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Volume IV
Spring 2000

Gainesville College
University System of Georgia

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First to understand a point of view
You must drive a knife
Or thumb nail
Beneath the thick-textured leathery skin
Do not bite opinions
All because of such bitter end results
Inside the meat
Pulp
Beliefs
Thick
With ideas
Luscious sweet
And easy to eat
It simply depends on how you want to see it
In slices
Bites
Or neatly knifed proportions
As long as they are easy to swallow
But
Beware of the seeds you might ingest
And how they grow inside you.

*The Ethical Orange*
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**Words Best Left Unspoken**  
*Donald L. Brown*

Ears have wings  
And they fly about the house unnoticed,  
Perching in the hidden, cluttered corners  
Where dust settles over old resentments.  

Listening,  
Circling like birds of prey  
Ready to swoop down and seize  
The angry words that scampers from our tongues  
Like mice caught naked in the field  

Like carrion crows  
Some land to shred and tear,  
Rending tattered strips of meat  
From the carcass left behind,  
Consuming the sweet flesh of understanding,  
Leaving behind only the bitter bones of frustration.

Ears have wings,  
And they fly about the house unnoticed  
Listening for words best left unspoken.

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**Sitting in a Restaurant Overlooking the Bay on St. George Island**  
*David Tishaw*

Crooked telephone poles stretch across the bay  
Like crosses in a row marking graves  
Of unknown soldiers.  
They lean to the left and to the right  
Like masts of sunken ships.

At their base barnacles cling,  
Their brown wood has faded to gray.  
High above osprey perch  
Beside wires heavy with hope.

If one pole should fall, all wishes would be lost  
And scattered about the water's murky floor.
The Morning I Saw Nature

Adrienne Wilder

On this morning, traffic paused
Somewhere between the cities, reaching high
Spreading outward,
I was in my caravan
Held captive.
Bound by the bumpers of man-made metal.
Spewing noxious breath
Forced to inhale.
Suspended above liquid nature—
Running free.
Concrete shackles bound me to
The city ways and around me
Almost in my reach—
There was God
There was Nature
There was Earth
There was Life
She sighed her warm breath,
And it curled upward
From her birthplace
Somewhere between walls of rock and trees
Moving southward in her clay bed
That had been spawned by liquid heat
And forged by time.
The humming of the machines,
The Vibrations of man,
The texture of our impact
Was deafened.
I could not hear or see.
The silence was too loud.
The beauty was blinding.
I saw only the Sky
I saw only the Cloud
I saw only the vivid hue of ice white and mercury,

turning pink around morning’s fire.
And then the slave train of vehicles shifted,
and I was forced to move on.
It was in my rear-view mirror
that I could catch a glimpse
Of my memory of nature.
Motherbird
David Tishhaw

Motherbird, how close you were
To reaching your nest.

From the maple near-by
I hear your young,

If only you had flown a bit to the left
—or not quite so low—
you might have returned.

Instead you crashed into my bay window.
—interrupting my morning meal—
you snapped your hollow bones,
broke your fragile neck
—leaving your brown feathers ruffled,
and your red breast bruised.

How you flew!
With your slowing breath now
I wonder if you could
—still sing?

As you flutter and flop in my
Garden bed
How patiently you wait
For the finishing drop...

From the stone
That my hand
Now holds.
Drive By
Donald L. Brown

Driving south on 365
I slow as traffic backs up,
Angrily muttering
As I glance at the clock.

Flashing lights, blue, and red
Play on the corona of shattered glass on the road.
At the center of it all
A white SUV on its back,
Roof crumpled in.

As I pass slowly by
Gawking at the spectacle,
A fireman – saw in hand –
Hurries toward the wreck.
I glance back
—an instant only,
traffic is speeding up again—

Pale blue sweat suit
Curly red hair, spread like the shattered glass
She hangs upside down
Unmoving
Head resting on the pavement.

I do not know her.

Country to City: 60 miles
Selena Johnson

Jungle creepers sway like asps
In baskets mesmerize.

Xylophone men in skeleton bands
Play jumble-sounds on bones of cars;
Cinder-blocked giants and
Weed-eaten Chevys.

Umbilical roads stretch and bunch
In tire-squall circles—feed semi breezes
Like drops of water on a prayer wheel.

The twilight thickens,
Precariously balanced
Between daylight and the night.
Fire-fly cars whip-crack past.

Glitter-temples and the moon rise,
And fires blaze skyward in perpetual
Sabbath.

Xanadu or Valhalla,
Sodom or Gomorrah—
The landscape gives birth:
A spinning top,
An infant that nurses greedily and
Gives suck both.

Paradisio, Purgatorio, Inferno,
They all exist in one.
A Film of Social Satire
Hugh Braseton

keep your head on straight
worry about the other later
state your place in society
in your actions and not your clothes
clear your eyes of protein
do your own thing to your own song
if you like it don't forget it
smoke-filled house smells nice in winter
on the basement smelled-filled house
sitting here with you could be better
lonely-sarcastic eyes around your face
pinching for a friend
film the ignorance
and show the t.v. your accomplishment
too proud to cry is ignorance
tie your bones to your bed and remember who you are
sweat for the right to and not because it's hot
shave your tongue and taste the difference
social sonic collages filmed in your brain
help fill the stark spaces of emptiness
stated simply is your love for one
too intricate to explain
like an overload in your brain
keep the doors open for performers and storytellers
not for fiends of the other kind
throw your guts to the vultures
see how they are thrown up
and learn from your mistakes
hang your head from a social noose
see what your face shows
a vision of masks not usually seen
take your face off and look into your chest
a broken heart of perspective people
a film of brick in its place
to block out the sweetness
to block out the caring
to block out the interest in you
and not your car

Red Wedding Dress
Selena Johnson

Tuscan Red.
Or, to make it a foreign thing,
To try to see it—
"Rouge Tuscan"

Scarlet and brown and pink.
A mad palette, an orgy of color
Cut into the white world of canvas,
My stretched circle of existence.

—But it will not be framed and hung
So easily.

Nor defined.

Sweet and disgusting
Like roses and root-rot.

Fleeting and eternal.

A mirror that scorns the surface,
The mere show.

Like blood and marrow and mind-matter:
Physical and Spiritual, and Intellectual—
It trades rings between opposites
And marries opposites:
A strange procession.

And I, the bride—mute
Behind a blood-clot colored veil.

And all that is real to me is
Tuscan Red.
The Swallows Leave Pico Rivera
Michael Doss

There is nothing special about birds. They hold their eggs with their scaly feet Until the fever of spring breaks out of them, But I wonder how long they could watch An egg that never hatched – Puking-up bugs and worms in vain Like a habit that makes you sick For the indispensable feeling of love – And still have the nerve to sing On the corner of 19th and Whittier. No, there’s nothing special about a bird; Flying away is just a reflex.

Untitled
Christal Spitzner
acrylic
Abelino smoothed the folded check from the Green Diamond Citrus Company onto the counter and nodded at the cashier. The man behind the counter licked his fingers and produced twelve new twenties and some change. A five disappeared into his own pocket as he turned his attention to the next in line.

Placing a dollar in the same spot that he had left the check, Abelino pointed to the wall behind the counter and pronounced "chiclet."

The man behind the counter stared at Abelino as if he had suddenly been awakened from a dream. "What?" He studied the shelves of pint bottles behind him until he saw the Super Lotto banner hanging from the ceiling. "Oh, you want a ticket?"

Abelino nodded.

