**Nin Andrews** is the author of many books including *The Book of Orgasms, Why They Grow Wings, Midlife Crisis with Dick and Jane, Sleeping with Houdini, Southern Comfort* and *The Circus of Lost Dreams*. She is also the editor of a book of translations of the Belgian poet, Henri Michaux, called *Someone Wants to Steal My Name*. Her latest book, *Why God Is a Woman*, is just out from BOA Editions.

**Claire Bateman**'s newest collection *Scape* is forthcoming from New Issues Poetry & Prose. Her other collections are: *Locals* (Serving House Books, 2012), *The Bicycle Slow Race* (Wesleyan University Press, 1991), *Friction* (Eighth Mountain Poetry Prize, 1998), *At the Funeral of the Ether* (Ninety-Six Press, 1998), *Clumsy* (New Issues Poetry & Prose, 2003), *Leap* (New Issues, 2005), and *Coronology* (Etruscan Press, 2010). She has been awarded Individual Artist Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Tennessee Arts Commission, and the Surdna Foundation, as well as two Pushcart Prizes. She has taught at Clemson University, the Greenville Fine Arts Center, and various workshops and conferences. She lives in Greenville, SC, and is poetry editor of the St. Katherine Review.

**Bruce Bond** is the author of fifteen books including six forthcoming: *Immanent Distance: Poetry and the Metaphysics of the Near at Hand* (University of Michigan Press), *For the Lost Cathedral* (LSU Press), *Black Anthem* (Tampa Review Prize, University of Tampa Press), *Gold Bee* (Crab Orchard Open Competition Award, Southern Illinois Press), *Sacrum* (Four Way Books), and *The Other Sky* (Etruscan Press). Presently he is Regents Professor at University of North Texas.


**Steve Coughlin** has published poems in several literary journals and magazines, including the Gettysburg Review, Michigan Quarterly Review, New Ohio Review, Gulf Coast, Seneca Review, Plaisiades, and Slate. His first book of poetry, *Another City*, will be published later this year by FutureCycle Press. Currently he is an Assistant Professor of English at Chadron State College.

**Denise Duhamel**’s most recent book of poetry *Blowout* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013) was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. The recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, she is a professor at Florida International University in Miami.

**Maria Mazziotti Gillan** is a recipient of AWP’s 2014 George Garrett Award, Poets & Writers’ 2011 Barnes & Noble Writers for Writers Award, and the 2008 American Book Award. She is founder/executive director of the Poetry Center at Passaic County Community College, and director of creative writing/professor of English at Binghamton University-SUNY.

**H. L. Hix**’s recent poetry collections include *I’m Here to Learn to Dream in Your Language* (Etruscan Press, 2015) and *As Much As, If Not More Than* (Etruscan, 2014). He lives in the mountain West with his partner, the poet Kate Northrop.

**Adam Hughes** is the author of *Petrarch* (NYQ Books, 2010) and *Uttering the Holy* (NYQ Books, 2012). He was born in 1982 in Lancaster, Ohio. He still resides near there on a farm with his wife and daughter, two dogs, four cats, and five horses. He works as a drug prevention specialist with high school students.

**Kathleen McGookey**’s prose poems and translations have appeared in many journals and anthologies including *The Antioch Review, Boston Review, Crazyhorse, Denver Quarterly, Epoch, Field, Indiana Review, The Laurel Review, Ploughshares, The Prose Poem: An International Journal, Prairie Schooner, Quarterly West, Seneca Review, West Branch*, and Willow Springs. She is the author of *Whatever Shines* (White Pine Press), *October Again* (Burnside Review Press), and *Mended* (Kattywompus Press), and the translator of We’ll See (Parlor Press), a book of prose poems by contemporary French poet Georges Godeau. Her book *Stay is forthcoming from Press 53 in fall 2015; her book At the Zoo is forthcoming from White Pine Press in spring 2017. She has received grants from the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation and the Arts Fund of Kalamazoo County, and in 2014, she received a grant from the Sustainable Arts Foundation, which supports artists who are parents. She has taught creative writing at Hope College, Interlochen Arts Academy, and Western Michigan University.

