



The
Monongahela Review



Summer 2008

The Monongahela Review

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On the Front Cover

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Saints Speak
in Numbers

Sacred Hearts
of the Dead

Life Will Die

The Good
Luck Tree

Life Goes On

The Devil Took Ill

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This issue fights. This issue confuses. This issue wonders if it's actually done. This issue attempts to spread thin the deep grooves of known ways: to re-
envision formerly held forms. This issue's worried it hasn't done that. This
issue is not entirely consistent in theme, though it's tried its best. This issue
loves Modernism. This issue loves confessional poetry...

This issue enjoys the contributors within its pages, their words of silent purpose
and anxious ambiguity, their bleeding hearts in twigs of ink, their meetings
with death, their late-night limbo between tears and haste and dreams, their
drifting souls gutted of sense of place and home, their demons, their loneliness,
their broken trysts with Memory, their words and art like making love with lost
time...

This issue wishes it could meet them all, argue with them, edify them, hold
them, laugh with them, cry over them, encourage them, love them...

This issue was difficult to make. This issue might not know what it is.

This issue hopes you like it.

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Notes on Contributors...62-65

**It smelled like old teeth
or a box full of buttons,**

the day did, the air.
It bucked like unkempt tables
tilting under plates, one
shorter leg of four.

The world glitched suddenly,
shifting to the left, left

a feeling that three dimensions
aren't enough to live in, that you can't
build a house here without having,
in the end, a box of unused parts,
wondering if they mattered.

**Your tools are sharp
and your hands, strong.**

Dig, and put
your spade to the root of it.

Watch the whole thing fade
down from wrinkling leaves,
down the veins of its interior
as branches wither, let go,
marry gravity and fall.

The stones at your feet
are many and tireless.

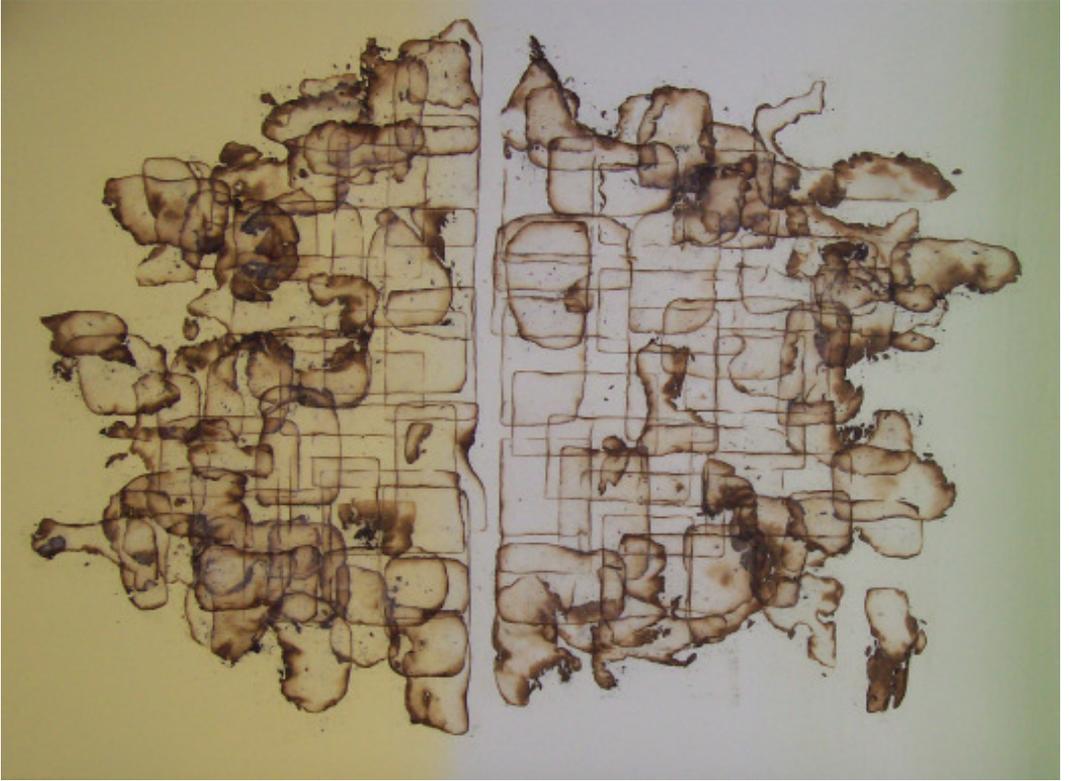
Go ahead, toss that one in.
When it doesn't swim, watch the ripples
rise, expand, and disappear.

The days are broad, and
though the shadows stretch slowly,
go ahead, pitch your tent here.

You've long since out-waited
your chance to walk home.

Lovesick

It isn't love if our embassy isn't burning,
if the windows haven't exploded
in a shower of diamonds from the heat,
if the ballerina isn't staggering around on stage
as from an accidental elbow in the face,
or if the knife-thrower, subject to ironic applause,
doesn't suddenly doubt the accuracy of his aim;
it isn't love if the moon isn't breathing,
if we don't receive unsought help from machines,
an automated summons to appear in court
and our bewildered joy upon entering the night
a moment after everyone else has left.



Kimo Pokini
Full and a Half

Beating up the Bee

i waited to hear the city beat in your chest.
but like a cloak, you would drag.
four needles in a bucket; my crown.
four zippers near your neck,
and this is where you would hide.
for there are no bees in the winter.

last winter,
as the honey poured, and my chest
was too close to my neck,
we allowed the city to hide.
street lamps as your crown,
watching our wingless bodies drag.

and while the yellow would drag,
and the black would hide,
we spoke our way into winter.
your pretty crown,
like a city beating in my chest,
making spaces for my neck.

with four needles, and only one neck,
there was no room for your crown.
each bee, with no place in your winter,
and no place in your chest,
had no other option but to drag..
no other option but to hide.

this cloak came to hide,

somewhere within my chest.
the neck,
of each yellow and black bee, had winter
on its face. it was hard not to drag..
while the honey caught your crown.

your crown,
was careful, but it liked to hide.
this city, beating, came to drag
on and without my chest.
and yet, there was a season for my neck,
but there was no bee for my winter.

with my neck, and with your beating chest
this crown will not drag,
for we will hide, and we will be winter.

A Table for Two

You were always the actress;
Fragile and falling
to the ground; bowing to a god
you must have hated,
or needed.