"The big pay-off! What's it up to tonight, Jacky? Eighty million isn't it?"

"Uh-huh. Must be a full moon."

"What do you want? Quick pick?"

Abelino bobbed his head once, cautiously, sustaining his smile with some effort.

"There you go, amigo," the man slapped the ticket down, "bet you could buy a whole lot of tortillas with that." Both of the men behind the counter laughed. Skillfully concealing his frustration, Abelino took the ticket and left. Walking back to the bus, he studied the slip of paper carefully, unsure of the nature of the joke that he felt had been played on him. Carrying a case of beer, Agustín caught up with him at the door of the white school bus.

"What you got there, Buho, a lottery ticket?"

"I asked for chiclets," he said handing the slip of paper to his friend.

Agustín laughed, "You have to watch those putos."

"How did you do this week?"

"About a hundred and thirty bags. Having to wait so long

the other morning didn’t help anything."

"No." Abelino rubbed a sore spot on his thumb where the skin had cracked. It's the wind that does that, he thought.

"Hi! Do you see how much this ticket could be worth? Here, take the beer; I want to get one too."

Abelino took his seat in the bus and slipped the ticket into his wallet behind a laminated image of the Virgin of Guadalupe. He placed his straw hat between his knees and leaned against the window. It had been almost six months since he said goodbye to his wife this last time, and already he felt that he couldn’t quite remember her face, even after almost ten years of marriage. The children, he knew, regarded him as stranger—an honored guest in the winter, like a visiting priest maybe—and whenever the ice finally began to melt between them, it seemed that it would always be time for him to return to the North. As the wind blew through the open windows of the bus, he thought that he could actually feel the passage of time in the air.

A pack of gum fell into his lap as Agustín sat down next to him. "Those guys in the black Torino said that they would tell the numbers tonight on ‘Radio del Norte.’ Looks like everybody is getting one."

Many of the men had gone back to buy a ticket, and the foreman with a stack of them in his front pocket was revving the engine impatiently and letting the bus roll slowly, a few feet at a time, toward the road.

"Calmate, culo!" Jorge yelled at the foreman from the back of the bus, careful not to be seen. A few of the younger boys laughed foolishly as if one of them had just stolen something.

Abelino looked at Jorge and thought about how he would always pick a tree far away from the truck and snatch oranges from the lower branches of the other trees as he walked, when he thought that no one was looking. "He's always trying to make a fool out of someone," Abelino thought.

The last three pickers ran across the parking lot together, holding their hats to their heads, and stumbled into their seats as the bus rolled out onto the highway.
For miles the road ran between mountains of boulders and ash colored hills of dry grass and weeds until suddenly, on one side or the other, improbable rows of dark green orange or avocado trees would appear and just as quickly yield again to the barren hills. Occasionally there would be a scrub-oak clinging to the rocks or a tall stand of eucalyptus trees growing in a ravine.

After working in the groves all week, Saturday evening was a reprieve. Everyone had been paid; there would be visitors at the camp tonight; and tomorrow they could rest, but there was something more than the usual expectation of Saturday night in the voices of the men on the bus: something like a discovery of an unknown possibility, a secret answer just hanging there waiting for someone to come along and ask the right question.

"Can you imagine winning that much money?" Agustín said. "No more camping-out and hanging in a tree like a fucking monkey..."

Abelino shook his head solemnly and smoothed the frayed edge of his hat. "Do you think they would let us keep the money?"

"I heard that when they first started the lottery, the first big drawing, some mojado from Coahuila, a strawberry picker, won something like twenty million dollars, and then they had this thing at the end of the year for all the winners to spin a wheel or something, and that son of a bitch won another two million!" Agustín said.

"Ha!" Abelino smiled. "Whatever happened to him?"

"I don't know. I never heard anything else about him."

The bus turned off the highway and followed a road that rose and fell and twisted unpredictably through the canyon. Ancient oak trees and giant stones signaled abrupt turns in the road which revealed an increasing number of citrus groves. Legions of fruit trees were bordered by deeply rutted slopes of bare rocky ground where masses of withered tumbleweeds had drifted and become impossibly entangled.

"You know, Jim wants us to stay on with one of the groves through the winter and help with the irrigation system and the pruning—things like that—work by the hour," Agustín said. "He wants to keep Miguel and Chango too."

"Did you talk to them yet?"

"Miguel is going to stay; I don't know about Chango though."

"What about you?" Abelino asked.

"I don't know, man. I need to check on things back home sometime..."

"What's the matter? You think you got a sancho or something?"

"You never know," Agustín said gravely. "I'm sure women get lonely just like we do. I'm kind of worried about that youngest kid of yours though, myself."

"What are you saying? He looks just like me!"

"I know, that's what worries me about him," Agustín said, sticking his elbow into Abelino's ribs.

The bus climbed the long dirt road and turned into the clearing in front of the tool shed where the work trucks were parked. Jorge slipped out the back door of the bus and headed for the shower, but a group of the younger men passed him like stampeding horses. By the time Abelino got to use the shower, the water had run cold and the drain was backed up. Even standing on the brick, he couldn't keep his feet out of the dirty water.

The shower was in an old bunkhouse that had been partitioned with the one toilet and shower accessible from the back door, and a kitchen in front where the foreman's wife sold sandwiches, cigarettes, and beer. The dirt road continued down the hill to where the trailers were parked in a rough semi-circle under a canopy of eucalyptus trees at the edge of a lemon grove. Abelino followed the trail down through the grove, his footsteps involuntarily keeping time with the bass and accordion of the ranchero music coming from the clearing below.

The sun had dissolved into a swirl of red, orange, and purple, and the rocky slopes of the mountains to the west were a haze of blue shadows. A large prickly-pear cactus marked the border of the grove, where Abelino noticed a white elbow of plastic pipe lying exposed in the ground like a bone at the end of the row of trees. Even the water has to be brought here, he thought as he looked out across the hills. Thousands of miles of plastic pipe had been buried throughout the valley so that fruit could grow in a desert, only to be
washed clean when a whole year’s worth of rain came flooding over them in the winter, but there was never a drop of rain in the growing season.

Jorge had lit a fire with some dry brush and a sun-bleached, twelve-pack box while some of the men carried avocado limbs from across the field. “¡Orale, Bulo!” Jorge said as Abelino approached. “Get yourself a beer. Hey, they just said on the radio that Querétaro beat Guanajuato today.”

Abelino stared blankly at the mountains and a strange feeling of emptiness fell over him.

“What’s wrong; did you bet against your own team, cabrón?”

“No, that’s good. I didn’t know that they were playing today.” Something about the realization that football games were being played in Mexico, that life was going on as usual at home, made his face turn hot and cold. Young men were winning battles while their fathers watched, and the whole town honored them. They must be very proud, he thought. He wondered about his own family. How many great and small victories had they already won without him? Abelino could see fifty miles to the south to the blue and gold peaks of the Vallecito Mountains. In the sun’s last rays, the stark contrast of light and shadow on the rocks made them seem alien, as if the moon had crumbled and the pieces had fallen into the valley. He was fifteen, he remembered, the first time he saw them. Crossing into the North for the first time it seemed that everything he hoped for was just beyond those mountains; and now, almost fifteen years later they still seemed to be standing in his way.

Agustin whistled from the edge of the grove and slapped the side of his fist to signal that the girls had arrived.

“Did you see Chato’s van up there?” Jorge asked.

“No. El Gordo said that he got locked-up.”

