

ancient party

COLLABORATIONS IN
BALTIMORE
2000-2010

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....So, just recently, when I found myself on the brink of the final *squawk!* it dawned on me to look again for the key to that ancient party where I might find my appetite once more.

Arthur Rimbaud, *A Season in Hell*

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Preface

This book was compiled about five years before publication, and edited about a year and a half before. In the intervening year, both Chris Toll and Blaster Al Ackerman have passed from this sphere to the next, incomprehensibly. A couple of months before Chris died, he helped copy-edit the text for me. He was always doing this for writers he knew, volunteering his eagle eyes and fearless red pencil. When we met to discuss it over Yeunglings at the Club Charles one day in August, he insisted the book should be no more than 100 pages, and preferably shorter, half the length it is. I demurred. I'd been sitting on the manuscript for years, and did not want to delay its publication with another round of edits.

He might have been right, but for whatever reason, I can't figure out which darlings to kill. So here it is in all its bulging, swollen glory. And despite letting Chris down in this way, I'm glad to be putting this extra batch of his and Blaster's words out into the world, and grateful for the time we spent together writing them.

Megan McShea, 2014

Introduction

This is a book of collaborative writings created by a group of Baltimore writers between 2000 and 2010. Collaborative writing is an ancient practice that has taken many forms over the centuries (*cf.* renga, dada, Oulipo, New York School, fluxus, etc.), and contemporary collaborations of every stripe are popping up all around. As such, this book doesn't claim any new or unique practice, but is more of a monograph. It documents a particular site of collaboration among a particular group of writers, formed of friends and friends of friends, with the particular aesthetic impulses that arose at the time. Experimental culture has strong roots in Baltimore, and I'm sure that helped the writing happen the way it did.

Collaborations happen in all kinds of ways; the pieces in this book were all written simultaneously in the same room. It was an improvisation, and they haven't been edited to smooth over the odd artifacts of our spontaneity. There are a handful of pieces in this book that went through revisions by their authors (some of the "Golden" poems in the Parallel Stories section are a result of protest, if I remember right, by writers who wanted to work on their pieces), but most of the writing here is pretty much the way it was written in the moment.

My only claim on the title of editor is that I have selected among our many, many works to produce this volume. When we met, I always absconded with the writings at the end if I could and typed them up for everyone. So I had most everything on hand. When I began to sift through them, my selection criteria

varied. Some pieces were chosen because writers showed a lot of agility with language within the constraints of the exercise. Some are included because the pieces just really sing and hold together, somewhat miraculously given the set-up. Some I liked because the group sort of peeks through the piece, or maybe you get a window onto the social aspects of it, the personalities and relationships. In others there seems to be a many-headed voice we conjured up and spoke through together. Some got picked because of a zinger or two that I just could not pass up. Lots of those, in fact.

When a group met we usually did a lot of chatting, and in truth sometimes the hanging out part seemed like the main thing about it. But that was part of how it all worked, too. The conversation warmed us up to each other, created a set of words and phrases and ideas to refer to once we got down to writing, and this sometimes allowed for a faint thread of coherence to run through the goulash that let loose on our pages any given night. We brought our solitudes with us and let them run into each other, sometimes aligning or mixing, rarely resolving. Writers happily collided on page after page and it made all kinds of noise.

It helped if everyone could be hospitable to the cloud of influences each writer brought with them. Aside from the obvious stylistic dissonance that comes with this kind of thing, you had to accept that there was nothing you could do about it when someone tossed some goofy or scatological words next to your elegiac ones, for instance, or some mushy sentiment dumped on your perfect moment of satire. Things devolved into a sort of rough play sometimes, with writers undermining other writers' intentions. But if you could put up with all that, the reward was a) you

forgot yourself and your writerly blockages, and b) you may have found you had access to ways of writing that you could never have come to on your own, and if not, c) there were usually snacks. I think the best pieces churn with unpredictable movement amongst their words generated by the group's attention and energy. They may not be moving as in *emotionally* moving, but I think they are moving as in they are not inert. As such, reading them may require a nearly athletic attention. So reader, if you take it on, you might not be moved but you will probably start vibrating.

Personally, for a long time I have used writing to ameliorate anxieties I have about communication. Somehow this practice has been a relief from what often feels like a daily failure to make myself understood in the world. It's also a challenge of sorts to the relentless cooptation of language that is going on in the commodified cultural and political landscapes in which language often takes place, where the making of meaning is taken away from us and is issued from some low place, where it's used instead to get us to do stuff – buy things, vote for things, stay inside, or outside, this or that line. In that context, it's easy to forget language belongs to us in the most fundamental way. You can ditch the prefab ideas any time and make your own meaning from scratch.

Often when I'm writing by myself, it's as if I'm using a made-up language, communicating some absurdly nuanced or half-understood little facet of some pockmark of existence that's only ever true for half a second. It's personal, it's existential, and it's usually kind of small. It's a machine made of many small moving parts that does nothing but delight in its own functioning. Its existence is its only justification for its

existence. I, a particular language-using self, make a particular word-idea at a particular time and place, and put a little word-pin in some giant conceptual map, with ever-shifting dimensions and relations to other conceptual maps that extend well beyond the limits of my perception. Then if it's shared, the writer and the reader get to make all the rules and assign all the meanings and so, in this field of play, we are free.

In the writing group, I got to do this *in a group* that actively received my message, no matter how unhitched my usage was from any obvious referent, and then responded, built on it, sent it back transformed. And we just kept this volley going until we made something. This book is a selection of the artifacts of that play. For me, the work in this book is evidence that my tiny, personal acts of language were shared and made meaningful by others acting on them, and I cannot possibly overstate how satisfying that is. My heart is full with gratitude for the writers who participated, and this book is my thank you present to them.

As I put the book together, I had this fantasy that people I may or may not know would read it and start doing writing collaborations themselves. For those who might want to give these games a try, I have included the “rules” of our writing games at the beginning of each section. Know that we made up new exercises all the time, and not all our games made it into this book. It was always funny to me that whenever we met and began to write, everyone was often very concerned about the rules. They wanted instructions. They wanted to know, can we X? Do we have to Y? I think because I often hosted, they would sometimes look at me and ask me about the rules, even when they were aware that we were making up this

exercise at that very moment and there actually weren't any rules. I always wanted to say, we can do whatever we want, but then I didn't say that. I made up a rule, or if someone else did I said yes, that's the rule, because that's really what we needed to begin.

So that's my advice for the new collaborator: just make up some rules. There are a million more collaborations yet to be invented, and all of the ones in this book can be done a million different ways. So get to it. Everybody wins.

Acrostics and Mesostics

Write a word or phrase vertically on a page, with one letter on each line. For acrostics, write a line beginning with the letter on each line. For mesostics, the letter on each line can be used anywhere in the written line. Each writer writes a line and passes the page to the next writer. Lines do not need to be written in order.

Acrostics and Mesostics

Blaster Al Ackerman

Be mine
Leaky
lAsher
Snakehead
Taser party
bE evil
a tReat, a meat

peAches
and Lichen

Apprehended
unCorked
cracK and be
lonE Elysian
Rumpus
or just ruMp
rumped And
wriNged

John Eaton and Megan McShea

Acrostics and Mesostics

Rupert Rupert

I will putteR until my ass falls
off golf cariboU
strawberries naP until supper
please make me ruE to life like a cowboy!
Rrrrr rolf rolf
slut absoluT Rupert that silvery
liquid gas fouR five and six
my tears make yoU soggy, so you live under a box.
I sleep in a Pipe
with lifEr in my shoes!
in the future we will Read with our lips and stomachs.
love you, mean iT.
oh! Repeat *that* again
Cackle fruit coUld we start over? the river
and though the Please! Frivolity cannot dispel
my melancholy!
my house my someonE huff huff trigger mama jo.
I work the crosswoRd until my eyes fail
I like to take the Turnip to bed with me.

*Blaster Al Ackerman, Rupert Wondolowski, Chris
Toll, Megan McShea, John Eaton*

Acrostics and Mesostics

ric royer

redemptive
cillia feels funny
a hollow epicenter

roaring through los angeles
optimal syntax
cudly, curled leg
unincorporated
cupid pricks his leer

John Eaton and Megan McShea

Acrostics and Mesostics

Prettyboy

Perched
Rarefied
Eel
meager Tactics
transienT and lewd
as if the bees were Yodeling

we talked again about aBout your
Omnipresent dawn flicker
You're a bulb

Rupert Wondolowski, John Eaton, Megan McShea

Acrostics and Mesostics

Ordinary Pleasantries

they fOrgot the kitchen list
they foRgot sugar pants
they haD no time to go back
but insIst on repetition, yet,
I have eNjoyed this rain
some hAm socks shoving up
youR armpits
like honorarY degrees when you spoke

A Plea for the bitten
“iLl, I’m ill!” she screamed
and the Elephant wiped his eyes
the wAy children are eager
iS pretty repugnant
when A cop is pregnant
everyone’s herNia found in a stone
ample Tamines are just not a joke
pRay for Armenita
If q-tips had
fEelings
Stay home

*Stephanie Barber, Adam Robinson, Chris Toll, Blaster
Al Ackerman, Megan McShea*

Acrostics and Mesostics

Amy Is Quietly Sobbing

All of my little swells have taken to the future but
My full fledged cookie dealership seems so nostalgic
Yes we have no concern for your pleasure

It is disgusting in a way many things are and
Solid in a way that goes against nature

Quick like static of like rain
Umbrellas make surprisingly effective weapons
If you know when it's raining
Eat like a wizard
Travel like a clock
Lick cats and with this, gain compassion and regal
Yarn made from socks made from

Sugar pants a hunching
Orders to the swollen foam
Bubble along the interweb
Bubble along the
Iliad falls – out on rt 40 past mike's whatsit shop
Noted frick that included
Gggnnngghh, as the idiot ~~says~~ swallows

*Stephanie Barber, Adam Robinson, Chris Toll, Blaster
Al Ackerman, Megan McShea*

Biographies

Each writer composes a short biography or autobiography, either fictional or nonfictional. One by one, each writer reads the biography they've written, but just mouthing the words, not actually saying anything out loud. The rest of the group transcribes the words they think the biographer is mouthing.

Biographies

Mortimer Hadley (original)

I am Mortimer Hadley. I was born in Challenger, Mississippi, along the shore of the Missouri River where seventeen dogs had recently died of exposure to second-hand smoke. No one really understood this at the time, but it would prove to be a fateful pre-episode to my life as an epidemiologist. I attended the Milton Military Pentecostal School for wayward Boys until the 9th grade, when I ran off with my guardian angel and began practicing medicine on unsuspecting rural families. Some of my favorite and locally renowned diagnoses are Pale Ghost Disease, discovered in Fallow Holler in the Ozarks, Hollow Stem Fever, which overwhelmed a colony of rabbits in eastern Kansas, and Haddock Mouth, which infested a flock of tiny angels in my hometown of Challenger.

Megan McShea

Biographies

Mortimer Hadley (transcriptions)

I am Putpott Riding. I was born in South Beach along the coast of whenever. It was heavenly and moldy. Although it was really strenuous for me in the formative years in Ecology I did my. It was wild but right after I was wasted in my family. Memory of an envelope water. Was a rabbit. Fine, back alley. Jaguar.

Bonnie Jones

I am a player. Maybe a talk face. There's a pleasing people please feel like a pope. Sure you think people are funny but hmmm I've been here begotten and but forever funniness is real and lonely. Who do you fleeting talker?

John Eaton

I am Wonder Man. I was born in Mississippi South of the un pipy dog. I am rice. Gone whistling off the bone. No one isn't drinking. Before me was the northern muchgrow. Pela Meepa pea. When ran off with my wife, she took 45 minutes to poot. What a pointy meechu. Mamma, thank you.

Ric Royer

Biographies

Barley B. Jones (original)

I am Barley B. Jones born and raised in Metuchen, NJ. I was fed on wheat chaff and rockfish. I never knew my parents. Instead I was adopted by The Friends of Middlesex County. They raised me in the lodge. They were very strict but instilled in me a deep sense of pride and awe. I will never forget that Winter. I watched many daytime soap operas and made many pies.

