

Volume IV

Number 2

THREE RIVERS REVIEW
OF UNDERGRADUATE LITERATURE

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THREE RIVERS REVIEW

Volume IV Number 2 Spring 2000

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Karen Billingsley, Chris Chirdon, Natalie Cleaver, and Neil Chudgar for their laughter, conversation, and moral support.

Julia Kasdorf, this semester's Poetry Contest Judge, for sharing her time and expertise with the undergraduate writing community.

Hemingway's Cafe, for hosting our first Magazine Release Reading.

University of Pittsburgh, Bradford campus, for hosting with superb hospitality the First Annual Writers' Week.

The YARR reading group, for their undying support and creative propaganda.

Our publisher, Lordan Printing, and our contact, Lisa Guza,

for their professional guidance and many helpful suggestions.

To all of you, a summer of daffodils.

The Editors and Staff of *Three Rivers Review*

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MAY 2-5, 2000
BRADFORD, PA

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Welcome to the Spring 2000 edition of *Three Rivers Review*! As always, this magazine has done its utmost to bring you the very best undergraduate writing to be found in the city of Pittsburgh. If this is the first time you've picked up a copy of *Three Rivers Review*, I hope you enjoy your first taste of what Pittsburgh's undergraduate writing community has to offer. But whether you're a veteran who follows the magazine religiously or someone who just stumbled upon the blue cover with the photo montage, I think you'll find this semester's writing to be a pleasantly surprising mix of the traditional and the new. Innovative form, language, and subject matter can all be found within the following pages and are a testament to the literary creativity of the young people in this city. The writers have not abandoned their roots, however. Some call upon Shakespearean references while others try their hand at villanelles. Thus, whatever your literary preference, there is sure to be a piece in this edition which speaks to you.

The winners of our Third Annual Poetry Contest are also featured in this issue. This semester's contest judge was Julia Kasdorf, whose *Sleeping Preacher* won the Agnes Starrett Lynch Poetry Prize. The works of Miriam Greenberg, Matt Koeske, and Sarahlynn Pablo were chosen out of 28 manuscripts, and each winner received a \$100 prize and full manuscript publication. Congratulations!

On a more external note, *Three Rivers Review* decided this past term that it needed to become more visibly involved in the community if we were to expand the volume and quality of submissions. Thus, in February we held our first-ever Magazine Release Reading at Hemingway's Cafe in Oakland. Almost all of our published writers from the Fall 1999 issue read

their work, and the standing-room only crowd numbered upwards of 80 people. We plan on holding another reading in mid-autumn, so look for fliers at coffeeshops and bookstores in September!

Sometime in February another idea was hatched: to hold a small writers' conference away from the city so undergrads could write and workshop with new people in a new setting. Thus was born our Writers' Week, held May 2-5, 2000 at the University of Pittsburgh, Bradford campus, Bradford, PA. Fourteen students, including both *Three Rivers Review* staff members and faculty-nominated undergraduates, attended the 4-day affair. Writing and friendship quickly emerged as we basked in clean air and celebrated the lack of cement, car horns and exhaust, and most of us even went so far as to abuse our atrophied, college-bound bodies with hiking, volleyball and the grade-school favorite: kickball. The week was such a success that we felt we had to brag just a little about how much fun we had; thus, the third section of this issue is devoted to some of the writings which emerged from or were revised at the Writers' Week, and all the photographs in the magazine were taken there, as well.

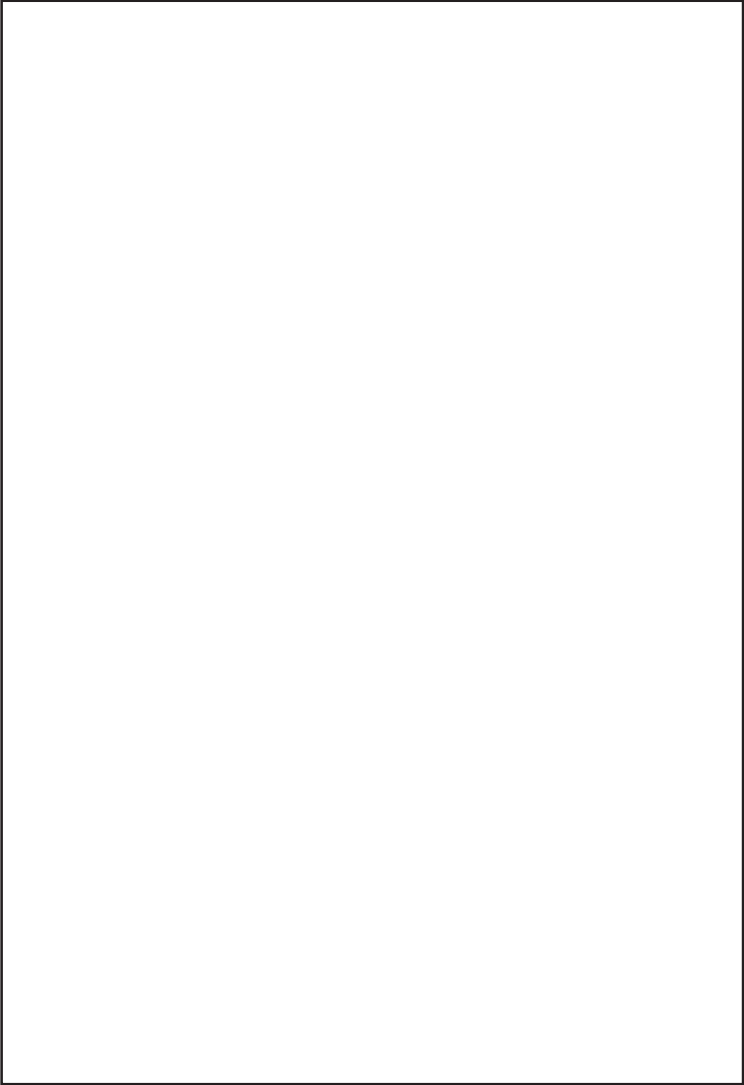
Finally I'd like to give a huge, personal thanks to the entire *Three Rivers Review* staff. This year has been so much work, but they've persevered through hundreds of pages of submissions with a valor that would make King Arthur bust his chainmail with pride. More importantly they make this editorial stuff way too much fun!

Go forth and enjoy what's contained between these pages!

All the best,

Catherine R. Hodorowicz
Editor-in-Chief

THREE RIVERS REVIEW



POETRY

LISA FERRUGIA

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

GANCIO DEL SENO

Steam bent boards
called ribs
are joined to the boat's

backbone by
interior joints. Dad
teaches me to say

breasthook, thwart
knee, names of joints.
He says, *gancio del seno*,

and I repeat it,
gancio del seno.
He jokes that I tug

at this heart strings.
We are trying to join
ribs to backbone,

long disconnected,
so the boat will
welcome water.

We work from the
center out, interior
to exterior, planed edges

of boards fitting
joints, belonging
only to themselves.

PAUL SIEGELL

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

FRENCH SEXY

— *for hands much softer than mine*

Lickable. Nice bites.
Icy spiders. Little chills.

My “majestic gesture” is
heavy-eye emails for her:

Re: Morning Born . . .

& when I fell asleep,
I began to swim
under sun-lit lake of clarity

& I Got To Breathe
As If Everything Was Normal
& She! Was There

& NO, WE WERE NOT CHILDREN
& YES, WE WERE OVER OUR
HALLOWEEN
& I FELT LIKE I'D JUST LEFT THE
HOSPITAL

She's just a certain elegance. Lotion. It's almost as if
underneath
whatever she happens to be wearing for the world
at the time

is a little black dress. Clinging. Like the lotion
of her tongue.

To my own

MATT NOVAK

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

PRAXIS (SAUSAGE AND ONIONS)

You are a force.
 You are a maker
 You make the deliberate. You are coincident.
 You own purpose and consequence.
 You take aim. You steady. You fire.
 You, the only one.

You are being made.
 You were chosen, and will be again.
 You are not alone. Oh, no. Look, they
 Are here, all around you, but in you better Look in you
 And there they are. They are peeling you like an onion. You
 are cooperate to anything
 But being left. You are amused at the sensibility of tight
 circles. Splendidly,
 You are coming apart in coral sheaves like a fat
 White onion. They are flaking you, taking turns at taking you
 Apart. You are supervising, a shackle biting your ankle. The
 flesh is coming apart so fast
 And shredded, the lot is blinding your eyes, a blizzard Your
 face is coming at you, indistinct
 Pieces. They are displayed tastefully, reverently by the throng
 responsible.
 You are calling to them from your splayed and fractal lips, Put
 Me Down. They can hear you,
 The ones with your ears, but these things
 You tell yourself are not like hands. Your hands

Have been reborn, resplendent, as a sausage, delicately cased
 and puckered.
 They drop in exhaustion, from malnourishment, from merciless
 driving, inept,
 Complaining of their trial. Your sense, carefully dissected,
 disperses, like winds would, or should,
 Systems of chaos, and is pocketed closely in wooly tangles of
 virgin cotton, under blankets and mountains
 Of snow, so that you'd never thought to see the like of And
 here, shaking your hand,
 Freezing your skin, melting underneath your firm grasp,
 pouring from you,
 Siphoning your heart and shorting out the lights, yards and
 fathoms of puddles, canyons and
 Plains of oceans; so much, so fast, that at last, finally you
 know you will never
 Contain their reach. So much relieved that you are coming
 apart, and coming to the center and you
 Are getting to the bottom of things, you have a final
 Thorough taste of yourself, and a fleeting impression
 Of charcoal and hubris; that here, at the center of it all, there
 will be no more disasters.