“Damn! He was supposed to bring me something,” Jorge said. “Listen, they’re going to tell the numbers at nine. I’ll be right back.”

Agustin laid some limbs onto the fire and opened a beer.

“Don’t up there,” he said to Abelino. “She asked about you.”

Abelino was somber; “I should save my money.”

Agustin nodded and looked at the ground for a while. “Hey, you coming with us to town tomorrow? Miguel is driving; we’re going to the Western Union and we might stop at the flea market on the way back.”

“Yeah, sure. I didn’t get to send anything home last week.”

“How much do you think it would cost to send eighty million dollars to Mexico?” Agustin asked.

“Ahh!” Abelino groaned skeptically, but his eyes widened like a child’s. “I don’t know— it’s twenty dollars per hundred...”

“That comes to about sixteen million, plus tax.”

Abelino whistled in awe.

“That would still be better than trying to get across the frontier with all that money, don’t you think? Either way you’re screwed,” Agustin said.

Abelino thought about it for a moment. “Either way,” he agreed. “That’s the way everything is here. You can risk everything, or pay to keep what you have.”

Agustin took a drink of his beer.

“Having to be away from home for so long and leave my family, sometimes the sacrifice seems too much, you know? But what can you do?”

“Chale!” Jorge said, taking them both by surprise as he returned to the fire. “Why don’t you bring them up here?”

“What do you mean?” The intrusion irritated him. “I’m not going to bring my family to this pinoche camp,” Abelino said angrily. “I don’t mean here; you could find a place. My cousin moved his family up here. They work in a packing plant and their kids go to school with gringo kids; learn English and all that stuff. ‘They work? You mean his wife works?’

“Yeah, she works. I think her brother stays with them too. It all helps pay the bills.”

“My wife doesn’t have to work. I can take care of my family myself,” Abelino said. “Besides, we’re Mexicans. This is no place to raise a family.”

“Sometimes you have to do what you have to do,” Jorge said, “it’s just an idea.”

Abelino threw his empty can onto the pile and walked to the
edge of the grove away from the light of the fire. "Gringo school," he scoffed as he pissed on the giant cactus. He wondered if it were really possible to have his family with him. If it were something that he should even consider. What if his wife should see the way things are here? What about the border patrol and the _rateros_? How could he afford a place for his family here? How could he find out these things? "Jorge is a dumb-ass," he said to himself, "an orange thief."

Abelino laid a limb onto the fire while the radio played an old mariachi song about a migrant worker who had been deported and came home to find his wife sleeping with his neighbor. Not far from the fire, a group of men were sitting on plastic buckets around a wooden spool and playing cards with a week's pay on the table. Abelino remembered himself five or ten years ago sitting at a similar table and betting a hundred dollars on a single hand. Sometimes it was like an angel had stacked the deck for him, and sometimes he lost everything he had made that week. He didn't like to take chances anymore. "It's different when you're younger, everything is ahead of you then," he thought.

Two of the girls had walked down the path through the grove in their high heels and were dancing with some of the men. A fat Chicano with a black mustache had come with them and was calmly observing everyone. The brown butt of a pistol showed above his belt and made a deep impression in his over-hanging gut. "You like the girls?" he asked as Abelino approached the beer bucket.

"Of course."

"Which one do you like best?"

Abelino was looking for a way out of the conversation when the announcement came over the radio: "...And now the winning numbers for the _California SuperLotto_ for Saturday, September..." "Shh, shh, listen!" Jorge hissed.

Everyone was silent as the numbers were announced, and a few of the men quickly scribbled the numbers onto their tickets. The image of the Virgin fell to the ground as Abelino took the ticket out of his wallet.

"Any big winners here?" the man with the black mustache asked in a strange tone of authority, like the voice of a _Federal_ or a Border Patrol officer. As Abelino stooped to retrieve the plastic card, the man snatched the ticket from his hand and compared it to the numbers that he had taken down. "Here, you didn't get shit. Who else wants me to check their numbers?"

Abelino could feel the fire on his chest and face, and he wanted to smash the man's head with something, but he knew he couldn't, and the thought that the man knew that too made Abelino hate himself. He picked his ticket back up, but he felt that he had lost something that he could never get back.

The man watched closely as some of the men passed around the numbers that Agustín had written down, but their faces all seemed to reflect the same sense of disappointment that was not entirely expected. "...Chin - guay!" was the consensus as the tickets fell to the ground or made it into the fire.

"Looks like you _pollos_ better get used to picking lemons," Jorge said before turning to walk with one of the girls up the trail, his hand on the back of her velvet dress. Abelino watched the other girl as she talked with one of the pickers. She was no more than seventeen, he thought, but she had the eyes of a much older woman. Abelino wondered who her father could be and how, out of everywhere in the world, she ended up in this camp. She doesn't belong here, he thought. Then he remembered the plastic pipes, and the perfect rows of dark green trees, and their fruit, thriving inexplicably, completely surrounded by desert. "Did some _campesino_ working in the fields bring his family, his daughter, here because he couldn't stand to be alone?" Abelino wondered as he watched the young girl walk with one of the pickers, leading the procession of gamblers and the _pajo_ with the pistol up the trail and into the grove. Abelino still held the image of the Virgin in his hand, and suddenly the trusting eyes and patient smile of his wife's face came flooding back into his memory. A cherub's innocent smile sanctified the folds of her gown. Yes, he thought, you have to do what you have to do. After all, if he stayed through the winter, it would only be a few more months.

In the dim glow of the fire, a lottery ticket had been caught in the bristles of a tumbleweed.
Abelino looked at the mountains to the south. He could barely distinguish them in the dark from the sky beyond them. It was getting late, he thought, and he closed his eyes and imagined escaping with the winning numbers.

Heroes
Michael Doss

Two Mexican mercenaries were hacking
Chunks of asbestos as big as a man’s arm onto the floor
Like Hector and Aeneas tearing through the ranks
Of the old boiler room.
Stripping steam-lines and recovery tanks
Of their dusty armor.

Asbestos.
Now there’s a Greek name for you—an island maybe—
Where you’d have to sacrifice your baby
Just to get to work on time.

So I yell from behind the temporary plastic wall
“Keep those masks on—that stuff will fuck you up!”
Because it was what the Trojans didn’t know
That fucked them up, after all.

But it should also be said
That what Achilles knew well—and couldn’t forget—
Is what messed-up his head
And sent his best friend to hell ahead of him.

So what are men like us—crawling through the dust—
Between Heaven and Earth
Supposed to do for a dollar
When even men of noble birth
Must choose between death and dishonor
And all the heroes have turned to dust?
Mechanical Aptitude
Selena Johnson

The idea, the sheer magic, the mystifying labyrinth
of cables and hoses
That powers my Pontiac 6000LE has ever eluded me.
And yes,
I have set aside Baudelaire and Othello,
To spend a Saturday up to my elbows in burnt transmission fluid
And Paleolithic oil—
And walked away as ignorant as I ever was.

Rack and pinion,
Tire iron,
Control arm,
Are to me the names of tools used by the Inquisition,
Or perhaps chapters from the Maleus Malificarum.

So I give my car to a professional—
Kyle, he announces—
Who wears the grit under his nails
And corset-like back-brace like badges of honor.

He swaggers like a TV cowboy.

He thinks Othello is a board game and Baudelaire
Is a city in... Paris?

So I take my place on a bench with the other mechanical ignorants
While Kyle, for me (and forty-seven dollars and thirty-eight cents)
Will Rotate
And Balance.