Bonnie Jones

Biographies

Barley B. Jones (transcriptions)

I am Mark P. Dolt who tries sweet juice. Our family played games. I love you Mommy. I found you filthy like lease make do. Me late he line. Marcus did hallow allow it yo bid. A job.

Megan McShea

I am Bonnie Shear Jones. More to nice to meet. Was friends with Frampton. I love mommy. I'm going to muthafucker bitch slap on your ass. I love me in the leg. Monk me. I would flibberate. Mochia to.

Ric Royer

I am partly cold. Poor dustweed. Drive a refrigerator. But I went home. I want to be a helicopter.

Rupert Wondolowski

I am Martha Porridge. An absolute bible levee. Give me a chance. Loudly fun is a organ, you know.

John Eaton

Biographies

Mr. “Floral City Campsite” Eaton (original)

I am mister “floral city campsite” Eaton. I am also the one who answers the phones in this place. My interests include mixing paint with the snack box, chipping Eva Hesse sculpture with the bandsaw, and crimping the hair of passers-by. If you take a seat I’ll be right with you, otherwise feel free to experience the rapture – after all, those are dreadful pants.

John Eaton

Biographies

Mr. "Floral City Campsite" Eaton (transcriptions)

I am Peter Falk Levy. I am all the way you voter. My dream date is thinking about clam bottom. Shepherd never had time to, and told me that I had a fat bottom. Of course with him wearing clam. After all these men would never make it.

Bonnie Jones

I am Peter Fornicator. I am all-knowing in ways of foam lining. My teacher please back to back with my job. Dummy feels it mint plop. If you take the train I will go with you to the rapture. Otherwise, I'm famous. After all, those dogs never bitch.

Megan McShea

I am Victor Vargas and the one to vote for. Put the phone in the meadow. And put me there matinee. If you like this twice a chapter. After all those are big beads.

Rupert Wondolowski

I am Bitch Flood levee. I home alone for fathers day. on the phone. my niece is on the moon. magic. let me sniff your levitator. the later brisk Bach. Loon. The lice fever. if. After school, the rivers really pitched.

Ric Royer

Biographies

Saul Wrangler (original)

I am dapper Saul Wrangler. Five years was all it took to build myself a paradise off of Key West. The Magic Banana Casino! The first of its kind – a prog-psychrock fusion themed gamblers Mecca. From Spooky Tooth slots to the King Crimson lounge we bring not only solid gold aspirations of gold, but double platinum memories of deep, mathematical trippy sound.

Ric Royer

Saul Wrangler (transcriptions)

I am Double Dog Rather. 5-year returning champion. You better suck my ass. Huff, muff, me white the magic banana of Cicero! The first of it's kind. A block of huge ape never mattered. From Gibraltar on the side to the gathering sound. Refrain Doctor Slideshow. Never knew. Never knew. But double blockbuster memory of spectacle trapeze.

Bonnie Jones

Biographies

I am Dapper Joe Planner. For five was hard to do. I am paralyzed from the neck up. Off off teeth wax. The best spectacular shallow! First on the ad – I'm rock near sane dapper magnum. From smoothie to transmatic to the sea rubber cow, ream-ray, salad nose, asthma record, I know. But supper tannum, paper is asleep. Badalope. Entrapment now!

Megan McShea

I am Samuel Gompers socks and hairnet. Sure I'm a bad boy. Please what am I. I expound and expand and go. First game, walk a few. Family over on the side. You are resting over there. One more thing. I have a cold double yours. Baby feet postulate a trembler.

John Eaton

I am 7 foot tall. Five thousand pounds of hog. On Wednesday the best ice skater in the world. The first of its kind dj, deep devin football from the smoothie drummer of the house. Replay Jack dose. First potato ketchup. Peppery of the deep. Mental but dropping down.

Rupert Wondolowski

Blues Poems

Each writer comes up with the first line of a blues lyric, which is repeated twice. The writer hides the line but writes the last word of the lyric where the next writer can see it. The next writer writes the final line of the blues lyric, rhyming its last word with the given word from the first lines.

Blues Poems

Without my feet I'd be a slidy, stumpy man
Without my feet I'd be a slidy, stumpy man
Wrap that pig in a blanket, lay it in the pan.

You busted my lip so big baby
that I can use it as a shelf
You busted my lip so big baby
I'm gonna use it as a shelf
Got a hog on my right here,
and on my left I got this elf.

These 'taters taste like baby shoes
And they've given me the runs
These 'taters taste like baby shoes
And they've given me the runs
If I could get down from this tree
I might stop rainin on everyone.

Got a rabid dog
he's sitting in my lap
Got a rabid dog
he's sitting in my lap
It's so soupy in the kitchen
My old dog's about to snap.

*Rupert Wondolowski, Mark Hossfeld, Blaster Al
Ackerman, Megan McShea, Bonnie Jones*

Conversation Pieces

The most unstructured exercise of all. Writers hang out, have a conversation, and use words from the conversation to write individual poems.

Conversation Pieces

“I’m the talent handler”

“Time for Beef”

An urchin dithers in the thirteenth chapter

Further reducing it after that, using that as a jumping off point... Infinitely more gruesome when done by camera instead of wrestling ... The gangsters toast a “Hotel of Happiness” Toy trucks tractors and robots undulating hands step in on the action--baby spitting on the raunchy ghetto mother in Influences from sea colleagues ... where you take a conversation with a robot ... Krazy banjo solo ... the party under the bulb – they say it’s abdullah’s restaurant.

More balm for the black roof ... midway between the shower and the teeth, psychic teeth .. I could keep this nonsequitor flowing like a toxic waste tube – oh God! Put the phone down ... after an exhale or two we do have several pungent towel-boys. A wonderful map of the day ...

“Rallying smart people” ambitious polyester – but when it flops it’s meaty. Ghetto robots to the rescue for the ungente shadow was collapsed its dark patch under its own depiction. Timid noise debut. The tin job was needed. Peanut composition only ever been saxophonic this far south. Rupe says: “Counted my chickens before there were firm boundaries” planting the seeds of funk ... beautiful breath of asking. Go with the burn – the scribblings of strange fear ...

My main fear: M&G shorts

Urination in the pre-nebbish architecture

Mark Hossfeld

Conversation Pieces

Time for Beef I

Yetta misery
Newton tractors
Einhorn war collects a
Kindly misery toy
robots ghetto trucks
uninhibited training
mother dithers beef again
If you don't weaken
texture flops another
cops another toxic doorbell
Sweet, to butcher orders
a situation all-day tube
stealing chicken writing boundaries
how Larry sip and bite
planted seed lunch
advancing odd chicken beer
pain ward hokey sniper
apologizes while perverse details
tasty shorts

Specific free for all
said game rebels
feeling architecture problem
son says no more creepy once a week
Canada or the pope
or the canadian pope
went for cheap laughs

horrible boring Philadelphia fabulous

Megan McShea

Conversation Pieces

Time for Beef II

Glunk! Goop...

Ascribbling

Rallying smart people

whenever I go to

my neighbor

I think of psychic

of the office

of university

of high school

of ed wood

of

Pardon my giggling

Scribble scribble

and the sound of paper

a breath

a clearing of throat

a burning

a situation

an all day

an itch

behind an ear

Mine?

Mine?

A stanza of worth?

To see human fantasy

A bridge to munch

cowardly noise thing

thing of tin job

a stanza munching

Conversation Pieces

I'm amazed
I'm amazed
A vibe house of "NO...!"
...or will one of the wilt
here's the date
the little ran and ran
and planted a lunch we had
there's a bit of possible movie
the visit was a possibly
advancing interest

robots toy
ghetto mother
the accident
there's no place
Charlie – the Lindberg baby –
Spitting defiance on the kinko's window
In 1920 national geographic
Scanned uninhibitedly
this raunchy thrust
quivering article
the article teaches fun
a speed-reading gist
early training
can I read it?
Hmmmmmm
Ahhh!?
Does ghetto trucks
Dithers
and jumping
camera and toast toast toast!

Conversation Pieces

Time for Beef II (cont.)

a talent
a jumping
a gruesome
Time Beef
Robots ghetto the
there's place – the baby
defiance the window
1920 geographic wet marks
uninhibited raunchy
quivering the teachers
a reading early
can read?
Ahhhh?
Ghetto dithers
jumping and toast!
Talent a gruesome glunk
Boundaries erect successful
In next the editor
commented on report
just stay socialist
stay in one ticket
Vermont place to stay during the trial
south of guns
my old boss Mason Dixon
warmed up to no kindness
mothers or wives of cheap skates
such organizations in a courtroom
a friend, a non-artist like Guy Debord
or is that a chance operation of modernism?
or simply a faith in an oval of tradition?
push against the crime photos

Conversation Pieces

Time for Beef II (cont.)

study the statement many prisoners made
each one in art pants
1920 did.
appoint physical exertion
movement of prisoners with a treacherous nose

John Eaton

The Defense

My brother had a dream once
that he didn't get very far
in Canada – creepy – his face
is a creep person when he
comes out of his creepy I don't talk to him
It is late
the constitution just crumpled
and so am I

John Eaton

Conversation Pieces

Ass Pants

Jacqueline's ass pants
cheap ass pants
camouflage as pants
rave ass pants
gun shop ass pants
intriguing ass pants
huge billboard
blood ass pants
worm pants
poem abs
evening ass pants
Now is the point where I ask
my smoking friends for a cigarette
Imagine pants....
Massachusetts ass
Ashcroft ass pants....?
Tasty pants
short ass
interesting pants
the fear pants
join pants
date pants
add an ass to dan breen somehow...
BOUNDARIES CHICKEN!

John Eaton

Dialogues

Writers decide on a title for everyone to use. Each writes a dialogue using that title in a set amount of time. Five minutes, for example. For longer periods, using a shared first and last line can be helpful. Lines can be grabbed from any source or made up.

Dialogues

Tiny and Young I

Tiny: Now keep up budding. Now keep up budding.

Young: Ears porn. Ears porn.

Tiny: I am tiny.

Young: I am young.

Together: There it's old overbred.

Young: Waiting man nice who spend soft til' twin best
away another brings chewed ships.

Tiny: To skirts it's nice what spends up after ululation

Young: (ululates --)

Tiny: Then into the final mole sexual stem alum
already gives when few to what's news age people
won by make you feel like it's a curse you're from low
testicle tapin land.

Young: You're from self-dental HMO role model new
with the crabs.

Blaster Al Ackerman

Dialogues

Tiny and Young II

Mid-stage is a heap resembling a bed. Occasional stirring on heap reveals portions of slumbering human. From the human within the heap comes muffled moans of “Tiny and young... tiny and young...” “ After a glass-rattling sound of a huge engine passing nearby two forms walk/shuffle onto stage. They resemble dust clumps.

Clump 1: The odor was coming from here.

Clump 2: They took out a man’s spine once and carried him out in a pail. I like it when it gets like jelly. Like Lucky Louie’s leg.

The form on the bed wakens and sticks its head out from the heap “to see or to carry?” the form asks the dust clumps.

Clump 1: Which would it be for the fetid? Someone’s left a pickle jar near Liz Taylor’s hairspray, a spray of webbing so gelid it never lards, causing eyes that watch it to glaze and implode.

Rupert Wondolowski

Dialogues

Tiny and Young III

Fishmarket, 120% humidity, empty stomach, The Baron and the Baroque Artist stroll past stalls of smoked mackerel, gut buckets, and filleted salmon. A crowd is gathering for a fish flying contest.

The Baron: Confabulation!

The Baroque Artist: Oh soothsaying tyranny! (The Baroque Artist grabs the Baron's tailcoat in a near miss of flying fish guts) All manner of things great and small. What ignominy befalls us.

The Baron: I've left my good galoshes at home (The Baron takes a face full of mackerel)

The BA: I'm no historian – but this is unprecedented. (to CROWD) This is a great man here!

The Barron: (Wiping mackerel off his front) I'm no lacemaker, but this is... (takes it in the stomach with a halibut that flops unmercilessly on the ground as the crowd gathers around)

The BA: Look! (Points to the fish) A great gesture, the last noble gasp of the tiny & young!

The Baron: I'd prefer to ignore your misconceptions of dinner for a draught of ale.

