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a damn fine literary journal

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MASTHEAD

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No issues were published between 1997 and 2001.

I miss the innocence I've known.

—Wilco, "Heavy Metal Drummer"

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EQUISITE PLATYPUS

The platypus's exotic features and stout build
make egg-laying a breeze. Jimmy, let's review the tape. Here
we see Nicolette, a platypus from the outback, throwing
up so much kibble even experts
don't know what to do. Rocky was watching
this on TV. He found the peanut brittle and Gideon Bible
in the nightstand. It was so like him not to know
where he was, and Rocky was like nobody else. That's why
they voted him Duke of the Condo Association
just before they quartered his hens. Oh yes, Rocky said.
It was coming back to him now...

THE BEETLE

The paths you cross,
thin blades of grass—
What places have you to go?

WELCOME, IRAQ

From 6,000 feet, we circled
for two hours, the landscape
below highlighted green and brown.

The flight chief said landing
may not be an option; it is how
I relayed it to the commander.

My soldiers, some just 18,
sat tentative at the thought
that two had died, below.

The planed then banked
steep and fast.

We were landing.
There was a lull.

MEMORIAL DAY

Does it matter—losing your legs?
—Siegfried Sassoon

Does it matter?
Perhaps not,
not when you're welcomed home
with yellow ribbons, hugs,
and your mug is plastered
on the front page of the local paper.
Not when there's a holiday
to celebrate your bone and flesh
scattered along some highway,
still picked at by mice and maggots.
Not when there are parades
and puerile speeches by politicians
whose tailored pants protect two legs.
Not while there's a long weekend
to swim, sun, drink beer, boat
and wander through shopping malls.
Does it matter that it's all a lie
repeated over and over until at last
you on your metal pegs swinging
back and forth on crutches believe it?

SECURITY AT THE BIG CHAIN STORE

Has thrown you out
You were sitting on their dolly
Waiting for your wife to come out
So you could buy some lumber
You join the rally protesting their tactics

WHEN RACHEL LEFT

That was a six-Corona day.
And after I sucked them dry

I sung myself the dirge
of every fucking drunk—

the one where a woman
makes him stop & weigh
the benefits of breathing

JOB, IN CLEVELAND

I wake nights asking myself
not why the righteous suffer
nor what it means to be blameless
and upright but why Lake Erie
appears so otherworldly
in the moonlight. Nature, it turns out,
still breathes: even on a city street,
even through the bus fumes. No one
understands. Each day I grip my broom
or mop, or push my cart through Wal-Mart.
True, a wobbly wheel is not the loss
of donkeys, oxen, servants, children;
but still I would tear my robe
and shave my head if it would help.
The ride home from work
is governed by such contradictions:
a day is done, a day is never done,
a day repeats itself yet never
is the same. The point, I know,
is not that I came naked
from my mother's womb,
not that naked there I will return;
but the way the moonlight outside
my apartment window falls
on the black water of Lake Erie, falls
like mystery itself, falls like this ghostly,
baleful life I can't escape.

RUST BELT

When the soot dries
the footprint stands out
the shape of a boot.

The smell of rust, 26 years, Jim Beam,
knees that twitch and wake themselves
from dreams of running.

Then the rain,
falling in the same cadence as the gears,
washes it into the gutter, shapeless.
Not even a shadow left.

SILVER SPOONS: THE LOST EPISODES

Boys Will Be Boys: Ricky and Alfonso double-team an underage girl who may or may not be related to Alfonso. Later, after blowing up a warehouse with a hijacked fuel tanker, the boys go on the lam to Chicago with Federal Agents in hot pursuit. Mr. T guest stars.

The Best Christmas Ever: Ricky wanders through a dream, tending after two mysterious dogs and cleaning up his dead mother's trashed house. Lots of crying. Erin Gray guest stars as a kindhearted U.S. Postal worker.