**Shivani Mehta**’s first book of poetry, *Useful Information for the Soon-to-be Beheaded*, is out from Press 53. Her work has appeared in numerous journals, including the North American Review, Midwest Quarterly Review, and Laurel Review. Shivani was born in Mumbai and raised in Singapore. A recovering lawyer; she lives in Los Angeles with her family.

**Jody Mussoff**, born in Pittsburgh, PA, has been creating colored pencil drawings since the late 1970’s. After attending Carnegie-Mellon University in Pittsburgh, and the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC, she has exhibited in museums and galleries in the US and abroad. Her works are in various museum collections, including the Hirshhorn Museum, the Delaware Art Museum, Montgomery...
Museum of Fine Arts, Smithsonian American Art Museum, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Yale University Art Gallery, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. For the past 20 years, she has also been working in ceramics.

Kevin Phan graduated from the University of Michigan with an M.F.A. in Creative Writing in 2013 and the University of Iowa with a B.A. in English Literature in 2005, and was a Fellow for the Bucknell Seminar for Younger Poets in 2001. He is a former Helen Zell Writer’s Fellow Postgraduate Fellow from the University of Michigan, where he won the Theodore Roethke and the Bain-Swiggett Poetry Prizes. His work, which explores environmentalism and his life as a volunteer Buddhist monk / construction worker circa 2006 & 2007, has been featured (or is forthcoming) in *Conjunctions* (online), *Crab Orchard Review*, *Fence*, *Pleiades*, *Gulf Coast*, *Colorado Review*, *Sentence*, *Cider Press Review*, *SubTropics*, *CutBank*, *Crazyhorse*, *Fiddlehead*, *Hayden’s Ferry Review*, and elsewhere. His first collection of poetry was recently selected as a semi-finalist for the Crab Orchard Open Poetry Competition, a finalist for the Crab Orchard First Book Prize, and as a finalist for the Colorado Review Poetry Prize.

Nicole Santalucia received her MFA from The New School University and her PhD in English from Binghamton University. She founded The Binghamton Poetry Project, a literary outreach program, in 2011. In 2013, Nicole won the Ruby Irene Poetry Chapbook Prize from Arcadia Magazine Inc. for *Driving Yourself to Jail in July*—published in January 2014. Her non-fiction and poetry appear in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Hawai‘i Pacific Review*, 2 *Bridges Review*, *Bayou Magazine*, *Gertrude*, *Flyway: Journal of Writing and Environment*, *Burlesque Press* and others. She teaches English and Creative Writing at Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania.

Maureen Seaton has authored sixteen poetry collections, solo and collaborative—including *Fibonacci Batman: New & Selected Poems* (Carnegie Mellon University Press, 2013). Her awards include the Iowa Poetry Prize, Lambda Literary Award, and an NEA Fellowship. Her work has been honored in both the *Pushcart Anthology* and *Best American Poetry*. Her memoir, *Sex Talks to Girls*, also won a Lammy. She teaches Creative Writing at the University of Miami, Florida.

Karen Schubert’s most recent chapbooks are *Black Sand Beach* (Kattywompus Press, 2015) and *I Left My Wings on a Chair* (Kent State Press, 2014), selected by Kathleen Flenniken for the Wick Poetry Center prize. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *The Louisville Review*, *American Literary Review*, *Best American Poetry Blog*, *diode poetry journal*, and *Extract(s) anthology*. Awards include a 2013 residency at Headlands Center for the Arts and 2014 Pushcart Prize nomination. She is a founding member of LitYoungstown, a new literary arts organization in Youngstown, Ohio.
Before we met her, our freakishly loud non-curvaceous antithesis, we made due with dull Cinderellas. Bullies got on Olive’s nerves. That made us laugh.