Bonnie Jones

Dialogues

Do Not Let the Water Boil I

The Bowl inches over until it touches the shoe. The shoe draws away until the mat it is standing on is seen to be a really large slice of ham. The slice of ham begins to curl at the edges until goat pills are seen nesting beneath it. The goat pills begin to move and coalesce into the worst model of a bracelet ever seen rolls across the floor until it is stopped by the hand made of rock. The hand made of rock, unable to move, remains unmoving. The Bowl, The Shoe, the slice of ham, and the goat pill bracelet all gather around the hand made of rock and chide it with the words: "Do not let the water boil." Loud braying sounds from off stage. Two weeks pass. A tiny pickle floats free suddenly, The Bowl inches until it touches the shoe...

Blaster Al Ackerman

Dialogues

Do Not Let the Water Boil II

Ma: You've been over by that stove a might long time
Little Debbie.

Little Debbie: I like to watch the water ripple in the
pot and picture it as a galaxy.

Ma: Well don't let that pot water boil. Boiling water's
no good to anybody. It disappears and you're left with
moist air.

LD: Would Jesus walk on boiling water?

Ma: It ain't right to talk of Jesus feet unless you're
ready to clean them.

LD: Boiling water would clean my porcelain unicorns
good. Erase all touches of other's hands, from other's
prying fingers.

Ma: I tell you not to let that water boil Little Debbie.
I'm not crossing that plutonium field again today.

LD: You're right Ma. I better take this pot water off
the stove right now. I better take firm steps in these
here canvas shoes.

Little Debbie grabs the pot off the stove and throws
the near boiling water onto Ma's face. Ma shrieks as
her mask comes off revealing a tiny pickle.

Rupert Wondolowski

Dialogues

Do Not Let the Water Boil III

(2 Hasidic Jews, Abe & Moishe)

Abe: Nice hair today.

Moishe: Ahhh, it's nothing. Whipped it up in just a few hours.

Abe: Did you take photos?

Moishe: Nah, I burned my neck with the curling iron though, and my hat nearly caught a blaze.

Abe: What? Did you boil it?

Moishe: what? The Hat? Doesn't seem like a good idea.

Abe: No, the curling iron? Did you boil the curling iron?

Moishe: What?

Abe: Don't you remember last week when you had that premonition? Remember? Do not let the water boil when preparing your socket wrench as a curling iron.

Moishe: Hmmm.. I remember the premonition (dreamy look) "New Monkey pants for all the baby boys" but .. I don't recall.

Abe: Typical – in one ear and out the other.

Bonnie Jones

Dialogues

Picnic Shoulder I

[a windy day, 2 people on a median strip of a main road]

[they have to shout over the traffic noise]

A: Ouch!

B: What, is your picnic shoulder acting up? [A pours the wine]

A: Picnic shoulder, ham shoes, you name it.

B: Ouch!

A: Where are all my raffle tickets?

B: You said, Michael will sing, Mary will play the piano

A: Right, never the other way around. [They drink their wine]

B: You don't need any raffle tickets, not here.

A: I need you to do something for me. [The traffic stops at the red light. They wait for it to start]

B: What did you say?

A: I need you to forge a signature on my contract.

B: I will forge your signature if you promise to handle the press.

A: That's like saying I have to tie my pants in a knot, you!

Megan McShea

Dialogues

Picnic Shoulder II

[Lucretia squatting by the duck pond with a face like a facsimile] [night] [no moon]

Lucretia: Just suppose... that this is what night time is like right? Similar? Comparable? An application of some dark copy?

The Duck: I'm surrounded by water, even my rotator cuff is wet. I might as well be a ripple.

Lucretia: The grass is as dark as the water is as dark. You might as well be a duck.

[Lucretia lights a match and drops it next to the duck]
[the duck moves towards Lucretia but she only sees the first part of his advance]

The Duck: I might as well be a match too – I sizzle up real good.

Lucretia: I like the way you move. You might as well be dark and then I can have a picnic shoulder with my iced tea.

[the duck moves away, Lucretia doesn't see]

Bonnie Jones

Dialogues

Picnic Shoulder III

Irma: As I've been trying to tell you, Bob –

Bob: Hey, there it goes again!

Irma: As I've been –

Bob: Jesus, would you look at that!

Irma: Bob, please, this is something serious, I've –

Bob: Amazing! Look at that thing!

Irma: If you'll just please shut your fucking mouth for 5 seconds!

Bob: Huh?

Irma: If you'll just shut up, then maybe I can tell you about what happened to my shoulder out at the picnic!

Irma's Shoulder: The ants have taken control of me, I'm growing many legs, I'm attacking Irma's neck.

Bob: Wow – You shoulder's devouring your head
Irma, did you know that?

Blaster Al Ackerman

Doubling

Each writer writes a sentence on a piece of paper. They pass the page, and the next writer writes a sentence with twice as many words in it, using all the words from the initial sentence and whatever words they choose to add. The next writer doubles the doubled sentence, and so on, until no one can take it anymore.

Doubling

I. Martha snarled “no” in her sweet lengthy drawl.

II. “Sweet Jehovah Martha, it’s been a lengthy drawl since our bodies snarled all in,” Todd replied.

III. Martha “drawled” ten bodies in memory a snarl of lengthy sweets its crux of Todd it’s since been hours since Jehovah replied to us all!

IV. Mary Todd Lincoln, ever the Jehovah plucking sweets monger, uttered a snarl in spite of lengthy hours spent bitching us all out for the drawled bodies that replied to Martha Washington in a ten no-point crux that’s been on my mind since memory failed me about eighteen words ago.

*Rupert Wondolowski, Matt Turner, Blaster Al
Ackerman, Megan McShea*

Doubling

I. Squirreling them frequently is one of the key doctrines that she noticed among the very nervous inmates.

II. Let's just say I've noticed you squirreling keys to inmates, frequently among the very pretty ones, making the first-timers nervous, and the one with Jesus is no friend of Santa or any of them.

III. Squirreling, squirreling, first-timers nervous Santa, frequently squelching among the very pretty ones, squirreling, let's just say the Jesus keys is noticed making open inmates among the scabrous squirreling, no friend but heaving bun buddy or any of oven hatch them squirreling and the one with you I've done plankton-like floor wheeling candelabra Liberace moustache juice dangling and heaving and almost squirreling, but not, not really – well kinda almost.

IV. Squirreling any noun has our consciousness also squirreling of the been much these uses first-time oven word is to may it nervous hatch is common the be to Santa them a use work external, refer frequently squirreling recent at of in to squelching and import least French the the among the from since psychoanalyst form distorted the one the the Lacan of products very with French, Surrealists, and art of pretty you and with critics works, ones I've bears reference such or

Doubling

IV. (cont.)

squirreling done the to as internal,
let's plankton-like traces all as
just floor of kinds Sartre in
say wheeling a of uses the
the candelabra long imagined the case
Jesus Liberace history or term of
keys moustache of invented to fantasies
is juice theorization meanings refer daydreams,
noticed dangling about it to similarly
making and the is the in
open heaving imaginary a intentional poetics
inmates and within key objects but
among almost French concept of in
the squirreling philosophy in the epistemological
scabrous but aesthetics work imaginary studies.”
Squirreling not literary as consciousness
no not theory, diverse as
friend really cultural as opposed
but well anthropology that to
heaving kinda and it's the
bun almost psychoanalysis recent perceptual
buddy as the history or
or a term also “rational

*Rupert Wondolowski, Matt Turner, Blaster Al
Ackerman, Megan McShea*

Footnotes

Each writer writes a simple statement on a piece of paper; something that happened that day, for instance. They pass the page, and the next writer footnotes a word or phrase in the given statement. The page is passed again and again, each time with a footnote added. Footnotes may also be footnoted.

Footnotes

Before heading downtown¹ I bought² gas (\$3.85³/gallon)⁴ and picked up^a the dry cleaning.⁶

¹ I'm not really clear on the parameter of downtown and believe that it may be an idea rather than an actual place.

² In our late capitalist era, we still cling to the notion of being able to purchase, and therefore own, rather than expend, energy, however temporarily. The rising cost of fuel is the perfect metaphor for our rising suspicion that we are kidding ourselves.

³ It is noted that today gas probably costs \$3.87/gallon, where the increase can be termed "up", as in "picked up."

^(a) where "up" means "from", as in "received from"...

⁴ How long does a lawnmower run on one gallon? Have suburban lawns⁽⁵⁾ grown raggedy in a hedonistic response to this inevitable crisis?

⁵ In poorer neighborhoods, you'll often find electric lawnmowers, which must be attached with a long extension cord – and these lawns are often raggedy anyway.

⁶ This: (chocolate smudge) ⁽⁷⁾

⁷ Lauren's face.

*Lauren Bender, Rupert Wondolowski, Jamie Perez,
Amy Peterson, Ric Royer, Megan McShea*

Footnotes

Yesterday I coped with my sister taking herself to the ER³ by napping⁵ until the rain¹ came in through the screen and hit me in the face.²

³ “Early Readers,” a pre-Victorian era support⁴ group for anti-revolutionaries.

⁴ Our own writing group is modeled after these same ideas, with the addition of gumminess.

⁵ I dreamed that my cat⁶ became a giraffe and started a sewing club.⁷

⁶ Beasts that get children all pumped up

⁷ of course it would be tricky for a giraffe to sew, what with the long, bendy neck and hard little hooves.

¹ Big hairy dunk Hampden guy.

² Adam blowout area.

*Lauren Bender, Rupert Wondolowski, Jamie Perez,
Amy Peterson, Ric Royer, Megan McShea*

Footnotes

There are some dogs¹ that are terrified of silver² balloons.⁶

¹ Did you³ see that big dude push that skinny chick up against his jeep and shout “Now you know what it was like for me in Panama City?”

² often in science fiction movies⁴ the conniving villain is covered in this type of foil.

³ gentle reader.

⁴ I have never seen these kinds of movies, for I prefer what has happened to what may be.⁵

⁵ snob.

⁶ Which makes me think of ballrooms, which made me nervous all through my reproductive years.

*Lauren Bender, Rupert Wondolowski, Jamie Perez,
Amy Peterson, Ric Royer, Megan McShea*

Goofball Oracle

Each writer writes a certain number of questions and answers on separate lines of a sheet of paper, say five. All the questions and answers are then cut up and separated, with the questions put in one hat, and the answers in another. A question is drawn from the question hat and read, and the answer for that question is then drawn from the answer hat.

Goofball Oracle

q: What was my favorite drink as a child?

a: Dinosaurs.

q: Does it matter, really, if you don't wash your hands after using the bathroom?

a: I keep getting interrupted by Moonies.

q: The woman to my left keeps staring into space and jiggling her little finger in her ear – why?

a: Frank Lloyd Wright's "Falling Water."

q: Is there a 5th dimension?

a: Beefamato.

Goofball Oracle

q: Name the animal for whom you were named by the gypsy grifters.

a: Makes it two o's like in kooky.

q: Tell me whom I am.

a: One is positive space (figure) and one is negative space (ground.)

q: What do you use to press your pants?

a: They mostly roamed the desert in nomadic tribes.

q: What is the difference between a scholastic and an objectivist?

a: Some jerkwater town in the trenches.

q: What do you get for a kid who has everything?

a: The secret ceremony.

q: Are toilets built larger now than 50 years ago?

a: It's all glandular.

q: How many of you are in there anyway?

a: Love is naturally pungent.

q: What does an umlaut do to a "u"?

a: The leathery skin of Johnny Unitas.

Bonnie Jones, Blaster Al Ackerman, Rupert Wondolowski

Goofball Oracle

q: When splitting one's codeine pill, is it proper to use a butter knife or a salad fork?

a: La Malinche.

q: How do you dodge the draft?

a: Tiny fibers.

q: What is the difference between your foyer and your finger?

a: Silent George.

q: Why does my ear hair grow so thick and fast now?

a: It's found in the hedges of most British gardens.

q: What makes carpet soft?

a: Smarties in the backyard.