Spare the Rod: Ricky, suddenly a college professor, confronts an angry mob of students who are resentful of his seemingly inconsistent and contradictory pedagogy. Milton Berle's legendary genitalia stars as the standardized test that meddles with Ricky's curriculum development one time too many.

What's Cookin'?: In this 33-second episode, guest-directed by a guy randomly chosen from a Milwaukee street corner, Ricky, in a room filling up with sunlight, contemplates the sublime and then immediately feels stupid.

Judgment Day: Alfonso "comes out," learns Norwegian, gets a job in a nursing home, and teaches Dexter the Nursing Home Sponge Bath Mantra: *Labia majora, Labia minora, mons in the back, mons in the back*. Ricky and his millionaire father go bowling. Edward Stratton III rolls a perfect game while drinking alcohol with Vicodin.

Educating Rick: Ricky wakes up with a tightness in his chest and a vague aching in his balls. From everywhere in the mansion he hears the future of a thousand things gone wrong. A bowed support beam in the basement snaps, collapsing the house on top of the Stratton Family. A fire starts. Giant ball bearings roll out of nowhere. The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders guest star as a home invasion of murderers and rapists.

NOT WORTH THE CANDLE

My paper windmill has been caught
in the rain and the jellypigs are eating
the feet of refugees. Lately I have been
on Mars, unravelled by cool breezes,
and kept under house arrest for napping
by silhouettes. Beneath the iceberg
lettuce you might fumble upon a song
that smells like Christmas and tastes
sleep in your ears, and you might still
remember the laughter of the drowning
closets spun by bottles in the quietest
basements of Suburbia. A vulture snuck
into your coveralls when the bombs went
on and on about nineteen-seventies French
disco, *tres tranchant*, under the watchful
noses of postmodern double-agents
in ironic ties. Sorry I'm not there to see you
and glad I'm not there to see
your reconciliation with the Fourth Reich
Fashion Brigade. When your telescopic
scrutiny falls on technically inferior public
school dogs, and their saliva mixes with blood
in the corners of their cliché factories
under their will-it-never-end gazes, scour
for a reflection of the crimson globe housing
the prisoner you never knew and forget
every birthday present you ever gave me.

AT THE BUDDHIST PARTY

exhausted vegans bang
into each other by the volleyball net.
“They need red meat,”
our resident Tibetan says,
flinging his cigarette butt into the grass.
“Jesus,” someone says, “I thought
Tibetans were, like, spiritual.”
Tenzin laughs, his face a wrinkled moon
and I remember Oakland Putnam,
my round Chippewa uncle,
belly swollen with Hamms and beef stew,
who loved to lie on the courthouse lawn
way past midnight singing,
I am ready now,
my sweet little pigeons.
I am ready for love.

JAPANESE PAINTING OF FLUTTERING RED TREE

The Bloodgood roots itself deep
in the dirt and hangs on there,
still under the surface
as limbs wave, shake with wind
and grow away from shadows,
a bundle of balloons
tied to a lead weight.

I waver the opposite way,
lying petrified in bed
under television lights
as my mind sways below,
letting out lines and angling
for anchors, swinging
and searching for my foundations,
for the roots of my failures.

NINE MORE WAYS OF LOOKING AT HEGEL

1.

I go walking with myself, talking again—here
we go—trying not to sense panic, all that panic.

2.

I cannot talk to you. Phlox, jewelweed,
and sunflowers don't comfort me anymore.

3.

I try to picture myself. My core is cylindrical, I have
always imagined, climbing through

the center of my ribcage. In my heart, cities rise
in a green sun. I hum in my bricks and beams.
My strength always crumbles
like a tower, Babel. Where is real strength,

the kind that city birds have, knowing
how to survive the elements, the blustering?

4.

My room turns into rain. I am wandering

through it, hearing things.

5.

With white noise, worms, and love stories,
I know I destroy myself. I talk too much,
filling the room with jitters
like the infrared wings of birds.

6.

