

BPJ

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**BRUCE BOND**

**Vigil**

Nights I take my lost sleep to the one lamp  
left burning in this house and thoughts of the man  
hospiced in a room next door, when, not knowing  
where to turn, I am hanging on by a thread of music,  
the last stitch closing a heart in its crypt.  
Just what binds me at the other end is unclear,  
though slowly as my hands work the frets, they take on  
their life, like pigeons in a magician's vase—  
which is part of the thread's resilience, piercing  
everything and silence, part of why, having come  
so far, I hesitate now to snip it with sleep.  
It simply melts, the way the green line melts  
in a heart monitor, slicing through its box  
and melting, though I like to think it follows  
something, that my neighbor where he lies, slack-jawed,  
amazed with damage, offers up the needle  
of a kindred music; for his curtain is no less  
troubled with lamplight, and as his pulse flits  
about in its cage, the same thread of air goes  
through him, holding nothing going in, nothing going out.

**NATASHA SAJÉ**

**Thanksgiving**

Be grateful for the bad things too, says Rumi.  
I'm glad I sit in a room with a thumb-sized wasp.  
A gust of warmth might wake it up  
to stinging. Of course, I could have been  
put stark naked in a barrel stuck with nails  
and dragged along by two white horses. Maybe  
that will be tomorrow's boon. But now  
I'm happy for the bunion on my foot,  
and for this gray November day that turns  
the trees to angry veins, and for tobacco  
with its sturdy grip on friends, their lively coughs.  
I'm much obliged as well to mischief I myself  
have caused: my petty meanness in the air  
like gasoline, my callousness a vinyl cloak.  
But most of all, I thank God  
for Sloth, the bear who eats my hours  
avidly. How difficult life would be  
without you, Sloth, an uphill road of industry.  
You make a drowsy wasp of pain.

**NATASHA SAJÉ**  
**Reading the Menu**

*This is my favorite  
part of the meal,*

she says, looking  
up at her friend with eyes

bright as coins in water.  
It's when the artichokes

are so young they can be  
eaten raw; when the coriander-

rubbed tuna with tamari  
vinaigrette is medium-

rare; when the Kiwano melon  
lemon ice lasts; and when

the Barolo's bloom waits  
to fill the air with berry

and leather.

At this moment  
the past is a small mouse

twinkling around the edges  
of the room, the future sits

like a pasha on his throne  
and the present's diaphanous

peignoir of words  
makes them forget

what hasn't been offered.

**NATASHA SAJÉ**

**I See**

the cats playing with a rose fallen  
from a wreath: a stiff silvery stem

topped by a dark pink ball.  
How charmingly they bat the rose,

sniffing it with glee, and that's what  
makes me bend, and see that it's really

the long dried tail and entrails of a rat.  
I laugh: If rose & rat are not so far

apart, then what can't be mistaken  
for something that it's not?

The turn's a way of telling me  
to make each breath a self-revision.

**ELIZABETH MCLAGAN**

**The Running**

Late afternoon stillness, and a girl  
in the arms of a fir, climbing  
the spiraled branches, leaning weightless

into the trunk. Her breath eases  
and she opens her little hoard of dirty words  
to suck their sweetness. Barechested,

she's opened a robin's egg, watched  
the red pulse flutter in the dark  
comma of bird. White of the eye, she thinks,

the shell's broken sharpness. And  
the fields, flattened and waiting.  
Carbide glints in her father's hair

as he leaves his shop for the kitchen,  
where her mother leans at the white stove  
and they will be alone and silent

together. If he cups her breasts  
she will lower her eyes to the gravy's  
sputter and flick and stir the gray fat harder.

Every night at the table the meat  
is stabbed, fingers wrapping the forks.  
The girl can't put enough in her mouth.

Eyelashes cut to a crisp, a bride doll's dusty  
in the girl's closet, and soon  
the dumb wandering buttons of breasts

will push her into confusion. But for now  
she's a knife, narrow and flashing, searching  
her hands and mouth for a sign.

**MARGARET AHO**

**Father's Dead. Mother's in the Chinese**

Elm, the highest  
branch. Mother, come  
back! She  
turns slowly, balances herself. Then swings  
down  
like a gymnast, like an ape.  
Branches snap, break  
off as she descends. In  
the yard  
a pink cloud vibrates, hums: an  
efflorescence.  
Look  
in there.  
She squints at the crabapple: something stock-  
still at the fork (dis-  
closed, almost  
erased  
by all that trembling  
tissue) in a glossy body, white, watching us  
with its red  
eye, newly wattled, combed: a  
cock, a  
cockerel.

**MARGARET AHO**

**“Rituals we perform to ward off ruin . . .” (Virgil)**

Boil water. Spoon  
coffee in the beaker’s  
filter. Download  
last night’s

dream: a  
leaky dinghy, the creaky  
ratcheting of being  
lowered, you

bobbing, thanatotic . . .  
Entelechy’s huge hull heels up,  
drops over the edge.  
You’ve brought your writings, your wadables?

That’s good. Masticate. Like a wasp  
make something use-  
ful: ogham oakum, portmanteau  
pulp: puispith, pulchaw . . .