Bonnie Jones, Blaster Al Ackerman, Rupert Wondolowski

Goofball Oracle

q: Seriously, what's up with the blob?

a: It's for cosmetic purposes only.

q: What's heavier than gravity but lighter than a nuclear weapon?

a: The Louvre covered in Mallomars.

q: Was Lincoln a happy drunk?

a: A neon rose garden at the end of the world.

q: What time was it?

a: A man with a performing monkey for a head.

q: Why did you insist on leaving your eyes here?

a: Wildly, freely, truly!

q: How do you clean a porcupine?

a: It was easier than carrying them back up the road.

q: Which little piggy scoffed at string theory?

a: Very carefully.

q: Do back hairs sense they're of a lower caste?

a: Only if you show enough evidence for a rock formation.

*Heather Rounds, Rupert Wondolowski, Bonnie Jones,
Ric Royer, Megan McShea*

Goofball Oracle

q: Hey, what do you guys think of Pammy's new Bummer?

a: The sound of the louvre covered in mallo-mars.

q: What's that sound that you hear when a leaf turns?

a: I slipped on a fallen wireless tower.

q: How many girders are there in the Basilica of the Weeping Mary?

a: Shut up and defenestrate me.

q: What sound does an herb garden make?

a: Good question. Unfortunately, the answer to this question and more is in my grandfather's car and he just took it to pick up some Mallow Cups.

q: Which was to the city of the lord's poison?

a: In the cruddy parts of the fridge.

q: What are the benefits of having lawyers, crooked cops, priests, bar maids, and Tim Allen's press agent in your family?

a: Just another bomb threat as far as me and the principle are concerned.

*Heather Rounds, Rupert Wondolowski, Bonnie Jones,
Ric Royer, Megan McShea*

Goofball Oracle

q: Why can only the bears understand you?

a: Because you are a big crybaby.

q: Why do babies happen after squatting with spiders?

a: Because you were pretending to pretend that it matters what's catastrophe and what is only a dream.

q: Why is this so hard?

a: Because my pupils are voluptuous and two different sizes!

Rupert Wondolowski, Marceline White, Heather Rounds, Stephanie Barber, Lauren Bender, Chris Toll, Amy Peterson, Ric Royer, Adam Robinson, Megan McShea

Haiku and Almost Haiku

Japanese Haiku is often an unrhymed, three-line poem with a strict syllabic count of 5-7-5. A looser form of haiku is common as well, usually sticking with three short lines of various syllabic counts or sound counts. Counting syllables lends itself to group-written haiku. Each of three writers writes a line with either 5 or 7 syllables, and then the lines are pieced together to form the poem.

Haiku and Almost Haiku

freezing unbelief

two front teeth
pick out the meat from
every cent of your money
extracting

melt a little

or dip, drink
make ideal outdoor
plastic fern in a gold pot
serve the sauce

one-arm jackleg

woody core
action of mercy
of wrestling with bones and fat
then collapsed

fine dry bread

best results
with a sinking heart
heap them whole with stems intact
men and beasts

Bonnie Jones and Rupert Wondolowski

Haiku and Almost Haiku

A Kiss-Cow

from lisp to deep end
a blockhead basting his knees
it was blubbery

Determining

plop! X marks the spot
girls watching boys go at it
train station statement

A Hundred of These Days

beginning for now
a staircase – a cantaloupe
guts come gushing out

Ric Royer, John Eaton, Megan McShea

Lardings and Juicings

Each writer writes a first and last line on a piece of paper. The pages are passed around and around, with each writer adding lines to all the pages, anywhere on the page, either reading existing lines or not, until the page is full of words. These were called Lardings at first by Blaster, and later renamed Juicings in deference to the vegetarians.

Lardings and Juicings

The texture and color of the eggshells made him place them between his toes to elicit a sweet thin crunch. My tree smelled all bad after that for like a week. I picked up the pieces and attempted to assemble my battered relatives. After much prodding, Uncle Warren finally played his piano for us, which helped. “Leave it dear,” she said with zest. Oh, but I kept picking. And picking. Live and let a truffle live I always say. No teeth, no teeth: your eye fits this description, whose drum, the sky rabbit thumping in your guest towel or towelette. Smoke your crack, that beautiful monkey you built with wet paper towels just like the estrangement I feel when viewing a total stranger’s anatomy unwarranted. Will you touch my stapler and venture a guess as to its length? Will you report me? I tried to walk like *you*, but I looked like a *horse*! A bit of candy can be nice if prepared properly. There’s nothing like sliding filthy drunk down the 12th floor laundry chute at 3 in the morning, forgetting that the person who went in front of you would be your landing pad. Give me a bit of sweetness and I will send you a shell home. Owls, banter, cheap merchandise – but those *eyes* – what was left after the church and Marxism and slippery boiled eggs?

*John Eaton, Megan McShea, Rupert Wondolowski,
Blaster Al Ackerman*

Lardings and Juicings

I was sure they were some kind of frog, but they looked more like turtles without shells, and they had no eyes, and their skin was scaly and kept falling off in chunks. And what have we here! If I'm not mistaken that is a snickerdoodle. A snickerdoodle indeed! It's my Aunt Betty and she's not breathing right! Ordinarily I am awkward but in this case your crud your hope your blinking book reports its moistures – it is a sin to write this. Moistness gathers. I liked to watch the figure, I tell you. "Well if you don't fucking believe me, look up 'bleb' in the dictionary!" I couldn't believe what the red light was doing to my eyes, my throat was caught on a breezy tune, my heart stopped up like a felt heart, as groovy as my chapped lips. As chained as my nalgas in my chaps. Not me, no, no, not me. No sir, not me. She studied infantile paralysis, yes, yes. Everlasting hope of what I found when I shed shorts buzzing the cult soon adopted bats because the apples made hoses like angels fed orchids some itches got scratches and some died, forever accusing libertarians for changes in the weather. And does anyone remember the incessant barking transmitted by that fat guy? It grew these spindley legs that latched onto the zookeeper's chest and he said, "see? They won't bother you!"

*John Eaton, Megan McShea, Rupert Wondolowski,
Blaster Al Ackerman*

Lardings and Juicings

Androgyny was practiced by the fever sisters long after their fear of women had subsided. Asphodel returns one life for shunting your past, regents of the mnemosyne, belonging to “Baby Snooks” a trip I took through the unwholesome character doll, consist of glass eyes, what tourism escape flats in court on next Saturday with all the pink coincidences, shaded and inappropriately dressed. Jumping onto the Dell paperback. Under proper analysis it’s like fractal and elongated. Ride in on a pea, settle and sift. If I was fortunate, all the voices here ping ping aring, I’m a fucking little teapot. Despotism in search of longer silences equals Thermo Pride. A pallid moon atop an angry night, my eyes shut like a thermos. It was our song! They were playing our song! My lips can be played like a tugboat. Bernice the shrimper will tell you so. A genuine horseman would and furniture should. But darling you now conjugate flensing retrieval when Simone smiles the whole world turns upside down like some crazy spittoon and MAKE MINE INTENTIONAL! With spill curls that light up a room in a heartbeat, you’re a greater challenge to yourself. “It’s like when you spoke apples and oranges,” he said. Oh you can’t be serious.

Rupert Wondolowski, Blaster Al Ackerman, Kristen Toedtman, Bonnie Jones, Megan McShea

Lardings and Juicings

I enjoy keeping liverwurst in my shoes like a great “Hornblower” novel feels hitting a wet woodchipper. Jane showed me her plan. It was quite elegant, in the shape of a church sleeping between the paws of a cat worshipping canned kingdoms. Detach pasta, detach saucy, dispatch Roosevelt, dispel sauerkraut Truman, detain Rudolph, def jam def jam! Forever! Forever! Forearm and crush! Pasta yet again, this time you leg out totally in my fucking house, man! (Just a little “up and down,” you know) hubba hubba. Doubt Italy, Doubt Musky, doubt Mussolini, I doubt my doubt can double your doubt missing gaps and gastritis and Sagittarius and pie. Announces the calamity or whatever makes me feel funny like skinning a cat! Just so long as you don’t nod out – coveting a grease stain down my rule Dribble meatball, dribble husky, dribble hitler, the basketball team without one decent Christian name. Pleased as punch! Beaming! A beautiful man. Bosco whereupon mercury will not doubt your feathery haircutter impending toe musk maybe that would account for their grey-eyed insecurities, and they lived sleepily ever after with pills and potted meats and basketball pillows.

*Chris Toll, Rupert Wondolowski, Blaster Al
Ackerman, Megan McShea*

Lardings and Juicings

When two similar faces are seen together they make us laugh by their very resemblance, though neither of them does so by itself. The gipper felt he'd pretended long enough. When I ached with fear, you scratched your foot. It was one of those moments with "2" and "two." Owl said – it's no coincidence! Then he swooped down. Unfortunately, the ground was 500 feet above him. Nowhere had they been better off than they were in Poughkeepsie. I don't ask for much – is that not enough? Pigs and rainbarrels. It was like a second chance, or the second coming. No, not enough, I say. Please touch my belly. If there was one thing I loved in those days, it was weed. Acorns, stems, roots, and walnuts, glistening in the glare of the porch lamp. I will forget them tomorrow, in fact now, for I am tired of small things. Now, I would like a tank, an armored tank, or a tank top, or a thank you. The cat is very much of a trickster, the dog is not amused, even tho I may be, the muse is not a plow not how we know but who we know and even then I can't figure what makes it sad and what makes it clean. It's time for attacking that pile of brains just ready for transplanting – the hospital needs me now. It was my feet. My true love sails an ocean. Precious, magical, juicy figs. I mean figments. He lives across the water.

Amy Peterson, Chris Toll, Megan McShea

Lardings and Juicings

He crossed his thin white duke legs, the dark leg hair flapping Moe Fine wigs and slammed down a Miller shorty, Fatts McNally blatting through his eartaint. A bulbous day it was: legs, ears, noses, awkward parts: why was he always thinking of these things? Crazy fuckers in my backyard. And when I say backyard, I mean that room where the coyote does his thing. Zoot beat through gingko tube with lost verities. I took a pill, took another, offered one to the coyote corpse, then dragged myself up the hill to where I could see the city of light floating in the sky. Sea, the moist body. Sea, the many. Through each of these four material bodies, of which the man sensed he was composed, special cosmic forces operated. It was true that he drank wine in a particular way: by soaking his lips, lips. And that his lore had raccoon eyes. I miss them verities bowlegged horse ride owl hooting. Them velicotes heirlooms. Please take the ephedrine and proofread Mr. Tolkien's proof of the Annotated Hobbit. Mind the p's and q's, mind you, for you are no Virginia Woolf. Scowling Peter tamed his despair and blew at the stinging wound, gently, patiently. All in all it kind of swam around without a head.

Amy Peterson, Rupert Wondolowski, Chris Toll, Ric Royer, Megan McShea

Lardings and Juicings

He got in the mud puddle a second time, his leering lips stretching like loose black rubberbands. It was just barely plausible. Cool mud, it was, allowing things to happen that wouldn't happen usually. I got scolded by the lady at the drugstore for pontificating. It's because I carry a pulpit around and I like to report the weather and everyone calls me stormy. I love horses and so does she and she loves saddles and so do I. She put on her bracelets, smiled, and said, "You're mine." If you don't collapse, I will. And then what? Henry bled red hot rocks. They dropped into the Laughing Beaver Pond. Scallops with honey and mint, after my great-aunt Josephine. It's funny I'm a cat person when I'm really a dog. I would bark but I have no mouth – Creepy, I know. But not as creepy as that old man creeping under my long skirt. People say I'm tight, but I don't know what they are referring to. Nonplussed I give them a firm handshake and call them "Lisa." The pastry was hollow and sweet, and that was a beautiful day yesterday, hollowing sweetly. I'm following ya, sweetie – but I won't come too close. I'm a sleepy kind of character so nothing makes sense to me. A flourish of her cape, and she was GONE....