A sparrow's wings beat against the window
like a swallowtail trying to flee a greenhouse. Escape

is the only word I know in my heart,
but there is nothing to escape from—or rather, into.
Go out of this room, and there will still
be the laws of the world.

7.

Upon finding my mind,
—which hitherto I felt was not a “type”—
described and analyzed in pages soft
as silk, I marveled.

8.

I embrace the sadness of certain words,
thinking of picking bouquets of roses,
black-eyed Susans, Queen Anne's lace,

but the most important flower
is the one that symbolizes everything.

9.

The unlighted candles are the mots justes
for the moment. Nothing is burning or in flux—
we are not seeking the Absolute, then how to
come down from it like trapeze artists
who learn that all their tumbling can be triumphed
by an unlit candle with a purple curl of wax
arching its organic namelessness until it touches
the lip of the faux Grecian urn standing in for candleholder.
Each shadow the urn catches is a little whisper,
edifying.

YOU COULD HAVE TALKED ABOUT

having done it, written it,
how you wrote what
you always wanted to write,
the words like the music,
but not the music,
the words like the voice,
but not the voice,
the words like the two together,
the one with the other,
the music together with the voice,
but not the music with the voice,
how the words were the other reality
you finally found,
the third one.

* * *

You could have talked about
the wind without the rain,
about how the wind
smelled of the rain.

* * *

You could have talked about
the flowers,
the salvia, vinca, creeping
petunia, peonies, impatiens,
begonia, rhododendrons,
or the end of the azalea,
drying out, drooping, leaving
its crimson droppings on the ground,
making that five feet of June an autumn.

* * *

You could have talked about
those two ants,
how the smaller one
was trying
to carry off the larger one,
and how instinct
compels the impossible
in all things.

* * *

You could have talked about
the white lilac again,
but this time
about how
the blooms,
burning white-hot through May,
had flamed out,
leaving behind,
on the twigs,
their ashen ghosts.

* * *

You could have talked about
the third reality.

How My Muse Diffuses Aggression

Among the clueless mass
Faces doused in doubt
Bob up like apples
My fangs hang poised to pounce.

TRIOLET FOR POLEDANCER

Her hips are the joyride I've never had.
Under these lights, my wife disappears.
Katwoman's never *tired*, or *lonely*, or *sad*.
Her hips are the joyride I've never had—
Their churning & chugging drives my cock mad.
With a porcelain grin, she whispers *come here*.
Her hips are the joyride I've never had.
Under these lights, my wife disappears.

GIRL

name says it all
man dont have a chance
if the bird got wings
strong like ox

dont know what love is either.

And the cage cant hold her

scent too pretty pretty pretty—
dont the breathless wind know—

Girl.

PASSIONFRUIT

i

to lick the juice that drips from your fingers
rivulets of flavor, to savor
one at a time as I suckle

ii

to catch the fruitflesh on your tongue
unchaste communion in the heat,
the sticky humidity, it binds us

iii

to drink the sweet and your sweat
from the same drops, summertime candy
goes down easy, greedy

iv

to feel your pulse race as we share
the taste, and like fruit we are overripe,
bursting, ready to be devoured

v

to watch your teeth pierce the skin
carve it, claim it with your mouth
I want to be the victory you taste

what's left of the flooding

for weeks after
unbuttoning my
coat and seeing what burst inside me

my palms ate
what sky blew lost and
stained its lull with worry as if

stuffing insects up
a fountain's spout with
numbness above the nail

I held it shivering a
tired succulence strewn to calluses
asking me to make a fist until it could disappear

had it sprained
far from lumps of things
clouds isolated like the dawdling wince of a cigarette

returned to itself
to find pieces sipped on
sighed by drawers cracking open

fingertips parted to catch
what was left of the flooding
strands of ice and wing sledding bath around an elbow

I sat on the toilet
fishing silk with a finger for practice
letting happen without a smile tilting after

anything that lets
without asking permission
or waiting to be told

patterns of stopping
not to unfurl and blow
into air a body serrated beneath fabric

worried about holding
anything entirely possible as
rain never turning to snow again

GRIEF

That year after it happened
we opened the summer house
and invited your brother and his wife
the second one, to join us.
Our laughter drifted into late-night air
joining the clank of glasses and ocean water hush.
Sunny, your brother's wife,
asked you to dance with her to a cd she'd brought
(not knowing that you dislike anything older than 80's rock)
and your hand stayed in one spot on her waist
as your brother and I drank mojitos and played Scrabble.