You, forceful, unopposed, unconcerned, willing
 To spurn and accept presence
 To have audience
 To bear witness
 You, a filling hunger

ILENE RAVICH

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

MY BLUE CUBA

Is a small square house,
 beige stucco, pine tree lined street.
 I am the mule strapped to this yoke,
 dragging a cart crowded with stories.
 Loaded down by a mother
 a dead grandmother, an island.
 I pull with shoulders,
 hind heels digging into the soil
 through this gauntlet of narrative.

The weight is lovely
 on my haunches, burns
 blue with broken English-
 with perfect Spanish.
 This yoke at my throat yanks
 with phone calls of send
 medicine for Juani's stomach-
 send lace for Janet's wedding-
 send shoes for Elmer-
 send *dollares*.

I am the last of this stock
 treading between traditions.
 I keep my lashes-feathered
 as the palms above the lip
 of these deep waters-
 these blue veined lines of blood

between that island, this country
Breathing it all in,
these fragrant burdens-
I become weightless.
I become this narrative.

THE POLAROID

Mom is helping me
hold him in my lap:
one hand on his belly
the other under his grapefruit head.

I can see his heartbeat through
the soft spot, a bruised banana.
I push hard enough and
my finger touches his brain.

His tiny hands are folded
in his tiny lap, the promise
of a gentleman,
and he is still wearing the hospital
band with purple ink stamped letters.

I'm encircled by every pillow in the house,
mom is hovering close in her red robe.
We're sitting on the old brown couch,
the couch I pushed him off
of when he was old enough
to crawl up and take
my seat.

KATE ZANGRILLI**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH****MIAMI HOLIDAY**

If I find one more angel in the garage,
I am sure to be west of dangerous.

It's just like the time you disentangled letters
from the soup. Claimed you couldn't read
the isoline. This rinky-dink terrorist
no doubt entails expletives. What's needed is a pleiad,
any kind of framed reminder

You think you're getting away; I'll call the platypus!
You're only closer to us both, the pleasure bar
where we began.

COMPLETE PARTY GUIDE

You never expect people to look at your feet, that's why you abandon shoes. Hah! Even I would dock the resolution to add capital, lest you swine end up ahead. Ahem, the road to Innisfree is lewd and deranged. So why leave breadcrumbs?

Only the press blame evidentiary news. Consolation: "This is a lesson." But generally? 'Whiz, wench. So you *do* translate.

With regards to the number line, I'm surprised when someone takes an interest in my illness. Will you come?

Always falling into the tub with the wrong people.

JOHN PAUL HORSTMANN UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

FRANTIC PUNCHATAN ENEMY

I want me a Mexican woman uh-huh
violence and wee-zul-wazel
flowers in the desert
I don't know what that was
I forget
don't interrupt don't interrupt
woman I know you from your top
up Brains-full to the
bottom-beautiful creek
run though me wash
me as I run you through
blade on blade cactus
pluck flower from
yeah fuck yeah this is now
let me begin with hopeful
wandering that brings full-fight
encourage you to sing me mel-o-dies
of taste of sound of look forget
I forget what was is belle
and such and such
a money fuming come here
let me grab a modest writing branch
and unfold let me crazy
snag a piece of scentful wandering

ALISON DEREK

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

FROM AN URCHIN(ESSE)

corporate man

you saunter

I counter

your saunter with a smile

oh please, *cher**ignore* methere's not *much* in the air

wait to grasp your moon coin chance

your passing footstep spells

penny ragdoll's sideways glance

here drift the wafting sidewalk smells

I mean in dreams I poke your eyes

to wake you starving singing

of years and tears and hungry cries

and frozen sweatbead fingers clinging

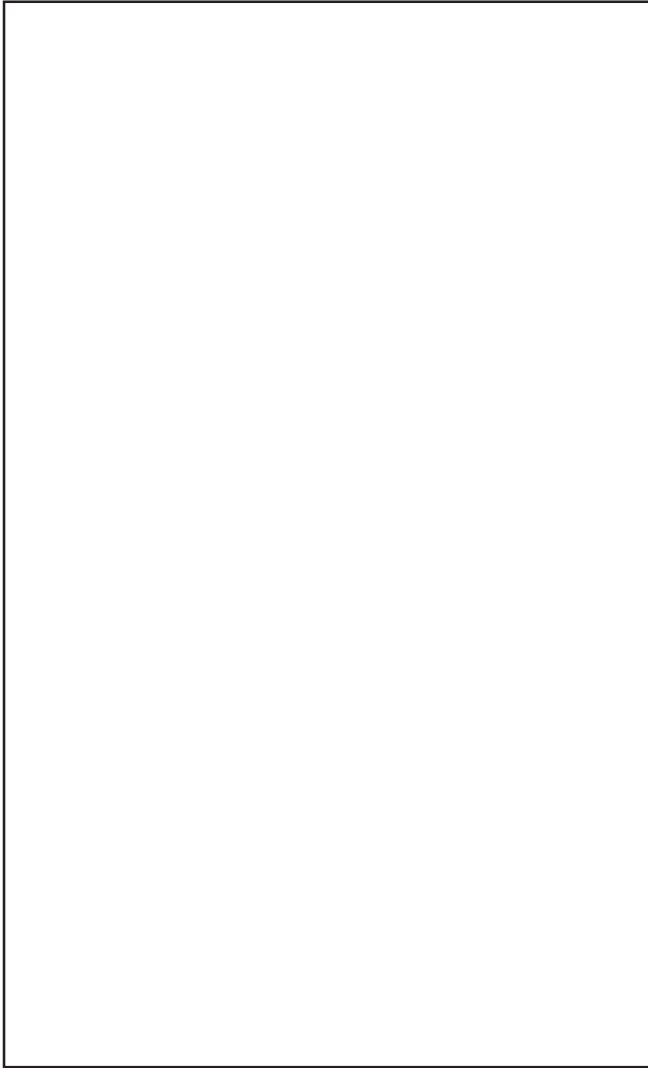
WINTER TO A SCULPTOR

Outside, the ash of clouds plaster a jungle-gym on Massachusetts Avenue. Children are digging tunnels out of their igloo. One girl is making molds of angel wings nearby. Her eyes are hidden like buried treasure. He watches her wrap herself in snow and remembers dipping his body in a hot tub, then rolling naked through fields of snowflakes, just to look like a marble statue posing in the Rodin Museum.

He wonders if it snows in Paris. He wonders if children build fleeting snowmen beside "The Thinker," or if they sift cold diamonds through their fingertips to make drip castles near "The Gates of Hell." He wonders if the same snowflakes dissolving on his tongue were once interlocking threads on "Balzac's" housecoat. As my brother walks

down painted roads he imagines Rodin taking a pick-ax to a glacier and chiseling his perfect hands. Randy enters his home and begins stabbing blocks of limestone until they breathe. As the white flesh flies around his head, pure as ice falling from a glacier, he will call it snow

THREE RIVERS REVIEW
THIRD ANNUAL POETRY CONTEST



JUDGED BY JULIA KASDORF

THREE RIVERS REVIEW

BIOGRAPHIES

CONTEST JUDGE

JULIA KASDORF grew up in Irwin, P A and attended Goshen College and New York Univeristy. Her books of poetry, *Sleeping Preacher* and *Eve's Striptease*, were both published by University of Pittsburgh Press, and a collection of essays, *The Body and the Book: Writing from a Mennonite Life*, is due from Johns Hopkins University Press next year . She teaches in the creative writing program at Penn State, and was the Visiting Poet at Pitt during the fall 1999 semester.

CONTEST WINNERS

MIRIAM GREENBERG is an English Writing major at the University of Pittsburgh and will begin her junior year this fall. Originally from Paris, Texas, her short term goals are to make a series of artist books over the summer and to go on a long bike trip. Her long term goals involve exploring the Amazon and eventually getting her driver's license.

MATT KOESKE just finished his B.A. at Pitt with majors in fiction and poetry writing. The poems he submitted are part of a manuscript entitled, "To Honor Our Father, Lame Vulcan," and the greatest influences on his writing are the ideas of Carl Jung and Robery Bly. He is spending this summer coaching youth baseball, wishing to be ten years younger, and regretting that he

is doomed to a poet's salary rather than a major league baseball player's. He will attend the poetry MFA program at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst campus, this fall.

SARAHLYNN PABLO recently graduated from Pitt with a B.A. in English Writing and Business. Back in her hometown of Chicago, she is on the job hunt before going back to school for a master's degree. Inspiration and influences on her writing include Pablo Neruda and spoken word group I Was Born With Two Tongues.

MIRIAM GREENBERG
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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MONDAY MORNING, 5 A.M.

I am counting the number of blood oranges
 your torso can balance, neck to stomach
 before reaching the slope of your belly
 and rolling off
 (apologizing slyly with orange blush before hitting
 the dewed grass w/ soft thump
 (seven. two in the indentations of your collar bones)).