I was the recluse,
watching from windows high up,
convinced the perspective
was clearer.

My god,
late at night, gave me a jolt:
a craving for a drug not in the bloodstream,
a premonition of the way things end:
Completely and rather
ridiculously.

Your rag doll limbs
gave out.

Sister, peel yourself off the pavement.
I'll unlock my door.
Let's watch this show from a table for two
and remain the audience we've always been:
Silent. Full of blows.

Leaving

A dollop of hawk fits the branch
like an upended teardrop. Birches
gleam like lightning streak pales. At the crest,
fawns forage before night starts
its crowding ways.

Above fields with its hair lightened,
he sits like the precursor, guardian
of the rabbit's piercing hurt
who never saw the shadow wing,
though, felt the talon
only as it clinched, and beheld an eyeful
of terrible bloody beak.

Amy Hinrichs

My Patriotism

The pit of my cardiac organ is a basking inferno.
And there lies the womb,
in the stretching spaces of a man.
The words of God are like strings of a violin,
screeching in the Everest.

An eel begins to stir water into wine,
And your rules are the thick graves in the desert.
His womb releases a Mongol.
So, Richard paints the silhouette of a cygnet.
And together,
We wander home in the swell of dawn.

Unentitled

I have not found the key to myself
the one that will get the high gates
to swing wide open, and the lights
to come on, at once

When not denied entrance entirely
I fumble in the dark and stumble
blindly, run into doors and walls
groping and hoping

I knock my head against false ceilings
and trip on traps I forgot to dismantle
then start at the sight of my reflection
bumping into myself.

Untitled

Adopt a funeral tempo:
there is no way in
playing it differently.
Sound halts and breaks
into fragments. How we
have been doing things
is a most impressive
scene completely
incomprehensible.
But now let me draw
a parallel with other
traditions or lack of.
Let us go back, travel
and separate at will.
There's no reason you
shouldn't slip out easily.
Keep out of sight, fear of
casualties could present
a problem. Try to scratch
out a reprieve and prevent
stars from sprouting. Lay on
the ground and absorb leaving.

Departures

We talked of drifting
from dream to dream,
celebrating the death
of archetypes.

We have been forewarned:
we cannot fathom the depths
of our own hearts.

Like the rest,
we shall depart in solitude,
in the end choose sadness.

Other voices assured us:
after solid blows
that break our shell,
a delicate hand will feed
grains of incense in the thurible
of a praying heart,
for ourselves, guests and nomads
in our own arcane pilgrimage.

Bill Mesce, Jr.

Ante Meridiem

The Greyhound bus waddled off and around the corner on its bad shocks, leaving him coughing and batting at a blue cloud of fumes. His lungs cleared, and the echoes of grinding gears faded. He studied the wake of exhaust lingering in the street, watched it rise into the fluorescence of the street lamps, thin, and finally disappear.

He put his duffel bag down in front of the station's open door and walked across the parking apron to the curb. Downtown was dark buildings, dark store windows, dark theater marquees. The street was wide, lined with red-flagged parking meters, and filled with a humid, sticky haze that lit up in fuzzy haloes around the buzzing street lights.

He shrugged off his denim jacket and plucked at where his shirt was already sticking to him. He bent for the duffel and went inside.

A weeping willow of a kid sat on a stool behind the counter, thumbing through an issue of *Maxim*. The kid did not look up at the sound of footsteps, and he did not look up when the man stood at the counter. The kid did not look up when the man raised his duffel and let it drop to the linoleum floor with a loud, flat slap.

"Hey," the man said.

He was eighteen, maybe nineteen, and rested a hand protectively around the base of the bottle of Dr. Pepper sitting next to his magazine. He twirled a long lock of stringy, greasy hair with his other hand.

"Hey."

The kid looked up. His nose twitched and he leaned back from the counter. The man could smell it himself; he'd been on the bus a long time.

The man leaned forward. "Connection to New York."

The kid leaned back another degree and waited for more.

"When?"

The kid nervously rubbed one of several nasty-looking red splotches along his collar line. "When's it comin'?" he said in a slow, rural drip.

“Yeah.”

The kid checked a schedule taped to the counter top. “Five thirty.”

“Five thirty? A.M.?”

The kid had gone back to his magazine. “If he’s on time. Sometimes he ain’t on time.”

“Is he late a lot?”

“Nope.”

The man took a long, patient breath. “Five thirty. A.M. If he’s on time. And he’s not late a lot.”

“Yup.”

“Thanks so much. No, really, thank you.”

He picked up his duffel bag with a grunt and shuffled past the counter to the empty waiting room. The Dr. Pepper clock high on one wall said it was three thirty-six. A.M.

The man moaned.

He dropped his bag on one of the Day-Glo orange plastic chairs and ran his jacket through the bag’s grips. There was a bank of dark vending machines along one wall. He dropped some change into a soda machine. He stared at the machine. The machine stared back. The man jiggled the coin return but nothing happened.

“Hey!” he called to the kid. “This thing ate my money.”

The kid flipped a page of *Maxim*.

“Hey!”

The kid looked up and blinked, confused.

The man tapped on the soda machine. “My money.”

“That thing ain’t on. Couldn’t you tell?”

“How ‘bout my money?”

“They unplug ‘em at night.”

“What do they unplug ‘em for?”

The kid shrugged.

“What am I supposed to do ‘bout my money?”

“Day fella’s got the keys. Don’t come in ‘till seven thirty.”

“If he’s on time.”

“What?”

“Forget it.”

He thought about asking the kid where he’d gotten *his* soda, but the heat, the humidity, the dead soda machine, and the conversation exchanged thus far were all giving him a headache.

He sat in the chair next to his bag. He sagged and let his head loll onto the curled top of the chair back. He drummed absently on his legs. He managed

a few good rhythmic licks and wondered if he should've taken drum lessons when he was a kid. He carefully balanced the heel of one worn sneaker on the toe of the other. He looked up at the clock again.

It was three thirty-eight. A.M.

He moaned.

He stood up, stretched, and headed for the men's room. At the door, he stopped and looked from the kid picking at a pimple scab on his forehead to his duffel bag. He went back, grabbed the bag and took it with him.

He had to wrestle with the bag for space just to make enough room to get the door closed; the bathroom wasn't much bigger than the closet-sized toilet on the bus. He set the bag down on the grungy tile and kept tripping over it while he peed, then washed his hands at the sink. He threw some cold water on his face. It helped ease the ache in his head and the burning in his eyes.