It was a month of long afternoons,
crossword puzzles and barbeque, quick sex
before we rose for breakfast usually
made by Sunny, your sister-in-law
(who didn't know you were allergic to eggs)
and your long after-lunch naps on the deck always
with a thick book resting on your undulating stomach,
reminding Sunny, the wife of your only brother, of the waves,
how they come in with such force, then fizzle
into tiny bubbles before her happy toes.

I watched her, Sunny, watching you one evening
while your brother, her husband, whistled along with the radio
in the kitchen, his apron slightly stained,
his wife just twenty feet away,
as he prepared the salad that would complement
the fish he'd grilled an hour before
you laid on the hammock swinging
at first, then still under the moon
and the dreaded thoughts
I could not refuse.

I went to the room that would have been our son's
and sat at the edge of the bed while memories of
last year, this time exactly, collided.
There you stood at the doorway,
which was now the shoreline of my private sadness.
Behind you the dim hall light and
Sunny, my sister-in-law, singing off key.

IT DOES JUST FINE WITHOUT A NAME

*A second passes. A second second. A third. But they're three seconds
only for us*

—Wisława Szymborska

The land doesn't call itself land.
Doesn't understand the human
wish for suffering, wasn't born
half-dazed by the departure
from womb, nor startled
by the first flutter of air on skin.

The land doesn't know itself
from one second to the next,
nor one grain, can't feel itself
being gathered in desperation
or communion, one human hand
at a time. Can't sense a boot
or horseshoe, or a desperate crowd
birring for cover behind walls.

The land isn't abandoned
when a window shuts it out,
doesn't distress being fled from,
nor calls the fleeing back again.

The land isn't troubled by its own
plume-raised ascension from the storm
of early afternoon bullets.
Doesn't feel itself pocked, marked,
nor the torturous multiplication
of weight, body upon sediment
upon grain, all the words we assigned.

The land doesn't care about history
or the names of the dead.
After all, these histories are only histories
we humans write to remember.

The land has its own sense. Doesn't feel
itself being clawed at or died on.

The land doesn't call itself land.
Sonoran. Desert. Death, too, that word,
is nothing more than a tangle.

Our emptiness upon our emptiness.

NORTHERN LAKE, WITH BATHROOM

The old farmers built houses against
not for nature. Lakes had fish
not views. So the farmhouse was blocked
from the lake below the hill
by a windbreak of poplar and pine.
Only when winter stripped the poplars
could I see slices of sun-crazed ice
bisected by black strokes of trunks.
And that only from the bathroom,
sitting on the toilet. There, right shoe
anchored by the tub's nearest claw foot,
leaning to look beyond the widest bole,
I might, on a late afternoon,
watch the sun settle among cattails.
The stun of its scarlet and orange
was eased by plastic sheeting nailed
over the loose window. So there,
myself unwatched, I oversaw
this ritual of fire and ice
and let my waters flow to merge
with those that kept the fish
in the darkness below.

WINTER SUN

1.

through the draught
a chink of sunset
shifts in the fireplace

2.

wintertime—
sunlight through windows
shining cold rays

3.

December sunshine
a tiny red azalea
blooming by the wall

4.

on iced river
sunlight thawing away
around a bend

5.

sparkling gold
behind frost-spangled branches
the rising sun

6.

winter sunset—
a patch of cold red
on a white wall

CONTRIBUTORS

Lisa Bellamy has published poetry in *Tiferet*, *Harpur Palate*, *Rainbow Curve*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Wavelength*, and other magazines. She received an honorable mention in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror 2007* and is working on a poetry collection. She lives in Brooklyn with her husband, photographer Peter Bellamy, and teaches creative writing at The Writers Studio in New York City.