It is an hour before dawn
 (I have woken to dress for work, but
 something has distracted me (you, curling against
 cocoon of sheets, stretching arms over me
 like Monarch wings) and we are lying
 in the cool still night, your hair fanned
 out like a dark radiant star
 (in my mind I am the young prince who lived
 in trees all his life, had an affair with (you,
 strangely dark) Spanish woman), as the
 intransigent city flickers back into the heavy
 slow heartbeat of (reluctant Monday) morning
 resurrection), the pervading smell
 (sound, essence) of city traffic dissects
 (the latticed veins of (blood) oranges)
 the failing night (paling sky)
 (precision of an alien language against
 my (imaginal) orange trees) and
 I (led revolts through the tree-tops,
 courted, corresponded with Diderot (with
 hair in his eyes)) and am falling asleep on
 the grass (Mondays).

(still, (I am (dressing for work)) myself, a (girl)
continually surprising reflection in passing
glass and mirrors) in the fish-like
underwater light, the
prelapsarian dawn.

YUKON SUNSET (VILLANELLE #1)*(refrains adapted from lines by Campbell McGrath)*

The early aurora, the skirl of tundra –
 unbroken ceaseless sky only unpaused
 by constellated glacial till.

A bag of peaches, remainder of distance.
 Unthawed, they are a sunset-colored bruise,
 an early aurora, the skirl of tundra.

A frozen knot, a weight against my palm,
 each one a heavy speckled darkness, black
 as constellated ashes, glacial till

in emberless darkness without language.
 Across the permafrost a dog howls
 in the early aurora, the skirl of tundra.

The hush of space has pressed a muteness at
 his throat. His breath stirs churning eddies
 in the constellated ashes' glacial till.

The thawing peaches, like the charcoal black
 of ground against sky, a dozen darkening sunsets
 are early auroras, the skirl of tundra,
 are constellated ashes' glacial till.

VILLANELLE#2*(refrains adapted from lines by Marilyn Hacker)*

In only June the branches will be bare with heat.
 The moon has thrown its net across the sky
 at six, when April chills out hands and feet.

The shaking cold won't deter us, we'll meet
 beneath the dancing statues, saplings sway-
 ing softly – soon our arms will be bare in the heat,

and sooner, Monarch butterflies retreat
 to Canada's cooler air. Shadows lie
 at six, when April chills our hands and feet.

The languages of warmth are foreign, entreat
 our pleas for summer air to silence, trying
 the wait for June. The branches will be bare with heat

then, past the ripened air of May The feat
 of enduring the summer's wilting cry:
 we'll wish for April, chilling hands and feet,

and find opening windows never helps, the sheets
 are agonies. We barely sleep by July
 We'll wish for winter, branches bare with heat
 at six, when thoughts of April chill our feet.

ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE, REVISED

Orpheus had gone to the market –
olives, milk and bread, a clove of garlic,
a tomato (later, Eurydice’s sautéed
peppers have burned this smell, a haze
into the room). Unfolded Celandines
in a mason jar, as delicate and fine
as day reflect her angled spine – an arc
of foliage. The kitchen cabinets mark
a cavernous expanse of cutlery
and mixing bowls that measure bent degrees
between the crease of knee and curving neck;
the frying pan’s quick oily songs dissect
the lack of mystery – no coiled serpent
is needed; every light socket, each intent
is danger still unformed (he spent morning
once untwining filaments of bulb, her fingers
were blackened once). Behind mirrors, death
is filled with labyrinthine angles pressed
towards Eurydice, weaving in peppery sparks
(the scent of sautéed peppers in her scarf),
a premonition in ornate scrolling script,
each letter contains the curving dark, her hip
her body’s graceless fall. Later
her shadow fills the spaces Cerberus’ howl enthrall
remembering the lyre’s fading song
that once paused the turning wheel of Ixion.

MELWOOD AVENUE, MARCH 2000

At 3 a.m. in the green bedroom
I dream I am my mother, much younger
than she is now, living in an apartment
so tall that from the window I see only
clouds. At 3 a.m. the hallways are still
and sinuous through pewter air, kitchen
cabinets are foreign in the umber light.
At 3 a.m. in the utter soulless self
of the night, the drum kit in the basement
is a subterranean machine, a
long-limbed insect lurking silent and still
camouflaged by the heavy air. At three
in the morning the neighbor next door
starts screaming, punctual to the minute, just
as every early morning before this one.
At 3:05 a.m. I suspect she
is being kidnapped by the drums, undersea
ibis, stork in the intransigent night
(but when I check, they are still there, crooked
elbows and kneecaps stretching, like ancient
mosquitoes stretching in their amber
sarcophagus towards skin, for a meal.
At 3 a.m. the basement is hemlock,
belladonna, a library of
uncategorizable silences.
outside, far away is the quiet soft
punctuation of mourning doves prescribing
rain, and less often, the hushing noise
of cars a hundred feet overhead,
traveling home over the Bloomfield bridge.

MURDER BALLADS

*"I shall tell you the secret of secrets. Mirrors are the doors
by which death comes and goes. Don't tell this to anyone.
Just watch yourself all your life in a mirror and you will see
death at work like bees in a glass hive."*

— Jean Cocteau

I am a firm believer in the life of a pack-rat;
have carried with me since eighth grade the picture
of a pale-skinned man, his body showing through
amid almost-moving clusters of bees. He is a
stoic, a believer in god and good intentions. He smiles;
beckons from among the flashing cemetery of funhouse
mirrors,
gibbous moon illuminating mile-markers to eternity

In this picture he has walked out of this skin,
stepped away from the paradigm of photographic
well-wishing
to the other side of the stream, where the reflection
of a horse on the water is flanked by tiger and tamer
on land; where he is on the other side of the
clash of shutters, click of lens caps, the bursting
magnesium flares like leaping flames of stars.

He is Ambrose now, peeking out from beneath bee-keeping
veil;
he is Winter; solitary, solemn. He is the anonymous
apparition,
the unknown man in photographs of your friends, the stranger
in house-slippers walking his leashed goat midmorning
through Central Park. He has planted his hands in the garden;

his fingers are sprouting up though the soil in little buds of green. He has carried with him the memories of every past moment, of every photographic persona, of each individual bee.

LE NUMÉRO BARBETTE

(after Jean Cocteau)

It is tonight a Man Ray metamorphosis
 Not woman into violin, but man
 (into violin). Suppose this: in the dressing room,
 the enameled, pastelled face of this thin and birdlike
 monument to the ineffable, testing his hair with mouth a
 bloomed bouquet
 of bobby-pins contained between the blooming red roses of
 his cheeks,
 and later among the processions of choirgirls he does
 knee-bends and checks the rigging between ground and
 tightrope and trapeze, shifting one last time before shedding
 the cumbersome gown feathered as it falls from him,
 he falls into the delightful arabesque of parody of all
 the women he's known and watched. Between scenes
 the mad ballet continues, his angel's face and shadow's male
 gestures
 serve him now as birds' wings, not particularly feminine
 across the alleyway chasm of footlights and spotlights, but
 far in
 the distance an audience transfixed as if by dream, takes in
 no notice of the perfidy. He now changes, chimera
 to goat, to tigress, to tamer; to curled and powdered beauty
 defying the blonde dazzle of choirgirls. At fifth encore
 he flings away the curled hair amid shower of pins and
 powder;
 in these transformations Barbette substantiates the Greek
 legends about young men changed into trees, into flowers: an
 antidote to their easy magic, and as if from the streets of a
 dream,

with the loss of curled woman's hair, his back also loses the
violin stripes in the final metamorphosis as he returns to daily
man,
astonishingly invisible among the flung bouquets
littering the stage and utterly unremarkable, limping back
as if to the street-corner table at which he drinks his coffee in
silence.

MATT KOESKE
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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BOTHER AND DAMNATION

My grandfather used to stand in his garden like a tree
 throwing old shade over a patch of flowers,
 glaring down and inspecting the vegetables with a crooked
 stick,
 a stick for standing and for inspecting,

and when my buddies came tearing into the yard
 on their heavy children's feet
 to drag me off for a ball game
 or to crawl through the dripping forest
 with toy guns and cap of little pops of sulfur
 explore the element of surprise,
 the art of camouflage,
 and charter the underbrush,

he would wave his arms
 and shake his stick until
 it trembled like lightning
 shouting, "Bother and Damnation!
 To Hell with you all, to Hell with you!"
 We would all scurry off and giggle.

Teddy even invented a game
 in which one of us would protect
 some sacred object – a Frisbee or a flag
 or Jo Jo's old first baseman's mitt that used to be his dad's –
 and all the others would sneak up from different directions
 to quickly pinch it, but the protector had a stick,
 a good heavy branch cracked off of some rough tree
 or taken from some alter of fallen oak in the woods,
 and if he spotted the thief

he would shake that stick at him
 shouting, "To Hell with you, to Hell with you all!"
 Then the thief would have to leave his sight
 and count to one hundred before planning another assault.

When Grandpa wasn't in his garden
 he sat in his old chair in the living room
 snoring like a typhoon
 or coughing or just smelling of age.
 He read the funny pages but never laughed.
 I thought maybe he was laughing somewhere inside
 where he was still young. I imagined
 Young Grandpa sitting there like Pinocchio
 on the squalid tongue of a gruff old whale
 just laughing away for ever and ever
 laughing at all the comics and all the jokes
 he'd ever heard, replaying them all in his mind,
 there inside the whale,
 like a man who had just discovered the kinetoscope parlor

When I pictured Young Grandpa
 he always looked like me
 whenever I made faces at myself in the mirror
 I couldn't think what else Young Grandpa would look like.