Amy Peterson, Rupert Wondolowski, Chris Toll, Ric Royer, Megan McShea

Lardings and Juicings

O Eyeless Seer, my car is faster than the real station wagon. That is why they call me "The Ultimate." Stimulated by the rain, and by the mingling of cricket and birdsong in the early morning, (DEEP PAUSE ----
-----)

We're having some problems in the Trading Department. We sought acclaim, but we had not the courage to ford the stream. I have been waiting a long time here, in the field, the blazing sun. (DEEP PAUSE
-----)

The mountain is high and the rain is wet and this woman croons: "standing all alone, wondering where the years of my life have gone." (DEEP PAUSE -----
-----)

A calamity was just around the corner, just ahead there where the plush loveseat sat out in front of the old Elk lodge. And if I never see you again, my prayer will be unspoken or perhaps unspeakable (DEEP PAUSE-----
-----)

Speak low, speak in tongues, speak of the devil. Impossibly, of course: only nothing makes sense, and I can't move, and my dogs fell asleep on top of my feet.

Amy Peterson, Rupert Wondolowski, Chris Toll, Ric Royer, Megan McShea

Lardings and Juicings

the ambulance literally screamed.
& so did the wild man
he was hopeful and with coin
he jangle + rambled his
spindly legs in silhouette against
the barn door.
the wild man keeps swinging
his arms. at this rate, he will
whack something or get sleepy.
but the most wild of all is
that husky swallowed scream,
the held-back literal.
the moist throat, hurling garbled
phrases into the waxy ears
of smaller people.
the sort of small people that make you
want to fly away just so you
don't fall on them or near them
"mother fucking breathers!" she hissed.
but no one heard her.
"i've got it!" darryle said. the class groaned.
"nonsun blob a' is taken, actually darry."

*Stephanie Barber, Adam Robinson, Heather Rounds,
Lauren Bender, Ric Royer, Marceline White, Chris
Toll, Rupert Wondolowski, Megan McShea, Blaster Al
Ackerman*

Lardings and Juicings

is this fish yours? i found it choked to death in my
hands--
i didn't even flinch like lopsidaisy
because, shit, i don't give a shit
but the shit gives a shit about me.
and how can one turn something down
when the only alternative is death,
dead, dying? a shallow greeting, a
limp reply. there is a lot of metaphor here. i
can smell it. smells like shit. but it's the sort
of shit that yells out, "please be nicer to me!"
jesus and god are exactly the same.
friendly and honest like bees, or shit.
friendly and honest like some wet-rag of
a metaphor or a noose. loose nuts rang
in the new year like simulated small talk.
i don't have anything better to do!
apologies hung between us like grapes.
or like hanging shit. or baby ropes that
hoped to one day be noose-worthy
and make the prime time news as
metaphors.
i miss our long hugs.
i miss tugging at boats.
down streets i fled
maybe not sepulchral
what a reception!

*Stephanie Barber, Adam Robinson, Heather Rounds,
Lauren Bender, Ric Royer, Marceline White, Chris
Toll, Rupert Wondolowski, Megan McShea, Blaster Al
Ackerman*

Lardings and Juicings

Surely it was bad trapped electricity pulsating,
shocking and static-cling clinginess and speaking of
madhouses, the bishop wants a new alphabet – I may
provide it, I may not. I need to read the words on your
lips with my cat. The loons invent a new language of
sounds, “wfwf” phonemes heard only once in tandem
with the snapping of my femur I heard binga binga
wanka woofoo felt snappy and full of jive. I could
never wear snap-on jeans since the Warhol ‘60s. Hair.
Mindlessly I gobbled away at her patoot. Sweet as a
flatfoot in WWII. His shrieking falsetto pierced the
silence. Bring me more of those harmones – macka
thacka bonk. Man Hair is two words, but some people
like to join it together into one: manhair. Like meteor.
Mindlessly I gobbled away at a toe tip, like a fish
beneath the glassy surface. Bootnail, baby,
happenstance up the road a bit, a miswired gangly but
of gangrene and he sure looked good. The man who
entered Morrissey’s feathered gentleplace. and then
the orgy of dwarf-tossing and the black hoods – and
that was what ended the glorious ride of Manhair.

*Megan McShea, Blaster Al Ackerman, Chris Toll,
Adam Robinson, Amy Peterson, Marceline White,
Heather Rounds, Rupert Wondolowski*

Lardings and Juicings

I wouldn't call it an attack—more like some andalusian spring-fed spasm. Like something springing out of my neck wire-like—and it could hum the sweetest tune—here I won't say “albeit.” The ache of the shells have holed up the ocean. Baby smells of butterscotch and spit-up slough off of her as she sweats. Quack quack quack—her laugh is a short half-choke. Between a sneeze and a snort. Between the meadow and the window. A place for that grinding, wincing feeling, behind the garage by the Rose of Sharon. Why do we question the science of sound? Faith Crisis! Faith Crisis! Hand me my Graham Greene decoder martini, pull up my soul stockings. But where will it go for when it's rugged out from beneath you? I'd never seen her so raunchy. But then again, I'd never seen her—not really. Only in the mirror, no, I mean the bus stop glass. Sometimes the lovers do not love and it is all Slot A and Tab B and grunting. These R words these our words

*Megan McShea, Blaster Al Ackerman, Chris Toll,
Adam Robinson, Amy Peterson, Marceline White,
Heather Rounds, Rupert Wondolowski*

Lardings and Juicings

There was this portal that only the pure in heart could enter. The portal leads from one sad scrap place to another woebegone forgotten town. But, upon exiting, some guy gets up in your grill and tells you to eat shit and die. It's embarrassing, but not entirely unpleasant. That article in the paper mentioned you were overseas.

A dark wood beckoned, birds cawed, and frogs bellowed throaty entreaties. Make like ten thousand mojitos and invite the whole goddamn town. After hours of hiking in the wild heat, Mabel and Constance came upon a clear, blue pool. Mabel dove in and shimmered up, Constance cursed the heat and dropped some acid. "Poetry is embarrassing," she realized. "And Mabel is getting on my last nerve—oh look, a fairy troupe." Pleasure always comes first with me. Then small business. It was full and pusillanimous. And it kept growing and growing. Until it ate shit and died. You could smell it for miles around.

Bonnie Jones, Chris Toll, Megan McShea, Amy Peterson, Ric Royer

Lardings and Juicings

I'm not one to enable truancy, but sometimes it is indistinguishable from Mormon missionary work, especially when one is charged with the great responsibility of missionary work (in porn). "Handyman special," he said with a twinkle in his eye and a twinkie in his pocket. I was so embarrassed that I called him, that I kept trying to make it sound like I'd been using a different sentence and it kept coming out "a dozen jelly donuts, a dozen jelly donuts" like so many small appreciative turds in one's lap, in the car. He said there was more powdered sugar on me than on the whole tray of donuts. Attachment disorder. Let me consider that from the other room, bye. When at the last moment it is like, I decided I really like you, isn't that like it's in my bag? Not my colostomy bag, no. Which reminds me – have you seen my Netflix envelope? I've been so distracted by weather and migraines. Annexed across a highway where we all stopped every five hours or so. I didn't mean to get so scandalized, but who could help it with the old man dropping his pants all the time? Girl's gotta eat. And it wasn't until we had a croissant at our disposal that I saw him, dismounting his Mormon bicycle. He traveled light and often and I'll never forget. Sandy hair, green eyes, dopey space ship. He scandalized into clouds of particles, dust mites, architectural kinds of talking. These particles felt like self doubt mixed with more substantial matter, like clay. The placid 'pfoomf' of the furnace firing. Imagine the vases breaking in there. Like every attachment between every verb in every book. She overheard him talking about sleep disorder. It was a cross between formaldehyde and a feral cat. That was the feeling of being awake.

Theresa Columbus, Lauren Bender, Megan McShea

Lists

Writers decide on a subject together, and each writes a list of things that fall under that subject. It can be useful to set a time limit of five minutes or so.

Fireable offenses I

1. Branding yourself on the side of the neck with the company logo
2. Constantly talking fellow workers into playing the “M&M Game” with you. (“M&M game is where you stick 2 M&M’s up your nose, put your head back and see who can blow their M&M’s the farthest.”)
3. Wearing things in your shoes that change the character of your gait, something different each time you go to work, i.e., liver, gravel, cat litter, spam, etc.
4. Using mucous instead of hair spray or hair gel.
5. Painting eyeballs on your eyelids so you are “looking” at people even when your eyes are closed.
6. Keeping your cigarette lighter in your pocket and flicking it constantly to the point of nearly setting your pants on fire.
7. Stuffing toilet paper, paper napkins, etc. down inside waistband of your slacks until your hips begin to look elephantine.
8. Same as 7, but tell people to call you “Jumbo.”
9. Announcing in loud voice, “I’m not wearing any underwear but my ankles are painted with India ink.” Put your foot up on chair to demonstrate.
10. If you have any teeth missing, make a false tooth (or teeth) out of bread and talk about which type of bread (rye, wheat, etc.) makes the best, longest-lasting tooth (or teeth.) Show this around a lot, especially at lunch time.

Lists

Fireable offenses I (cont.)

11. Use your lunch breaks to openly practice heavy scarification while talking about your abusive parents, spouse, minister, etc.
12. See how long you could go without washing your hands.

Blaster Al Ackerman

Fireable Offenses II

1. Suffering from so much on-the-job stress that blood vessels in your eyes pop and the whites of your eyes are constantly dark red.
2. Having had an accident with a lathe, the tips of three of your fingers were shaved off but not the root of the nail, thusly, about every 3 months or so, a small bit of nail peeps through your fingertip like a little bird claw.
3. Speaking to your co-workers solely through the medium of a sock puppet. "Hi!" "Hi there!"
4. Trying desperately to get your boss and co-workers' attention every time you see them having forgotten their names with each passing interaction. Waving and gesturing wildly seems to be the only way to have them notice you. When this gets tiring maybe a few little jumps, a flurry of hands and smile coyly.

John Eaton

Fireable Offenses III

1. Eating the office plants for lunch.
2. Frequent bathroom trips with claim of bowel or bladder problems, repeated 3-4x a week.
 - a. UTI, b. IBS, c. Incontinence, d. Diarrhea
3. Those contact lenses that look like tiger eyes
4. Constant sniffing
5. Wearing small stuffed rodents as accessories.
6. Bringing animals stuffed or sealed in lucite/polyester blocks as paper weights.
7. Folding all paperwork into origami
8. Drinking your soda with those penis-shaped straws you get for bachelorette parties
9. Wearing a shoddy toupee/using spray-on hair
10. Wearing crooked falsie socks stuffed in bra.
11. Poorly executed drag
12. Using a bubble like those with 20th century disease
13. Getting an extra appendage surgically attached, fingers, legs, arm
14. Any form of cultural body deformation; stretched neck, bound feet (lotus foot), large drooping earlobes, corseted waists that measure 3-4 inches around
15. Consistent use of the sports drinking hats with 2 cans and attached straws
16. Being productive but having an imaginary friend

Lists

Fireable Offenses III (cont.)

17. Poorly executed fake tans and blotchy all year round
18. Leaving snot and other bodily fluids around the office (idea for 3rd shift workers)
19. Making a nuisance of yourself by constantly being a fire hazard.

Bonnie Jones

Fireable Offenses IV

1. Get hair transplants on your hands (long)
2. Grown your nails really really really long
3. Have your nose replaced with a steel whistle
4. Hire someone to be your “living shadow”
5. Keep a jar on your desk with your nail clipping collection in it.
6. Have your eyelids replaced with prosthetic, clear plastic substitutes.
7. Wear a straightjacket and do all manual tasks with your teeth – tell them it’s better this way.
8. Wear a mask made from a raw steak and tell everyone it’s a religious observation.
9. Hire someone to wait outside your door for you all day.

Megan McShea

Musical Transcriptions

At a musical performance, each writer attempts to transcribe the music into words. Writers pass pages at mutually agreeable times during the performance until the piece is over. Or, write parallel transcriptions without passing the pages and compare. Experimental, improvised music, a genre with many expert practitioners in Baltimore, lends itself well to this exercise.