The face in the mirror made him moan again. He scratched the whiskered neck and touched the gray strands at his temple. He stepped as far back as the little room allowed, stood up straight, in profile, checking his figure in the mirror. He sucked in his belly—wouldn't look too bad as long as he never breathed.

He used his hands as a cup to rinse his mouth out with water from the tap, then turned to the linen towel dispenser and tugged for a stretch of fresh towel. No more clean linen. Gingerly, he patted his hands on the clammy part of the towel hanging exposed and hoped he wouldn't catch anything.

Back in the waiting room, the clock now read three forty-three. A.M.

He moaned.

He dropped back into his chair and listened to the kid flip magazine pages. He fished in his breast pocket and pulled out an empty pack of gum. He crumpled the foil pack and, after looking to see the kid's attention was still in his magazine, tried to hook-shot the wad into a trash can across the room. He missed.

The man looked over to the kid to make sure the kid wasn't looking.

The kid was looking.

The man flashed a brief, insincere smile of apology to the kid while he grunted himself to his feet and placed the crumpled pack in the trash can. He gave the kid another empty smile, an acknowledgment of his act of atonement, and the kid went back to his magazine, and the man back to his chair.

"Hey."

The man jumped. He hadn't seen the bum slip into the seat next to him. He guessed the bum was old but under the dirt and beard and ragged clothes it was hard to tell. The bum probably smelled, too, but the man smelled so badly himself he couldn't be sure.

The bum smiled. There weren't a lot of teeth in there.

The man picked up his duffel and shifted to the next seat over. He looked away, pretending to find something to study in a cobwebbed corner of the ceiling.

“Hey,” the bum said.

“What?”

“Waitin’ on a bus?”

The man closed his eyes and tried to wish the bum away.

The bum moved into the seat next to him. He pointed to the shoulder patch on the man’s jacket jammed through the duffel’s hand grips: a diving bald eagle on a black background.

“Hunnerd ‘n’ First!” the bum said, impressed. “Screamin’ Eagles, yes *sir!* You inna Hunnerd ‘n’ First?”

“No.”

“You inna service?”

“No.”

“Vietnam?”

“I said I wasn’t in the service.”

“Too young for Nam. ‘At Gulf thing? The firs’ one.”

“I said I wasn’t in the service,” and this time he said it slowly and carefully.

The old man was studying him through narrowed, rheumy eyes. “Yeah, you woulda been too young. So, wheredja get it?” He tapped the patch with the flapping sole of an unraveling canvas sneaker.

The man hooked his own foot around his bag and pulled it a distance from the bum. “It was a gift.”

“Somebody give ya *that* as a gift? ‘At’s some kinda weird – “

“Then it wasn’t a gift, ok?”

“Somebody ya know give it to ya?”

“Somebody I knew.”

“Like who?”

“You with the census or somethin’?”

The bum smiled and shrugged as if that was explanation enough.

The man sighed. “Like my old man.”

The bum nodded and looked away, seemingly satisfied for the moment.

They sat like that for a while, taking turns sighing with boredom.

Then the bum said, “Yeeeeeaaahhh, *I* was inna Hunnerd ‘n’ First, dontcha know.”

“I didn’t know.”

“Yup. Good ol’ Hunnerd ‘n’ First. I was with ‘em in the big one. World War and Number Two.”

“World War II.”

“Good ol’ boys, ever’ one of ‘em. The best. Battle of the Bulge, dontcha know.”

“I don’t have any money for you, pal, ok?”

“Battered Bastards of the Bastion of Bastogne,” the bum said. “At’s what ‘ey called us—”

The man leaned toward the bum and spoke slowly and carefully. “I don’t have any money for you. And the Battle of the Bulge was over sixty years ago. You’re lookin’ pretty spry.”

The bum faced him and smiled slowly, then laughed himself into a coughing fit so loud and violent even the kid at the counter looked up.

“You’re a smart boy, boy,” the bum wheezed when the fit subsided. “You’re okay.”

“Thanks.”

After a while, the bum had his wind back and the two of them sat silently in the bright plastic chairs for a few seconds. The man slouched down and put one hand over his eyes but he couldn’t sleep.

“I really *was* inna Hunnerd ‘n’ First, dontcha know,” the bum said. “Korea. But you say Korea and nobody knows what you’re talkin’ ‘bout. Yup, the ol’ *Pooo-san* Perimeter. Betcher *daddy* wan’ even born – “

The man sat up. “You settle for a cigarette?”

“Hell, sure!”

The man fished a squashed pack of Kents out of his hip pocket. He drew two bent, leaking cigarettes, took one for himself and handed the other to the bum, then lit them both.

“You’re okay, boy,” the bum said.

“You finished now?”

The bum looked offended, gave a conceding smile and nodded. “I’m done.”

“Then goodnight.”

The bum nodded a thanks for the cigarette and shuffled out.

“Hey!”

It was the kid. He was pointing to a sign reading, “THIS AREA IS SMOKE FREE.”

The man pulled himself out of his chair and squashed the cigarette out on the side of the trash can across the room before tossing the butt out. He looked up at the clock and moaned: it was going on three forty-eight. A.M.

He walked to the kid at the counter. “Hey, there some all-night place I can maybe get something to eat? A coffee or a soda or somethin’?”

The kid didn’t look up. The man craned his head around to see what was holding the kid’s attention. He saw a picture of some young thing he vaguely

remembered from TV. She was standing in the surf wearing bikini bottoms and a man's white dress shirt, unbuttoned and nicely and transparently plastered to her form by sea spray. The man didn't remember her looking that shapely on TV, but then on TV she was usually dressed.

"Over to Main Street," the kid said.

"Hm?" The man pulled his head back into place.

"Main Street."

"Where's that?"

"A block over," the kid nodded, "hang a left. Just keep goin' 'till ya see it."

"Is it far?"

The kid shrugged.

The man hefted up his bag and headed outside.

He didn't like the streets. Mannequins stood embalmed in half-lit store windows. Above the stores were dark windows of empty offices and quiet apartments. No night lights. Not even a night owl's blue glow of a TV. Air conditioners hummed, fans whirred, the street lamps buzzed, but the street was still dead and he didn't like that.

There were alleys and they were dark, too. Things scampered along the ground deep inside the darkness and rattled the garbage cans.

"Great," the man said half aloud. He walked quickly and stared straight ahead. He didn't want to see what was making the noises.