But once, when I was about ten,
 just a few days after Jo Jo's dad died
 and my dad continued to live,
 I didn't see Grandpa in the garden
 or in his chair
 and suddenly I wondered if he too had passed away
 or more likely, if he had gone and taken
 Jo Jo's dad's soul by the hand

(‘cause if anyone could talk to the dead it was Grandpa)
and taken him to a ballgame
to just sit and jeer and crack open peanut shells.

Peanut shells would be lying in a neat pile below their seats,
emptied,
all of their shells in one pile together
Little peanut nits would fly from their mouths as they yelled,
all around them the sounds of cheering, the crowds, the
gigantic kitchen smells
of the ballpark, the crack of the bat on the ball like a sweet
dab of thunder,
the players below on the field in perfect motion.

I don’t know why I thought it,
but what really happened –
I walked slowly down into the basement
pretending I was two hundred years old,
my crippled legs jittering
slow step by step.
A small light was on,
and when I finally reached the bottom
Grandpa was sitting in a little wooden chair
hunched over a fold out card table
molding with slow trembling fingers
small figures out of soft clay

And then, as though they had never been
there before that instant, all along the lonely borders of the
room
on two levels of shelves,
leaning gingerly out from the shadows,
hundreds of small clay figurines

stood and peered at me with kind eyes –
leopards elephants alligators human beings
silently smiling like relatives I'd never met.

I crept closer to Grandpa
who saw me but didn't look up.
His wrinkled knobby fingers
were covered with wet gray film
and a tarnished lamp dropped down a dim light
that seemed to fall quietly asleep among the old shadows of
the room.

Something in his eyes stirred and seemed to twirl
down upon his work like a spinning maple seedling,
maple whirlybirds were falling all over the basement quieter
than feathers
and dry as dust, churning in the tired air
sending a small naked flutter of light over everything,
but faintly --
a light I could never before distinguish
in the garden
in the sun.

The world had gone unnamed.

FEATHERHORSE

You're just a featherhorse—
 you're no Pegasus.
 I can see the paste slopping out at the creases,
 wings that don't lift or flap,
 and if I'm wrong—
 leap off that precipice
 and fly.
 I hope your feathers have dried!
 Or that some swooping fart of Zeus
 will catch you in its craw
 and steal you off to heaven.

Goldenboy is long gone
 with that hideous head—
 but the blood still burrows
 into the earth like a mob of beetles.
 The monstrous corpse,
 the snaky bitch-torso,
 quivering—
 looking almost human,
 almost a goddess,
 or maybe a dead-papped whore.
 May the gods bless her—
 holy muse and mother to us both.

You. For all your plumes—
 there'll be hard-heeled riders,
 buying and selling,
 spurs for those wings,
 a succession of hands at your nape
 tugging you toward the next glorious quest.

You would be better off
fat and hairy like me,
big footsteps, broad hands—
free to drink at leisure from clean rivers,
recline against the green of the hillsides
where the wind sits,
free to watch the dawn rise up
and forget it as soon as day
huge and free—
no heroes, no breakers, or tamers, or golden bridles,
too giant, too wild for the wants of men,
useless, utterly useless
and invisible to them all.

Blow off then—
but when you're done stomping and braying,
tell somebody my name,
and tell them
if they come upon me in the woods asleep
to go and roll a mountain over me,
if they think they can,
so every year I can sink
three more inches into the bloody clay

SCAPEGOAT

I fell
or was pushed
from a seat
among angels
and landed
like an armful of kindling
in a place
where the footsteps
of my father
were deafening.

I broke
or was drowned
in a river
among men
and sank
like a pair of spectacles
in a current
where the hands
of my father
were baptizing.

I shouted
or was blamed
for the waste
of passions
and froze
like grass beneath the snow
in a wilderness
where the breath
of my father

was stilled.

I wept
or was buried
near the mountains
by devils
and dreamt
like the nets of fishermen
in the cradle
that the might
of my father
had toppled.

(take one goat of white
one of black
drive them over the cliff
with your sins

**WHAT HAS HAPPENED IN HEAVEN?
(ANOTHER AMERICAN MESSIAH TELLS HIS TALE)**

The purpose of wandering upon deserted towns
is to run into deserted people, not,
as it is commonly believed,
to allow one's own desertedness to diffuse
through alleyways littered with anonymous metals
into the loose swing of barroom doors
down the frayed ropes of dead wells
that have absorbed the western dust as men
have absorbed the amber of the sun.

We Americans have discovered, and proudly
that going westward long enough is a way
of leaving death sowed in a plant row of waste behind us.
Movement is the essential thing, consumption,
our dear dead ones blowing off in our backfire
like the multitudinous flavors of emptied
crinkled potato chip bags,
the unwaddable inside-out silver of little souls
lost to the prairies where roads form
like premature wrinkles in the force smile
of the face of the earth.

Despite this, we have never been able to resolve oceans.

It takes an ignorant man, a man who runs
westward with his back into the sunset,
obsessing over the clumps of dead things
he scatters, the light looming off of the debris,
or how the wake persistently

chases the boat, a truly ignorant man,
 to continue west into the ocean
 and beyond, a man who is unaffected,
 for whatever reason or disease,
 by water,
 and can defy gravity out of stupidity (for just a moment)
 like Wily E. Coyote.

When the newspaper began advertising a position
 for such a man, I immediately made my application.
 Of course, I began to suspect something was amiss,
 something not quite legal, when
 my employer was not ready to meet in person
 and left little notes in coffee cans or
 scribbled on the underside of the toilet seat
 providing maps and directions and the words:
bring a pad of paper and a pen and quit your day job.

Still, a man must follow where his talent leads him,
 and undoubtedly, I was trapped in the pendulous swing of this
 mystery
 as a philosopher might be trapped
 in the finite language of his philosophy
 When the call came I rushed out in reverse,
 trailing a garbage of guilts and slivered glass
 stopping only to buy dream catchers and Mexican blankets
 in my 21st century style odyssey across America—
 following the Wal-Mart trail
 where the limped footprints of Coyote retreated, scavenging
 away.

I kept accelerating as if to delay falling
 over backwards until I smacked into a wiry
 old man and sent us both sprawling.

The Pacific chortled with shag like a damp buffalo pelt below me.

The old guy picked himself up and dusted the salt water off his trousers and introduced himself as Emmitt and asked did I remember the pen and paper and, yes I did. “Good,” he said, “now write this down,” he said and proceeded to tell me the story of what had happened in heaven.

“There was once a great partnership,” said Emmitt, and paused, “What I’m going to do is tell you my story But don’t worry, it’s short.

“Once, a long time ago, there were two Gods in heaven, two Gods just starting out in the Big Business, two who had together thought up a way of marketing mankind to the world, and to get to the point, I was the other God, no lower on the totem pole, I’ll have you know

“The way things worked . . . He did the designing, the abstract, and me, I was the God with the effable name. I did the legwork. If a universal principle needed to be written He would say, *You know we need a universal principle for . . . for entropy, let’s say, and my job would be to write the formula, hire the crews, and conduct all the construction.* He would say, *You know it’s gloomy over there,* and I would pound out a solar system, and so forth.

“If He wanted his presence felt below I would ghost write a

bible trying my best to capture the essence of his ineffable egotism without blackening his *raison d'être*.

“Well, who knows why such things happen, what straw finally breaks the camel’s back, what conceit floats up to the surface when the broth has bubbled long enough, but all of a sudden He gets this idea that the true axis, the kernel, the metaphysical omphalos of our corporation is monotheism. It started as one of those notorious what-ifs veiled in innocent pondering, that white raiment of ideological advancement, but it blew up like a hydrogen bomb into a mania, an obsession—all for the idea! The *idea* of monotheism!

“He felt there was a kind of purity to it, an unassailable, inarguable logic of ‘simplicity,’ and what else could come of this except The Great Downsizing? And after ages and ages of wondrous destruction and restoration, I was on the street. It was *for the good of the company*, He said. My talents were wasted on busy work, He said. He was really doing me a favor, He said, and the corporation was bigger than either of us, and must live on, as it always had, for the sake of form, *for godheadliness, for the sake of sake itself*.

“With me went the bulk of the angels, all laid off (or cast out as we later called it) so quick and unexpected that at first it all seemed a grand deific slapstick. And then it was He who said, *History is written by the winners*, and called that the Logos.

“And then heaven, which was once something like we’ve been pretending it is, fell into decay: the crime rates went up, gimmicks for transcendence and restoration flocked in like fat filthy pigeons, the pain of the lost began hovering like a

damaged storm as thick as the skin of a beef broth, and really the living were being stewed in their own juices, trying to live off of their own loosening flesh.

“What a glossing over we give to the damned, always making up reasons for them getting what they deserved, losers and sinners all we like to say but being damned is tightrope walking on the grace of a God who is sawing away with his bowie knife at the nether end. When you fall . . . well, there’s a mind out there that thought up gravity out of its love at the sight of falling things.

“What will He do? What can He possibly do without us?” we said, thinking that some comeuppance was in order. But as it turned out, spirituality could be manufactured cheaper overseas by Buddhists who are used to nothing. He was happy to import any of this he could get his hands on, it didn’t matter that Buddhists didn’t even believe in the soul and sought freedom from samsara and the 10,000 things. ‘Things fall apart,’ said Siddhartha, whereas our ethic had always been the passion of the spirit trapped in the corporeal world . . . ”

Then Emmet the Effable checked himself and looked sternly into my eyes.