Bail! Caulk! Pray for old world long-  
windedness, squat quat-  
rains . . .  
Row! Say: I love to row.

**MARGARET AHO**  
**Fingers pried up, off . . .**

grasping  
turned inside out and dropped  
like a glove. (Quid  
nunc?) The palm  
is reexamined:

Dear chiromantic: Off-hand  
these lines tend to ex-  
temporize . . . .

(Ad lib?) Like  
chromosomes,  
parallel and equidistant: one pair, out  
of the blue, crossing  
over. They  
do, you know, inexplicably, randomly: one jack-  
knives and flips its slenderness athwart  
the other—X  
where they kiss, X where they trade  
twaddle, inside  
dope, chit  
chat. Imagine the ex-  
change. (Allele,

allelic.) Close  
your eyes, your mouth. Picture  
annalida: 2 pink worms,  
decussate at their swollen saddles/girdles,  
swapping clitellum in-  
telligence . . . .

(And the castings from this?)  
Broadcast.

→

(And the fold/seam/pleats in my palm?)

Hatching, crosshatching . . . .

(And this clishmaclaver, this

transfer

of . . . )

Lively dirt.

(Death.)

Small talk.

(Lingua mortis.)

Listen.

**LOLA HASKINS**

**Five Ways to Look at Blush**

**1.**

It is in the nature of the horizon to recline. It is in the nature of the sun, to take her every afternoon.

**2.**

The azaleas suddenly explode in all-over pink, like a woman who can't get her clothes off fast enough. *Bad taste*, sniffs Mother. Then, moving on, *Plant something else*.

**3.**

The cheeks of the old woman pulling a shopping basket are startled fuschia, as if some passerby has just told her she is beautiful.

**4.**

A ruby glint is secreted in certain feathered bodies. The young of these birds are more voracious than the young of other birds.

**5.**

You brush it on, as an artist might. Dim rose settles along your cheekbones, goes wild into your hair.

**NANCE VAN WINCKEL**

**Fire in the Furnace**

Red faces feed its redness. Tend its  
madness. A silvered moon  
bores a white hole through the Black Sea.

In a secret everyone shares, ashes  
are hauled up, then thrown overboard.  
The fire whiter in the wee hours.

For those asleep, the dreamed ship rides  
high above the water. Far ashore, wives  
pull red awnings shut on the west.

I've stood inside the bored hole—  
a gnat pinned to the prow  
by a needle of sweet moonlight.

The boiler glows. It gasps. Whitest  
in the wee hours. Half-asleep, a boy  
stumbles up and tosses the ashes over.

**NANCE VAN WINCKEL**

**Mission Creep**

Shuffle twice and deal. Let poker deliver us  
down the ten cold steps to morning. Too much blood  
in the river turns it dark. Disembodied and disremembered,  
what does a dead corporal recall of his old orders?  
Not a word, not a glyph in the moonlight.

The greened-out countryside hurt our eyes  
after hours around a table,  
talking the bones of our faces dry. The work  
asked only a small piece of me—that was *it*  
to transport the words across the worlds.

Shush. Say nothing of import. Little ears  
overhear. The boys finger their coins  
and ante up. Vodka for verve. Dawn lightens  
the river's load. From its shimmer a hand  
is raised. It calls and I see, too far gone to fold.

**NANCE VAN WINCKEL**

**We Meet Three University Men Looking for Atlantis**

—*Greece*

They had a boat for a while but its bottom  
went bad. They had a map, they said,  
but now it seems a crook made it up.

We run into them at the museum.  
The short one studies a statue of a woman  
who may be from the century they're after.

Walking home, we pass the boys riding mules  
in circles over barley in a pit, calling *yee-up*  
while grain sifts down from the shafts  
as it has for six thousand years.

When the university men pass, tipsy  
with history, they bray back at a braying mule.  
They're headed south where a volcano wakes  
and coughs every century or two,  
and there's elation in the men's voices  
when they tell us that now it's been three.

**IOANNA CARLSEN**  
**Insomnia: A Sextet**

I

*On Reading Cioran*

Leaf caught in a branch of ice,  
I am unsleeping,  
heroic,  
neither dead, nor dreaming,  
awake.

I exist when I  
don't sleep,  
it makes me feel  
*you there,*  
*me watched.*

You think because you  
are not God,  
I don't know you.

But I've been here as long as you,  
I know the territory:  
(it's yours *and* mine),  
our marriage is  
the first map.

II

*The Insomnia of Galaxies*

is archipelagos  
not knowing where they end,  
but swirling by each other endlessly,  
sleepless

a sea of one accident succeeding another,  
moons circling moons,  
breath succeeding breath,

*sleep, you, sleep, in stillness rest.*

III

*Virtual Insomnia*

Sleepless,  
a picture of Giacometti's  
*Woman Standing* stands on the sill,  
next to dead roses and a clock.  
On a chair, a book propped-open, wide-awake,  
shows a woman Utamaro drew once.  
Absent-minded,  
she sticks a toothpick  
through closed lips.

