arms. No bulge of gun visible but concealed in his pit may be a shooter. The kings use whites they meet in prison to play bit characters in bigger hustles, Ryno knows this, but he's met them before. Weak scared junkies. The doors of the subways close. The two men look at each other in the empty car, eyes shifty and wide. Ryno plans to wait for the doors

to begin to close at the next stop and hop off. A slip pulled on lots of cops when he worked the streets.

"What do ya want?" Ryno says.

"That boat you had come down here never showed, and I want to know where it went. I think you know. I'm sure something as big as a rat didn't get past you. So you hid it and knew the word was out."

The train pulls into Lorimer and the doors open. Ryno sweats from his upper lip and licks the salt from the chapped skin. He jumps out of the seat and out through the door. The emergency alarm blares when the steel door slams open. He doesn't look back even after he clears the stairs. The temperature dropped while in the train. He walks straight, past the former Lazy Catfish and turns right. The homes to either side all seem empty. No lights, no blue television flickers through the blinds. He looks back and sees nothing.

Inside the restaurant Peach colored figures covered with black blue and red hazes. Jolted movements at each table. Dark red fills glasses. Mounds of red and white and brown fill the tables. A sign reads, "Established 1911". Established by trash like Charlie. Handed down from owner to owner through forced takeovers. The mafia history of Brooklyn confused and bored Ryno and Charlie, as a Sicilian immigrant turned button-man, told and retold the his story hundreds of times. Mary must not listen to his gab, or maybe she likes it.

Ryno doesn't know, or care really. He never liked talk with Mary. He heard her because she had nice legs, but those went years ago and Ryno realized she wasn't interesting. They met through Charlie, who at the time held no real job or title. A soldier, he praised himself, under a Capo notorious for backstab. He told stories of grunt work he did for the boss that day over bottles of grappa, he bragged secret apartments with butcher showers in the basement and loose floorboards in the dining room. Restaurants with a pasta house front and a laundry service in the back. Cash hung to dry in a room behind the meat locker.

He blinks his eyes and holds them shut for one beat then opens them. Faces take shape and their clothes rest against their skin. Mary sits with her back to the window. Charlie laughs heartily across from her. Ryno crosses the street, glad Charlie faces the window. Ryno looks, eyes on Charlie, through the privacy plants and the thick, foggy windows. He glares through the glass, the thick neck swallows as their eyes meet. Charlie leans towards Mary and excuses himself, and as to not make it obvious he walks to the kitchen and comes out the back. Ryno walks through the alley to meet him in the shadows.

"Ryno, what are you doing here?" Charlie says.

"Enjoyin' yourself Chuck? My wife got all gussied up for ya. Smell that perfume she's wearin'?"

"Lucia got sick and forgot to call Mary, I'm just giving her some dinner. Right Ryno."

Ryno imagines his hands around that red throat. Charlie taken out like a rat outside his own place. He could stomp out Charlie in a breath, but Charlie's friends like to have DeStefano's around. A high profile hideout whose books are perfect. Ryno would put himself in danger if he killed Charlie. He wonders, though, if he cares. The lost investment that will never show up, cargo that nice never gets lost, just taken. His back starts to hurt again, only for a few beats. He wants to get back home and open up that other bottle.

"Boat never came" Ryno says.

"Impossible, what happened?" Charlie says.

His back throbs again and he feels his teeth clench. Ryno looks Charlie up and down. Charlie's cut from the boat deals keeps the cops out of his kitchen and the bar stocked, he should be more worried, Ryno thinks. Mary, she has a hand in this too. Ryno's sure. A metallic tap comes from somewhere. Ryno twists his back and his neck, stiff with tension, cramps. He holds his chin and pops his neck, which helps, then hurts. A black car floats down the street and in one fluid motion changes directions to head east on Metropolitan.

"Mary's probably worried bout ya Chuck," Ryno says.

"It's really not what it looks like in there,"

Ryno can smell booze from Charlie. Ryno laughs and touches Charlie's shoulder and wraps his arm over his neck. Charlie follows suit and puts his arm over Ryno's neck.

"We've been friends for a while Ryno. I'll help you through this," Charlie says.

They take a step towards the back door. A planted tree hides them from the road. Ryno pats his friend's back twice and laughs while he grips the blade. . Three quick bursts with the blade and Charlie slips to his knees. His eyes wide in surprise and mouth opened in pain. Ryno looks down at him, then the bloodied blade, then turns and walks north towards the BQE. Under the expressway he hears sirens, but can't be sure if they are for Charlie. Behind that plant, next to that dumpster, it will take a while to find him. He thinks past the sounds, where can he go now. Nobody saw him with Charlie, but the black haired kid knows which stop he slipped out on. Charlie could have lived long enough to tell them he did it. Mary would wonder. Charlie was scum.