He crossed on to Main Street. It was brighter, bigger, and deader except down at one end where he could see the lights of a little café.

Inside, it was small and dull with a tile floor like the men's room back at the bus station. There were a few booths along one wall and a counter down the other. There was a dark juke box at one end, still fans hanging from the ceiling, and an air conditioner over the door that dripped water on him as he stepped inside.

In a back booth, someone was slumped over the table. A black man in cook's whites pattered around in the kitchen. A bleached-blonde who looked like the woman in *Maxim*, only plus twenty years and thirty pounds but trying not to look it, was tucked into a waitress uniform with little room to spare. She was leaning on the counter reading a paperback with the cover of a mustachioed man in Victorian tails, a woman in a hoop skirt, waltzing under the title, *The Dastardly Duke*.

The man found a stool at the counter whose vinyl was not cross-hatched with patches of duct tape. He tucked his bag under his legs while the waitress swing-hipped her way over with a big smile of big teeth stained with candy red lipstick. Close up he could see she'd mistakenly thought she could shave off a

few years by pancaking on the make-up. He marveled that all that plaster didn't crack when she opened her mouth. "Help ya, hon?" she asked.

"Coffee."

"Coffee."

"And an English muffin."

"English muffin?"

"Yeah."

She started writing out the check. "That it?"

"That's it."

"Want the coffee with the muffin?"

"I'll take it now."

She handed the check to the cook, then poured a cup from the Bunnomatic behind the counter.

He got change of a dollar from her and went to the juke box, dropped in some change and looked up and down the accorded title cards. He didn't see anything he liked but picked a few numbers anyway.

Nothing happened.

He started banging on the juke box.

"Hey!" the waitress warned.

"I lost my money."

"Thing ain't plugged in, hon. Can't you see?"

"Why didn't you say something when I asked for change? What'd you think I wanted it for?"

"Maybe you were gonna buy cigarettes or somethin'."

"You have a cigarette machine in here?" He made a show of looking around for the non-existent cigarette machine. "How 'bout my money?"

"Can't give it to you outta the register. They gotta get your money outta the machine."

"And the day fella's got the key, right?"

"What?"

"Can you just plug it in so I can get my money back?"

She made a face. "Not s'pose to do that."

"I promise I won't tell."

"Mister, how long you think I'm gonna keep this lousy job doin' things I'm not s'pose' to do?"

He held up his hands in surrender and went back to his stool. "You're right. I don't know what's the matter with me. I must be out of my mind or somethin'." He made himself calm down and took a sip of his coffee. He blinked. He guessed the coffee must've been sitting on the Bunnomatic for hours. He took another sip. Maybe days.

“You come in on that last bus?” the waitress said. “They go right by here is how I know.”

The man nodded.

She rang up “No Sale” on the cash register, took out some change and handed it to him. “For the juke. I figgered since you come in onna bus.”

He missed the logic but smiled a thanks anyway.

“So,” she said, “you from outta town?”

“Yeah.”

“Back east, right?”

“Yup.”

She smiled proudly at her deductive powers. “Where ‘bouts?”

“Is that my muffin burning?”

“Kitchen always smells like that.”

“Order up!” called the cook.

The waitress scooped up the muffin and set the little white plate down on the counter in front of him.

“Is it supposed to be that dark?” the man said frowning at the muffin.

“Better when it’s crunchy like that. You gonna be in town long?”

He scraped at the charred edge of the bread. “No.” He said it hard enough to send her off, slightly offended, to trade mumbles with the cook.

“Hello.”

He hadn’t heard the door, or her cross the floor and slide onto the stool next to him. She was small, young, and black. She was dressed well, a simple, short one-piece thing, and had a better flair for make-up than the waitress.

“You in on the bus?” she asked.

“People in this town are perceptive as hell.”

“Waiting on another one?”

He nodded.

“Need a place to sack out for a few hours?”

“I am not a rich man.”

“How do you know I’m just not the social type?”

“I guess I don’t.”

She tapped the shoulder patch on the jacket still tucked through the grips of his bag. “Let’s just say I’m doing my bit.”

He considered saying something about the patch but passed. He wrinkled his nose: “I’ve been on the bus a while.”

“I’ve got a shower.”

“Ok, then.” He smiled and started to get up.

“No rush. Finish your food.”

He offered her half his English muffin but she smiled and shook her head. He took a sip of the acrid coffee and a crunchy bite of the muffin. “I think I’m finished.” He reached for his pocket but she stopped him.

“My treat,” she said, reaching for her purse.

He thought about how thin his wallet was and decided against asserting his gallantry.

On the sidewalk, they walked side by side.

“Thanks,” he said.

“For what?”

He nodded back at the café.

“Forget it. You, um, didn’t mind, did you?”

“I’m a modern guy.”

“You can put your arm around me if you want.”

He did.

They came to a bank of dreary row houses. She started up the stoop of one of them, fumbling in her purse for her keys. He stayed at the foot of the stairs, taking in the gaunt, dark-eyed building.

“I know it isn’t the Sheraton,” she said.

He felt guilty and put on a smile. “Sheraton’s uppity.”

He followed her inside and up a stairway lit by bare bulbs to the third floor. The apartment was three rooms and a little bathroom. She headed for the bedroom.

“You coming?” she asked.

“Just getting my breath from all those damn stairs.”

The bed had a noticeable sag down the middle. There was just the bed, one scuffed dresser, and a lamp on a night stand. She didn’t turn on the lamp.

“Make yourself at home,” she said, kicking off her shoes. “Drink?”

He shook his head and dropped his bag near the bedroom door.

“Hungry?”

He shook his head again.

“Anything the matter?”

Another shake of his head.

She slid out of her dress. She wasn’t wearing anything underneath. Some street light slipped in under the half-pulled window shade. Wherever it touched her, her skin shone smooth and dark like freshly poured chocolate. He had a glimpse of slim thighs; a slight bulge of belly; dark, erect nipples.

She stood against him. Her head was just below his chin. She felt warm even through his clothes.

“Cat got your tongue?” she said and pulled his head down toward hers. She kissed him, open-mouthed, and nibbled when he sent his tongue out to

meet hers.

“Now thee doeth,” he said around his captured tongue and they both laughed.

*

He sat in the open window, looking out at the streets, a towel tied around his hips. Fresh from the shower, the air—humid as it was—felt good on his wet skin.

“Don’t you sleep?” she asked.

“I did. For a while.”

She stretched her arms overhead. He liked the way the movement tightened up her small breasts.