When we wrote about her we sifted chaff with wheat, admired both stiff and rubbery pasta, al dente or soft and buttery like our moms used to make it. Women’s lib (our preoccupation) was not Olive’s forte, or was it? Role model or fashion fiasco? Brown boots, black skirt, ashen complexion. What about the male gaze? Olive as objet d’art? Were we crazed? It’s those big feet of hers that did us proud.
THE THIMBLE THEATRE
Now Playing—"The Dish of Death"

Percy Pieface
Fair Maiden
Willian
Harold Hamgravy
Olive Oyl
Bondo Bitter

THE FAIR MAIDEN MUST MARRY ME
I SAY SHE SHANT!
I LOVE ONLY YOU POICY
THE BEST MAN GETS HER—HERE—CHOOSE YOUR WEAPON
I MUST TRICK THE VILLAIN

HAVE SOME SPAGHETTI BEFORE YOU FIGHT
AHH!

THE TIME IS Ripe—GO YONDER AND STICK HIM WELL
CURSES I'M DEAD
MY HERO!!

Note: “The Dish of Death,” by E. C. Segar, is in the Public Domain in the US.
The Signer at Nelson Mandela's Funeral

“The signer at Nelson Mandela's funeral is a fraud,” says the headline. He is just moving his hands around and not saying anything. He stands next to President Obama. The signer explains, "I was having a schizophrenic episode. I thought angels were shouting at me. It was very distracting; my head was full of so much noise I couldn't hear the speeches." The organizers of the funeral fall over each other trying to explain how they came to hire him. He was only $75 a day. Signing usually costs a $100 an hour and signers work in pairs so one can be resting, while the other works. No one can explain where they found this agency that offered the signer for an event that thousands attended and millions more watched on TV around the world. No one vetted the signer or the agency. What if he had taken out a gun and shot all the world leaders who were on that stage at the time? "The angels were so loud," the signer said. Their voices were so high-pitched I didn't know what they were saying, and I kept moving my hands hoping they’d stop so I could understand enough to translate into signs all the words I was able to hear:"

www.mipoesias.com
1990

When I was nine I dressed up for Halloween as General Norman Schwarzkopf. I outranked all the other kids in their Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle costumes their mothers had purchased at the mall. I proudly wore my four silver star stickers, the medals made of yogurt lids, the fatigues a few sizes too big. At recess we shot Iraqis with sticks, our stomachs full of cafeteria pizza and chocolate milk. I wrote a letter to the general himself, I found it fifteen years later in my parents’ basement, like a letter to Santa Claus, unsent but so full of childhood that the paper crackled like distant stars and smelled of popcorn made in the old yellow plastic popper we kept above the stove. That same year I lost my hearing in my right ear. I wore a big bubble around it after my first surgery and kept the gas mask in the top drawer of my dresser—for months it still smelled of counting backwards into blackness. That was third grade, when it was easy to get Joseph Coffman to throw a chair in class simply by saying “Bo Jackson sucks.” Clearly he had issues. We didn’t know that then, we just thought it was fun to see someone throw a chair. And besides, everyone knew that Bo Jackson didn’t suck. I had several girlfriends, some for weeks until we forgot. I was twice married on the playground. I was in a band, with imaginary instruments and choreography that included the other members taking turns kicking me from behind while I sang. They told me once that I was lucky they allowed me to be their friend. Some things just stick in your memory like a bee fossilized in amber or your fingers after breakfast-for-lunch. I was a good General Schwarzkopf. Everyone thought so. No one saluted or anything, but I could see it in their eyes.
Exodus

When we were exiles my mother wrapped me in paper bags for warmth, carried me on her back as she walked for miles. Our shadows on the ground were one body, everything I saw was framed by her long black hair. Sometimes we stopped in villages for shelter, never stayed for more than a night. We weren’t searching for anything holy, just a place where we could uncurl our fists. My mother told me I was born with the map on my back. I remember how, when we were lost, she used it to orient herself, her coarsened fingers undoing the buttons of my dress, smoothing the cloth from my shoulders, cities and towns asleep under her fingers. Once she said, your spine is the river, each vertebra is a path we could take.
The Journey