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Peter Joseph Gloviczki lives and writes in Minnesota. His work is forthcoming in *MARGIE* and in *Gertrude*.

Frank Dixon Graham is the current Poetry Editor of *Poetry Now* and serves on the board of the Sacramento Poetry Center. His work has most recently appeared in *Feelings Poetry Journal*, *Syncopated City*, and *Because People Matter*.

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Jessica Harman is a poet and artist living in Brookline, Massachusetts. She was born in Montreal, Canada. Her poems have appeared (or are forthcoming) in *Stand*, *Orbis*, *The South Carolina Review*, and other journals. An essay on poetics is forthcoming in *The Iconoclast*. *My Journey As An Unharmonious Being*, her first chapbook, is available from Flarestack Publishing.

Colleen Harris was raised on Long Island, New York. After escaping to the South for college and graduate school, she indulges her passion for literature and information as a Reference & Instruction Librarian at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She is currently working on her MFA in creative writing at Spalding University.

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Jessica Jewell is a recent graduate of the Northeast Ohio Master of Fine Arts program, where she was the Wick Poetry Fellow. Her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Nimrod*, *Rhino*, *Poems & Plays*, *Harpur Palate*, and *Barn Owl Review*, among others. She was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize and is currently teaching English at

Ken Jones has been a published poet for over 20 years in academic and underground journals, magazines, anthologies, websites and other forums. He has given readings of his original work since college at bars, bookstores, coffeehouses, conferences, and other venues. He earned an MA in English/Creative Writing from the University of Texas at Austin and is a full-time faculty member at the Art Institute of Houston, teaching Creative Writing, among other subjects. His collection *Unutterable Blunders and Palace Disasters* was published by PlainViewPress in 2006.

Francis E. Kazemak has published poetry and stories in various journals and little magazines. His book, *Exploring Our Lives: A Writing Handbook for Senior Adults*, was published by Santa Monica Press in 2002. He lives in Buffalo, Minnesota.

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Michael Ogletree is the poetry editor for *SUB-LIT Literary Magazine*. He just wrapped up a ten-year stint as an undergraduate. Michael is leaving these United States to study literature and write poetry in Germany with a graduate fellowship at the University of Mainz. He has new work forthcoming in *Identity Theory*. His mother says his poems sound pretty, but she doesn't always know what they mean.

Doug Ramspeck was awarded the 2007 John Ciardi Prize for Poetry for his collection of poems. *Black Tupelo Country*. The book will be published in the fall of 2008 by BkMk Press (University of Missouri-Kansas City). He teaches at The Ohio State University at Lima, and his poems have appeared in numerous journals that include *West Branch*, *Confrontation Magazine*, *Connecticut Review*, *Seneca Review*, *Rattle*, and *Hunger Mountain*. He lives in Lima with his wife, Beth, and his daughter, Lee.

J.R. Solonche is coauthor (with wife Joan Siegel) of *Peach Girl: Poems For a Chinese Daughter* (Grayson Books). His work has appeared in numerous magazines, journals, and anthologies. He teaches at SUNY–Orange in Middletown, New York.

Carol Steinhagen has recently retired from college English teaching to devote time to poetry, though it feels strange, when filling out forms, to write “poet” instead of “professor” in the occupation line.

Janet Thorning lives in Toronto, Ontario. She has been published in *Mud Luscious*, *971 MENU*, *The Rambler*, *Arabesques Review* and *anderbo.com*. She had work forthcoming in *Mississippi Crow*, *Bateau*, *Nano Fiction* and *1097 Magazine*.

Jianqing Zheng haiku sequences have appeared in *California Quarterly*, *Hurricane Review*, *Poetry East*, previous issues of *Poetry Midwest*, and *The Kerf*.

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