And I remember a story from my father's younger days about a man
He had convinced that stale air will ruin an otherwise sound tire.
And the man had listened,
And believed,
Untitled
Jeremy Farrington

A parade of pale blue thunder
So useless to a crying baby scared of the storm in the middle of its
Night in the beginning of its third year.
Even if you have never traveled west the sound is the same—
Wherever you rest your bones for an interrupted sleep when the
Storm has made its way home.
Why must the sky be so loud?
Why warn us for nothing?
Sometimes bringing rain or even a cracking light,
But the majority is just vain noise—
such as the promises of the world,
Or the oaths of a liar.
But its purpose, if nothing more than to annoy the peace or make
One aware of His existence, is all in the design of nature itself—
Not one single movement more important than the other.
Every single motion and every single sound works together for the
Good of the beginning.
And someday it will all have its end.
Inanimate and unseen, collaborating to bring the world history and
Wonder.
But the inhabitants under the sky just complain, complain,
Complain.
I really need to sleep but how can I with all this racket?
Can anyone tell me the reason for all this noise?
Monomaniacal Motorhead
David Titshaw

Grinding the gears in my mouth
I let go of the clutch
Running now in my highest gear.

With white-knuckled chrome
I hold the throttle wide
Inhaling ether in deep breaths.
My carburetor lungs are idled high
Still my heart can pump no more fuel
For my engine to burn.

Spark plug, don't foul out now.

Torso-pistons knock in a pumping synchronized rhythm,
Compressing and combusting into an overheating red-line of sweat
My head now spins thousands of revolutions per minute.
The muffler now removed
Exhaust runs straight from my pores
As I am propelled further down the stretch.

The final lap draws nearer
Winding out into an obsessive blur
I can feel that the end is here . . .

Yet I will anxiously wait
With rubber tires
That squeal

For next Saturday night.

When I will
Race again,
And again.

A Moment of Peace While Performing Bach
Mark Richter

As I listen to the Bach I've heard a hundred times,
My mind begins to wander.
I notice the girl sitting directly in front of me—
Less then a foot away—
I see her brown hair turned amber in the late noon sun.
It hangs like a frozen waterfall.
I'd like to reach out and run it between my fingers;
Pull it straight and watch it bounce back into shape—
But that would cause a scandal.
I can't see her face right now but I can still recall it:
It's soft and pale,
Her cheeks are smooth and cheerful,
Her nose is small,
Her eyes glow.
Already, I imagine us living together in a small farmhouse
And sleeping in on a summer Sunday morning.
The rays of sun strike down out of the eastern sky and through the
silk curtains.
The warm beams hit on the bedspread where she and I are
cuddled—
She slips from my arms—
And my light tug on her flannel nightgown does not stop her.
As her feet land lightly on the carpet she looks back at me and
smiles.
She always gets her way with that smile, and I don't mind.
I smile back.
Then, closing my eyes, I listen and hear her move out of the room.
Down the old squeaky steps,
I hear her soft gentle feet pat, pat, pat across the cold stone floor
downstairs.
Soon, the aroma of coffee lures me from the bed, down the stairs
And across the stone floor to where she waits in front of the bay
window—
with two mugs of coffee in hand.
My left hand takes the warm mug and the right takes her,
Her shoulder fits comfortably under my arm
And we stand there drinking coffee
And watching the cows dip their noses into the fog.
A movement of the conductor’s baton suddenly puts Bach in my ears
And gives meaning to the dots on the page in front of me
And the dream, like the notes just sung, disappears
Into the space above the audience and vanishes.

Rendez-vous in Autumn
Lisa O’Rear

Floating leaves descend
On a pond they reflect—kiss,
In autumn they meet.
Dinner Party
Selena Johnson

I would have liked to have seen a man in love,
His wife seated close and turned to and asked
"What do you think?"
Her response kindling a smile or nod,
Or even disapproval,
Just so long as his eyes met hers,
Invoking her.

Instead I saw her lavender dress and
Gently bobbed gray hair floating spectral
At the fringe of conversation.
Her eyes following his expansive gestures.

I would have liked to have seen a man in love,
I've had enough of ghost stories.

Repose
LaRese Heidingsfelder
Computer Graphics
Clippings
LaReza Heidingsfelder
Mixed Media

Gutting Fish
Selena Johnson

Everybody cuts themselves
When they first experience the potence
Of knife and blood.

And see the organs glisten pink,
Slimy and foreign between fingers.

Feel the pleasure that only a little death
Can bring.

Conquering cutting.
The Storm Cellar
Stephanie Reed

1.

Johnson grass wrapped his boots as Virgil Odum pressed himself over the wooden handles, and Black heaved forward. The leather tack snapped, and the iron face of the plow wedged another stubborn red shape of clay out of the row that curved along the sunny rim. My neighbor tilled a place for collards and mustard in the buckled hardpan. He looked into the blue October sky, its reflection in the lake below, over the rounded back of his horse across to the oaks on the knoll, and at his own handiwork in the forged iron hardware and carved wood of the plow that brought food to the table for his sister and his wife and himself. Mr. Odum never looked up the hill and through the locust fence posts and the red barbed wire to where I stood on the property line, at least not while I was looking at him; then, I didn’t understand the reason for the distance between us. That was the last time I saw the old man and his horse working the berm on the hillside.

A branch snapped and I looked up to see Mr. Odum’s grandson in the small tree above me.

“Carl, get out of that dogwood! You’ll break it,” I said to the dangling teenager. “That’s my dad’s tree now, and Mom loves it to death. She’s probably looking out the window right now!”

“Hey Yankee-Talk, my grandpa says it sits too close to the line to say for sure.” He cocked his head toward the farmer in the field.

We heard the Ford wagon crunch up the gravel drive. Carl’s dad leaned into the wheel to steer through the dust while his mom scanned the hilltop to find her son. Her eye caught the movement as clusters of bright berries, a dry branch, and Carl dropped from the tree. The horn wailed as the car rolled to a stop on the flat at the top of the drive, and Wynell’s head reached out of the opening window into the settling dust. “Say your goodbyes, Carl, and let’s go. Your Aunt Pot’s got an appointment and Granny wants to shop.” She turned to me and called out, “Janice, you be good now! When ‘ya comin’ back?” Then she said something to her husband.

I was eighteen and leaving home. Carl and I had known each other for less than a year, only since old Mr. Odum had sold my folks a couple of acres to pay for his sister’s medical bills. We roamed around the hills when he came to visit his grandparents. He was a few years younger than I, and often a pest, but generally amusing and sincere. Carl and I exchanged glances and soft punches, and parted company. In December, after I left, Virgil Odum died.

2.

For ten years, I wandered around the country as part of the caravan of young people who were trying to identify perfection; and just like most of them, I realized that it didn’t matter where I lived because I was the constant in every equation. I had two kids and wanted them to grow up with their grandparents, so I landed on the ridge along the line of locust fence posts.

The force of gravity eventually pulled everything off the ridge and down into the bottom of the property where corrugated tin sheets too rusted for a roof lay end to end keeping blackberry and honeysuckle back and making a path to the spring hole. There were tires and replaced sinks and all kinds of heavy things that traveled downhill easily. It pulled me down, too, from where I once leaned against the locust fence post and viewed a life I never thought I’d be a part of.

Sometime while I was gone, Dad had purchased the rest of the Odum Farm, so I moved down the hill into the old house, where I began to explore Carl’s childhood haunts and the settings for the outrageous stories he had told me. I remembered Carl’s honesty and sweet simplicity appealed and I started expecting our reunion.