Outside it snows—  
who is "it"?  
In another room  
the weatherman  
thinks he knows what whoever is snowing  
is going to do with it.  
A series of "it"s  
underlines the truth—  
he doesn't know who snows either,  
but streaks the early morning with a stream of empty sound.

IV

*Virtual Sleep*

In the air over the lake  
the big birds fly, wheeling;  
they scissor the light,  
pattern over pattern, invisible scribbling,  
and later,  
dive into the trees  
for truth.

**V**

*Actual Sleep*

The world was smothering me;  
I took its hand off my mouth,  
it was remarkably easy,  
a little pressure on the wrist  
and it lifted,  
I dreamed in a different direction.  
(I became the world,  
and it turned out to be nothing  
but possibilities to contain me.)

**VI**

*The Marriage of Sleep and Insomnia*

I think of people missing from my life  
as gone  
but not yet returning.  
Or returning  
but not yet returned.  
Either  
is equal  
in the eyes of my life.

When I think of you  
with my eyes closed  
I wonder  
if tonight is one of those times  
when you are here or not.  
Actually come back.  
Virtually tell me.

Show me in dreams  
what I already know:  
we have borne between us this marriage,  
our conversations a beast with two backs.

**PATRICIA GOEDICKE**

**Who But We**

“. . . *most changeable ones, who walk about with the urge to comprehend everything and (because we're unable to grasp it) to reduce immensity to the action of our heart, for fear that it might destroy us.*"  
—Rilke, *Letters on Cezanne*, Oct. 13, 1907

Waking to it, alive, in  
    side, behind the eyes the skull's  
    blood purple incandescence,  
        across the swaying  
        dance floor such sleight of eye  
brave islands of blur —

fallen, some would say  
    reduced. To a few brief  
    backlit blood cells passing —

Yet if they be not luminaries, inflamed  
    galactic fingerprints, if they be not peepholes  
        to blazing sunstorms, royal siblings of red  
    and gold origin —

Please may the tales told by physicists  
    be more than fables,  
    than comet tails by fools for fact, but true  
        irradiated bolts of shattered light spun  
    from creation's first awakenings, *O wake me*  
        *again and again to the hiss of it*, the speeding  
    from farthest space straight down

into hidden seed, into self's most intimate  
    aftertaste and secret  
    ultra-hum, lymphatic  
        silence sub/silence. At chambered warp  
    mini-speeds and deeper, in this extra-  
ordinary hum as the snared tap, tickle  
    and whirr of felt thought's small  
        symbiotic change, ex-  
change, the very currency of mind's tiny  
    talking to each other stars *leaps*

with all its neurotransmitters sizzling, its dazzling  
miniature mirrors flashing their own dazed  
super coronal flares to the heavens, flagging them down  
and then up again, with such raging  
dragontoothed intensities, how is it not clear,  
reduced or not,  
for all time immensity is immense everywhere:

even in these quarters confined,  
in the cramped cosmogeny of Self, its sickly notes  
spiraling in on themselves,  
the kingdom's not lost until we are, *and we are one,*  
*please may we be many*  
*and kind,*  
*may we meet often —*

If each shining scrap of us at our most far flung  
atomized longings, if our lost  
piecemeal presences still flick, still surge,  
repulse and then attract, with dainty  
electric flourish spider across the world's

trembling networks, voluminous  
as ancient tree saps oozing, past, present  
and future, near and far  
arteries in their micro-macro floodings  
from one center, one raw  
pumping red valve to another, then here —

where, what? — in this unstoppable Eden, this small  
everywhere connected human  
regal tube's hot and cold  
primitive elegies to a broad cosmos  
whose ends we may not know,

for those no longer here  
and for those who are, the leap to be taken is to close  
constantly with in-  
constant sorrow's intermittent sparks shooting  
from far off into the semi-personal peace  
of this micro-cameo: with every arctic

→

fiery solar immensity flaring  
outside as it is in,  
at unthinkable speeds changing, why  
who but we should perish  
or not perish, my  
dear and the universe  
with us

**PATRICIA GOEDICKE**

**Hole**

Glares up at us like a black  
graffiti covered

stone the day after  
the execution.

Birds like heavy cigars, coffins  
wheeling overhead.

If this be corpse

or grave. If this be tooth or cavity  
or dry lake bed. Or spewed

vomit of self pity or howl, no tongue left  
to speak with: if there be the same

killing fields from the start:  
the gallows in the playpen.

If there be cracked eggshell  
and no egg. Neither yolk nor white

nor whole-Baby-live-forever. Hah!

If there be no kernel. No core  
to the applehead. If there be love

when love is dead.

If the outer firmament be arched  
skin only. If the noose embrace nothing

but cold ore and bowels,

*where is the high famed convexity  
of which this is the concave?*

For this is not a private. Not a personal  
crack in a sealed container.

No, this is not a single

lost shoe: on the nation's highways the owner  
is long gone.

And whether this be outer  
or inner rot, murderous

aimed or innocent kick, here

is an end to it, a hollow  
depression which has no bottom

and no top.