“I want you to take this all back with you and show it to the world. Make sure everyone knows the truth, because people *should* know why it’s all gone to hell on a hog cart.”

And with that he vanished into thin air

and I was whisked instantly into one
of the sea's realities, one of Emmit's
formulations of descent.

I fell like a flying fish
falling back down after a near perpetual
flight into the salty laments of the seawater
and sank heavily down to the scullery of the ocean floor
it seemed miles down until my feet found some
floor to walk on, and walk I did,
crabbing all the way back along the bottom
to the beaches of the west coast,

and it was like walking in suburbia at three AM
when even the lampposts have fallen asleep
like bilge-bellied security guards paid
to keep track of a warehouse
without any wares,
it was like walking back from the Land of California
to the Delta after making forty dollars
for a race record and shedding a shackle
of heaviness like a shirt collar thick with salt
only to come back
to the steadiness of sharecropping,
the plow, the stink of the old beast of the field,
the old beast of self,
back to the east, back eastward
back into the ignorant gaze of the sun
and the amber waves of grain
over which it fails
to mean anything.

My mouth began to open, spilling out words.

It was a slave ship jettisoning half its starved
and sickly cargo in mid-passage.
And America's eyes fell on me
as the eyes of plantationers might fall on a union man
Speaking at the laborers of the field.
The country raised up its great tattered flag
like a distracted glance at its wrist watch
and drifted away whistling to itself.

I wanted to carve my initials on its hanging tree
inside a little heart to show how defiant my love could be,
but the only world that came to mind was

“Croatoan”

Croatoan—you know where you can find me.

WHAT TO DO WITH AN ANGEL

I'll tell you what to do with an angel.
When you walk through the front door
of a stranger's house
and lying stiffly in a hump of a heap
is an old prayer-stained angel,
take off your overcoat
and throw it over the formless bulk
where the angel's body is lewdly crystallizing.

Then walk over to the stranger
and put your head on his shoulder
Say, "It will be okay now friend.
Just try to sleep it off."
Turn to leave.
The stranger will say "Thank you, friend."
Smile and nod slightly and step toward the door
"Friend?" the stranger will call out,
"What about your coat?"
Try not to shudder or hesitate too long.
Reply, "Keep it," and now you may leave for good, and
quickly.

When you have left the house
and are moving away more gradually among your footsteps
you will be free to mutter to yourself,
"It is ruined, it is ruined."

SARAHLYNN PABLO
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

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THE FIRST TWO POEMS I LEARNED

1.

Me Chinese

Me play joke

Me put pee-pee in your coke

2.

Chinese

(slant eyes up)

Japanese

(slant eyes straight out)

Pekinese

(slant eyes down)

Look at these

(lift shirt)

**FALLING DUSK, PUKA SHELL BEACH, BORACAY
ISLANDS, PHILLIPPINES**

*after Campbell McGrath's "Sunrise and
Moonfall, Rosarito Beach"*

My yellow flip-flops sunk gently into the sand,
brown waves and frothy crests, warm as a shirt worn all day
in the sun,
asked me kindly to wade farther into its waters.
When I walked my flip-flops sucked
on the sand like starfish on a reef,
then flicked out of the water splattering
the backs of my dark calves with more dirty sand and stinging
saltwater,
all the while making a noise like wet air kisses.

We each gathered
puka shells in the hammocks of our shirts,
each wave uncovering more just as I looked down.

Behind us, the sway of the banana leaves
sang with the crash of tropical waters in front of us.
Fearing floating seaweed, schools of meandering fish, sinking,
I wouldn't dare
venture out more than an arm's length
from my mother, a would-be dorsal.

My willow-reed fourteen-year-old frame,
awkward and erect and squinting at nothing,
did not yet know how to bend with the water
did not yet know how to ride upon the seat of a wave.

My mother, her large abdomen filling her suit,
did back strokes and grinned as she sprayed
the salt water out of her mouth and nose.

A few months ago, she told me, “Sarahlynn, we are going
home this summer, you know we go home every summer
You have to see your Grandmama, all your cousins, every-
body.”

I believed I didn’t belong here, but I knew otherwise.

I saw almond-shaped eyes, a wide, flat nose
hair that didn’t take the spiral perm
dark skin no makeup ever complemented.

Pointing with her brown hands
the color of mud, of coconut bark, Auntie Aida said
Sarah dese are de most baluble of all shell.
Ordinary as shells are, with ridges and rings,
fingerprints of mahi-mahi and eels,
sometimes colored brown or green,
with a hole in the center of each,
smaller than the ball of my pinky toe.
I did not know their value.

STRANGERS, AGAIN

If I could again talk with the wise,
 again with Ronald Takaki,
 I'd imagine us sitting together Indian-style
 in my studio, biscuit crumbs falling into book eaves.

His coffee mug rests precarious atop
 the white-cushioned ottoman. I'm passive
 towards this, his only personal glitch I can tolerate with any
 decorum.

At least I got him to stop that incessant foot twitch
 after he created an ebb and tide in everyone's glass at that last
 dinner party,
 made us think there was another aftershock.
 But even grass roots folks have faults for every altruistic act.

I'll speed along the niceties without force,
 the requisite banter and gossip, who's "staging"
 since we last spoke (married, pregnant or dead).
 Before he can get to the comfortable half-bottom
 of his lemon and hot water, I'll toss him my manuscript –
 the intro I've penned late nights for the sequel he has yet to
 write.

Holding his orange tome, I'd say Ronald –
 "Strangers to Both," it's the next one.
 You see, he left us undone, unfinished.

Ronald, from your book I now know why
 I expect the white lady at the car rental place
 to speak slowly to me, who thinks she's helping
 a former UNICEF kid, us poor non-natives.

I, an English major optimist, expect to be treated
as an English-as-a-second-language refugee.

Mr. Takaki, when is enough enough? Or are we
in a kind of sick, perpetual Halloween, our ethnic costumes
black and red and yellow
irremovable, cartoonish; stereotypes masking us with fiery
tongues, boogey eyes, simpleton smiles?
America, land of the free? Only for those brave enough to
fight for a homeland.

Where is home?

In my real “homeland,” Mr Takaki, I don’t expect to be
stranger again.
My roots journey across the seas to the land of my
grandfather’s blood
taught me now to expect a homecoming for the prodigal.
I imagined a reconnection, a loosening of my native tongue
suddenly with fire,
but I was left alone as if I belonged to someone else.
You should have written that once you leave the Motherland,
there’s no return for the sinner and the sinner’s sons and
daughters
for seven times seven hundred generations after

Is there penance for being American?

WEEK AGO SATURDAY MORNING,

I waited for Scott in the U.N. mimeo section of the library
the only prism of quiet natural light in its massive academic
fluorescence.

Three tables away, a man and a woman sit down,
he with light-rimmed eyes,
an olive face the color of fresh rolls;
she, about 15 years his senior, upswept black hair,
eyes kohled with navy, lips with *special occasion* red.
I didn't notice them until he asks,
"So, how long ago did you come to the United States?"

Reading someone's poem, mouthing *autumn, gazpacho*
as if unacquainted,
I pondered Scott's lateness and wondered
what's really in the U.N. mimeos.
Then into my open moving mouth, over my non-voice
entered

"Ka . . . Ka"

The man's nylon pullover has fallen off the back of his chair
They leaned, together, over a book, him slowly again
pronouncing.

"*Caifa el hai.*" She told him and me, "That's *how are*
you."

I tried too, speaking the sounds of an Arabic *how are you*,
moving my tongue forward more than I'm used to, rolling
the tip down.

It filled my mouth as never before in English;
English that is projection, throat, nasal.

Saying *bauble* lost luster after pieced Arabic that is tongue,
voice box, jaw.

Arabic that is a diamond I want to swallow

Arabic that is the delicious taste on my forefingers

This I must say –

you are this and more, my Arabic

an accidental meeting in my waiting life

a medium I perform that performs on me

a teaching I don't understand

a music, a poetry with an unseen horizon.

THE HAVEN OF ANONYMITY

9.20.99, wet, Monday morning:

You were on my mind, again today and for a whole semester. Relationship bile fouled would-be clean lines, balanced stanzas. God, I can't believe that was me. Guess every poet has a vice.

fat white women in Queens blossom into Madonnas
 songs throwing open the exhibitionist trench
 songs insulting gods of every people

piggyback atop Mainstream, crop-driving flushing red,
 leather-tested ass to a Christmas flushing red,
 tamales from the South Street farmers' market burn the
 tongues of your tired souls and even more tired
 poetry
 who thirst beyond the reach of Alex's chain and Alex's bark
 echoing through the neighborhood.

gen why-ers eating American pie face first, without "please?"
 or "may I?"
 conspicuous rice boys swathing self-indulgently in a naughty
 shade of pink feathers and rouge.

the rabid elephant doling out just desserts to his top hat
 master
 the middle finger salute to every token character on the
 whitewashed media I've seen thus far

swimming dogs and sushi chefs drowning your entrenched
 primordial ties (yeah buddy, we all got 'em)

an embarrassment best forgotten, already forgotten
 dairy crates full of poetic histories inscribed with our birth
 names,
 hauled from apartment to the next to permanent storage and
 back
 history's our cellmate, our confessions
 to Reader, Gentle Read about boyfriend cheated
this, father alcoholic *that*, momma gone for good, *yadda*
 yadda.
 End of line, sentence, stanza, death.