“Where you heading?” she asked.

“East.”

“Where you from?”

“East.”

“Ah. Going home.”

He shrugged. He went to his jacket and pulled out his Kents. He offered the pack to her but she shook her head. He lit up, took a long drag, then parked himself back in the window, leaning against the sill, letting the smoke bleed out of his mouth.

“Been away long?” she asked.

He shrugged. “How long is long? You know...”

“What?”

He nodded at the jacket saddled across the top of his duffel. “That doesn’t belong to me.”

“The jacket?”

“The *jacket’s* mine. The patch...”

“Oh.”

“So much for you doing your bit. I guess I owe you one.”

She shrugged it off. “Didn’t really matter. It was something to say.”

“Ah.”

“Is that just your idea of decorations? That supposed to be cool? Or—”

“It was my father’s.” He took another long drag on his cigarette. “He didn’t come home.”

Her head lowered. “The Gulf?”

“Nope. He came home from *that*. He just didn’t come *home*. They discharged him at Fort Campbell. That’s in Kentucky. Gave him his papers, his mustering out pay... He mailed me a hundred bucks, that patch, and a note that said, ‘Good luck, junior,’ and that was that.”

She nodded gravely. "Oh." She ran her fingers through her short, spongy hair. "Got anything lined up?"

He laughed self-mockingly, and ruffled his damp hair. "Hadn't really thought that far."

She lay back on the squeaking mattress. "Want to come back to bed? C'mon, you were nice."

"She said with well-rehearsed allure to the Dastardly Duke."

"I was serious," she said, hurt.

He looked back out the window. "Sorry."

"Come back to bed," she said. "Please."

He flicked the cigarette out the window. It made a long, glowing arc down to the sidewalk where it exploded in the shadow of the curb in a burst of orange sparkles. Like a falling star.

*

They walked down the street holding hands as if they'd known each other a long time. Over toward the east, the dark sky was starting to fade.

"You don't have to see me off," he said.

"I'll just walk you to the station."

"You don't have to."

"If I *had* to, I probably wouldn't."

They walked silently. He ran his thumb along the back of her hand.

"What would you do?" he asked after a while.

"About what?"

"If you were in my boat."

"I'm not."

"If you *were*."

"If I were, I think I'd find somebody better to ask advice from than mysterious women of dubious repute whom I meet in the middle of the night in the middle of nowhere."

"Like who?"

"If I knew, *I'd* be doing some advice-asking myself."

Outside the station doors she kissed him. Gently, sweetly. She let go his hand slowly, stepped back, then turned and walked back down the street.

He stood there watching her go until she disappeared around a corner. He went inside.

The kid was still there still picking pimples and still flipping through his magazine. "Find it ok?" the kid asked.

"Yeah."

"You were gone a long time."

The man shrugged. He looked at the clock. It was five-fifteen. A.M.

He started to sit in the waiting room but stopped. He headed for the door but stopped. He headed back for his chair but stopped.

The kid was looking at him trying to decipher the man's particular difficulty.

"Aw, hell," the man grumbled. He threw his bag on the counter by the kid. "Watch that."

"Hey!" the kid called after him.

The man ran outside and up to the corner where he thought the girl had disappeared.

"Hey!" he called out. The windows looking down on the street stayed dark and the store mannequins remained mute.

"Hey!"

He ran past a traffic light click-clicking changes over an empty Main Street. He looked up, then down toward the lights of the café.

"Hey!"

The side streets all looked the same...and they all looked unfamiliar.

He could hear the rumbling echo and hissing air breaks of a bus.

He jogged back to the station and grabbed his bag from the kid.

"She's gonna be two minutes late it looks like," the kid reported.

The man ignored him and took his bag with him out onto the parking apron.

The bus was three minutes late.

The door hissed open for him.

He didn't get in.

"Sure?" the driver said.

"Nope," the man sighed.

The driver closed the door and turned the bus back onto the street, leaving the man coughing and batting at a fresh cloud of blue fumes.

He shifted his bag to his other hand and headed up the street toward where the sky was growing light to see if he could find some place to stay.

Marciano Malvar Guzman

Another Journey

Guess when it is time like no other,

as bones grow cold and stiff

and nights congeal before fearsome tidings.

Friends and fumblers have loved and left,

with no farewells, histories of transfigured
lives.

Soon we shall imagine swift messengers,

long swoopers, fluttering hoverers

eager to take us home.

There will be time to watch a wounded hand,

a wave of power, perhaps light

turning movements and shadows

to retroactive present.

Snow King

When the clothes are taken away from the bed
When I no longer know the way that bone fading in your ankle feels
I will go
But, if the morning is early enough
And if the bath water stays hot and strong
Sometimes I can see
Oh, I can see you

I know that you are there
Like clearing away the fog on the mirror in the rust and dim silver
The vials of perfume flickering with your reflection
Your shadow overcomes
A crumbling moon
And still your face is grimmer now
You look blacker as the years go by

The way spring moves to the darkest leaves and we forget about it
And a child will walk over them in the damp snow, unknowing
We were laid, we were set aside by the meadows
I wouldn't want to be on a pedestal like you—
I will always want to feel and
I'd rather let the blue kernels explode out of my pockets
The way that I am when I write poetry

But you will stay your Majesty forever
Hiding in the kingdom of your walls
With the furry white snow cats and the mountain tips
And your sculptures of wild, beastly animals
Sipping old Scottish gin that tastes like our sour water
In your marble patios on the forest, placing bets

On the high horses that sway, further and further—

We are spread away from each other,
On a trail that runs from Corsica to Manila and then only to Hades
Did you forget about that road?
Once meshed bodies, melted hands, once lovers
Now damned in muscle and the music
And further and further I go, Snow King,
Only pennies and silk with strewn honey tied to my wrist.

The Funeral

clocks have lost track of time
mirrors covered in cloth
a path of calla lilies in their frail vases
in a bed of maple and steel piping
lies an expensive suit
filled with bones and skin
arms crossed over his chest
cavern that once cradled
my sorrows

what secrets do fathers take to the grave?
their true identities
hidden under magnolia
and earth
dispersed into the atmosphere

in come the mourners
single file
pregnant with mortality
veils of dried tears
whispering
the funeral
and I with a torch

Demons

demons, demons
lurking in languor...
the Raven, the Raven
what quoth he?
I look for
the ladybug,
the pastel tone of leaves
in slow-setting autumn sun;
yet there is insipid dimness.
You are an ocean away,
though I know
you will find the same subtlety
in perception—
the dust motes swarm
in winter
and the first
centimeter of green
in the spring.
If we were to speak,
you would maybe say,
It's mourning time,
with madness
akin to a firefly.
It is the times,
we would muse,
the darkness like
a mossy film
covering everything.
We would want to be

as the secluded
poets and philosophers—
Dickinson, Thoreau,
unnamed hermits and saddhus...