**LANDON GODFREY**

**Chaim Soutine Is Invited to Tea at the Ritz**

black ink, oozing *oui* and *oui*, gashes the curt  
surface of a correspondence card—  
what might be considered ridiculous  
formality—he is starving to death—

a greasy joke—his hands stained bloodish black—  
he will allow his thin suit to accept  
an afternoon wasted sipping assam:  
these are the thoughts the flies think for him now

as they crowd into the stink, the deep rot—  
the fervent carcass hanging from a hook,  
leaking a slow rage, filling the channels  
between the floorboards with a runny moan—

the flies' thousands of heckling eye frames,  
exactng hexagonal coffins  
in which each brush stroke will see its maker—  
the dead cow a ghetto for crimson glaze—

the last layer of paint—a greasy joy—  
he is starving but he waits for pink tea cakes  
that shudder *bonjour*—the flies eat—  
this might be considered ridiculous—

the once delicate flesh ravaged by taste  
but untouched by the painter—  
and still his hungry gaze detains him—  
a greasy farce—beauty and desire

coagulate on the jilted face of his rich hostess,  
her gold watch complaining—  
there will be no food again today—he is starving  
when even the weakest maggot

will be sated—evidence of a terrible regime  
in which a slave tortures a painting  
until it begs on bruised knees  
not to be magnificent—

**LANDON GODFREY**

**Self-Portrait as Lucien Freud's *Girl with a White Dog***

As the morning light—slivered, jaundiced, literate—lifts  
my hands to close my brassiere,

hooking breasts twice and eyes thrice,  
the sun stitches my fingers into the concaving and -vexing of buttons, pearls,  
watch

strap and garters. I feel light  
hum  
*silk and wool, wilk and sool,*  
*wilksool, and milk and soul*

across my skin. Is this the sitter's slow sense of sound?  
On the bus to the studio (I just make it,  
crowded up against the other bodies)

I pass a shop selling mirrors,  
like thriftstore lingerie, shocking, too intimate.  
One, a mocking canvas in which the painter will see

himself at night, undressing for bed  
(I know he sleeps naked),  
tomorrow filling paintings  
with jewelry that questions its own

vanity. I haven't any—  
But how the painter mourns.  
Wilksool a prayer—the source of the gods—

to his doubt-torn hand:

*Wonders of heaven: woman half-dressed:  
blest are the naked painters  
—skin, hair, breasts,  
light and shadow, greying crevice and neck,  
Cremnitz white serenading  
body and flesh.*  
*Wonders of earth: woman half-dressed:  
I sing of my maker, I sing of my death.*

And now—for a while—bright, busy silence.  
The couch stripes and lines,  
the sleek white dog muzzles as my breast

nipples; I am the dis-  
content of the painter stripped bare  
and staring—no *son*, all *lumière*—  
unmoving, unmoved.

**BETSY SHOLL**

**At the Public Market**

*Abandon all hope*, reads the hand-scrawled sign  
propped beside the lobster tank—some joker  
brooding on its murky doom, which looks

more like the world unformed and void,  
stirred by a mind feeling that sluggish urge  
to make itself known, a mind struggling

into form, water to gel, to claw and tail,  
oozing its way out of slime, stumbling  
among bottom feeders, grovelers, creeps

all bunched up, feelers adither  
over their future's watery inferno.  
How innocent Dante seems at first—

trembling and clutching at Virgil his guide,  
as if he hadn't constructed that bucket  
of dry ice himself, and personally

tossed each specimen in. Such a din  
of marketing all around, it's easy  
to be wilted by guilt, or to rage at

whoever made this place. But to watch  
how lobsters madly scramble, you have to  
bend close, look through your own shadow

into the tank's dim algae light,  
where a few black beads fiercely eye back—  
grabbers and pinchers clawing their way

to the top of some little heap.  
*And for what?* I suddenly have to ask,  
trembling, here, in the middle of my life.

**RYAN FLAHERTY**  
**February Shack Song**

1

I don't see myself forgiving you,  
maybe sometimes forget, but no  
not never, you damn cheat hog.  
Down to lard, beans,  
and a land of drift snow, and you

hoarding jerky and chocolate;  
I'm choking on Frank's rotten  
spoil mash, and you  
with some fancy single malt,  
damn straight I'll have some.

If I could cut a hole in the lake  
I'd drop you in, or pry the wind open  
and give you the boot through.  
Who's here to see? No stars  
cause there never were stars, and I ain't

looking up. I'm sitting tight,  
not inching a budging, counting  
up from one to one with the dice-light  
from the fire shaking these walls, now  
please shut up, shut up you.

2

I'm only going to tell you again:  
fill the luminum up to full,  
the grounds to black  
and boil the death out of them.  
That'll keep you more than up.

And how'd you like them extra  
37 seconds of sunup  
we had today? It was like a few slipping grains  
of Bermuda, no? We were talking  
about it, me and the mice

and they were saying, well Eve  
should have given God the apple.  
I said, damn straight, he's the one  
who should've known better,  
that we'll take what we can,

and since we were storying by the time  
I spun up that first canoe out:  
black flies snacking on my shoulders,  
wind soft as a babe through a head-back sky . . .  
and all that paradise skipped us a few minutes by.