When they threw us out Mama and I took to backpacking and I was the pack. She carried me so close you couldn’t see where I ended and she began. The wind blew her hair in my face. I didn’t mind not seeing, didn’t mind not knowing where we were going. Some nights we stopped at a diner, got to sleep inside, out of the rain. We knew better than to look for god. Instead Mama looked at the map on my back. When we got lost she bent me over and raised my shirt up to find her way. I didn’t mind that her hands were rough. Mama traced my spine with her fingertips the way a preacher reads the bible. She said, *every road leads to a reckoning*.
Memoir with Animals

1. Portsmouth, Ohio

We have a dog named Sputnik. Huge tics scramble up the kitchen walls. Sputnik won’t eat canned spaghetti. When the Ohio floods, my dad says, the locals go down in pick-ups and pepper away at the river rats. My parents belong to a young couples’ church group. My father mocks the song they sing at the campfire. *Second verse, same as first. Pine tree, pine tree, pine tree, pine tree, pine tree.*

2. South Euclid, Ohio

My brother is born. I have sawdust dolls named Edith. I ride a tricycle around the block, which takes so long it scares me. Stevie’s dad calls me Fuzzwoggle. Stevie and I sit under the porch pouring silt through our hair. When I sink to the bottom of my neighbor’s pool, my neighbor’s daughter swims down to get me. My grandfather dies and my grandmother learns to drive, knocking us to the floor when she brakes hard.

3. East Liverpool, Ohio

We live in a trailer park with a duck pond in the country. The playground swings are high. I climb on the rocky outcropping covered with morning glories. My school is in the basement of a church. We are learning French. My dad works in Weirton, West Virginia, a city with an orange haze we drive down into. When he gets blood poisoning, we visit him in the hospital.

4. Bazetta, Ohio

My teachers hold up flash cards with tricky words like LAMB. I am the only kindergartner who can read. Our trailer is parked next to my grandmother’s house. I pick up toads and small snakes in my grandfather’s garden. When the horse Molly is lying down, I climb onto her back. I watch a horror movie with my aunt and wake up screaming for weeks. I give my aunt chicken pox. One night when I am so mad, I lean hard against a door and fall out into the snow. Everyone laughs.

5. Omaha, Nebraska

The big kids put the little kids like me into the wheelwell of a tractor tire and push us down the hill. I tell my mom there’s a room at school like a forest, with deer and other animals, and the janitor lets only me go in. My parents buy a beagle puppy we name Rascal. We run from his sharp teeth. My friends teach me to smoke a corncob pipe in the cornfield behind my house. One day during recess I run home by mistake because I think school is out.
6. Snyder, New York

Outside my window is a mountain ash with orange berries. My teacher at Smallwood Elementary talks about her plane and her basset hound. I keep messing up a workbook page about a crow that collects shiny things on a house roof. We drive to Ohio to visit my grandparents. In the car, my brother and I pretend we’re in a submarine surrounded by octopus and whales. We play the alphabet game. In Erie, there’s a sign with a Q. Sometimes it’s snowing so hard, we’re not allowed to talk.

7. Erie, Pennsylvania

We live at 234 E. 33rd, a duplex on a street of brick bungalows. My best friend is Virginia. I write her name in the snow. I earn dimes helping the woman across the street with her twins. There’s a shop at the end of the street with ten cent popsicles. My brother asks if a bee in the yard is dead. I study it and say yes. He touches it and it stings him. On my birthday, we have a party at the zoo.

8. West Seneca, New York

I make a monkey on a vine for my rainforest diorama. My mother begins dental hygiene school and I help her study. I learn so much, I present dental health care to my fifth grade class. The kids laugh when I say rubber dam. In our duplex we’re not allowed to have pets. We take in a stray cat with kittens, a pair of guinea pigs, and turtles, guppies, and a gerbil. Out back in summer, I keep jars of bees and grasshoppers, and buckets of crayfish and frog eggs. I teach the younger kids church camp songs. Pennee’s dad makes huge root beer floats. We burp and burp.