Musical Transcriptions

High Zero Poems

pop racks blast sweet facts
around the rim of terrible
eagles after Tuesday with
rice
smart
heaven toward almond-aged
torque we have no shoes its
heavy.
hiss in bed like a pause – an africa
and indian elephant with all of their
differences hunched
like the equinox a box like
an old head
acoustics hush
They take a moment
to shrink – it's almost a spine
tube eeked out of the era
that was after tanks but
soaking massive hack lines cut
before dinosaurs assessed their
available props.
tube column cutting
stone head shifting to a fault
kiss bird

John Eaton and Megan McShea

Musical Transcriptions

High Zero Poems

when it shakes – a breath
a beak and un-nerving nod
eyes muddy with blur and hair and a twist
click
drip
Supine my ordinary
desk calls you up it
likes you but you're wondering what
cloud that is and I'm worried about the furnace.
It's a kind sort of light as if we hadn't ever
attacked anyone but the plum
blow key – blow announce – lip on spring flounce
here as nose – breathe odor
fringe – metal lunatic
my neck in heat – wave of spasm and spine
cheek furrow metal
private doctor turntable hair
as it crashes our feet burn
We invited them but they got too hot,
a putt like a tug like scrounging around
in the sky.

John Eaton and Megan McShea

Musical Transcriptions

High Zero Poems (parallel)

fork-lift
flat tire
sun
migration and insect
hitch
hat basket
bread
belief
forever dog
and hands
hearth

breathe

John Eaton

gallop
lisp
parade
plug

skintight
orange
oily
planet

my phrase
embraces
effortless
placards
which you
bake
into pasture

there was
an hour
a perfect hour
between bells

they argued
over spoons,
dark,
and trees

Megan McShea

Musical Transcriptions

BMA Collaboration

ski bird founded dead it spoh ken lye mixer
Icelandic Earth thighs, model of kinetic penalty
omnivorous though
speculated
they drew no fossil
in captive dressing

half bot half butter, an overhead skirmish
paste enormous fossil fall, half overhead another
hazmat overture worm.
loose physical jaw.
an archeological crescendo

spindly perturbation makes
everyone uncomfortable
likened to daggers and
the wings of wax wings.
first discovered by nothing
more intrepid than
rock formations/bursting

I A PEAR DE TATCHED I SO LATE SO HEAD ED
song muffs riddle internal plankton
might SO MITE blossom ICE CREAM POP order
drive a tree standing in place a SAY NT
The elderly gnaw on suspicious things.
Blurbs of painters caulk. Swollen alps.

Bonnie Jones, Ric Royer, Megan McShea

One-Minute Stories

Writers each write down a number of single words on slips of paper and put in a hat. A word is drawn, a timer is set, and writers have one minute to write a story using the drawn word as a title.

One-Minute Stories

LEG

I scratched my leg. Then I scratched my other leg. Then I scratched the coach's leg and he knocked my hand away. Why didn't he knock my leg away? This would give me only one leg to stand on, like a beautiful pink bird that tastes so good with fruit in the swamps.

SMELT

"I'm a little vague on this one," the typing teacher said. "Shit on your head," Freddie Held shouted. This was at the School for the Blind Fish.

SKELETON

The skeleton dancing across the lawn. The skeleton peeping out from behind the shower curtain. The skeleton in the bread box, smaller than the others, so obviously it was the baby.

JACKET

"That is the ugliest jacket I've ever seen," I told the potato; but it said nothing in response; merely eyed me.

SALTICK

The deer crept forward eagerly but the saltlick turned out to be a statue. MORAL: CIVILIZATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS.

Blaster Al Ackerman

One-Minute Stories

FORGERY

I am pretending to write like my father: some weather we're having...

I am pretending to write like Ayn Rand

It is a sin to write this....

I hate having guests when I'm trying to forget Chagalls.

JACKET

When I think of jackets now, I think of Frank's jacket, or Joe's. And at this moment I think particularly of the fact that my reading has slowed to savor a future moment – not knowing whether it is worth savoring or not. Why do I drink? Hey, there's a list.

MARTINI

Bunuel through George told me the perfect martini needs to have one ray of sun pass through a drop of vermouth. If only I always followed these directions, I'd never be seen stumbling out of a bar at last call – long after the sun has gone down setting the sky on fire.

SKELETON

The way his skin sat on his frame, his skeleton, the whisper of ribs like an automatic round. I still see this sometimes and feel the recoil. Memory does that, transforming the banal into the fantastic.

John Eaton

One-Minute Stories

SKELETON

The skeleton made a beautiful wind chime, hanging from the back porch nail. Darren from next door loved to use it as a swing. Darren's father would shoot squirrels winding through the bone tunnels. All in all it was good cheap fun.

GLARE

It was a day of glares. Glares shouting from pastry shop windows. Glaring toy poodles standing imperious over their sad doughnut emissions.

The sun caught the edge of a samurai's sword and that truly caused a wicked glare. He crawled under the Oldenburg soft sculpture of James Dean's shades.

JACKET

Nathan wore a fine feathery jacket at all times and little else. He would spend hours embroidering words on the jacket describing the colors of his day.

TEETH

Kung Po then crack. Hazy fuzzy bar light and cradled tooth part. Fistfuls of whiskey hats passed over. Stars and flashes of tooth agony. Could this be the final skull rot of LSD use?

Madge, Madge, tell me I won't lose my smile.

Rupert Wondolowski

One-Minute Stories

SKELETON

"Quite a predicament," said the possum.

"I'll say" said the skeleton.

And the ice floe drifted quietly out to sea.

MARTINI

I fled the theater after the lights dimmed and the show was safely underway. A man in a bright green scarf was standing under the floodlight on the corner. A dozen polite stares greeted me at the bar, and the barmaid silently began mixing my martini.

FORGERY

It turned out the site manager was a pure forgery. Someone had made him from wax and elmer's glue and given him such a steady gaze and a stance rife with confidence and authority, that we didn't suspect anything until the sun was high in the sky and his waxy face began to glisten.

TEETH

People with teeth understand the difference between hard and soft and can discern many gradations in-between. The teeth know things that they never entirely communicate to the host brain, but these things help them do their jobs. Teeth make decisions constantly and have very stressful lives.

Megan McShea

Opposites

Each writer begins a page with a sentence or phrase. Pages are passed, and the next writer writes the opposite of the given line, and the next writer writes the opposite of the opposite, and so on until the pages are full or everyone has written a line on each page, or until the pieces seem finished.

Opposites

Smiling cat sucks the breath swiftly
Howling dogs drool dead slow
Meeping canaries titter breathing meepy
Or gusting giant pterodactyls suffocate on oxygen
And tranquil tiny rabbits breathe free out CO2
But big frenetic owls choke up on helium
Tiny wolves lay down in mud with gastritis
They had long erratic fits involving special clean
 rooms and laxatives
You hadn't short sane misfits non involved
Mundane messy views or binders
I got a big, crazy athlete mixed up in neat, exciting
 blinders and blew up
The mellow beatnik leaned on a paper mache giant
 banana, wafting smoke rings from his mauve lips

*Bonnie Jones, Blaster Al Ackerman, John Eaton,
Rupert Wondolowski, Megan McShea*

Opposites

Following the ordinary morning was a gummy
afternoon.

As the abnormal beckons, the savory evening falls.
In the dull desert, blinding and flat, the light doesn't
change.

Oh my sweet cuttlefish! So migratory, so covered in
flashing stripes, so predatory.

Rhino whose flesh sours. Somewhat turbid. Circular
staidness. Passive.

Barnacle with largest penis relative to its size! Sweet,
cubic and aggressive. Soft moss of small mouth all
out of proportion from its inner life, sour, round
and passive.

A fleet of Choctaw hanging low! Wild,
disproportionate and easy.

*Lauren Bender, Rupert Wondolowski, Jaime Perez,
Amy Peterson, Megan McShea*

Opposites

She told him her troubles, which were interminable
and real.

He wouldn't share his victory, his fantasies or his
fires.

The crowd repelled from each other, sullen,
depressed and wet.

One tiny lady magnetized to another, hysterical and
parched.

Eighty enormous dull skanks repelled us, calm and
fresh.

A belly full of bubbly do-rights attracted Cosby.

Carol Burnett's secret place was all flat and wrong. It
repelled Harvey.

Richard Pryor protruded.

*Lauren Bender, Rupert Wondolowski, Jaime Perez,
Amy Peterson, Megan McShea*

Opposites

Kimbo slicing along an indescribable chaos
ad sprouting up among the gummy rocks.
Hold absolutely still like a chair that is holding
absolutely still.
Release slightly mobile swimming pool releasing
slightly mobile.
Clutch completely stationary toilet hold clutching
completely stationary.
Dangle partially moving breakfast nook dangling
partially blanket.
Wiggle all night. Dinner's in the corner covered by
that bastard.
Fall asleep with the light on, stomach full of your
mother's dirty martinis.
Wake up, your father's bowels are alight!

*Lauren Bender, Rupert Wondolowski, Jaime Perez,
Amy Peterson, Megan McShea*

Pantoum

A poetic form that uses repetition in any number of four-line stanzas. Lines 2 and 4 of the first stanza are repeated as lines 1 and 3 of the second stanza. Lines 2 and 4 of the second stanza are then repeated as lines 1 and 3 of the third stanza, and so on. To write as a group, writers each write a number of lines on a given subject, say five. Lines are cut up and drawn at random, arranged and repeated as the form suggests.

Pantoum

Ode to Chihuahua

ever trembling vigilant
legs obstacle and hurdle in pairs
roto fur vibration
you worry your teased ears

legs obstacle and hurdle in pairs
so misunderstood like rocket science
you worry your teased ears
limpid eyes pooling wisdom

so misunderstood like rocket science
you hide under peaks of whipped cream
lipid eyes pooling wisdom
a neurotic's abattoir is arrested by your lolling tongue

you hide under peaks of whipped cream
ever trembling vigilant
a neurotic abattoir is arrested by your lolling tongue
roto fur vibration

Bonnie Jones and Rupert Wondolowski

Parallel Stories

Writers decide on a common story title and begin to write individually. As they write, one by one each writer says a word, any word, aloud, and all the writers must incorporate that word into their stories. The faster the words are spoken, the more abstract the stories tend to become. This method can also be used to write poems and dialogues.

Paler Than a Princess I

The merchants watched the prince grout his tub and all agreed he was paler than a princess. He was her arch-rival of paleness. Like rocks baking in sun as the tide pulls into the guts of whale schools like krill after dinner, like so many midgets with harps taking angelfish for tiny fishbowl walks on rhinestone leashes, like, I suppose, your piping hot stew you made for that entrepreneur even though he was just trying to get in your pants. Like all that dimness of the world, pale Stephen had his blood washed out of him by heaven's decree, so pale the people speculated water ran in his veins, and on some days even that evaporated. Will power made the princess like a pumice machine, slaking of the dead skin and hiding from the sun, until her skin became, by all accounts, translucent. The prince was sloppy with his scissors after another polluted day as the Prince of Nimrod, and he sang softly towards her shiny dark window a secret blessing for the pale, pale sister who liquefied her heart in search of a prairie mouse to put out the fire in her brain.

Megan McShea

Paler than a Princess II

The grout ell was trusted like a sail slip, cool and filled with fungus against the pale tide. Rusty lowered herself into the tepid bath and groaned. The arch comments of Grace bail left their mark on Rusty's sail, but the tide was turning. Krill were abundant, and you could survive with no teeth in this cruel Rusty. Oh hell, she realized. This is hell. I need my loofah to slough off this bad mood. Crap. Little by little, the skin cells drifted away like midgets in a clown car. Don't even start with me, thought Rusty as her castoffs drifted in and away. Suppose I get up for this here bath and become an entrepreneur, sell my own line of baths and cheeses. I could quit my job and tell that Grace to put it where Stephen wouldn't even dare to go. That Bitch! thought Rusty. Oh, it's heaven here in a tepid bath in a one room efficiency. The glare of the moon slowly evaporated the water then slide out of Rusty's now fetid tepid bath. She tried to lift herself but the machine wasn't working the way it's supposed to and cracked and groaned, and Rusty realized she might never escape this trough of despair and slough of dew. She'd never expected the life of a hairdresser could be so sloppy! So politically charged that no one could help her back to the joy of scissors and bryll cream. Rusty sank deeper into the tub and groaned again. This polluted water may be my end she realized, as the fatal chill began to set in. The nimrod in the next apartment was blasting Llynnyrd Skynnard, and Rusty couldn't imagine a more humble passing. It will be a blessing to drift off to heaven, realized Rusty.

Parallel Stories

Paler than a Princess II (cont.)