3

See you eyeing the door,  
making like it's an out.  
Where you got to go. I'm asking, where  
you want to go. Far as I see  
it's howl and needle-white and just plain

damn ass cold, it's like a marrow  
transplant. And I don't care, we'll  
tear down the outhouse if need be.  
I want it Sahara-can't-see-straight-  
hot in here. Oh yeah. Well, long

as we're sharing a skull  
and a shack how about you  
keep out of my way. You don't  
quite make up enough  
to make do, now shush,

I'm trying to get some sleep,  
so I can wake up. Hey. Wake up.  
You hear that, down there  
between the floorboards and outside  
that who-woo-who-rue-re-rue?

**MICHAEL MACK**

**Homework #3**

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. All the lights are on. Jesse leave those lights alone~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. Mama gave our toys to the poor people. The kids next door have our toys. We have cigarettes~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. My big brother had brown hands. Mama said poop. Not poop the other word~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. Mama put poop in cereal bowls. She said this is holy. My brother could not wash it off~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. Daddy was knocking on the front door. He said Annie for God sake open up. My brother waved his arms~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. Daddy has a station wagon and Mama had to go to the hospital. She jumped out and ran in the woods~~

~~My name is Jesse. Mama's name is Annie. If you see her tell her we live on East Chase Street~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. Daddy said leave the radio on and the TV. When will Mama come home? Jesse do your homework~~

~~My name is Jesse. Everything is on the floor. All night the phone rings. Police cars parked across the street. Why are people in the yard? Someone is knocking~~

~~She made me promise. She made me promise not to tell~~

~~My name is Jesse. I live on East Chase Street. All the doors are open. All the lights are on.~~

**CARMINE SARRACINO**  
**The Courage of Sergeant Miller**

The ball took me in the rear of my hip  
as I turn'd to rally the companie, our Captain  
on one knee coughing blood, Lt. Hooker  
tramped under a casson that run away.

So, it come down to me.

Without command the boys were clos'd off,  
too far forward to retreat, and chew'd  
by the volleys of Virginians before us.

I thought of mother and wisht I might live  
just so long to be hit in the chest or face  
and so not bring her shame, nor any folks at home.

My new boots nicely took up the blood  
so leening upon my rifle I remained  
to all apperance strong and able.  
In this way I commanded the charge.

Splendidly, bayonetes bristling, the boys  
pitched in, licketty cut, and routed the rebs!  
Then righting about on my command  
enfiladed the ranks of sesech at our rear.

I keeled over then and was carried back  
and borded upon this hospital ship  
where I woke and found myself alive not dead.

But they whipped us bad in that terrible fight.  
Chancelorsville. They whipped us again.

Theres worst damned things than dieing.

**CARMINE SARRACINO**

**The Cowardice of Corporal Hughes**

His jaw vanished entirely! The length of tongue  
wormed out the bubbling hash of his throat  
like maggots in the beef rations I boiled.

Soldiers vanished in ranks and returned to view  
out of all order in bits raining down as I ran  
from that speechless standing corpse, the detritus  
on the field, past comrades hobbling, crawling, as if in extreme  
forgetfulness of feet and limbs left behind. Officers  
waved hangers, mouths open and voiceless like the dead.

All the way to the abandoned town I fled  
and in the third house found suitable clothes  
and left my uniform sprawled on the floor,  
no one bleeding into the blue, and departed

a live man out of a dead  
in some husband's homespun  
heading north to catch up the evacuees, north  
toward Providence, toward Hannah and my girls,

whose names I recited aloud as I joined  
the exodus of mothers clutching babes, greybeards  
staggering carts of heirlooms and chickens,

and so turned quite away from the field of honor,  
of duty, of every impediment to the fealties  
of my own hard-beating heart.

PHILIP ST. CLAIR

Poker

It's Presidents' Day in heaven, and seven of them are sitting around a table,  
playing some five-card draw. Taft has the deal.  
"I am compelled to take three," Lincoln announces in his high twang,  
and when he gets them a flicker of disappointment,  
which Nixon has noticed, passes over his gaunt face. Teddy Roosevelt  
clicks his wide teeth, says nothing,  
tosses a single card at Taft, folds at once when he doesn't fill his straight.  
Nixon, who has the biggest stack of chips,  
meekly asks for two. George Washington has dozed: after a few seconds  
of respectful silence, Jackson clears his throat.  
Washington lifts his heavy eyelids, looks at his hand and folds. FDR  
is taking his time: he taps his cards, grins,  
and looks straight at Nixon. "I think I'll play these," he says. "Just one,  
by God," says Jackson. "Dealer takes three," says Taft.  
Now the betting begins: Lincoln leads off with two, Nixon, in a low voice,  
raises the bet to ten. FDR folds. So does Taft.  
Jackson curses, flings in a handful of chips, shouts "Call, by thunder!"  
Lincoln matches the bet, shows a pair of queens.  
Nixon carefully spreads four aces on the table. "You son of a bitch!"  
shouts Jackson. He leaps to his feet,  
pulls a caplock pistol from beneath his frock coat and levels it at Nixon,  
and in the diffuse, golden light of heaven  
the diamond pips of Jackson's ace-high flush glow like molten metal.  
FDR and Taft are astonished; Teddy Roosevelt  
clenches his fist and snarls. Lincoln slowly unfolds to his full height,  
his compassionate eyes now hard. And Washington,  
remembering days of treachery and betrayal and nights of gambling,  
looks at Nixon's cards, goes back to sleep.