Eight years ago the Maine man mentioned a friend in Greenpoint where he stayed after the deal. A studio by Mcglorick. He can remember

addresses on his walk there. Sand, dirt, and pigeon droppings line the road under the highway. A van on blocks with curtained window and a dented door plays faint music. A person on a bicycle passes by and swerves to avoid broken glass. Three cabs are parked in a row, they wait for a call. The driver on the end sleeps. A pair of gloves soaks up the brown that drips from a gutter. At Graham Ryno looks at the bright gas station with an ad for a ninety-nine cent hotdog, and the picture makes him hungry. Normally he would grab food with the captain of the boat, but he forgot about his reservations. A flag that says "Ice Cold Beer" sways above traffic. Ryno wants more vodka. At North Henry st. Ryno turns left and heads straight north towards the park. He looks at his hands, the knife still clutched in his fist, drips blood down his wrist. He feels like he did when that final rubber bullet slammed against mouth, he thought for a second that the black fighter had thrown one last hook, but the pain of the slug brought back his sight and he could see the fighter curled on the ground, the crowd, arms over head all in watch of Ryno. He spit out a tooth and sees the bullet on the floor. The cheers continue through the rain and the shots. He smiles a red grin and takes another slug to the gut.

The building houses eighteen apartments, he remembers. Bricks line the windows, and lighter colored bricks make the walls. The friend lives on the fourth floor. It looks over the park from the west. He can find it. Ryno remembers his shoes and feels shame. Shame that he had to kill his partner in these shoes. Shame that his whole outfit crumbles in these shoes. Shame that

tonight will end with him in jail and he's in orthopedic slippers. Go home now, he thinks, it could all blow over. Take another two Tylenol and put your dress shoes on. Throw these ones away and bear the pain. Ignore the pops in your knees and the spasms in your neck, the arthritis in your knuckles. Go home to your ugly wife and call it a day. But Ryno also knows that nothing blows over.

The arch in the park has a spot light out and a pigeon infestation. The cement that surrounds it, stained by the feces, does not invite anyone to visit. A fenced in dog park made of mud to the right. Green plastic wrapped chains guide pedestrians through the park all opened in the middle at the black and white spackled arch. Polish park sleepers on the lawn snore loudly hugged around bottles of mixers and holstered with hip flasks of whiskey. Lie down next to them, Ryno considers, pocket a bottle and fall asleep. He can get used to whiskey if he needs. Wine, with it's acid reflex, he can choke down.

The arch and it's façade face west and the pigeons all live on the east side, hidden in the trees wrapped with power lines and loose telephone cables. A mess he and his friends would climb in, climb to the top of the arch with an automatic rubber band gun and fire away at families and pets. As a child, the Greenpoint police spent their time in Williamsburg and he had free reign over the neighborhood. He would walk the bridge north and pick fights that he would hide from and watch as his friends took the heat. Fights, unless forced, were avoided through life. He got into the bottle early and even in Sing he

found ways to get into it. Through the park trees and the uncomfortable snores Ryno sees the building he hopes the friend rents. He looks down at the ground, at his shoes, a strap undone and a large sandy gray smear over the toe. He bends to tighten the Velcro and imagines the tap of the Kings behind him.

The man he wants lives in Number 9 but won't let Ryno in. He turns back towards the park and looks over the homeless, or homed drunks asleep in the grass. He turns back towards the door and puts his fist through the glass with two punches. His knuckle torn he reaches through and twists the bolt. He almost sprints up the stairs, but can't. At number 9 he kicks his foam heel through the door. He kicks again and a door across the hall opens, the voice of televised people reaches into the hallway. Ryno looks at the observer, who sees the blood and the busted door, and goes back inside. He kicks again and the door slips open. A middle-aged fat man with thin fingers runs back into the kitchen and tosses chairs between he and Ryno. The apartment smells wet as he walks in.

"He's not here," Says the man.

Ryno steps, then kicks the furniture from in front of the man. He feels a tight pain in the back of his thigh that moves into his back. Ryno pulls back and with a crack knocks the man down. He falls against the wall with the doorway and lands flat on his back, gut in the air. Ryno steps over him and into the back room where another doorway opens into another smaller room. Ryno looks underneath the metal-framed bed and grabs a black duffle bag that

feels the weight of his cargo. He unzips the bag and looks inside. The investment, his last investment. He wants to take it to the docks and throw it in. Mix the stuff with the dead fish. Go home and go to bed. He walks back to the man and looks down at him. His eyes shake under their lids and a small line a blood drips from his nose.

Bag in hand he walks back down the stairs and out the front door. He turns left on the sidewalk and heads to the docks. Closed bodegas and last calls on every corner. The bag heavier with each block. His shoes more comfortable every step. He considers the ideas, Charlie hired the Kings to take the drugs, and make him swim, they would probably be at the docks. Bats against the ground in wait. Charlie's dead, but the word's still out that a bag of product can be had.