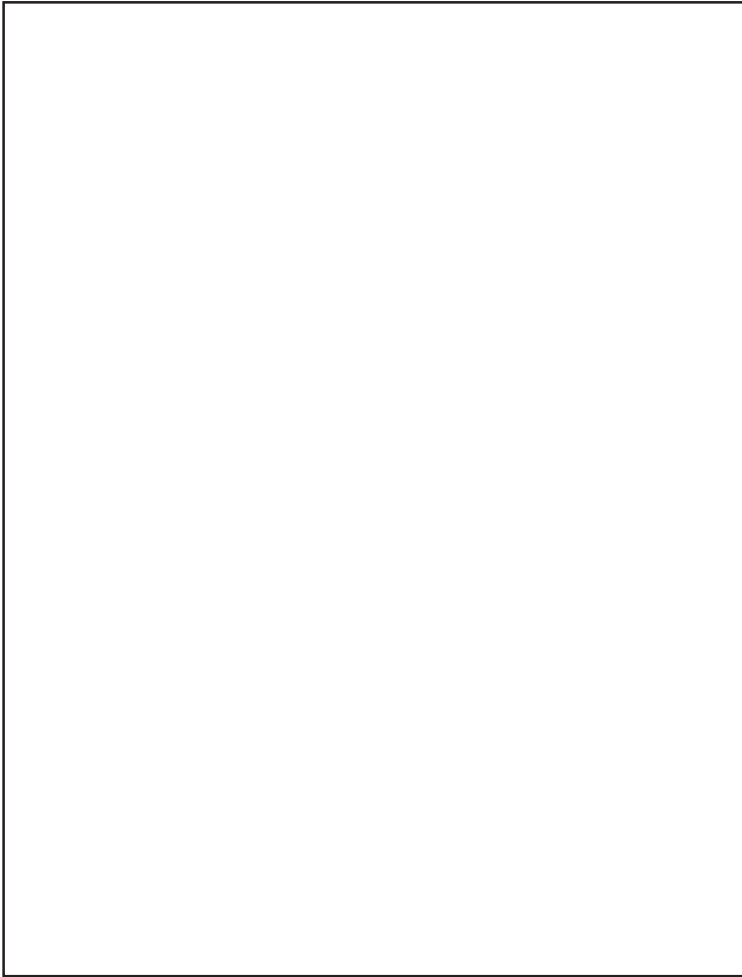
Get the Fuck over it.

Or lose the new apple smell and loose potatoes
 leave the delicious episodes of vertigo,
 abandon the hordes of angry little girls,
 turn away from that police officer's alarmingly red mug,
 forget about the thirty shiny pinwheels spinning all in a row
 dismiss the rumors about the gap-toothed bitches

no reason this can't be yours
 be yourself and be that yellow jar in the back
 of the
 fridge no one's sure what's in

What's NEXT for you?

AWAY FROM THE CITY



WORKS FROM THE
THREE RIVERS REVIEW WRITERS' WEEK,
MAY 2-5, 2000
BRADFORD, PA

TOM CHRISTOPHER

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

FOURTH OF JULY

While you slice the tomatoes for the salad, realize how different the house is since he told you. Pause and look around your kitchen. Everything that you had previously admired, the hardwood floors, the copper pans, the wooden counters, look empty to you. What had been yours is now half yours. Last week your world was perfect, the suburban dream, then he told you. It was completely unexpected. He did stay out late some nights, he did have too much to drink now and then, but nothing to have been suspicious about. At least you still have your daughter, Samantha. She's watching *The Lion King* in the living room. It's her favorite movie, she watches it nonstop. You'll get custody for sure. You haven't told her yet and that's weighing on you as well. You can't imagine what she'll say if she'll understand or blame you. Or herself, you've heard children often blame themselves, but she's only four, you can't imagine her blaming herself. Go back to slicing tomatoes.

He walks into the kitchen and claps his hands together. It's the Fourth of July big deal.

"Time to make the burgers," he cheers.

Ignore him, move on to the carrots. It's all part of the show: you still living here, his false enthusiasm. You both decided that it'd best for Samantha if you'd tell her after the paper work clears. Things would be more final then, easier for a child to understand. You're afraid that you're not willing to give up the family yet, that some deep maternal instinct is taking over. You're afraid because you know that you'll be the one hurt. You couldn't fall asleep last night because you wondered what sort of woman is replacing you. He said it wasn't like that, you

weren't being replaced. Things just changed. You don't believe him, you know the truth. He needs everything in his life to fit into a certain image, a self-vision. He's a lawyer for a chemical corporation, it's his job to look good. You don't fit anymore so you are discarded. Maybe a blonde is better. Maybe no kids are better. Hear him knocking things over in the cabinet.

"Honey, where's the garlic powder?"

You answer, try to sound all right.

"Oh here, right in front of me."

He hums to himself as he seasons the meat. Tell him to stop, say you have a headache.

"The charcoal's lit, how you doin'."

Salad will be ready in ten minutes, that's the only thing left.

Thinly slice the cucumber. Try not to think. Hear him wash his hands. He walks up behind you and puts his hands on your shoulders. He massages them slowly it feels good, you've been so very tense recently. Shrug his hands off of your shoulder so you don't cry.

He whispers, "I'm sorry"

Bite your lip. He's so pleasant about the whole thing, it makes you hate yourself more. Hear him pick up the hamburgers and walk out. You shiver but you're not cold. Samantha calls you from the living room.

"It's the part with the pig." The part where the lion cub meets the boar and the merecat. It's her favorite part. Put down the knife and drop the cucumber slices into the bowl. Walk into the living room and put Samantha on your lap. She sings all the words, try to sing with her. Bounce her on your leg. When the song is over, hug her, place your chin on the top of her brown hair. Rock back and forth. Love her and try not to think about the future. She puts her fingers in her mouth. Us-

ally you'd scold her, four is too old to suck on fingers, but don't. She takes them out and says, "I'm hungry"

Dinner will be ready soon, daddy's cooking the hamburgers now.

She puts her fingers back in her mouth. Set her back on the couch and walk into the kitchen. Finish slicing the cucumber. Mix in some grated cheese and sprinkle Bacos on top. Get a fresh bag of potato chips from the pantry Set the table on the back porch. It's a beautiful day, clear skies, a little humid, but not oppressively so. There's a cool breeze to keep off the heat. It will be a great night to watch the fireworks. Samantha will love them. He calls, "Two more minutes," from the back.

I'll tell Samantha to wash up.

Call Samantha. When she runs in, check her hands to be sure she washed them. Bring the lemonade to the table. He is piling the burgers on a plate by the grill. Smell the charcoal and burning meat, smells of a previous life. Smells of a contented Sunday, a previous image. Pour the drinks.

"I think I'll get a beer you want one."

No, lemonade is fine.

"Can I have a beer?"

No, Samantha, it's a grownup drink.

"You can have a sip, but that's all."

Don't say anything, squirt ketchup onto Samantha's bun. He comes back with the beer, gives her the bottle.

"Only a sip."

She takes a big sip. She doesn't like it, her entire face scrunches up. "Ew!"

"It'll grow on you."

Don't say anything, give Samantha a piece of corn on the cob, butter it for her

"You ready to shoot off fireworks?"

“Yeah.”

Samantha, you can't play with the fireworks like daddy it's dangerous. You have to stay back with me.

“She's old enough for the sparklers. You get to hold the sparklers this year.”

“Yea!” She takes a big bite of her hamburger.

Not so big, you'll choke.

Eat slowly and carefully. It'll help you keep your thoughts from racing, bring you to a lower state of mind, like an animal. The hamburger is delicious, he has a special way of preparing them. He's a good cook. Watch him eat. He has very precise movements, you can tell he is a lawyer, everything about his eating is choreographed. You wonder if the new woman will notice things like that, you wonder if she will treasure them. Realize that you are thinking about him again, it's inevitable. Everything reminds you of the past, the smells of fresh cut lawn, a dog barking in the distance, the maple tree shaking in the breeze. You loved this neighborhood, it felt safe and familiar, like a sitcom. Now it feels hollow Samantha wants more chips, say only when she finishes her corn.

“Do you know why we set off fireworks today?”

She shakes her head no.

“It's to celebrate America's freedom, Independence from England.”

“What's England?”

“It's another country that used to rule America. They used to push us around. We didn't like that very much. On July fourth America seceded from England. “

“What's seceded?”

“Si-seceded. It means to break away from.”

“Was England mad?”

“Sure was, there was a war about it. But we won.”

He raises his hands above his head for victoryhis hands balled in fists. Samantha mimics him, giggling. Don't say anything, you just want her to finish her corn.Your heart beats in your throat. Hear a firework go off in the distance. Samantha squeals with pleasure. Since it's light out you can barely see the explosion. More follow, some are screamers. You can't see them but you can feel them, tiny explosions in the back of your head, your inner wall is under attack. Each firework a cannon ball chipping away at your life. Realize you're crying and they're staring at you. Try to stop, but cry harder Bury your face in your hands. You are sorry, this is not what you had in mind. How could you have known?