—after a *New Yorker* cover by Edward Sorel

**MARTHA SILANO**

**Where's Our Dignity?**

She's hanging out in malls. She's up there swinging  
with the climate controls, with the dusty, greasy  
lingering-from-the-60s *give me a hotdog and a Pepsi* exhaust.  
Swooning, pre-baguette, pre-lime-infused Evian.  
She's gotten wind of vents that gulp down noise,  
but not her cracking gum. Invisibly lurks  
through grandiose bathrooms, innocent  
as freesia, as faucets sensing the heat  
of hands. Promising visible lift,  
she's bought a laptop but hasn't logged on.  
Released like Jello from an aluminum mold,  
she reminds us of the 54 billion galaxies,  
then retreats to the slot in our stubbornly  
unprogrammable VCR. In the unlikely event  
of a water landing, she's our stalwart  
flotation device. When we lean in ("Eternity,  
do you like it?"), when we peel yet another  
\$100 bill from our money clip (not  
for the homeless, AIDS, Cystic Fibrosis,  
The American Red Cross), she shakes  
a bony finger: "Stretch Lycra, stretch limo—  
it's all the same in the end."

**MARTHA SILANO**

**Salvaging Just Might Lead to Salvation**

so when you come home there's a tickle in my throat what should I take  
is there tea?

Could you make it with honey? Could you bring me an aspirin a pillow  
all

the *New Yorkers*? Could you turn up the heat so we almost choke?  
& the remote? Could you stick a Coke in the freezer? I do

& when I come home with a headache the size of New Hampshire you go  
oh my sweet sweet

square root of three my tikka masala poppadum chutney-dipped  
let me get you a patch of blue a stratocumulus don't move

so when you come home at noon in a suit going yeah I know I know I got  
fired

I'm all ears those bastards! they don't know who they're losing  
but didn't you say you weren't anywhere close to a window  
& how about those cubicles

so when I come home with a nasty note from a student *you're not foster-*  
*ing my learning*

you tell me there's a present for me on the couch & when I get there  
it's a what-really-counts-is-letting-them-stand-in-another-person's-  
tossed-from-a-speeding-car-and-sitting-on-the-freeway's shoes

which also means after months of *we'll let you knows* and *we'll call you*  
on the day I say

honey maybe you should call the folks at Parker Personnel you get the  
job

& it's the right one the one you've always wanted & when you pop  
the cork unbelievably I catch it all the dogs convening  
a crazy canine chorus praising perseverance luck

which means when some god of the classroom lets me slip into improv  
zone

& I'm on a roll & there's this buzz and they're getting it! they're getting  
what it means to have all been to Auburn but not one of them to Fife  
that they all hated their 2nd grade teachers but love baked beans

Lyle Lovett windy nights you know to bring me not only

#2 pencil yellow African daisies exam-book blue

forget-me-nots and fresh as a brand new roster

lilies but to tell all the guys at the poker table

I'm the best teacher in all King County

which means when my card slides out from the little slot WE CANNOT  
PROCESS  
YOUR ACCOUNT TRY AGAIN LATER you're ready with your card & when  
the money you made tagging fish in the Bering Sea dries up and disap-  
pears  
I pay for the yellow finns jalapeños tortillas turtle beans & God forbid  
we need to go back on food-stamps I'll stand in line at DSHS  
*Silano? I can almost taste it* while you head off to Our Lady  
of the Dunes melt the Velveeta till it's almost brie

which means we've stopped keeping track of who paid for what who  
bought table skillet spoon  
who'll fork it up for the rent who scratched broke dirtied tangled what  
focus instead on averting fights fending them off like nasty germs  
that are hell on a throat on a life

& when really we want to say *you're selfish you're so fucking selfish* I'm  
selfish but  
if you'd wipe the counters put out the trash or on the one nice thing  
they did that day week month or even yes a fight a good one  
real juicy not lugging up 88-year-old phlegm but new stuff  
like don't tell me when I'm bloated or starting every  
*other raging sentence you*

& now and then so horrible it ends in tears me of course wailing almost  
screaming  
you're the wrong person I made a mistake I hate you I hate you  
but because you're there to hold me a miracle my pea brain  
*maybe he really really does love me won't leave* which doesn't  
mean he won't which doesn't mean this way  
of taking care is for everyone or only for hets  
or like I'm advocating some kind of morality  
Anita Bryant fresh-squeezed homophobic  
takeover or even that single people  
are inherently unhappy mistaken  
or downright lost

but that maybe we're meant like great-crested grebes mouths dripping  
slimy weeds lifting erect  
or the bird of paradise who clears on the forest floor a place to lift  
glinting wings

→

to waltz twirl leap to land on a mate he'll keep though yes it's oversimplifying  
anthropomorphizing is not the way a red-winged blackbird colony operates

but if we're to trust the eyes and ears of anthropologists & scientists over 90% of birds