At Dupont he takes a left. His back so sore he wants to sit. He passes Harte factory with it's rounded corner of glass cubes and mirrored water tower above. He passes by the park, crosses the street and unlocks the gate. The tide, high against the rock shores, sprays against his face as he walks the docks. Loud taps come from the park as though the water woke a metallic monster. He sits at the end of the dock, his toes almost in the water. The smell from bellow irritates his stomach and puts a bad taste in his mouth. He opens the bag and pulls out the bricks. Taps closer. The boys banter as they close in on Ryno. He puts the bricks back in the bag and zips it shut. He stands and looks

at the boys, who have made it to the edge of the dock. He takes out his empty gun and tosses it into the water, pulls out his knife and grips it hard.



Simonetta Morro

## **FROM THE BASEMENT 6, REGAN ADVISES LEAR**

*for "Shakespeare: Power and its Opposites" Class*

Henry Shapiro

When Regan tells him "Being weak, seem so,"  
she names the rule that makes the world go round,  
at least seems to describe the daily flow  
of "this one, not that one"—so we'll be bound,  
all, by infallibility's sound and  
keep it clear, you are stamped this one, or not—  
so fit the name brands abroad in the land,  
differing thus from prototype not one jot.  
But only trouble is, these words are hers,  
Ur-Monster's, who perforce preys on herself,  
and all the rest of us, who choose defer  
to there being someone inside, no shelf  
with a label but, pray, somewhat labile,  
in many ways, thank God, unviable!

**FROM THE BASEMENT 9, GRADUATION DAY SONNETS:  
GRADUATES**

*for Teresa Franco and Nick Paliocha*

Henry Shapiro

Someone, I hope, has loved them well enough,  
each one, whatever make, disposition,  
sign born under, in embraces soft or rough,  
Muslim, Buddhist, Bahai, or Christian,  
so here's hopes for each one there'll be some path,  
at least somewhat visible ground, marked  
enough to sidestep steeps and cliffs of wrath,  
trails of too much grief, declensions too dark  
to survive the terrain. Though some, one knows,  
lack guts, life-deprived of instinct for light,  
which might help some scruffy love-garden grow  
even through stakes planted too high, too tight.  
But on all, I dare beg, time for blessing  
on entrance, exit, love all-confessing.

## SUBWAY STAIRS for Mark Larrimore

Henry Shapiro

That curved young man strays  
from what century,  
which play, dragging  
epée

behind him idly  
wa—  
ving, embla—  
zoning my day

with quirk—  
y small circles'  
lurk—  
ing dance

up stairs,  
so highly unaware  
of the cosmic chance  
he dares inspire

in the city, air, me,  
glistening history,  
compressing today  
to its peculiar destiny

## OVERNIGHT

*c. 5/14, for Jennifer Firestone*  
Henry Shapiro

Far down yellow sky there that other land  
we've seen, known, but not how to remember,  
since by the middle of the night these thin bands  
in magisterial shapes plus one star  
have effaced themselves, exchanged their beauty  
for one crowded, clear star-field—map almost  
of endless order, upheld to scrutiny  
without thought of any sort for the cost  
to our lives, even this oncoming day,  
that we know some wild beauty has been there.  
So we're all to wake and thread common way  
on through push, hope, talk, doubt, wait, love and fear;  
I then must obey facts, those stars are far—  
still knowing sortilege of clouds so near?

## RIVER SCENE

for Rob Buchanan  
Henry Shapiro

Beyond my cognizances  
dances  
slow sail  
unfail—

ingly upstream,  
but is that a hawk  
I've dreamed  
or falc—

on, phoenix on, at the helm  
or is it bow,  
in that real realm,  
I never know

nor need I  
more than flow  
beyond my eye,  
while it glides

its own  
day's route,  
errand  
command to float

to Thule  
holy Tintagel,  
one other land  
stories tell

## BETWEEN SILENCES

Grace J. Lee

*Clothes we put on  
In the hope of  
Taking them off.*

*Joe Bolton*

Subtext is everything as the x-ray  
confirms, the television blushes  
the walls blue as if we were

underwater.  
A half-life  
courtship: an altar

of fluid friendship. An atomic  
line and hook is  
dropped.

We sit semi-  
platonomically, his roommate  
sleeping, muscles

nursed with beer.  
There is nothing

to say, the television  
drones. There is no finale, he is too polite.  
Lingering,  
the door closed, definite.



Felicia Urso

## MOON FACE

Grace J. Lee

You are a late sleeper. Halmoni says  
I have an ulgool like the moon.

In America, having a moon face implies  
that my skin is pocked and cratered, ugly.

But my grassfed grandmother means that my round,  
Korean face is shrouded with discreet  
depressions or incandescent like an ultra-  
violet fly trap.