I felt as though I had become the caretaker of an old farmhouse, an overgrown yard, and barns full of interesting and complicated disorder. I yanked the last diaper from the clothesline, springing a clothes pin into the daffodils that spread the backyard yellow.
"Yankee-Talk!" A voice wrapped around the front of the house—pitched ten years lower, but unmistakably Carl's. "Hello, Jan! Where the heck are you?"

I took a deep breath and turned, wondering how we would look to each other. I'd gone away to find myself and returned with two children, half a formal education, and sometimes, I worried, a little too much experience. I wondered how many fragmented stories about my adventures he had heard.

Carl's long arms reached around me, and the mound of fluffy diapers humored our intimacy and made us laugh. I looked at his deep-set eyes as they told secrets unintentionally.

"I heard you were here. Couldn't wait to see ya. Has the place been sittin' here ever since your dad bought it? I reckon the mice cleaned up anything we missed after Grandpa died, and then, I s'pose, the black snakes took care of all the mice?"

"Snakes in the house? Carl, you're teasing me!" Just last week I had coaxed a lumpy black snake from behind a dresser and out the front door. It was hard to plug every mouse hole with steel wool, so I appreciated all the temporary pest control I could get.

Cleaned everything? I wondered. It appeared to me that something had stopped the Odum Family from finishing. The buildings were still filled with more than my family and I could dispose of in a lifetime.

"You've got kids! Where are they?" Carl demanded.

"I just put Sarah down for a nap, and Thomas is up at Mom's." I looked up and over my shoulder to the top of the ridge at my parents' home. Carl's dark eyes scanned back and forth across the view of outbuildings below us, and his distraction and fascination forced me to suggest a tour. "Let's go check on the baby first. We've got time for a walk." We stepped up onto the porch and into the place that testified to practical ways and pragmatism, to wood and metal and leather, soil, air and water, to the lifespan of trees and to their function after death. The heart pine walls gave us something more than any dead thing could give. The waves and curls and contrast in the grain of the warm brown boards interrupted assumptions and promoted new ideas. The knots and the nails spoke to us as we peeked at the sleeping baby. Carl stretched his neck into every corner as politely and as intently as he could, recalling his past. I assured him we would come back for a cup of coffee.

We bounced off the porch like teenagers on a mission. Carl led me around the side of the porch and down to the garden shed. Just like the house, it was covered with asphalt roll siding made to look like tan brick with black mortar. Inside the door I saw my own shovel and rake, leaning against the end of a pile that filled the shed from front to back and floor to ceiling. All kinds of things. An old shovel blade worn and split, a bucket with a rusty-edged hole in the bottom, wheels and flat tires, bundles of tongue and groove cut-offs, and muslin sacks full of seed peas and corn that were tied to the rafters with bailing twine.

Ten years was too long to proceed my question with condolences about his grandfather's death. I needed to resolve the issue that surfaces relentlessly every day that I lived in the old Odum place. "What made your family leave all this behind?"

Immediately I felt insensitive. Of course the value of all the stuff left when its caretaker passed away. I felt my face heat with embarrassment. Carl jumped in to save me.

"When Grandpa died, it took the better part of a month just to clean out the house."

He carefully explained how after the funeral, the women in the family had come to help his grandmother and Aunt Pet sort their way off the farm. Pet went to a nursing home, as his grandfather had carried her crippled body for recent years. His grandmother went to be with the oldest daughter, to stay until compatibility distilled the best living situation for her. With ten children, his grandmother would eventually find the right place to live. Carl proceeded to detail how Virgil Odum's survivors would convert the place into budgets and nursing care.

"My dad and my uncles came to help on weekends, carryin' the furniture out of the house, boxes from the attic, and jars of canned cabbage out of the pantry. They hauled off Grandpa's pickup and got the Pontiac started. The outbuildings sat there a while waitin' to be emptied—the crawl space under the house, and the storm cellar, too. I don't think Grandpa ever hauled anything off this property, and I'll bet he brought half of it with him up from the..."
old place. He had a plan for all of it. In 1949 he built the cinderblock foundation and moved the house out of the way o’ the lake. The old home place is only a quarter of a mile down the road, just past where Harrall Mill Road slips into the water. You know, the boat ramp. Pa remembers watchin’ the river backin’ up and finally coverin’ the piles of stone that the house used to sit on.”

“Where is the storm cellar, Carl?”

“Let’s go take a look. I guess I can find it in all this mess.” He whacked honeysuckle and blackberry canes ahead of me as we followed the trace of a path past the pumphouse.

Carl found what he was looking for. “This is it, Janice! Right here. Grampa and I flattened out a spot, really pretty big, I reckon, and poured a slab of concrete. Let’s go down below and find the door.” I was excited at the prospect of learning any new clue; something that could let me understand how the Odums created this place and then left it behind.

Through the thicket, Carl spotted the old door. I followed him towards it. He scraped away some of the soil that had built up at its base and pulled it open as if it were a tomb. Sunlight illuminated three chrome and oilcloth chairs.

“Grandma was scared to death of tornadoes. They were down here ever’ time there came a bad storm. Will you come in here with me?” He had one leg over the threshold already.

I didn’t say no. I stepped inside the cave. Carl showed me the shovel scraped walls and explained how he and his grandfather had pulled the dirt out from under the concrete slab above to make this room in the side of the steep hill. Three jars of sauerkraut and a dusty sweater sat on a board laid across two cement blocks.

As we climbed out of the dark shelter, the shimmer on the lake below was all that we could see. Our eyes adjusting to broad daylight, Carl navigated our way past the old chicken barn. We didn’t stop to examine the obsolete poultry equipment, an old-fashioned washing machine with a ringer of dried and cracked rubber, beanpoles with strips of cloth tied around them. I knew from my own exploration that every building had an arrangement of upholstered furniture too torn up or broken down for the house, but suitable for a rest from hard and dusty or muddy work.

We wrestled weeds and bushes, tumbled into holes, and tripped over vines on our way down to the lakeshore. The draw was tangled with briars that isolated the lake and made it unavailable to the house above. The properties surrounding the old Odum place were clear and manicured, and the lake was accessible to their owners. My father always mowed his access to the peninsula, where Virginia pines grew over abandoned agricultural terraces. Now and then he tried to bush-hog the hillside below my house but always quit when he recognized the probability of turning over his tractor.

Crossing the bottom of the Odum property proved more difficult than we expected, and worrying about the baby waking made me hesitant, and eventually I suggested that we turn around. Our clothes were covered with hitchhiking beggars’ lice, and we pulled blackberry thorns out of our fingertips as we climbed up toward the barns and the house. We felt the cool change as the afternoon sun dropped below the ridge on the roof above us.

“Just one more place, Jan,”

Carl approached a depression in the hillside. “And this,” he said carefully, “is where we dug to bury Black. Everyone brought a shovel. I think even your pa and brother were here to help. I don’t exactly remember who all was here. We forgot about him a bit in the barn. He died, and we buried him here.” Carl tried to tell enough, hoping I wouldn’t have too many questions. In his face I could see every vivid detail surface in his reminiscence, but when he spoke, he condensed his words. He felt guilty and self-conscious, assuming I would discover his feelings.

“I remember the horse. Carl, you were a boy. Twelve years old. You loved your grandfather. It wasn’t your fault.” I reached for his hand, and our fingers twined for a moment.