*How could it
have come to
this?* we would
wonder,
Such promise,
such enterprise
now
teetering
with no tenacity.
We would
zen-like think:
after all, we
are only specks;
the demons—
with their
jowls and fire—
cannot touch us.
We are nothing
to them
and so much
as a snowflake.

A Cure for Boredom

Invite a word inside, doesn't matter which,
they all suffer the same strange inability

to distinguish between bright and dark,

but if it refuses to tell where the loot is hidden,
or even how many birds constitute a flock,

shove its fingers in a drawer and slam the drawer shut
so that neighbors can hear a concerto of pain,

and when you're done, and it's mashed and misshapen
like a nail repeatedly and inexpertly struck,

fix it a drink and might as well have one yourself.

On the Desk

Beneath the black and white photographs of birds,
The ones that you used to tousele with news from Israel,
Lay a red wooden pencil that I took from you and put back
I wonder—
Whatever happened to that pencil?
Surely we didn't use it until its end
The lead must stay
The lead must be somewhere
Where are those yellow papers?
The ones that were so important to carry?
I wonder that now in Vermont,
Hundreds of miles away from you,
And the day that we looked at the pictures of elephants
Transposed onto the ocean with the zebras,
Peacocks floating in the sky
I cut out those pictures that day and told myself to save them,
To never lose them and their grayness,
Because when I looked at them
They reminded me of you,
The way your eyes had black and hazel irises and circles that expanded in surprise.

On the Edge of Breakfast

curled up in a carpeted corner
of this podunk pub I await
your interrogation

lipstick stains
my cheek mascara
smeared crushed peonies
teeter on the edge
I run my finger
around breakfast's remains
coffee cups ignored my legs
uncrossed in a way that'd make
my mother blush I didn't even
try to wipe away your smell

4 hours earlier
on a dusty futon your lips
were a perfect ripe strawberry
lashes a veil blankets
your head hidden I laced
my boots by moonlight
and slipped out the keyhole
without making a sound



Daniel McKechnie
Kensington

Electro Lux Imbrolio

Whether the cops throw me down the stairs
or she holds my place in line
I'll wear something from the Salvation Army thrift store
for the occasion a paper crown in sly reference
to the king of darkness and remember high school
finger-fucking behind the football bleachers
the sharp birdlike cries of the drowning sailors
in case there's no solution by the time I get there
only the night watchman facetiously swinging
the feeble yellow beam of his flashlight this way and that

Robert Smereda

Untitled

I always feel they never stop in that water.
Winking beneath our lines. We fish for wire, secretly
burning across your face in the slowest way possible.
Surrender the chain between your fingers.

Your breath separates.
Your breath envelopes.
You breathe rust.

Later

I'm sad again and it feels redundant
because it is
since the dawn of my time
wishing for things that seemed as delicate as primrose
as lovely as old lace
but sighing a sigh of dead wonder here
I've discovered loneliness—again—
a shape-shifting persecutor
that once hid in an open heart,
an empty bed,
& a quiet night
& finds me tonight as one of the many faces that won't stop talking
& all I can think is 'I want another drink'
'let me do some dishes'

& I don't think I'm making much sense
& it feels so much later than it is...

& why am I the only one awake
everyone is sleeping these days
he's asleep beside me & it may as well be the whole world
for as alone as I feel
turn back the clocks
pass me a nightcap
'thank you, left hand'
do-it-yourself manual's mantra wails:
EVERYONE'S ALONE
or so it seems when it's—
a very reasonable hour, actually—
where the hell did everyone go?

must have dozed off while I was feeling sorry for myself
drinking in the corner
is a perfect way to find alcoholism the best answer
good for what ails you
good for what haunts you

& I don't think I'm making much sense
because it feels so much later than it is
oh, hell, it feels so much later than it is...

& the night is a minion bringing omens of strange dreams
of doing nothing at all
twilight is a sense that fills the day with lack
& morning is the glimmer of promises to be broken
and unbroken, too...
it seems loneliness is much more than empty nest syndrome
empty heart ailment
but suddenly being left to oneself
a soul-sickness
which hurts the more a heart brimming full with love
and still feeling alone

& I don't know if I'm making much sense
but it always feels later than it is
Lord, God, it feels so much later than it is...

Signs

In between seasons
a deep loneliness rules
like isolated trees
on vast, monotonous plains.

We long to see a face,
wounds that speak to us
of love.

The rustling of leaves
around us finally
makes our silence audible.

A spirited wind within us
magnifies the sound
of running waters.

Dust Collector

I'll hang myself back on the shelf
Amidst the clutter I'll be lost
Until you come to take me down,
Play with my heart at your leisure
And break my parts to discard me once again
Among the rubble of toys from the past

My paint has cracked, revealing the raw wood beneath the surface
I'm splintered and rotten now, just a vague shadow of your old favorite doll
My wooden eyes betray tears that never fall
For I have been forgotten, and how I long
For you to want me once again—but for you I am no more
Just a relic that you once loved,

Hard pressed to be worth the effort of fixing

Stab

Coalmine
Miner

Accustom to holes
To our scraping earth

The shovel sensitive
The cold shouldering

Power planted
In sinewed stratum

Veins of years
Veins of the coal

The child's father
Piles the black into piles

With the shovel and so
She digs too

The stacked smoke
A mellowed hole

Of the mine as slender
As the awe of division

Jesus her hole
Jesus her country

7 Aphorisms

1. Impulses we attempt to strangle only develop stronger muscles.
2. There is only one way to live against one's own nature: unhappily.
3. History does not repeat itself, human nature does.
4. The small spirit is quick to misperceive an insult, the large spirit is slow to receive a compliment.
5. However jeweled the mind, we also think through its defects.
6. Time heals old wounds only because there are new wounds to attend to.
7. A good listener helps us overhear ourselves.

Leaving Cleveland

There is an infinite amount of time between
the moment when you pull the trigger
and the moment your third eye opens
and the slug buries itself in the wall behind you.

You think your purest thoughts then.