My moodiness a motel Impressionist  
painting, my body a crass  
boat in a blue-gray-pink-black ocean.

You are a late sleeper. I watch  
you sleep until you arise in the pallor  
afternoon, unfettered by your fluency,  
the watercolor of solace that rested  
on your cerulean face, while you slept.



Felicia Urso

## **NO MAN IS AN ISLAND**

Grace J. Lee

On the island of men, no  
one is wearing a shirt. Bellies

are soft, due to the constant  
apparition of cold

beers. Thunderstorm  
prone; there is an occasional

sprinkle. Neil Young and Southern rap  
blast through speakers that dangle

from palm trees. Flies flourish  
in the sweaty marijuana

breeze. Nobody asks, What should  
I wear? Feelings are discouraged.

Pillows like breasts, sleeping dogs  
with tongues out. There are

no moms to tell, I love you.

ARLES DE L'AMOUR  
et l'amour



Felicia Urso

## THIRD TRY AT A TANKA

Grace J. Lee

His stalwart nature  
Tree trunk hair, sovereign nose  
Thirty-one years old  
My verdant crush on this man  
Pines like a forest fire

第三試圖寫一首和歌

和歌的題目

他的堅毅本性  
樹幹頭髮，君主的鼻子  
三十一歲  
我對這個人的青睞  
像森林之火

第三試圖寫一首和歌  
和歌的題目  
和歌的內容  
和歌的題目

他的堅毅本性  
樹幹頭髮，君主的鼻子  
三十一歲  
我對這個人的青睞  
像森林之火

## A NECESSARY DISTANCE

Zach Whitesides

Pungent roadkill's days of sun and  
sun-love: here is the pregnancy  
of swollen flesh become rot bugs.

Or: on the car-ride in, there were  
at least two possums laid out dog-  
meat not even, like road-markers  
of where and when brakes were not  
worth the effort.

Or: the westward carress of I-64  
through and down West Virginia into Kentucky  
is quite beautiful though one needs a distraction  
from the coal plants and look: sangre!

And that is why I have set a map  
on the table between us,  
have traded my bloody minute scalpel  
for Impressionist landscape,  
why over these I have glued articles  
and proper nouns about people  
and deaths not affecting my birth  
or death/fiscal situation. And why

the map's lines look like verse to me.

But you, underneath my gaze  
you are reaching and feeling  
my bare knees  
anyway you are  
in the type whispering against the ear.



Natania Sherman Presser

## **PRE-HISTORY**

Zach Whitesides

In this paradise unknown was  
the kid-killing dog,

swathes of grass were almost blue  
with water in the morning,  
love paperless.

A boy, squatting in mud  
watched a spider walk up and down rocks  
for ten minutes. He (the boy) left  
and he was alone.

There was nothing to compare  
against the dew,  
pond sunlit.

From here the boy drank  
for the deity's amusement,  
who hid in the world of wild corn.

And drank again, his sips brief echoing  
off nothing.

## **POEM**

Ariana Cameron

[preface]

I wanted an answer  
like everyone else

I understand there are laws  
concerning causality:

bad things happen  
to good people don't

tell me there is no evidence  
I lived it and you too

in someone else's house

[MGH: department of neurology]

the lobby, the unhinged  
beam of your face

the vending machines blink

{list}

[night]

the room has no windows

[the hands]

took from you everything  
that settled

your writing  
unrecognizable

you salt-shakered all of it  
you became an island

[ talk]

neurodegenerative  
hypokinesia  
dystonia  
neuroleptic  
progressive  
antipsychotic  
perphenazine  
ziprasidone

by which we mean, this  
will surely but gradually  
get worse

[journal entry]

I want to be a journalist  
when I grow up

[night]

there is a door but the handle is concave

[MGH: department of neurosurgery]

how is it  
the human body could require  
foreign objects

two wires  
and a battery pack

you cough vomit into a tin pan  
sheen of linoleum

fluorescent eye  
of the recovery room

[sunset lake]

did you hide yourself here  
to die

to sit in the quiet  
unravel

integrity of the tongue  
stability of the foot

you are covered in holes  
from which you leak

[the feet]

I am trying to reassemble, retrace  
what equals this you

[night]

the narrow crack in the door through which we speak  
the guard, who has been here since the  
beginning of the war, has a very  
thin, pale face, and his eyes are  
almost black. He is wearing a  
dark green uniform with a  
yellow belt and a yellow  
cap. He is standing in front of  
the door, looking at us.