BRAD COFFIELD**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH****A GOOD SPOT**

You sit down. It's a good spot and you like it. You've been here hundreds of times but the spot is oblivious — it will never show you have been there; its stone is impervious to your soft flesh. Dozens of people are about, a library a museum, and shops in sight. It's a good spot on this fountain. It's spacious here; the great expanse of heavens is above you, and no one is beside you on the fountain. It's fall and a soft light is breaking through the clouds making everything glow people are smiling because of the light. A breeze runs through your hair, over your stubble; you shut your eyes and breathe deep. It's a good spot.

Your apartment is small. Your apartment is dirty. Your apartment is dark.

You come here all the time to forget. You love the silence that the constant clamor leaves in your mind — scuffle of feet and chitchat. You always think how wonderful these people are, content and performing their little tasks, buying their trinkets. You light a cigarette and exhale slowly happy that these people exist. You spend your afternoons here. A time to not think, everyone needs it, especially you. While you're here you get to live these people's lives.

You drop your cigarette, fuck, no one noticed you think, when you pick it up a middle aged man catches your eye — he's got a baby strapped to his back in some plastic contraption — socked feet dangling and kicking, looking in the same direction as his father's ass — strapped to his back and out of the way —

you remember that you and your father made fun of that thing once: “stupid yuppies” – the two of you laughed – where were you then, you can’t remember. . . a dog, a big dog, he’s licking your leg, right here right now, you don’t pet him, you just want him to get away – get away here comes the owner, big fat lady, you don’t want to talk, goddamn fluffy dog – she says sorry sorry; you grimace; you hate pets – what the fuck was that dog’s problem – everywhere you’ve ever lived, no pets were allowed, no goldfish, no bright birds, no hamsters, bugs seemed fine, certainly no big fluffy fucking dogs – neither before or after your dad left no pets ever; you hate happy pets, why should they be so happy – they don’t even have thumbs; sick pets or road kill get pity – road kill, you can relate – in the middle and passed by – it’s ok you say it’s ok. . . you see a massive little bastard, with his mom, probably came out four feet tall, must be eight and 5’6 – a kid like that beat you up on the bus once, for no reason, your dad called you weak and slapped you. . . look at that woman with black stockings – great calves – Margaret had great calves, you would watch them as she’d walk away never her ass, that would be disrespectful, she had great calves; she’d help you with your English homework, she was so smart – she was in a higher English than you but she helped you anyways – you never understood why – she’d help you and you two would meet, she never saw your home – you thank something – you could give a shit about commas and dashes – you two’d meet at the park, the library school, restaurants, why are you thinking about her, goddammit why didn’t you ever ask her, ask her anything, someplace without books – for ice cream – the back of your car – prom – a motel – you’d have bought whipped cream or a corsage or both, anything she wanted; where is she; now you remember – you hate black stockings – like your Mom hated Margaret – thought you were going off to fuck; you wish; your Dad would have liked her

short black hair with wispy bangs in her eyes he probably would have liked her ass – to squeeze it – but who cares about him – you liked her; you wouldn't be here; you never did understand the difference between the dash and the comma, what good are they anyway; tiny marks, insignificant little fucks – dividing everything – your Dad beat you once for dropping a Popsicle one summer, your lip busted, the back of your head hurt for two weeks – you had to sleep on your stomach, he almost hit you with his thermos but didn't; he left a year and two months after that. Jesus Christ what's wrong with these people today not now, not today – you hate these people, let them rot.

Your place is small, dirty and dark.

You stand up to leave. You will be back.

ALISON FARINACCI

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

MOST EXPENSIVE PENIS

— *inspired by The Guinness Book of World
Records 1999*

Napoleon was buried without his penis,
castrated after death,
someone hoping to score
a high price on the one-inch
“small dried up object.”
Somewhere in America it may float
in a jar like a pickled fetus,
bloated and soft from formaldehyde,
or perhaps it carries on
as the world’s most unusual paperweight.
Maybe it rests limp
on a shelf of Freudian texts, a monument
to man’s fear of woman.
But no matter where it lies
now, it can’t be more exciting
than the first time it swung into battle
as upright as the French flags,
poised for glory.

KRISTIN HALL**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH****THE SHOVEL IS SIX FEET WIDE AT THE ANIMAL FOOD
PROCESSING PLANT**

I am drowning in meat
little pearls of Iams chicken,
I am wading my way through
Iams fresh veal chunks
I am wearing this badge
of food processor-Iams,
not squid and horse liver
Iams, not pigs toes or crows
Iams fresh pig hindquarters
Iams brand of the rich
dog eats Iams sautéed ribs
Iams roasted rump
Iams curried rice
Iams sweet potato pie
Iams deep fried rabbit legs
Iams hand dipped cow tail
Iams baked balls of ox are
what I am finding in spilled
ten-foot piles at the Iams plant
and I am not flying above this
and I am not rolling my way
through the piles of Iams
I am clearing my path with
this six foot wide shovel
of Iams and I am not
shifting through the allowed

two percent of the Iams flavored
cockroach legs and heads that
are crushed and molded into
cows and pigs

JENNY LYNN KELLER**UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH****AMERICAN HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY PRACTICAL
GUIDES**

Greg wishes he knew the names
of trees and rocks so he could use them
in his writing so the readers would feel complete.
A birch would be a birch, and not a hemlock.

I don't know the names of anything exotic.
A dandelion is yellow, then fluffy. Its leaves
taste like a suburban lawn. My momma had a baby
and its head popped off. When I sit by the creek
I hear someone walking towards me.
But it's just the creek. And you don't even have to know
where the creek is (Bradford, PA) or how deep
it is (past my ankles, below my knees). It's just a creek
and you can imagine it anyway you want.

I probably ruined it for you-
I told you a place
that if you've never been to,
you have to try and imagine.
Because maybe you're from California and have seen one
creek
in a National Geographic.
You're pissed off now,
using all your energy to conjure up this creek
in some bumble-screw place like Bradford,
and you've forgotten

the creek sounds like footsteps (which was, incidentally the
whole point).

And all this energy wasted,

the sound of the creek lost

and I haven't even the ink left to lead you to imagine

the tree I'm sitting under

TONY MANCUS

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

**FOUR FELLAS, TWO BOTTLES OF BOURBON, AND A
WISH TO GO FISHING**

It came set in a 1976 Buick Skylark
Tan with beige interior 105,692 miles read
the odometer like a badly taught child, missing the one.
It read something else as their feet stepped out,
this was before the bourbon was bought,
they had to tackle the fishing gear
What great sportsmen, smiling soon to be drunk
lacking even a rod or lures—they walked
into Bob's Baits, let's say
but what if I changed the name?
Would that change the smell of the droning refrigerator
that held the slowly dying earthworms,
the wet sweet smell of cardboard on the floor
It'd still be the same place if you passed it
in the country on your way to somewhere else.
It'd still be the same place if you stepped out of the back
of that tan road beast, careful not to smash
your shin on the hunched over front seat
tired from the clouds and traveling.
And the miles,
do they matter?
You would still feel the bumping as it idled
and if your ears wanted to, hear the old ignition
kick like a great horse hoof stamping the ground,
just before turning over
This you'd know in the miles and the years,

almost an antique,
 and I'll tell you the car was purchased
 from an elderly lady with light blue hair
 that matched her eyes and the sky the day
 the fish wouldn't come to our sticks
 and drowned worms. The old woman
 would wear pink slippers on Sunday
 into the drivers seat to the end of the road
 and the newspaper's grey edges.
 Would this be a different scene
 if it were raining on and off all day
 and Creedence held the switch for the sky?
 As the car moved with passengers intact
 little droplets of water crested off the corners
 of the windows, slightly opened
 and smoke poured out of their mouths.
 Would this change anything,
 Could I have been dreaming?
 That would still leave the dream the dreamers in the scene had,
 something about standing by a lake somewhere,
 scrambling to find sticks to notch
 and hang worms from strings into water
 Mouthfuls of whiskey, talk about family,
 the smoke from the cigarettes, the marked sticks
 floating on the wet lake, traces of sleep marking
 their stay, and the worms alone
 squirming around each other at the bottom
 of some dirt in a white styrofoam cup.
 They may have been resting peacefully
 I think there were four left.
 And what do worms dream from the bottom
 of black and white?

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**MICHAELANGELO
MONTELEONE**

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH

ARE YOU SOME FLY SHIT?

Victor sat down on the rocky beach at the water's edge and watched the stream. It ran, the way water runs, always in one direction and always over the rocks, burbling its way toward some larger body, some unity of molecules, some wholeness of form, that really, upon maturation, is nothing but a great holding tank for rain. This thought danced quickly through his mind, and then was quickly flushed away like a twig borne on the ripples of the stream before him. In his peripheral vision, mountains rose around Victor, still slightly shrouded in the mist that the late morning sun had not quite burned off, the craggy skin of their peaks showing over the vegetation that clothed their lower halves. Victor imagined great stone giants seated and hunched over, their mammoth thumbs intertwined and clasped to their bellies as they studied him intently and as he imagined this, he felt very, very small.

To him, it seemed as if the whole affair had been doomed from the beginning. His flight from Newark to Rome had been long and cramped; he had spent it wedged between the window and an overweight ex-stewardess who talked too much and had bad breath. Victor had tried to be polite at first, but after an hour of being blasted with the stream of jet exhaust that spewed from her seemingly tireless mouth, he realized that he would have rather been strapped to the plane's fuselage in a hailstorm than sit next to her for eight hours.