& humans are monogamous though I'm not 100% sure they're including the Choctaw, Crow, Cherokee, Creek, Pawnee, Minitari, & Arichara for whom the husband weds not just his wife

but aunts & nieces too kinship increasingly matted a woven mesh precariously dangling

not too unlike a bushtit nest till *this situation ends in IX (MB = B; MBW = BW)*

for any "a" is MB though I bet it makes sense if it's all you know like asking Emily Post or the tribal elders

though it probably isn't true for every stomped on wine glass borrowed or blue

for every groped for garter tossed bouquet sweetheart neckline Bertha collar

or leg-of-mutton sleeve there's a Moulay Ismail emperor of Morocco siring 888 children from upwards of 200 wives or the Tiwi nubile whose privates are poked with a spear her future son-in-law strokes hugs calls *wife* in this way marrying all her unborn daughters

which means there's a chance you too might want someone who'll buy more Kleenex

tell you your tea is steeped shirt's wrinkled tag's hanging out who swipes with licked finger the ketchup from your cheek who tells you my you're looking pale knows how to raise your drooping head

though I know you might be asking *marriage?! are you fucking kidding? I just want some pussy!*

Which I don't blame you for at all especially since there's a strong argument we're more

like the forgivably polygamous lion than a bunch of birds a case to be made for a male to spread his seed

→

which is not to say every woman  
craves monogamy

no matter how much our behavior resembles hornbills hoopies meercats  
cobras  
or moral owls I'm not about to tell you marriage is easy or difficult  
or a hocus pocus fantasy only breeders want or know  
not about to tell you it's for you

girls traded for coconuts chariots shields yams all of it resting on capture  
hope-chests painstaking lace I'd almost say resist it in homage to all  
those wasted lives all those hours filling trousseaux  
before a father could breathe a relief-ful sigh  
I'd almost say stay single don't get stuck  
like my grandmother says  
washing some guy's  
shorts

except I've always been drawn to the scraggiest plant on the shelf  
leggy zucchini contorted delphinium mangiest chard  
to fixing what just might have a second life  
can't stand not trying to resurrect  
a broken fan into could I?  
a hotdog grill?

to taking a heap of a '61 Caddy spray-painted gold  
half-reclaimed by Ozark mud  
digging the damn thing out.

**JOSEPH CAMPANA**

**Sleepless: 8:00am**

Little fingers stretch pages  
up over the edge of the world  
and into a room barely lit.

So the light found itself  
caught on pulp and vein  
so delicate you'd want  
to hear them ripping  
each page rent  
and it would horrify you  
every shard of story  
pulled from the same spine  
from which it took so long  
to sprout, bend and seek  
what little light the furious  
room could let in.

And what was written there  
what you were waiting to find  
in dream, what you thought  
sleep would deliver to you?  
Your fear. Because you know  
if you sleep you will not wake  
which is why you reach  
for pages in the first place—you  
want to hold the book yourself.

You want to know it  
as you know your teeth  
clenching nothing  
and when you sink into dream  
when you grasp the book  
you'll find a story ending  
on every page—hundreds  
ending, and not one of them  
is yours, but the book is,  
though you never know  
where to start.

**JOSEPH CAMPANA**

**Sleepless: 8:01am**

A dream lit the water from below  
rising over the edge of a flat planet

and it hovered over the surface of a body  
flattened by sleep and need, greed and darkness.

For that body, the edge of the planet  
was a narrow band of safety

and around it stalked arms and legs  
of the crazed, the criminal, the dead.

How they refused themselves luxury  
a net of oblivion stretching to catch them

if they sailed off the edge of the island  
of the world they had come to know

though they longed to know the light  
of the dream above them, scorching down.

**JOSEPH CAMPANA**

**Sleepless: 8:02am**

A man in a dark room scribbling thoughts  
on a sheer moon hanging before him.  
And what's to stop him from writing  
himself into sleep, burrowing deep in his body  
except the fear, except the knowledge  
(which is itself the same as fear)  
that in a dark room, in the early  
slipping autumn, he could keep writing,  
all night stretching his limbs to an indifferent  
moon, and in the darkening air,  
breathless and cold, without sensing it happen,  
let the ink (which is darkness itself) run dry,  
and on an invisible surface of the hand  
of night, scribe the moon blank,  
only tearing its skin—never knowing  
the difference.

→

**JOSEPH CAMPANA**

**Sleepless: 8:03am**

In the palace of Morpheus  
in a wheeze of dream  
rest the hungry bodies of night.  
All their trials, the terror and need  
hanging above the courtyard  
like storm clouds  
swallowing the sun:  
flame in the entrails of a darkness  
that will consume or be cast off  
that looms but will not arrive.