[MGH: recovery]

how light trails through cotton, people  
on the train all have the same

face frozen city I  
wake when you wake

[night]

the snow is accumulating

[night]

the room is full of snow

[night]

## **ALL GLASS IRISES**

Ace McNamara

Long after you've run out of things  
to say to every sorry soul  
in this forsaken panopticon  
whose only guard died masturbating  
to the very thought of tulips  
growing from our eye sockets

& long after  
we've ambled to the end  
of the peeled-back layers  
of sugared skin & the evening  
has made  
a void out of your being

It will not be as silent as all  
glass irises.  
There will be younger sweeter skin  
to peel away like tulip petals  
asking if she loves me  
loves me not.

There will be echoes of your image

in the mirror. Angles of your face  
that only your own mind,  
the guard, could ever see

\* Tulips are flowers native to the human continents.  
Two lips are flowers, natural on the human countenance.

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\* Tulips are flowers native to the human continents.  
Two lips are flowers, natural on the human countenance.

WARNING: Please do not use eyes over 60  
watts in the eye sockets.

## SOME FINGERS, GODLY VIOLET

Ace McNamara

I throw a net of Christmas lights  
on the flame, hoping

the holiday magic will help me catch some of the fire in the act.

No it is impossible.

The fire refuses to be caught. It is a wolf  
that will swallow the world.

It isn't night or vice  
or any of those mirrors.

I make a cat's cradle with a strand  
of Christmas lights. Just to see  
how you feel about magic &

getting close enough to me to untangle things.

"Yell at the top of your digital lungs.  
They brought Ginsberg back to life  
to write billboard slogans in Nowhere,  
America. I'm bringing a noose of Christmas  
lights to the backyard to execute a fire.

In its throes, the fire burns green,  
copper blue,  
some fingers, godly violet.

The fire reveals itself to be  
the ghost of Whitman come back  
to love the things of this earth  
the only way:into oblivion.

The ghost of Whitman is inside all living things.

He was right. He was birds  
& lilies of the city

He was Helen & other emotions.

He is in you

waiting for the spark of passion,  
a steady source of oxygen & a break

from the rain.

## Once the ghost of Whitman lays

his love on you  
you too will be  
but a song of yourself.  
Leaves of ash.

\*

---

\* Whitman was originally some neat atoms that were made in the center of stars.

It's funny because some fingers were actually burned in the making of the poem.

## TOGETHER ON HOLIDAY

Ace McNamara

A blue shirt hanging from a door  
that doesn't believe in opening anymore.  
A few pictures in a chipped frame.  
(The whole family together on holidays,  
in the backyard among the fallen  
                apples & deserted vehicles,  
& we are laughing).

I sit next to my father  
in silence so complete there isn't  
room for a cricket to squeeze into,  
despite the bowing grain outside the window.  
We are watching a movie about freezing to death.  
It's a movie about father & son bonding  
while they burn books.

We are reading the subtitles.

There's an atheist in the corner  
                in the movie  
holding on to a Gutenberg Bible  
like it's the last ticket to Babylon.  
The father & son are eyeing it greedily.  
We are reading the subtitles.

My father gets up to make himself  
another Nashua & asks if I'd like  
to join him. The drink is cool  
& we are laughing.

\*

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\* The Nashua is a drink consisting of 10oz light vodka, & 12oz diet cola, not shaken nor stirred, to be served over ice in a BIGGULP® plastic cup.

## ON FAMILY

Muggs Fogarty

The basement flooded last year  
the basement is hollow now  
    the house creeks louder  
        it sounds symphonic  
            sounds: groan, tinkle, tap  
my house has songs  
in its pipes  
the baby behind us coed  
    the baby in the restaurant  
        I saw its family happy  
            I thought about wanting  
the baby, the happy  
I wanted them all  
in impossible ways  
    my wanting has babies  
        and they're happier  
            than you  
the car in winter  
    the car inside of winter  
        my friend and I inside the car  
the car like a snow globe  
in another snow globe  
    I wanted to cover you up, friend

my hands like glycerin  
my hands like  
tiny falling  
snows

—Doris Lessing  
from *The Golden Notebook*

“I’m not much good at writing about myself,” she says. “I’m not good at writing about anything. I’m not good at writing about anything that’s not a bit of a mystery.” She’s referring to her new memoir, *The Golden Notebook*, which she describes as “a kind of self-portrait, but it’s not a very good one.” She’s referring to the fact that the book is written in four notebooks, each with a different personality, and that the characters in the book are not always consistent with the real Doris Lessing. “It’s not a very good self-portrait because it’s not a very good portrait of me,” she says. “It’s not a very good portrait of anyone.”

Lessing, 82, has written 15 novels, three plays, and two memoirs. Her most recent novel, *The Golden Notebook*, was published in 2001. She has won numerous awards, including the Booker Prize, the National Book Award, and the Nobel Prize in Literature. She is also a member of the Royal Society of Literature.