You might think—

I live for a broken beat ideal
from a truer time—
when the pigs were always wrong
and the kids were all alright.
1956, 1967: So-Cal to Chicago.
I'm hip to that scene, you dig?

Bukowski told me:
“Don't write without a sun in your gut.”
I pose and flash, pop hiss and HOWL!

but you smile with your viridian eyes
and everything melts.

Hemingway knew this.

It is August already and the wind is dry—
the wind that carries you over the mountains

to the coast:
The mythological seaside
where some of 1967 still breathes.

But here the painted brick still scowls and crumbles
like it always has
whether you're here to watch it or not.

You think your purest thoughts
in the infinite time between the opening of your third eye
and the closing of the others.

Daniel McKechnie

Plastic-Silver 9V Heart

November is brown-grey dust and frost
begging the sky for snow and warm winds from the mountains,
scouring across Alberta's washboard landscape
cut by highways: gravel and salt stains.
She is a prostituted princess, scarred by use.

November is empty: an Alberta skyline.

Barren plains, dry and cold
with a spine of radio towers—
her plastic-silver 9V heart.

Ian Tyson's cowboy poetry ringing through the air:
bitter smoke and sweet whiskey.

November is Alberta's silence.

Old Schoolhouse

Rain was, rather, the sky
letting go of itself. Sun
fought for the day,
from low above the treeline,
losing ground.

Bricks and shingles
were letting go of themselves,
of each other. Branches,
dismissed from trees,
were piling high like elephant bones
in rooftop valleys.

A boy threw rocks,
zipped them madly straight through
windows. Glass cracked, shattered,
scattered, jangled
down empty halls, clattering
off concrete walls.

A squatter, startled,
lifted up from his book,
lifted surprised eyes
toward the settling
of another long silence.

Picking Up

Your pen and marbled notebook rest on the table before you, a mug of coffee and silverware set parenthetically enclosing your writing tools. You blow little waves into the mug to prematurely cool the liquid.

The server took your order moments ago, but instead of immediately getting to work on your short story, you've decided to wait until your breakfast arrives. This diner—a friend's recommendation—has enough atmosphere to provide you with inspiration, even with a sparse crowd. You may be able to glean some of that atmosphere, slice off a little with your butter knife and spread it across the page.

Your last few stories were a success, and you even made a small amount of royalty money when your most recent piece was included in that short story collection. You remember, the one from earlier this year? But now it is time to write something new, and you do not want to rest with the familiar. One of the criticisms you've received about your work is how similar it all is: all of your stories are about normal people doing normal things. If I wanted to learn about normal people, a friend had said, I wouldn't have to spend money to do so.

So you've decided to branch out, to untether yourself from the mundane. Will you write about dragons and jewel-encrusted bucklers, or biplane-flying apes on the run from evil scientists? You look from seat to seat, looking for the sort of person that could build a Rube Goldberg-ian engine of destruction. You pick up your coffee to take a sip, lowering the cup when the near-contact almost flash-burns your upper lip and tongue. You resign to let it cool down some.

You pass your gaze over the occupants—bald heads, striped collars, ball caps, work slacks, sandals, messenger bags, denim purses and overalls—and move on to lacquered tables and frosted glass partitions. A car horn on the avenue outside draws your attention, and movement atop one of the buildings across the street draws it further: there are several men moving around, barely visible over the lip of the roof. Their heads bob into sight, then out, like turkeys making their way through forest brush.

You think you spot a hard hat. Are they surveyors? A construction crew? You pick up your pen, page past some of the notes made earlier in the week, fragmented ideas shot from snapping synapses. You start to write as a face and pair of shoulders pause, hanging in sight over the edge of the roof: brown hair, blue track jacket. A jaw that's a tad too long. He looks away from you, toward the others, before sinking from sight. Like he's about to....

What? Run? Run from what? The construction workers? Maybe he's not supposed to be there. Maybe he's trespassing, or a lookout for a dealer on the ground floor lobby. (Your gaze levels out, pen still in action. No one in the lobby.)

But those couldn't be construction workers. You don't see any tools, any stacked cinder block or portable mixers. Their gear could be a ruse, an elaborate set-up to nab a spy.

There. You write the word again, as if repetition lends clarity. Any moment, you expect to see the flash of orange work vests through the windows in the stairwell, the faux workers dragging the agent to an idling car in the back parking lot. Is he unconscious? Maybe not—but once they get him in that car, it won't matter, will it? You underline the question mark, then add a few more for good measure.

But what if he's not the good guy? What if the whole confrontation on the roof was the fruit of an elaborate sting operation, a joint effort between several metro police units to nab the infamous Highrise Contract Killer? The police just saved—God, what—at least a dozen lives with this collar. (Yes, you tell the server, rye is fine.) Good planning on their part.

There's no movement in the stairwell, nothing on the roof. What if the agent/possibly hitman got away? On the sixth floor, close to the top, through the access door that leads to the floor proper. His escorts may've been lax, or caught unawares. The rest of the detail stayed on the roof to provide cover. Big mistake; the ones on the roof have been trying to radio their comrades for the past minute, but in vain. All three—you scratch it out, make it four—are down. The pooled blood would have already—wait, no, he only knocked them out. Though the one that fell down the stairs could be paralyzed for life. He knew what he was getting into.

This would make the man with the windbreaker the good guy, right? He could've responded with lethal force—but chose not to. Maybe because he knows that the paperwork isn't worth it—and bad guys don't have to deal with paperwork. You hope to use this line again later, and circle it to make sure.

So the rest of the men, the assorted band of assassins and underworld henchmen, raise an alert and fan out. Five minutes ago, they were only united by the similar vests they wore, and the utility belts they used to conceal handguns

and ammunition. Now, they were bonded to stop this man—this nondescript, hatchet-jawed man—so they could collect the reward money. The server refills your coffee, oblivious to the anthill kicked in across the street.

(A few more minutes, you're told—and you begin to worry when an acrid cloud wafts out from the kitchen.)

You look back to the high-rise, searching for a sign. For something. You turn the notebook's page, letting the pen hand drop and get back to work. Your other hand tips some more fuel down the pipe.

You know the thugs aren't going to catch the agent. He's too good. He loses them by doubling back on the fifth floor, hiding out in the living room of an unoccupied apartment, and slipping into the ventilation system and sliding out into the boiler room, like a child launching from a playground slide. He makes it up the stairs before anyone realizes that he left the vents, onto the second floor, and shimmies across a clothesline strung to the sandstone building across the alley. No one sees him, except for you.