Gate of ivory, let me in,  
gate of horn. Send me  
ambivalence and dream.  
Sting the singing motors  
the trembling relays of flesh.  
Let them be still. Swallow  
the voice whispering  
confidence and collusion  
ticking night into day, saying  
*give your body to sleep if you can.*  
*You will always belong to me.*

## BOOKS IN BRIEF

Marion K. Stocking

It was the fall of 1939 when I somehow made my way to Smith College to hear Robert Frost read. I knew his poems, some by heart, but the reading was an astonishment. I began to hear what my eye had never noticed. In good old "Birches," for example, I sensed the importance of the iambic heartbeat when he accented the last syllable of that "boy too far from town to learn baseball." And then came the ice, "shattering and avalanching" in what today seems like an aria interrupting the recitative. A few years later I heard the first recording of Dylan Thomas, another poet for whom the vocal presence transforms the text. I realize that giving this prominence to the poet offends the New Critical approach that I was mastering in those years under the spell of I.A. Richards' *Practical Criticism*. And it is even more offensive to the theorists who today deny the role of the poet in the artifact with which they interact. All the same, I have come to value every approach that brings me closer to the poem. The actual voice of the poet, when available, is one of those paths. Oh, to hear John Donne reading Donne!

This is by way of introducing an exemplary series of recorded poetry: Random House Audio's *The Voice of the Poet*. For four Aprils now they have presented for National Poetry Month three modern poets in boxes of book-plus-recording. Here is a cassette (until this year, when they shift to CD) with an hour or more of reading. The accompanying booklet of about 64 pages includes a biographical and appreciative introduction to the poet and to these poems by the series editor J.D. McClatchy, a poet himself and an editor who makes no effort to disguise his enthusiasm for his various subjects. Each little essay is a model of its genre. We can then follow the texts of all the poems on the recording, accompanied by brilliantly selected shadow-box quotations from the poet about the art. We get engaging photographs, reproductions of revised early drafts, a brief bibliography, and a list of sources of the recordings. I'll repeat myself: *exemplary*.

Here is a catalogue of poets now available: **W.H. Auden**, 1999, \$17.95, ISBN 0-375-40592-5; **Sylvia Plath**, 1999, \$17.95, 0-375-40599-2; **James Merrill**, 1999, \$17.95, 0-375-40667-0; **Elizabeth Bishop**, 2000, \$15.95, 0-375-40964-5; **Robert Lowell**, 2000, \$15.95, 0-375-40966; **Anne Sexton**, 2000, \$15.95, 0-375-41585-8; **John Ashbery**, 2001, \$17.95, 0-375-41637-4; **Randall Jarrell**, 2001, \$17.95, 0-375-41636-6; **An Anthology of Women Poets**:

**H.D., Edna St. Vincent Millay, Louise Bogan, Muriel Rukeyser, Gertrude Stein**, 2001, \$17.95, 0-375-41635-8; **Langston Hughes**, 2002, \$19.95, 0-553-71491-0; **Wallace Stevens**, 2002, \$19.95, 0-553-71490-2; **Adrienne Rich**, 2002, \$19.95, 0-553-71489-9.

The approaches to the readings are as diverse as the poets. Randall Jarrell explains the scene of “The Death of the Ball Turret Gunner”; Langston Hughes provides a running commentary between many of his poems, relating them to his life. Most recordings are purely poetry. Many of the poets’ voices are familiar to me from readings or recordings. I enjoyed all, but most valuable to me are the readings of poets for whom I had no aural image. Of these, the most surprising and most powerful has been Wallace Stevens. I have long been impressed with his work, but I have had occasion to teach only four or five of the poems, and though I’d read many more, I had not made them part of who I am. I had had no opportunity to hear him, since he considered public readings “something particularly ghastly” and had repelled most efforts at recording with the excuse that he did not read well. Fortunately, in the fifties he allowed a few exceptions. I listened with some trepidation; the fourteen poems, happily including two powerful long ones—“Credences of Summer” and “The Auroras of Autumn”—were unfamiliar to me. I was in for more than a surprise. The poet had a rich, resonant voice. He reads, in McClatchy’s words, “with a stirring nobility.” Listening, I was drawn into a deeper attention than I had ever paid to his work. I learned that he was emphasizing words that I wouldn’t have stressed, enjambling lines where I’d have paused, inserting unexpected silences, modulating pitch where I’d have been tone deaf. I discovered surging rhythms of a music that was not altogether audible in print. There

the secondary senses of the ear →  
Swarm, not with secondary sounds, but choirs,  
Not evocations but *last* choirs, *last* sounds  
With nothing else compounded, carried full,  
Pure rhetoric of a language without words.

(from “Credences of Summer” IV. Enjambment arrow  
and italics added.)

Discovering that music was for me a portal to the complex

intellectual vitality in each poem.

Adrienne Rich says that her poetry is driven by “a belief in art, not as a commodity, not as a luxury, not as a suspect activity, but as a precious resource to be made available to all.” I strongly support the endorsement of the *Library Journal*: “Essential for all libraries.” These recordings should be accessible to everyone.



**Editor's Note**

For as long as the supply lasts, copies of the spring 2002 issue of the *BPJ*, the Poets Under 25 chapbook, are available for classroom adoption at the reduced price of \$4 each, postpaid. We'll add a complimentary desk copy. Orders must be prepaid (no credit cards) with check made out to *Beloit Poetry Journal*. For further information, inquire at (207)667-5598 or [sharkey@maine.edu](mailto:sharkey@maine.edu).