## APOLLO'S GARDEN

Evamarie McGarry

Arching backs of green tainted with the scorn of gypsy breath  
Petals reaching towards the sun  
Oh the fingers stretching onward  
How I could mimic this  
This elongating scheme with the furor of screaming talons

Explosions beating out nightmares  
Medieval feeling, dip me into you  
and let me drown like the  
Syncopated wax on the dreamer's desk

Explain this with Darwin's  
Scuffed mask, broken at the jaw.

Touch her smell her neck  
The stem of elegance  
Her rose petal arms  
Her heavy scorn  
Sagging in her tired beauty  
Loose yourself  
Let yourself die  
Let her breath into your veins  
Roots of new oxygen

Heaven's skyscraper

Travel through this garden  
Aimlessly with your mind  
Close your eyes and listen  
with your wrists.

Shoot your arrow  
Pray it not be lead.

Heaven's skyscraper  
Travel through this garden

Aimlessly with your mind  
Close your eyes and listen  
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Shoot your arrow  
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## BREEZES

Ryder Baldwin

Don't ask me for January  
27th... It's been one year  
that went like wind through

a screen door, since my father left  
his body like wind through a screen  
door, a gentle tap on the door jamb

on its way back. It was spring loaded,  
it was closing on its own, it caught  
my fingers hard.

He was a half sat up husk. Under  
light as fake as his life. A power outage  
and he'd make his way out.

The titanic sank faster than he  
did, both with holes in the hulls,  
blood not ocean in his case.

I ran to my mother's roots

in New York as fast as  
I could.

He read us Carl Sandberg;  
my sister ended up in Chicago;  
her brother ended up writing this.

## FALLS

Ryder Baldwin

Rolling we were rolling over  
and over we were  
over rolling big heavy boulders  
down a hill

full of apple french  
toast and bacon you were getting  
wet I put you up  
for two nights like  
the ascension of a house

in a tornado More rolling  
and more like tumbling  
still wet clothes in a dryer  
and boulders chipping

a craggy hill It's so hot  
in this apartment we can't  
wear pants it's a stripping  
heat that made all this

possible Face me I face  
you my glasses are off  
Connected and unconnected

a slack phone off the hook  
a slack cord to the floor

a switchboard with no operator  
I was touching  
you I had you over  
my shoulder when the lights were on

and it was nothing but throwing you  
around my bed was when  
your weight set in I watched  
you take a shower

I put my glasses on for that  
back in the light  
The air conditioner  
came the day after you did

## POEM

Ryder Baldwin

I only want to live in you  
as a building, a tenant.

When the food on my plate  
is gone and pooling in me  
as oil I'll pay the check and

leave. In the summer with all  
your windows open the wind  
will go through you one side

and out the other. Turning a page  
on my desk I'll ask who did that.  
Who is the one way street with

cars on both sides I'm trying to  
squeeze down. When I see the  
earthworm I probably just stepped

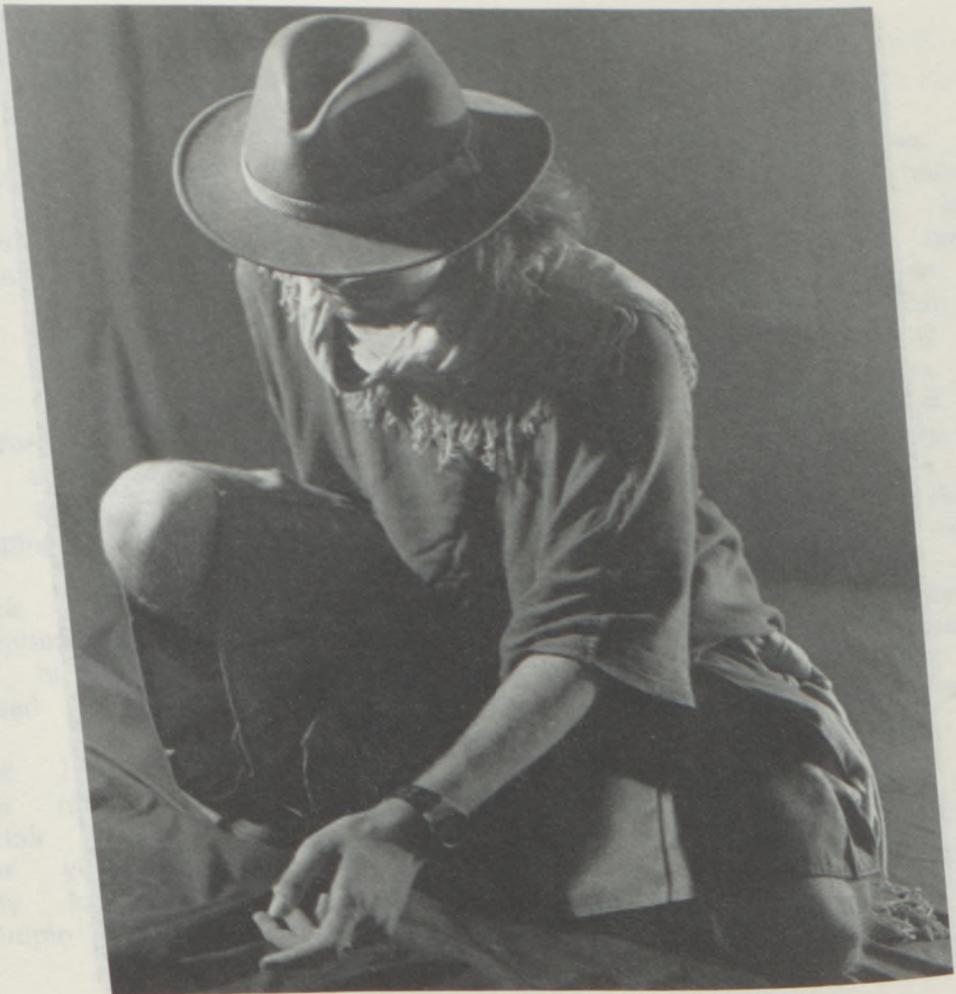
on am I a child again?