“With ropes we dragged him right out of the barn and down to this spot. I’ll never forget that.” His shining eyes reflected the world around us as we turned to wrestle the blackberries on the overgrown path that led us up and out of the bottom.

When we approached the old outhouse, Carl winked at me and said, “This two-holer is where Grandpa recycled all his mail and newspapers and catalogs. You go on up, Jan. I’ll stay here a while,
for old time's sake."

3.

I heard Carl approach the front door just as I finished nursing Sarah. "Let's have that coffee now!" I called from the chair in the kitchen. Composure had returned to his face, but the familiarity I felt when he first greeted me by the clothesline was masked by some preoccupation he brought up with him from the gravesite below. "Let's sit on the porch, and look at the dogwood blossoms," I said to console him.

We sat quietly. "Tell me what happened, Carl."

He rocked for a few minutes, held and cooed Sarah, then gave her back to me.

"It's just that the last time I was here at the house was when Momma and Daddy discovered Black dead in the barn. They didn't know, and still don't, I reckon, that I was listening to it all from where I was hidin' in the attic. I heard and saw it all through the cracks between the boards. They thought I was down at the lake with my fishin' pole. I heard the floorboards creak on the porch, and I saw Momma wipe her hands on a cloth towel as she moved from the kitchen toward the front door. She reached up to grab the smooth, flat slab of wood, and turned it around enough to unlock the door and open it for Daddy. She just stood there waitin', lookin' at him through the old brown screen. His silence told me more about his feelings than he ever would. Grampa's death changed him. I reckon it changed us all.

"Daddy'd been down in the barns and sheds where Grampa worked. Those places witnessed my grandfather's life, and the lives of people just like him—people who built their own houses and taught each other how to raise chickens in the hills. Anyway, finally I heard Momma say, 'Won't you give that nail a tap, Donn?" You know how them leather washers on Pa's door turns, 'specialy the one on the front door gettin' used so much, gets loose after a while and they slip and... I guess the door locked itself.

"Pa's eyes were swollen and moist. 'Black died,' I heard him say.

"It took a few moments before I drew my next breath. I was sure they would hear me sob.

"'Starved to death,' he said and then, 'How could we 'a' forgotten about him?" And he cried out, 'Lord God All Mighty, what kind a people are we that forgets about a good animal like that! How could we 'a' done that—much as that animal meant to Pa? There he lay, bloatin' and still confused, still wonderin' why the old man was so late a comin'." Daddy was gettin' louder and faster. 'Eyes bulgin', still open, lookin' right at me and askin'! Oh Lord God, I feel so bad!' Daddy fell into the only chair that was left in the room. After a minute, Mamma turned toward the kitchen and said something about wonderin' how would she tell me. She knew I loved that horse, and that I lived to slide over his back and take out across the field. Then Momma just went into the kitchen and stared at the linoleum. And Daddy sat in the darkness of the heart pine walls hiding his anger and tears."
A car swerved around the bend; a couple more cars and a pickup truck. When the moving equipment topped the hill above, the compressors hissed and the brakes screamed until the truck and its trailer of axles and steel beams and house jacks stood in front of me.

**Insomnia**

*Donald L. Brown*

The ceiling fan spins ceaselessly in the darkness, Its comforting whir turned screaming buzzsaw, 3:47 am. My prayers to Morpheus go unanswered.

The green glowing jester Taunts me from the nightstand, Hurling the passing minutes at me Like daggers that slice open wounds. Memories bleed freely once more To stain my sheets black-red with regret.

My bed an altar I am the sacrifice To the dark god of sleeplessness
Moths
Michael Doss

From the darkest regions of the night
They arrive
Like pilgrims
To a three-by-four
Double-paneled Mecca

A temple of glass and screen
Where they kneel
And offer silent prayers
Or dance whirling
Like Sufis in sacred robes

Beyond the pale columns of the poplars
The shadows are tangled
And conspire with the spiders
While the faithful keep
Their vigil at the window

Manic Depressive Magic Tricks
David Tishhaw

Watch me jump through a flaming hoop of fire
as I juggle bowling balls
that bounce
when dropped on my toes...

Why turn away when I saw through
my lovely assistant’s legs?
—there’s no blood lost—
—nothing real performed.

Now you see me
—Poof—
now you don’t.
—only mirrors used—
to reflect reality
—improperly refracting light—
—unjustly skewing truth.

Though you stand to applaud
I will bow and cry
knowing
—All magic in life—
—All magic in love—

just an illusion
—Incapable to remain in one’s memory—
—Unable to manipulate Death—
Vanishing from thought
after the stage curtains
have been drawn.
Vampire
Donald L. Brown

Life is the vampire
To which we all must eventually succumb.
It slowly weakens us
Maliciously leeching away our hope
And our sanity.
Drop by seeping drop,
The parasite feeds.
Draining us until we are empty husks
Hanging from the gallows where we were sentenced to birth,
Rustling our disillusionment
In the bitter wind.

Masked
LaRese Heidingsfelder
Colored Pencil


Memorized lines are forgotten
as pain invades my body
like a pervert invades an underwear drawer.

A 9-volt battery on my tongue,
aluminum foil grinding on my fillings, times a thousand—
this isn’t what I remember from rehearsal.

I scream the words from my personal script one final time
and the director presents me with the new star of the show.

Applause surrounds me
and I realize that I don’t mind giving up the spotlight.
Acting isn’t my life anymore.

Hear Me Roar
LaReSe Heidingsfelder
Computer Graphics
Why Poetry is Arrogant
Selena Johnson

Charlatan that I am and martyr, too.

Trying to reflect the ocean
In a hand-mirror.

In the words give the world,
New-painted, back to the human zoo.

And donning a crown of thorns,
I suffer and die and resurrect
For strangers who aren’t watching.

Self-importantly prancing
Before an empty theatre,
Trumpeting soliloquies
I wrote for myself.

But just as understanding
Is not enlightenment,
I continue to float paper-boats
In a flood.

One Minute of Silence
(For those who are in need)
David Titshaw

Those in our country that cannot afford a warm bed on a cold night,
A child afraid of math
Song birds with broken wings,
( 8 seconds )

Mothers with delinquent kids
—and husbands with no love,
Families living in trailers
—In Kansas
—In the Spring,
( 20 seconds )

Killers with guilty hearts,
Those of Christ,
Those of Allah,
Those of religion,
And those of none,

Politicians in need of purity,
( 32 seconds )

Hills of earth made flat,
And rivers damned by man,

Those that follow their watches,
Those that follow their orders,
And those that follow their hearts.

—Amen.
Farewell to Heaven, and Thanks
Kenneth Rosen

There was a great rat in the evening sky,
A great joke of the grisaille, the half-moon somehow
Upside down like a heavily lidded eye
In a huge but thin chinless cloud with its mouth hung
Open in mean eagerness, spread across
The vast west, and whatever I said, whatever my
Happy curse was, it meant, “Hooray,
Gangster! Let me take your picture.” But after I fumbled
With the door key, took a leak, asked
My wife where she had hidden the camera, it was too late:
The half-moon in a patch of clear blue
Was slowly righting itself like a woman pulling up
Her bloomers, the cloud had drifted
And dissolved into gauze, all as if a cosmic magician
Was taking a bow. “It’s over,”
I thought happily, staring and barely understanding
Then how fatalism was our fate,
How long before we feed worms we become worms,
Cringing and hiding, even eager
To eat dirt if anyone thinks this would help, like that
Cloud allowing the rat’s brief peek.