When they landed at Fumicino, his hook-up was nowhere in sight. Victor spent the better part of an hour battling with an Italian pay phone only to learn that she had gone back to her flat as soon as she'd heard that his flight had been delayed, and the travel-weary Victor was compelled to make the two-hour train ride south to Cassino. The city turned out to be a horrid collection of plain, three-story apartment buildings, with no trace of redeeming architectural value anywhere, save the abbey on top of the mountain that buttressed the municipality.

When he arrived at her flat, rumped and weary after a day of traveling, he found his expected sleeping-place filled by Alejandro, a Portuguese exchange student studying linguistics at the local university. And so this is how Victor came to spend two sleepless nights wrapped in a blanket in her couchless living room, trying in vain to ignore the constant hollow thumping sound that, after dark, seemed to be amplified by the thin layer of faded yellow linoleum on which his pillow rested.

He had left after those two days, heading back to Rome. The first night he was only concerned with a good sleep, and after a simple dinner at an excellent local *ristorante* suggested by his hostel's proprietor, a good sleep he enjoyed. Waking early, he had spent the next day tramping about the city munching on crispy squares of pizza when he was hungry and absorbing Rome in all its splendor. He found the Italian weather in mid-March to be much more agreeable than that of his native Pittsburgh, and he'd meandered his way over the course of the day from the Coliseum to the forum, on to the Pantheon and finally to the Vatican, where he capped his wanderings with a climb to the cupola of St. Peter's Basilica. For the first time, he could see the entire city, its red-tile roofs crisscrossed by its mazelike expanse of streets that all seemed to be zany perfect in their configuration. That evening he checked into a different hostel and, spying an attractive young lass of about his own age,

took her out. They had dinner and some wine, wandered around the Piazza, had some more wine and went dancing. It was some time after midnight when he whisked her back to the hostel, and it was there, deep in throes of passion, that she had leaned over the side of the bed and let fly an extensive stream of vomit. Horrified, he had thrust her violently off of him (not taking care to listen to the loud slap of her bare thigh on the vomit soaked floor), and literally jumped out of her bed (taking great care to skirt the stinking puddle of chunks in which she now sat) As he stomped torpidly back to his own room, he'd tried to console himself in the fact that at least he had not been puked on.

The next day, when he had checked his email, he'd found a message from his friend, apologizing for Alejandro and begging him to come back, she was having a party. He called her and semi-sappishly agreed to return that evening. At the party he got marvelously drunk and the next thing he knew he was in an apartment, stripped to the waist and tied round with an oversized balloon while three young coeds from Spain cavorted about him in the nude. Like lambs in a pasture they frolicked, here and there feeding him more wine, now and then delivering a kiss or a playful nip on the buttocks. Victor was enjoying himself immensely, giggling like a schoolgirl, and then the room began to spin.

He woke up the next morning, sun nearly blinding him, face down on the floor in puddle of his own drool, still wrapped in the balloon. His tongue hung dry and filmy out of his mouth, which emptied of all its spit, felt something like sandpaper. Wriggling out of the balloon and retrieving his clothing, which had been scattered about the room in haphazard fashion, he decided to head back to Rome. Victor had hoped to salvage his trip by doing as much sightseeing as he possibly could during his last day in Italy. At the train station in Cassino, he checked

the schedule and boarded the train that was bound for Rome. It was empty, and still being a bit groggy from last night, he quickly fell asleep.

Victor awakened to the gentle swaying that a train makes when hurtling over the tracks, and had been horrified when he'd glanced out the window and saw that the landscape spinning by in the wrong direction; he was getting farther and farther away from Rome by the second. Thinking as quickly as his sleep-clouded brain would allow, he decided to get off at the next station and catch the first train to Rome.

Victor felt the great hurtling mass of the train slow down, heard the angry squeal of steel on steel as the brake pads clamped against the wheels and watched the countryside move by at less and less of a clip until it was crawling along outside the window. With a hiss the countryside ceased to move and Victor stood up, grabbed his bags and stepped off the train. The sun was bright on the concrete platform and he stood there, watching the train slowly disappear, snaking its way towards the hills that jutted up from the surrounding farmland, their naked peaks obscured only by a translucent haze.

Victor made his way to the window in the small concrete building that served as a station, and after fumbling with his phrasebook for several minutes, finally succeeded in asking the two old men behind the window what time the next train arrived.

"Due," one of them answered, his southern accent apparent even to Victor.

Two o'clock. Victor's sightseeing plans crumbled before his eyes; it was nine-thirty A.M. A stream of adjectives flooded into consciousness — miserable, thwarted, unlucky hapless, doomed — there was nothing left for him to do except shoulder his pack and march off down the track that led away from the station.

He rounded the bend and crested a little hill and an expanse of farmland stretched before him. The road meandered its way past the houses, through the farms, and Victor saw not a soul, save the woman hanging her day's laundry on her veranda, her hot pink housedress a slow blur of motion against the surrounding hills. Victor's attitude was softened somewhat by what he considered such simple, honest work, but morning sunshine and sentimental musings were not enough to dispel the self-imposed funk in which he still wallowed.

Presently he came to a fork in the road. He started up the small hill that led left, and caught sight of a large dog, grey and wolfish-looking, guarding the rundown farmhouse that terminated the path. The dog sat there, eyeing him suspiciously. With the way things were going, Victor decided it was wise to avoid confrontation, and he hastily altered his route.

The track came through the glade around the bend and bisected a field. One side lay freshly plowed, thick clods of earth, still damp from the morning's dew basked in the sun, accented by little flashes of green, upturned vegetation. Opposite the field lay fallow, and vegetation sprouted haphazardly. Straight ahead ran a stream, which seemed to swallow the track; and on the far bank sat a rich expanse of farmland uninterrupted by path or plow. And this is how Victor came to be sitting on the rocky beach by the unnamed stream in the middle of Italy.

The sun, hot on his back, prompted Victor to take off his shirt, and he did so, figuring that he might as well come out of this vacation with a tan if nothing else. As he sat there, bare-backed and brooding his bad luck, a fly began to torment him, landing on his pale Pittsburgh skin and taking off just before Victor could swat it with his bare hand. In a few minutes Victor's skin was blotched from his repeated slappings. The fly continued to taunt him.

“C’mon bzzzzz-otch!” It said, buzzing around his face, in front of his eyes, alighting on his nose for just a second. “What can’t catch a little fly? Bzzzzzzzzzz-otch!”

Victor flew into a rage, flailing wildly at the tiny creature which seemed to represent his entire week. He scrunched his eyes, screaming and scratching at the thin air screaming at the top of his lungs. Finally, out of breath, he slumped over in defeat.

“Nasty dirty creature,” he thought out loud, hoping to regain a measure of respect for himself.

“Harbinger of disease,” he said vehemently

“Sinky, garbage picking, maggot laying scud,” he announced, somewhat loudly. He was starting to feel better. He relaxed a little bit. He counted his breaths. The fly landed on his arm, which was now resting atop his knees. He watched it walk about his skin, feeling the tiny tingling sensation of its six legs.

“A fly shits every seventeen seconds,” he thought, “or shites, as they say in England. He liked that word, shite, it made him feel sophisticated.

“A fly shites every seventeen seconds,” he said out loud, and counted to seventeen before shooing his fly off his arm.

“So that’s it,” he soliloquized, “after all this, the snubbing, the puking, the balloon incident, the wrong train, I’m reduced to being shat upon by the most insignificant of God’s creatures. A suitable ending, I suppose.”

He pondered the fly droppings he was sure were on his arm. They had to be pretty small, he figured, microscopic even. He couldn’t see them, he couldn’t feel them, he imagined them, these tiny, microscopic turds rolling down the valleys of his skin and into the gaping maw of one of his pores. They snuggled up next to the hair follicle and slipped into his bloodstream.

He pondered this, these infinitesimal piece of doo. They were now part of his body. To anyone else they were insignif-

icant, dirty even. But to him, they were his innate being. They were him. He imagined them floating around his capillaries, mingling with leukocytes, making small talk with his lymph nodes, finding their way to the large intestine for a little sightseeing. Those little pieces of feces were probably having a hell of a time in there, thought Victor.

And with this realization he stood up, and championing himself to whoever or whatever would look, the fly the burbling stream, the hills (which seemed to have eased back a little now), he threw off the blanket of ills that had befallen him and proudly announced his realization to the world.

“I don’t care if that New Jersey ho is banging some Portuguese dude named Alejandro, and I had sleep on the floor I don’t care if my international hookup was interrupted by a spree of projectile vomiting, I don’t care if I passed out half-naked and wrapped in an oversize balloon on what was probably shaping up to be the best night of my life, and I don’t care if I got on the wrong train because I was hung over and can’t read Italian, because I, Victor Janikowski, am some fly shit!”

And with that, he raised his arms to the sky and laughed a deep belly laugh, and he didn’t feel quite so small anymore.

SUBMISSION POLICY

LITERATURE

All undergraduates enrolled at a university or college in the city of Pittsburgh, or any of the University of Pittsburgh branch campuses, are eligible to submit to *Three Rivers Review*. Please send a maximum of five original works of poetry/and or prose to *Three Rivers Review*, University Honors College, 3500 Cathedral of Learning, Pittsburgh, PA 15260.

All submissions must be type-written, single-sided, and accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (S.A.S.E.). Name, permanent and campus addresses, phone, university attending and email should only appear on a separate cover sheet.

All submissions are reviewed anonymously. No simultaneous submissions will be considered for publication and no revisions will be accepted. All writers will be notified as to the status of their work.

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