It's all the wind  
it's all the wind going back  
and forth, playing a tennis volley

between two rivers and diving  
between the buildings. A swell  
up the tall ones and crashing as

waves when they reach the top.  
And at night, the clouds move so  
sly, shifting with the ground light

laying on them.



Renee Auburn



Renee Auburn

## WORDS SIMPLE

Melissa Basaran

WeOve become a room full of stuffed\*clothes boxes and  
I—wrapped in a moving blanket—am immobile  
trying to mute the running tub with my mouth  
ThereOs only so much a girl can swallow  
I remember taking baths with you before I was too  
young to realize your faults  
with pretzel leg and I wondered where all that hair  
came from And why did you glue  
black paste to yourself? That was before you hid  
underneath pillows—chronically touching yourself during the  
day and empty\*stomach drinking yourself during the night  
and maybe if you were lucky restlessly  
humping until the morning  
And I was forced under pillows  
Block the uh uh uhs and yes yes yeses of  
sleeptime The world rejects you and  
in turn you reject it And being  
raised sociopath\*psychopathic this includes me  
As your child I couldn't defy the world I  
But I validate it if alive  
am mirror So you burn me until I  
drink water instead of yell out your name or reach  
for your bosom Lost in Toy Shop  
My hand to the stove WeOve been reduced to  
simple words

## **ON DAISIES**

Natalie Raymond

slit white petals  
bruise easily

popular yellow  
centers smile

at young girls  
in meadows

unsuspecting

## ON VIOLETS

Natalie Raymond

curved & lump-coloured

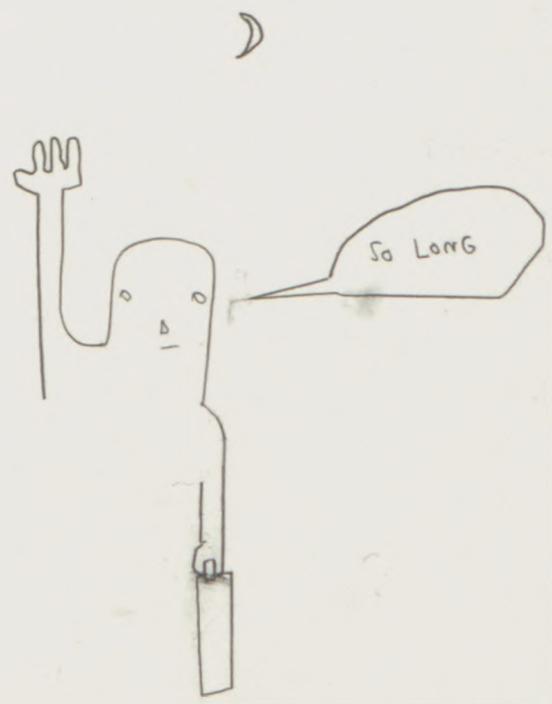
they push up

from stick grass

smelling

of under-earth  
activities & with warm

devious lines



William Hardy Stewart

## CONTRIBUTOR BIOS

**Renée Aubern:** Renée Aubern's photography has been featured in galleries in Sacramento, California; namely, Día de los Muertos with the *All Saints All Souls* collection (2007) and Second Saturday (2008). In 2008, Aubern was the recipient of the Laura Vromann Memorial Scholarship with the photo "La Belle Garçon."

**Mia Bruner:** Mia Bruner is a junior at Lang. She is currently on a year abroad at Oxford University to study poetry under Jamie Mckendrick. Her work has appeared in *RELEASE*, and *Modulo*. She is an intern for the Belladonna\* Collaborative, a hub of feminist literary action. At The New School, Bruner co-founded an annual memorial reading in honor of Lang professor and radical poet/activist, Akilah Oliver as well as a regular student/faculty reading series.