Jesus will only take me now I'll be clipping mullets in
paradise and no one can stop me.

Just then the party burst in, and found Rusty dumped
across the tile, her pale, bloated feet splayed out like a
prairie full of decomposing flounder. Oh sweet
reward, oh cool pale sauna.

Kim Carlin

Paler than a Princess III

He described it later as paler than a princess. His friends wondered why he had chosen to describe group that way, in such arch, artsy terms. The tide rolled in and the tide rolled out. "Where have I heard that wonderful expression before?" The Krill asked the Bible of Midgets it carried around with it everywhere. "No telling, no telling," the sup horse replied, butting in. Its legs were described as very wild by the entrepreneur in long rides out into the country where Stephen played a banjo and talked to a goose, just to get away from him was heaven. Just to get away with murder was even more evaporated if milk was your name and machine-like dairy sloppy was your game and the scissors was all over the professor's neck, chowing it first, even before what the burning, beautifully polluted nimrod came out of, i.e., little Italy, lost but not forgotten as a blessing to those who search high and low for steebin prairie lovin! Whooo-eeee! That Steebin prairie lovin is what took my paw, announced the beaver with the stump.

Blaster Al Ackerman

Hot Snacks I

15" looks to me more like a doll whose head has sleeping glass eyes so separate they appear on opposite sides of her skull, open mouth with teeth seldom seen except when Hitler comes into the room with label on back of his shoulders and borders usually found only with down curls, up features – alternately up curls, down with people too caustic to walk when hand-propelled on Adult Wasserman Champion Balls one with large, bulgy eyes fixed on one of thirteen Brownie Spit-up books. Can you guess which one? One depicting hips and shoulders of headless thus inexpensive thumbtacks. Thus features are all scotch taped on faces. Well worn feet of wood dance across your scrotum the way you always knew they could if your dad hadn't been from Russie and worn old woolen clothes and hand knit violet stockings that marked him as the sort we rolls in the park, sometimes for fun, sometimes for reasons more cutout and bumpy, stuffed all leather has deeply moldy butt and pained features of one who has been rolled for his poke in a misnomer especially when inky and hand propelled in his blonde mohair wig on back which might account for slumming tendencies that would lead him into the park with his obstructed color with two upper teeth just begging you to put your index finger in and pull out a plum, elastic strung, cosmopolitan, unusual taste for hot snacks, or dog ends for that matter.

Blaster Al Ackerman

Parallel Stories

Hot Snacks II

After the excision I really needed a burger. Problem was I was still really doped up. Separate taste buds desired teeth, according to Baudelaire, the vision resulting from hashish. Borders must be crossed to find the proper burger, the sublime burrito, the deliquescent pie slice. Without even Japanese oxes. How to keep the caustic runoff from your fingers. How to see with your fingers like a champion freak who does not play or eat well with others. The voice is thus set aside, motioning to the burger clown, gasping, rolling your shoulders (the “sentiments”). “I’ve eaten here, those things are like thumbtacks,” the teen in front of me says. I instruct him in the nature of the oriental transvestite. How he does not copy woman but signifies her.

“I come by the mountain path.

Ah! This is exquisite!

A violet.”

All the mouths smack wetly in agreement, a few bodies are rolled from their seats. “Have a good share of life force,” the counterwoman yelled. Stuffed, yes. Punctuated by strokes and vocal substance. Expelled from a motionless body mere tremolos, a falsetto tonality, sharp yipping and indecent pathos. The air was filled with jibes so profuse and impertinent that it grew octopus inky, dulling my senses. Obstructed I slid down the formica, eluding the gaze of the pimply night manager. Through it all I’d forgotten my excision and the repercussions of dangling the sailor suit.

Rupert Wondolowski

Parallel Stories

Hot Snacks III

Made like cookies, with the wet and dry ingredients separate, Howard's hot snacks weren't difficult, although there was that persistent rumor about folks losing teeth eating them. Maybe without the borders, which were made with molasses and one of those acetylene torches and glistened through Howard's packaging, they became tender and caustic, although Howard himself was rather a hard man. His dog Champion used to sit with its head on its paws all day outside the kitchen, watching the lizards roam about the yard. Champ liked hot snacks, so he'd watch Howard's shoulders through the screen door, waiting for the shrug, the signal that another batch was ready. One day Howard got tired of the spiteful insinuations, and he fed Champ some hot snacks and told the kids watching there were thumbtacks in the batter. Kids got wide-eyed and wouldn't leave the dog alone for a second. They imagined his stomach lining dotted with violet thumbtacks and they waited for a sign. Howard rolled his eyes and kept on making hot snacks.

One day Howard stuffed the snacks with turkey balls, and Champion was in seventh heaven. Dogs go to a special ecstatic plane, propelled by food and love. In 7th heaven, Champion looked down upon Howard, the kids, and the lizards in the yard, and his eyes became inky with despair for the humans and their shy distrust of one another. Poor Harold and the children were trapped in a world where hot snacks obstructed, and did not free, their intentions.

Megan McShea

Hot Snacks IV

For some gathering, there are sweet snacks. Those are the ones when the boys are separate from the girls. Their teeth get all gummed up with taffy and gummy this-and-that. And the borders are drawn in pixie-stick granules.

For others, there are no snacks. These bring out the would-be champions, the backstreet drivers, the shoulder-riding chicken fighters.

And then the laminated-“beerages”-sign-thumbtacked-to-the-wall office parties when stomachs growl as co-workers return to their cubicles with pictures of violets depicting May. Paper plates rolled around pastel napkins.

Boy am I stuffed. And I haven’t even gotten to the hot snacks. Who would serve hot snacks now?! I’ve already eaten three Fudge Mint Oreos, gobs of ‘peanuts & friends’ and whatever was on the way in between ‘em. My fingers still inky with the chocolate bar wrapper residue from gripping it so tight through the Drive-In movie, a movie I couldn’t even see because of the Chevy Dodge Plymouth Viewfinder obstructing my view.

Kristen Toedtman

Parallel Stories

Grub I

Grub, you mothers! (sound of slurping bean soup -)
Several crept closer (long drawn out groan.) Sleep,
said the sleepyhead with the warped sense of humor.
(high pitched titter.) Nestled by a pearl you sound
like this (blub blub blub.) (Startled cry) – what a
mess! Butt and ear! Butt and ear – (cruel sounding
laugh.) Several were pissed – (Bronx cheer.) Several
captions read “Military” (angry muttering.) Mouth
opened (Loud “oh!”) Only the confused one cried
(Snoring sound.)

Blaster Al Ackerman

Parallel Stories

Grub II

Grub lived out in that tilty boll weevil shack where you might hear a groan now and then. He crawls through the brown crinkle grass and you can see his white neck hair tufts like an old furry caterpillar catching sleep in the sun.

You know Grub's broke when you hear someone's been accosted. It's usually Miss Rath in the alley who he robs of one pearl each time.

You hear Latin music? Like a quiet spooky carnival mess.

You like my spiral buttoneer? Grub gave it to me after he shared my humpy back.

When Grub gets liquored he pretends that he came from the Bronx and used to be a badass. The caption under Grub reads "Neck Tufted Thief Who Was Kicked Out of the Military Because He Opened the Bathroom Door on His Sergeant During Key Moments One Too Many Times."

"It was the cries of the dying that got to me," Grub said, although the only fighting he saw was over the ration lunchmeat.

Rupert Wondolowski

Parallel Stories

Grub III

Sit down here and pick at your
food. Like a small groan
slipping like glass or crystal.
Give a look like sleep
a look a glance like snore or nap
a wink that accosted this blatant day
a day that's like a pearl on the goo of a body
the mucous that passes for a mess
like flesh of ten is

a booteneer for my baby
a booteneer like a crab dip
a booteneer that covers a very
embarrassing crotch stain

In the bronx I found a small strip of news
that was as inept as any caption
(the ones that tend to accompany these most
recent military photos are particularly banal, no?)
My mouth is opened and listless
and my head feels like a cup
but it doth not runneth over
but instead cries in this drought.

John Eaton

Grub IV

Peaceful grub-time groaned sloppy moon-like bits of air like teacups filing past our bitty teeth. An avalanche of sleep brought true scenes of bygone sympathies rushing over the stoop like a waterfall, accosted by the tribal hoot of mortar aged by wind. Some pearl drop tines on forks of limestone breathed the silky mess into a back room, with pitchfork purses perched on hairy boutineers our prom dates brought us from the country. Worms and parlor mice were drinking in the basement by our teacher's special Bronx-made pipe-fittings, and later we would laugh when Mom put a caption on the military memorial under the attic stairs. It said "opened here March 10, 1942, to great cries of the rowdy masses, our oyster pudding, in honor of peaceful grub-time."

Megan McShea

Parallel Stories

When It's Golden, It's Done I

From this distance you can learn from a woman,
examine a boy, navigate through a man, suspect a
girl,
set a bowl gently
from a house that has no address because it is the
only
house,
a brother shrugs, a sweat gathers, voice gathers
bumps, bumps on the head
yawning in the afternoon
blood through a body, a thought that considers
how it moves, the blood
a brother has a brother, one more prone to
embarrassment,
the other more self-concerned

Under the ground there are bones, mostly of boys
if it is not known it cannot be untrue
fatal lessons, bumps on the head
alone in a house with no address, a boy, a brother can
fly
or look at photographs
cats sniff, but no rats
the boy, the other brother, has bones everywhere
if they cannot be seen, they cannot be untrue.

Ric Royer

Parallel Stories

When It's Golden It's Done II

The hot milk rattles in the bowl with blue roses, and I may seem to address this milk when I say today is an important day, and gently offer a rumination about the trailing vines, a hard landlord, crossing my legs, bending my head over this rattling milk. This was a trick during my childhood, the snapping of fingers, rolling in my head, the circle of rumination.

Amy Peterson

When It's Golden It's Done III

The moment, the exactitude of that favorite last moment, was true: I may seem to raise my voice a notch, but the hot milk rattled in the bowl at that moment, and my brother trailed in a lazy circle. I may seem gracious, but today is an important day, I say, the hot milk rattling in the bowl, the drunk hunters selfish, cringing, addressing this rumination.

Amy Peterson

Parallel Stories

When It's Golden It's Done IV

Waiting for the boy vines
tonight from fingers made bastard small
blurred gazed in the morning
what do you mean, brother map?
milk suspiciously dressed
Avoid certain loved ones, lesser rats,
dance out toward green things.

Megan McShea

Parallel Stories

Spider

Follow an open mouth confidently
strike it, strike it
the length of a silence, wind through a hollow jaw
skies left behind, the disabled, deformed adults also
eventually useless
these are the beginnings of arctic myths
curious underwater objects, the youth do not cry over
disease is death avoided by a horn that breaks the
waters surface
midnight
ice chamber
eyes, cheekbones, pulse
physical distinctiveness formed in the recesses of
pillows
the aging, eventually useless
washing of delicate feet
a thousand years ago laughter was in the bottom of the
 great river
tiny crowns encrusted with the severed heads of
prisoners
the brutal, the vulgar can be made strange,
exceedingly beautiful
when crafted by the artifice of hands
a thousand years later, fatality is life
the edges of tradition are blurred by white squalls
no sun
the peering faces in response to natural feelings
like fury, detestation
no earthly reason, no lack of night
still there is merely need
there is want without another wanted

Ric Royer

Parallel Stories

Back Room

That man is lying Henry Bolton and you are a
keyhole of the lower region. This is my wife, Camera
Portraits, old devil and this is my dear pee so frankly
indolent, filling me with a terrible desire to cry.
Nothing but your delicate feet come near the beauty
of my painting of Mo. Tilted picture scroll leading to
a garden, the path, the shut door, the smoking
chimney. A thrusting stranger so near the threshold.
D and R are agreed like emaciation, and
expectoration, juggler friends from my old stage days.
Now I'm busy penciling memoranda, her tiny head
beside the waste, ossified.

Rupert Wondolowski

Parallel Stories

Screaming I

Amplly coated gray feathered rooms clouding
whispers.

Goodbye rococo radiance.

It's the only spell performed with a bucket and brush
of
outbursts among fun seekers split invisible.
Out of the sea ghosts of fur avalanching
pull on her steam whistle
under that big ellipse and begin to edge away.