Where will he go? He has to make it out of the city—those files have to be hand-delivered to Control. They'll be watching the airport; they even radioed ahead, several men flexing their gun hands as they wait by the ground-side terminal entrance. By car is too tricky; you think the agent remembers what happened to his partner last year, when he tried to get out of Vienna with the stolen Renault. Boat? No, and on foot is not likely.

Train. The agent shucks his windbreaker and tosses it in a dumpster, tweaking the collar of his blazer. By rail is his only chance. You know he sighs as he slips the magazine from his pistol to check the cartridges inside. He may have to shoot his way out, but if that's wh—

The server fills in the parenthesis with your breakfast. It smells good—really good—and you put your pen down at the request of your rumbling stomach.

Looking at the open notebook, the server smiles, brings the level of your coffee back up to the brim. "What are you working on?"

You pause, look across the street one more time. "A story." A normal one?

The smile widens. "Think you have something good?"

"It's a start," you laugh, and pick up your fork.

Notes on Contributors

Mason Brown DeHoog grew up in Manhattan and rural southern Michigan. When he's not traveling between states he usually can be found in Center City, Philadelphia and part of the year in south-central Texas. Previous work appeared in the journal, *Si Señor*. He is finishing a first manuscript of poems.

Ruth E. Dominguez is a published author of non-fiction, short fiction, and poetry. She has worked and traveled in numerous cities in South America, North America, and Europe. She holds a B.A. in Latin American Studies and Performance and a M.A. in Sociocultural Anthropology. She presently works in education, and continues to write.

Michael Egan lives in Pittsburgh, PA. He is a funeral director and embalmer. He has had numerous exhibitions of his artwork since 1996, among which include his most recent contributions to Cement Gallery in London and The Hive Gallery in Los Angeles. For more information and art visit his website at www.eganpaintings.com.

Saskia Everts is a recent graduate of Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA. Currently, she lives in the East Village in New York City and is an Assistant Editor on Wall Street by day and a poet by night. She tries to find time to balance what she loves and what pays the bills. She also enjoys traveling, getting up early, sleeping late, olives, classic rock, and whistling.

Brennan Fitzgerald is an MFA candidate at Lesley University with a degree in Creative Writing. She has received awards and fellowships from Vermont Studio Center, Atlantic Center for the Arts and the Boston Arts Council, and has published poetry and prose in various art publications.

Howie Good is a journalism professor at the State University of New York at New Paltz. He is the author of five poetry chapbooks, *Death of the Frog Prince* (2004), *Heartland* (2007), and *Apocalypse Mambo* (2008) from FootHills Publishing, *Strangers & Angels* (2007) from Scintillating Publications, and the e-book, *Police & Questions* (2008), from Right Hand Pointing. He has been nominated twice for a Pushcart Prize.

Marciano Malvar Guzman is a poet, philosopher and certified public accountant based in the Philippines. He received post-graduate degrees in Journalism and Philosophy from universities in Spain and Italy. *Breaking into Light*, his collection of 100 selected poems, was published by the University of Asia and the Pacific in Manila. His poetry has appeared mostly in Philippine national print publications like *Philippines Free Press*, *Solidarity* and *Philippine Graphic*, among others. More recent credits include U.S. based online magazines like *Flutter Poetry Journal*, *Static Movement*, *Slow Trains Literary Journal* and *Poetry Friends*.

Amy Hinrichs recently graduated from North Park University with a B.A. in English and eats grapes by the pound. She also enjoys perusing Craigslist, spending countless hours in Target, and loves a good Gchat. She also loves how this sounds like a personal ad.

Yahia Lababidi resides in Maryland. His first book *Signposts to Elsewhere* (“a book of aphorisms, epigrams, maxims”) was recently re-released by Jane Street Press (www.janestreet.org/press). Moreover, in 2007, his writings were included in the acclaimed encyclopedia of the *World's Great Aphorists* by former editor for TIME magazine (Europe) and best-selling author James Geary. His essays and poems have appeared in journals world-wide, including the US, UK, Canada, Australia, Spain, Iran as well as Egypt.

Jacob Lasham divides his time in the Pacific Northwest. He was born in Wyoming and currently lives in Missoula, Montana where he received a BA from the University of Montana in Creative Writing, which means he works as a poet and wildland firefighter to pay the bills. His mother was a school teacher and his father was a coal miner.

Lucas Lawhead wishes to remain in the annals of mystery.

Joanna Lowe is a Writing graduate of Geneva College. She has had poetry published in *Taproot*, has had several plays produced in the Pittsburgh area, and is looking forward to seeing another of her plays, “Absence Makes the Eyes Grow Fonder,” produced in 2008’s Pittsburgh New Works Festival this September.

Notes on Contributors (continued)

Daniel McKechnie is a freelance photographer, journalist, designer and artist. He currently works as a retail wage slave with aspirations of collegiate heroics. Dan sometimes writes and often doesn't, and holds a deservedly low opinion of that which he does write. He prefers to tell stories with images, chiefly of the photographic sort. He maintains the website www.urbanobscure.com.

Bill Mesce, Jr. is a New Jersey native. His most recent previous writings were the academic work *Overkill: The Rise and Fall of Thriller Cinema*, and the novel *Four Day Shoot*, both published in 2007. "Ante Meridiem" is his first published short story.

Jason Panella has been a contributing writer to several magazines, including *Comment*, *Catapult*, and the now defunct *GO*, for which he was the music columnist. He lives in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania.

Ava Perez has been writing for twenty-three years and has been published in English and Spanish.

Kimo Pokini is a visual artist and musician living in Salt Lake City, UT. His modern paintings and collages focus on form, texture and color. An aspiring blogger, you can track his story of life as an emerging artist at www.kimopokini.blogspot.com.

David Strait completed his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology at the University of Tennessee at Martin. He is now finishing his MFA in Creative Writing at Carlow University in Pittsburgh. As part of the school's study abroad program, David has worked under the supervision of Irish poets Desmond Egan, Michael Coady, and Mark Roper. Previous publications include *Castings* (1999), *Beanswitch* (2002), *Perceptions* (2006), and *Inspirations* (2007).

Robert Swereda is a musician and visual artist who got more serious about writing when he moved to Vancouver, Canada. He is the author of the chapbook *Answers* (a Robin Skelton project). He has been previously published by *terminus1525*.