Kenneth Rosen

Ken Rosen has been publishing poems in various literary venues for the past thirty years, or roughly since the appearance of his first collection WHOLE HORSE, in 1973 with the Braziller Poetry Series. Describing WHOLE HORSE, Richard Howard cited the poetry’s “strangeness” as “a different thing, an alien force which I am at some loss to characterize, perhaps because loss is where Rosen is at, and easy there.” BLACK LEAVES came out with New Rivers Press of Minnesota, then THE HEBREW LION,
LONGFELLOW SQUARE, and REPTILE MIND, followed from the
Ascensius Press of Portland, Maine, where Rosen has lived, written, and taught at the state university since 1965, for the last twenty years as Professor of English. Besides the University of Southern Maine, Ken has taught at Syracuse University, the American University in Bulgaria, and the University of Sofia on a Fulbright Fellowship in 1998.
GC: When did you first begin to write?

KR: I think I first began writing when I was a sophomore in college. It was the summer of my sophomore year. I had always loved to read; I taught myself to read when I was four years old, read obsessively, so I always felt a great comfort in language and words, and a lot of confidence in my ability to manage language and words, but I was just hanging-out with this really (I thought very charming) drunken professor at Penn State, and I think I must have bored the daylights out of him because I didn’t know anything to say. I’d just buy him beer and try to get him to talk—diplomatically pester him with questions. I don’t know why kids do that—I mean, you attach yourself to some lost soul and you treat them like they’re the source of all wisdom. He took off to visit his brother who was also a professor—I think at Michigan State in East Lansing—and he says to me: “Kenneth, why don’t you write some poems, or something.” So that’s pretty much how I started writing. Then one night I had a breakthrough, and it was very much like the break-through I had when I started reading, where I realized that my ideas for the poem were taking shape before I consciously thought of them—you know, in the same way that your eyes move faster than your mind when you’re reading, there was a part of my mind that was moving faster than my conscious mind, which was in the whole business of hitching a ride. Having consciousness hitch a ride to that part that was moving faster was extremely exciting—a lot of fun—so I kept working at it, though I would say that it must have been fifteen or twenty years before I successfully understood what the parts of the puzzle were that I needed to pull together—and I still don’t know—because you still make mistakes. You fool yourself because the act of writing consists on the one hand of giving yourself permission to write, and then trying to hold that permission up to the strictest possible critical standards, and you can’t let the strictest possible critical standards win-out or you destroy your permission to do it, but on the other hand, your permission can make you very enthusiastic about lots and lots of foolishness, and you just have to keep a balance between those two things.
GC: Do you let that poetic level of consciousness tell you when and what to write about, or do you set aside specific times for yourself to write?

KR: I have been doing a lot of writing in the middle of the night because I discovered that when I wake-up in the middle of the night with insomnia, and I’m upset about something, if I can figure out what I’m upset about and write about it, I feel a lot better, and it’s easier to go back to sleep. I wanted to show you what I use to write with: I’ve been writing for the last several years with these composition books that you buy in grocery stores—they cost about a dollar or two—they’re awfully nice because you can take them to bed with you. I put them beside my bed, and when I wake-up in the middle of the night, I scribble. So I have gotten in the habit of writing about a poem a night. Sometimes I write when I go to bed. Sometimes I write in the middle of the night. Sometimes I write first thing in the morning. Sometimes I write more poems than one, but I basically write whenever I get an idea. I have a feeling, sort of like a superstition—you know, everybody has superstitions—like joggers: if you don’t jog every day, in twenty-four hours you’re going to be hopeless out of shape and never be able to jog again—and that’s part of my feeling about writing: if I don’t write an idea, it’s going to block-up all of the other ideas, so I’ve got to let everything come out. So if an idea strikes me as being potentially possible, I generally go for it, but it’s not principled. You know, I write about all different kinds of things. I write about Greek myths; I write about these Balkan observations of mine; I write personal poems or poems that are about emotions in relationships, but it’s not a principled thing. I don’t choose a subject: the subject has chosen me.

GC: In your work, does the place influence the subject of the poem, or vice versa?

KR: My poems are, in a funny way, becoming more and more philosophical and less tied to place. The odd thing is that my manner—my stylistic manner—is so homely that people don’t recognize the extent to which it is philosophic. It seems as if it were located in a physical place because I’m using such homely language, but the fact is it’s rarely located anywhere; it’s located in some kind of a general—you know, place of cities and schools, and barns—stuff like that.

GC: In one of your lectures in ‘A Spy in the House of the Thought Police,’ you discussed Nietzsche’s statement that “at some point the idea becomes woman.” What does that mean, and how does it relate to literature?

KR: Well, I think that that’s a pretty mysterious idea, but I think what Nietzsche meant, and what Derrida was picking up on, is that ultimately an idea is a physical thing—that it has to do with the blood and the cells, the protein and the meat that makes up the mind. Probably for him to say that the idea becomes a woman is a somewhat joking and derogatory reference to women being custodians of the physical and the biological, but he is at the same time also seeking to dethrone the intellectual from its ethereal and non-physical status, to point out that basically thought is as physical as anything else. The question brings up what, for me, is a very interesting feeling I have been having lately about the status of philosophy and the status of that branch of literary study that is considered theory. There was a time when poetry and philosophy were considered very close—you know, that poets nourished philosophers and vice versa—and I think that turning away from the philosophical and the theoretical—this kind of turns poetry into the business of collecting snapshots that testify to our decent feelings, whereas theory has continued to be very ambitious, looking at and answering the big questions, being willing to learn everything and know everything, and I don’t know if I was as certain as that when I included Derrida and Nietzsche in that lecture—that long lecture—that I gave when I had that endowed chair, but I knew I wanted to represent myself as not being hostile to ideas, as being open to ideas, and I wanted to encourage people not to believe they were going to protect themselves and preserve themselves by circling their
intellectual wagons, but rather by doing the opposite—by being open to thought. What I have come to find is that when I read a philosopher—and this is something, a wonderful part of my reading at this phase of my life; it wasn’t like this when I had to do it when I was in college, or even twenty, fifteen, ten years ago—is that I read philosophy as if it were poetry: somebody is thinking very hard and trying to find the words to serve the truth and sometimes they take risks, sometimes they make jokes—even Hegel makes jokes—and I think that being open to philosophy becomes a way you keep the mind in some position to grow, and I think that’s very important to me and I think women are very important to me as far my personal growth is concerned. I think that when I spend too much time in the company of men I feel like I stop growing.

GC: In that same lecture you also said “I deliberately sought my identity in attitude and voice as a woman in order to write; after that, everything changed.” What did you mean by that, and how has that affected your work?

KR: Yeah, I guess we’re talking about a moment in my life in which I changed something about my concept of myself. I guess I had always—you know, you spend all your time trying to figure out how to do your gender duty, so to speak—in my case how to be adequately manly. I did not have much interest or aptitude in sports when I was very young—I didn’t even like to play with other kids; what I really liked to do was read. When I was older—in late adolescence and early adulthood—the whole question of manliness was probably more important to me—and then I just became intensely charmed, virtually enraptured, by this rock and roll singer who seemed to be giving expression to issues of change that were in the air—critical perspectives on American values and American policies. I’m speaking of Neil Young. He, in this one song of his, is talking about a ride to Tulsa—(Young, Neil. “The Last Trip to Tulsa.” Neil Young. Warner Bros. ASIN: B000002K0G, 1969.)—he turned all my ideas of masculinity upside-down, and my whole pride—or the pride that I was seeking to develop in being male—seemed not so valuable, and thinking about life and experience from a female perspective seemed to free aspects of the imagination in myself that I was very grateful for. I don’t know if I can fully describe it; it was like also freeing myself from the rigor of rationality—freeing myself to imagine, and I don’t know why I connected rationality and masculinity—if I feel free to imagine anything it’s not a gender issue—at the present time, but somehow at the time when I wrote what became my first book of poems, ‘Whole Horse’, a kind of womanly mockery of male rationality that I allowed to be liberated in myself seemed to make those poems in ‘Whole Horse’ more possible, and I had a lot of fun writing them.