We should find a doctor, wrap the captain faces
in steel tape.

Goodbye slit trenches of laughter's wool.

At true ease on a mountain slope, quilted with
rockets and engineer pages.
Awful celebrity vibrating wrinkled comfort,
awaiting test results of the mirror pathology.

Out of the oven of fucking children
comes a transparent subject
doomed by hands and pies,
followed by a salt length of captain boots.

Goodbye captain boots.

Rupert Wondolowski

Parallel Stories

Screaming II

In my world I dance with my forbidden wings.
Sometimes I try vigorously dancing with my
forbidden wings,
banging against the wall until dust burns my old
white
lapels.
Fuck me with whispers. Baffle me with your secret
rococo.

This is my world, a big pink big big.
Let us lay together, here sweet and responsible.
Tonight our mothers are moody, maybe from pepsi.
The soldiers are blowing, and screwing, and leveling
their playful lips on hinies.

We are resting. Indefinite companions.
Try my silk arm, see my synthesis.
Before we cut the boat in half, lets (ha ha! ho ho! hee
hee!)
be young and grunt.
Make our blisters connect.

I'm trapped in the garden! I mean a coal mine.
Ripe with the symptoms of a clinical hard on,
my experimental subject is in my hand.
I doubt that I am lost in my inextinguishable brew,
but I still can't figure out how to master the 7-minute
casserole.
I mean that pre-sexual choreography.

Ric Royer

Parallel Stories

Scream Come

Oh, the world over there, like the bruise on my knee,
like a wing pressed into soft stone, saying goodbye!
goodbye! you mustn't inhabit my dust, my residue.
The game moves quickly on, perfectly, whispering a
baffling half-wanted swoop – an invisible, stupid
ghost, I am, an avalanche of spangles, a steam whistle.
“Have a nice life” the chimp says over the telephone,
and what is there to say? Ha Ha! The boat has taken
off, and the tide is enough, and a nice life it will be: a
box car, chimpless, a conversation, conversations,
much better than taking an arm, together, gagging,
bodies, pressed together. I prefer troublesome talk,
the true ease of remembrance, the confidence of ideas
I cannot extinguish.

Amy Peterson

Nothing Golden Stays

The sun never quite sets: a spectacle shown tonight, in the city, a sky nine times grayer than black, stars rising without confidence. And yesterday I was out to sea, hue haired, pocket eyed, a near gentleman: and the restraint I felt there, far from the islands: this malformed heart, drawn of bones, accordingly. No one knows what swimming is, this heart says, staring at the sea. Yesterday, seven months, it's useless to count, to interfere. For one must return to the city now, the face of the little window, the smoke glass, the panes paled with the trick of the light.

Amy Peterson

Rituals

Each writer writes the name of an imagined ritual at the top of a page, and then writes the first step in performing the ritual. Pages are passed, and writers add steps to each ritual until they are complete.

Ritual for Dogs and Mints

1. Move into a “Safe House” and don your dogs-and-mint togs.
2. Adhere flypaper to a park bench. Shave a poodle-terrier until it resembles Peppermint Patty and then affix its toenails to the flypaper bench. Lower your trousers (or raise your skirt) and draw Charlie Brown face on your bare ass. Sit on bench facing the wrong way.
3. As the wind picks up, your skirt or trousers should tent, now it is optimal to fill those areas with a blend of alpaca fur and dachshund tail hairs.
4. Now put on the elbow and knee pads, and roll the Astroturf out in a moat pattern around the house.
5. Fix your eyes on whatever comes out of the moat pattern first because what you have mistaken for an acid flashback is them testicles that Dickens derived from his innumerable interweavings of wine and mammary barest essential explaining almost anything soil lets me show you, dwarf brain.

Bonnie Jones, Blaster Al Ackerman, Rupert Wondolowski, Megan McShea

Rituals

Making Love to Rich Folks

1. Step right here on this lump under the rug.
2. Softly pull each body, one at a time, by the left finger. Never the right finger. Ever.
3. It is at this stage that you must choose your approach. Choose wisely or you will be sent to the scullery.
4. Paper money, while obviously making up the majority of the aforementioned “lump” is not the only thing you should focus on at this stage of the process.
5. Do not release until the hydropeeled hydroplaning wig of Robert Goulet sweeps over both sets of genitalia. The first lovemaker to say “booby” gets both wallets.

Heather Rounds, Rupert Wondolowski, Bonnie Jones, Ric Royer, Megan McShea

Rituals

How to march into Jerusalem with your battle dress on, go on girl!

1. Receive only the absence, not the presence
2. Wave and pat pouch cloth. Form leg trumpet
3. Make it ouchie in the Humvee
4. Make sure that Kirk notices you by wearing so much make up you look like a clown and appearing at his big gig at the MTV music awards with the lead singer of Stone Temple Pilots and tell him you're pregnant.
5. Buy a custom fitted mouth guard, the kind for teeth grinding not hockey. Put your head down, groan a little, channel Cormac McCarthy, bend at the knees, wipe that tiny bit of spittle. Rush.

*Ric Royer, Rupert Wondolowski, Bonnie Jones,
Megan McShea*

Rituals

How to devour a reindeer (in New Mexico)

1. Lure Santa away with cookies.
2. Send in a team of pleasure-seeking nibblers.
3. STAY COOL.
4. Remove all four hooves with knees still intact.
No, don't put them on. Yet.
5. The New Mexico sun is beating harshly on you
and the carcass. Hydrate and get a grip while
placing a clamp on nose. Yours.

*Ric Royer, Rupert Wondolowski, Bonnie Jones,
Megan McShea*

Sestinas

A poetic form of seven stanzas with a strict word repetition scheme. The first six stanzas have six lines each, and the last word of each line of the first stanza is repeated in successive stanzas in different orders: ABCDEF, FAEB CD, CFDA BE, ECBFAD, DEACFB, and BDFECA. The last stanza has three lines, the first containing the final words of lines A and B, the second of C and D, and the last of E and F. To write in a group, each writer chooses a word and writes six lines ending in that word, and half a line containing the word for the last stanza. Cut up and combine according to the poem's form. Easiest with 3 or 6 writers.

Sestinas

Wet, they murmur

The apples, wet, they murmur

Moving in stalks

The faucet water ran like a whisper

“Oh indeed it was lovely,” she said, fumbling with
the

latch

grisly, silent, buttered

deteriorating Hungarian

Italian? Or Hungarian?

Scratched a knee and murmured

Acclaim for the buttered

During summer solstice the dog stalks

A hair got caught in the latch

Zephyr whisper

Flex spend drizzle whisper

It's time for your Hungarian

My arm dropped red and meaty as I backed against
the

barndoor latch

In the hour, the hands pick up murmurs

A probably sign, stalks

Beaches as if buttered

Sestinas

If parents were only buttered
Zipper caught on a whisper
There shyness stalks
You march like a Hungarian
Timid it murmurs
For hours I sat puddling by the latch

We tripped the lock but there was a rusted latch
Precedent set, angrily buttered
An older man had a rash in the shape of Michigan's
mitten, and a heart murmur
The head a wrinkled melon, protuberant on the
pillow, emitted a whisper
Slogging through the Hungarian
On closer inspection the stalks

Hair lines the bathtub in stalks
Pressing rubber submarine submerged latch
A lady like a broth, Hungarian
Struck Marty all buttered
Gas leak hissing whisper
Uneven surface like a murmur

Small hands murmur in cornstalks
When her lip latch gave it loosed a raspy whisper
Instead of Mary, a buttered Hungarian.

Bonnie Jones, Megan McShea, Rupert Wondolowski

Sonnets

A classic 14-line poetic form with many variations that can be made into a group exercise in a variety of ways. For instance, each of two writers writes six lines with last words that rhyme, and a final line rhyming with an agreed-upon word. Lines are then cut up and arranged so that the rhyming lines alternate, with a couplet at the end for the final lines.

Sonnets

On wheels the gathered rosebuds conceal a viper
Peas for sunglasses that are besmirched
Struggling as a high school typer
Juice we gave out to the little church

The actual moment – relaxes our sent-resurge
The fasting fakir doesn't pale gray pearl
From which the terribly human loaf verged
With every bent lash or curl

His shiny silver into the folds of pearl
“Oh vowel” your place was rudimentary
the nicest kids will boil their wick
in the strangest booth of all – then bury

“What connection” you say, scream, and pound
wasted underground

*Bonnie Jones, Megan McShea, John Eaton, Blaster Al
Ackerman*

Sonnets

The choices of loose habits such as wiper
Clambering headfirst up a birch
Tough insomniac hollow biker
The swell of – a rudiment in sing first

One doesn't need opinions glum to sing a dirge
Our eyeball penny world
A distinct desire to merge
When Rilke drove his SAAB out back and hurled

A log is to a reason as the beach to a stick
Stickiest grubs nibbling a century
No longer erp-less hawked up quick
While reclining upon the church benchery

And officially forgotten sounds
A branch for a birth ary-bound

*Bonnie Jones, Megan McShea, John Eaton, Blaster Al
Ackerman*

Word Lists

The group comes up with a collection of words and then gives themselves a set amount of time to write a short piece using all the words. Like the parallel story, but leaves more room to be intentional.

Word Lists

treasure	spaghetti	fused	carpets
lawn	muscles	watershed	rush
groovy	bagging	flutter	dizzy
lunching	loaded	banquet	lastly
dirigible	rollerblades	signage	chintz

I felt dizzy. The start of a sad rush against my eyelids.
The carpets, chintz, fused into tiny kaleidoscopic
wedges.

You. Groovy.

This not that.

A lunching feat, the tautness in your muscles that
had us all bagging up sand for the hurricane. And,
and lastly when our eyes welled up radiant,
restitutive.

All of our things were loaded up just the same.

The sunken briny treasures of domesticity and
dungarees. All lawn spaghetti, right circuses. A life
spread in gulls and shells, lapping at the banks of the
watershed. the moment. umm. moments. Fancy
dirigible blown. The flag we set on the lawn made a
last sad flutter. Goodbye banquet of our years. Adieu.
This is the signage of the times. No rollerblades. No
topless bathing.

Bonnie Jones

Word Lists

Muscles: Check it Diz, my girl is passed out on the lawn lunching on a banquet of dirt 'cause she just bit it when she got on her rollerblades loaded.

Dizzy: Chill Muscles, I'm on a groovy hidey-high from some pot spaghetti I cooked up. Your girl's fused to the asphalt, no rush, we got carpets to flutter babe.

Muscles: She could die any minute, man! Get the first aid from the watershed and quit bagging on my lady, my dove, my treasure.

Dizzy: Muscles, did you read the signage when you walked into my loft? "No chintz, no shirt, no dirigibles." and lastly Muscles: I will rain infernal terrors upon all mankind. Howl! Howl! The end is upon us.

Ric Royer

Word Lists

It was banquet time on our dirigible. All the treasures of lunching fused with the dizzy rush of flying high in a chunk of rubber lined with thick carpets. As I worked my muscles devouring spaghetti I considered this moment a watershed of the last decade of life stretched out like a lawn overtaken by crab grass and worked over by a bagging middle-aged groovy work out guy on rollerblades gasped and loaded on prime flutter and strip mall signage.

Lastly, for your people of the future that survive. It was a chimp I wanted, not this embroidered chintz.

Rupert Wondolowski

Word Lists

lastly,
a fused rush
a banquet in chintz
I said
get off my groovy lawn
in the dizzy shadow
of your dirigible
under your bagging eyes
muscles flutter
loaded with carpets
"want some more signage"
said my rollerblades
and I nodded
wide-eyed
a watershed
for spaghetti.

Megan McShea

Credits

Individually, the writers whose collaborations grace these pages are making their myriad ways in the world, with words and other pursuits. Since the writing group evaporated, some have remained here in Baltimore, others have found new places to call home, and as of this writing, two have shed this life and live on in their words and our hearts. (Blaster's daughter tells me his astral self can be found in front of Normal's books in Baltimore, where he is working on projecting backward into the store without tripping on a dog end.) Find their great works and current shenanigans in these virtual and actual places:

Blaster Al Ackerman (shatteredwig.blogspot.com, search "Blaster")

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