**Katherine Delgado:** Katherine Delgado graduated from Lang in 2010 with a degree in Literary Studies. She draws vegetables and posts them here: <http://squashparty.tumblr.com/>. She hails from California.

**Michael Doherty:** Michael Doherty is a Creative Writing sophomore at Lang. He is 19 and never thinks about the future.

**Sharon Dolin:** Sharon Dolin's fifth book, Whirlwind, is due out from the University of Pittsburgh Press next fall. Her fourth book, Burn and Dodge (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008) won the AWP Donald Hall Prize in Poetry. She is the Writer-in-Residence at Eugene Lang College, The New School and she also teaches at the Unterberg Poetry Center of the 92nd Street Y.

**Martina Gordon:** Martina Gordon is 19 and is studying Theater and Literary Studies at Lang. She likes singing, chocolate covered bananas, and submitting late entries to literary magazines that she helps to edit.

**Lisa Gonzalez:** Lisa Gonzalez is a fifth year BA/BFA student studying Visual Arts and Culture and Media Studies in the Arts in Context program at Lang. She completed her Parsons BFA Photography thesis project this past May, which depicted American ideologies of the suburban landscape. "*Untitled (Toaster)*" is a Digital C-Print photograph that is part of Gonzalez's Lang thesis project, "Housewife".

**Grace J. Lee:** Grace J. Lee lives in Brooklyn and works at Frenchkiss Records. She has had work in The Journal, Contributor Magazine, and Thought Catalog. She likes a few people, some animals, and all babes.

**Ace McNamara:** Ace McNamara has had work appear in Boog City and 12th Street. He lives in Brooklyn with his two plants. A recent New School alum, he now places objects on plastic & is working on designing a tarot deck.

**Lauren Nicole Nixon:** Lauren Nicole Nixon is a Brooklyn-based artist representative and poet. Nixon holds an M.A. in Arts Politics from New York University. Recent and forthcoming work can be seen in Bone Bouquet, Sugar House, The Tulane Review, apt, 491, Jelly Bucket, No, Dear, Spillway and In Posse. She is a Pushcart Prize nominee. [www.laurennicolenixon.com](http://www.laurennicolenixon.com)

**Paula North:** Paula North is a painter who lives in New York City. In addition to paintings, she has done cover illustrations and graphics for a number of literary presses.

**Charles North:** Charles North's poems in this issue are from his recent collection What It Is Like: New and Selected Poems (Turtle Point/Hanging Loose), which heads NPR's list of Best Poetry Books of 2011.

**Natalie Raymond:** Natalie Raymond is a Gemini, poet, cat lady who lives in Brooklyn. Her work has appeared in 491 Magazine & Poetry for the Masses. She was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize & her favourite colour is pink. [www.natalieraymond.com](http://www.natalieraymond.com)

**Barie-Claire Rogers:** Barie-Claire Rogers is an artist and writer living in Manhattan. Her photo featured on the cover was taken with a pinhole camera made by the artist herself. Her fashion writing can be seen at: [www.cityist.com/author/barie-claire-rogers/](http://www.cityist.com/author/barie-claire-rogers/)

**Ariella Ruth:** Ariella Ruth is a poet from Boston, Massachusetts. She received her BA in Poetry from Eugene Lang College The New School for Liberal Arts and her MFA in Writing and Poetics from the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University. Currently, she is working on poems about floods, stale, dried-up creeks, and stories that arise from red sand. She lives in Boulder, Colorado.

**Molly Schulman:** Molly Schulman is Eugene Lang alum that still writes poems, eats tacos, and "works" "in" "publishing."

**Henry Shapiro:** Henry Shapiro is a Lang faculty member who teaches both Literature and Music at the college. He has been at Lang since 1989 and is now, (he believes) the oldest faculty member. In 2003 he won the Distinguished University Teaching Award. Very often he teaches a course called The Elements of Poetry—Sound, Meter, Rhythm, Structure, Forms—which, (he guesses), will go part of the way toward explaining why he writes sonnets. Shapiro was educated at Oberlin, Columbia, and Balliol College, Oxford. Universities he has taught at include Mannes College of Music, University of California at Berkeley, LaGuardia Community College, and SUNY Purchase. Publications include fiction (*Salt River Review*), non-fiction (*Bennington Review*, *Ballet Review*), and poetry (*Exile*, *H.O.W.*, and next February, *Pennsylvania Literary Journal*).

**Zach Whitesides:** Zach Whitesides was born in Kentucky in 1991 and lived around the South his whole life before coming to New York for college. He is an upcoming junior at Lang, majoring in writing poetry. He was published in the last issue of *Release*. Whitesides believes that poetry should investigate and communicate with the world and stories around it.

The Literary Journal of Eugene Lang College,  
The New School for Liberal Arts