GC: Why did you choose poems over short stories? Have you ever written short stories?

KR: Yeah, I’ve published about a dozen short stories. I know a lot about short stories, but I’ve never felt comfortable—I’ve never felt as if it were a natural medium, or genre, for me. I never had that breakthrough with stories where I felt that my conscious mind was hitching a ride to my unconscious, which gives you that marvelous sensation of creating. It was always work. Now, I believe that you can learn how to write. I mean, I’m a non-athlete person who made himself into an athlete by jogging. I ran marathons for ten years. I met my goal, which was to break three hours in a marathon, and it’s amazing to me now because to break three hours in a marathon is to run twenty-six miles at less than 6:40 minutes a mile. It’s an amazing distance; yet if you point a gun at me, I can’t run a seven minute mile right now. I don’t know if I had natural talent for poetry; I guess I did for reading—circumstantial or natural. I think people can learn things. I think you can teach yourself things. I mean the mind is a woman; the mind is a muscle, and if you can keep your perspective open enough, I think you can train yourself to reach your goals.

GC: What do you want to accomplish by writing poetry?
KR: I think one of the things that I do is that I believe in poetry, and I believe in what I was calling in class “the poetic or metaphorical alternative to rational thought” as being helpful. A poem is a return to the mind to something that’s troubling or problematic, and it may not solve the problem or eliminate the trouble but, by making it into something, it transcends the problem or the trouble, so you feel good for having written a poem, and then if it becomes something that you can share, then you feel good about that too. I like to be amusing, but I also like to shock people to things that they’re not paying adequate attention to.

GC: How do you respond to people who criticize your work for being too sexually graphic?

KR: Well, probably with an apology, because if it’s “too sexually graphic” it means that it was too sexually graphic for that person. I mean, we live in a country where personal standards are tremendously various, and you can’t really regulate yourself according to the standards of the most inhibited or the most rigid, but on the other hand, I don’t have a desire to offend or shock. I like to startle people, and I like to use surprise and shock tactics, but I think that if I have been sexually explicit in my poetry it’s probably something I’d be inclined to apologize for or attribute to immaturity. On the other hand, immaturity can help keep us growing.

GC: Every writer seems to have a particular area that he or she draws from for his or her writing. F. Scott Fitzgerald, for example, drew from popular culture for material; Wallace Stevens drew primarily from nature. What area do you feel you draw from the most for your poetry?

KR: I guess I draw from both nature and my life. I write a lot of poems about nature—about season change, about the sky, the stars, the moon, the sun—but I write about them in ways to sort out certain thoughts I’ve been having about my life: what I think is going on or how my life is justified by something... I had a poem—I didn’t get to read it at the reading—I was coming home from school one night, and I looked up at the sky, and I saw the most amazing thing I had ever seen. I saw this cloud spread out against the sky, and it looked just like a rat. Right where the rat’s eye should be, there was the moon. I ran into the house, and I wanted to get the camera, and I asked my wife for the camera, “I’ve got to take a picture of the sky!” and she’s telling me, you know... of course it’s kind of a wild moment; you know, you run into the house: “Where’s the camera, where’s the camera!” I teach all of my classes at night from seven to about nine-thirty, so it was about ten o’clock and here’s this guy—madman, jumping, running in the house—going for the camera, and she’s trying to tell me it’s hard to take pictures at night. Well, by the time we got out there, it all had shifted, but the thing is—and this is true about your writing as well as mine—when we live in consciousness... consciousness is really a kind of unconsciousness because you don’t really know what you’re feeling and thinking; you’re sort of processing all the time, kind of processing challenges that are right in front of you. You’re not really figuring out your feelings. So here I am looking at this rat in the sky with the moon peeking through it, and I am tremendously excited by this—as a vision—but I didn’t know what I was feeling until I had worked all of this out in a poem. I didn’t know what the content of my consciousness was, or the content of my excitement, until I sat down and started to work away at the poem and was able to develop some insight into it.

GC: If you hadn’t been a professor, and you could devote all of your time to writing, how do you think it would influence your work?

KR: I don’t know, when I have all of the time in the world, I don’t feel like writing. It’s when the world crowds in on me—that I have my teaching tasks and other demands—that’s when I want to sort of get inside myself and write, so I can’t really complain that teaching has deprived me of time to write. The other thing is that I—maybe it’s stubbornness or cussedness, but as a writer I had to figure out a great deal for myself—teach myself, criticize myself—because I’m not the kind of person who can listen to what people are saying to
me. When people are talking to me, some kind of static machine goes on, and I can't hear it. So I had to figure out all kinds of things: how to read, how to write, how to get past my own static machine so I could learn from other people. When I would figure out something, I was pretty excited about it and wanted to share it, and Tom Saucet was my student when I was at a pretty early phase of that, and I was full of excitement about what I was learning, and that was pretty valuable for him and a number of students who were around. I'm reaching a point where it's harder and harder for me to teach creative writing because I'm not figuring out how to do things anymore, I'm just looking at stuff and solving its problems. So when I'm in a situation like I was in class with you, looking at your manuscripts, I'm not sure I'm really teaching. I can reach back in my memory and give you some of the principles that I put together, like a sentence that demonstrates emphasis and meter, and stuff like that, but basically what I feel comfortable doing is looking over your shoulder and telling you how I would do it: "Well I would put this here, I'd do this this way, I'd do this that way." I'm not sure if that's teaching, so I have been drifting away from teaching creative writing classes in the last couple of years because I don't feel as if I'm providing the solution to conceptual problems; I'm solving problems of carpentry, and I'm not sure that that's the right thing for a writing student. I think that you need to get someone to share with you excitement of understanding the nature of the enterprise, rather than just how to do it or fix it. I do look forward to retiring in the next few years and spending more time writing—when Tom Saucet was my student, I didn't have a cabin in the woods where I could go to and hide out from the world—it's actually in the western mountains of Maine, near Bethel, where Tom came from—in any case, I might just be ready to do different kinds of things. I find myself being very gratified teaching introductory level courses—just intro. to literature courses, and just try to persuade people not to be afraid of literature, to enjoy it—even difficult literature—and that's been my chief satisfaction lately.
Hugh Braselton is a sophomore at Gainesville College. He plans to become a film student at Georgia State.

Donald L. Brown is an English major at Gainesville College. He won first place in the poetry contest with the poem “Words Best Left Unspoken.” He also served on the editorial board for the Chestatee Review.

Michael Doss is an English major at Gainesville College. His story “American Dream” won first place and his poem “Heroes” won an honorable mention. Michael also served on the editorial board for the Chestatee Review.

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Kami Stevens is a freshman at Gainesville College. She has yet to declare a major.

David Titshaw has won several awards at Gainesville College for his poems, short-stories, and essays. He has no plans for the future except to “embrace fully the famines and the feasts while dining casually at Life’s table.”

Adrienne Wilder has not declared a major, however her primary interests are art and literature.