9. Orchard Park, New York

We move with our mother to an 1830s farmhouse at the edge of town. We climb high into the white pine down the hill. I sing in the choir and take French. In spring my appendix ruptures and I miss the class field trip to Cooperstown. My friend’s family has a pet duck I feed when they travel. When I turn 16, my friend gives me a mobile made of cloth-wrapped sugar cubes. At 17 I live in a village in Spain for a summer, come back with a taste for olive oil and coffee. I go to college and drop out.

10. Oshkosh, Wisconsin

In the snow, my kids play with the neighbor’s Scott terrier. My daughter reads to our cat Sylvester. My son puts Sylvester in the dryer where he is stuck for days. We have gerbils, Ella and Emil, a hamster, horseshoe crabs and an aquarium with clear fish. When my husband’s father dies, we rescue a dog we name Snicker. My kids make a fort with couch cushions and that’s where I read Wuthering Heights. When we camp, I can almost hear the loons.
11. Bazetta, Ohio

I finish my degree. We live in my grandmother’s house, across the garden from where we lived in the trailer. The goldfinches gorge on thistle seeds. One cold night the snow sparkles and there are so many deer in the yard, they swarm like blackbirds. In the early morning, red squirrels chase each other in the wall next to my teenage daughter’s bed. She bangs on the wall, yells SHUT UP! I drink coffee and read for school on the back patio. One day I doze off, and wake to a squirrel licking the spoon in my hand.

12. Lakewood, Ohio

I live alone, across the street from a boys’ high school, where the disembodied tubas march behind the long hedge. I work on my second master’s. I watch a hawk and squirrel argue on a brick ledge. The squirrel wins. My son and his girlfriend come to visit and we ride the rapid transit to the end and back. He wants to go inside the Greek revival funeral home next door. When he returns to Wisconsin, he becomes a funeral director. He will kill me if I die without a will.

13. Youngstown, Ohio

I buy my friend’s house. My boyfriend’s cats sleep between us. In winter, the sharp-shinned hawk waits in the Norway maple, its back to me. The bluejay pesters it but it stays. Later the jay impersonates the hawk so it can have its way at the bird feeder. My daughter and her husband live an hour away. Their child will be born in spring. I pull out dusty books, Max and the wild things, The Tale of Two Bad Mice. “Give me some fish, Hunca Munca!” My daughter’s rescue dogs pummel the snow into mud in their new back yard. I make cookies for the baby shower and dream of a sandbox, a shoebox full of little cars, dinosaurs.
Doogie’s House

I watched each Thursday night, 9:30,
the twisted rabbit ears barely capable
of capturing the distant signal of Doogie Howser, M.D.
This was the half-hour I hid in my bedroom
away from my mother sitting at the kitchen table
blankly staring at the unwashed floor.

Doogie’s parents—Katherine and David—might have quarreled
with Doogie over his purchasing a ‘57 Chevy convertible,
but in the end problems dissolved:
of course Doogie would return the very-red convertible
and make instead a thoughtful donation
to the Lackmore Institute for Childhood Leukemia Research.
And then there was Doogie’s genius:
perfect SAT score at six, Princeton graduate at ten,
licensed physician by the age of fourteen.

Not that I identified with Doogie—who could?
But in each episode there was Vinnie Delpino,
Doogie’s best friend, who—like me—struggled
to distinguish himself. And even if Vinnie’s mother wasn’t lost
in a black fog depression, both of us wanted to be included
in the annual Howser family camping getaway.
When Vinnie entered Doogie’s house I sensed his relief
at the living room’s cleanliness: no lopsided pile
of newspapers, months old, no broken lamp,
no dinner-plate size wine stain on the dirty couch.

And then there were those invented episodes
of me taking Vinnie’s place. Each afternoon
I walked from school imagining
I was headed toward the safety net of Doogie’s house.
Even though Doogie had no interest in sports,
his father would still be my basketball coach—
it would be Mr. Howser who would insist
my ball-handling skills were better
than anyone else on the team.

It didn’t matter if my own father, drunk,
walked angrily past my room. The door was locked
and once again I had successfully contorted
the television’s rabbit ears to produce
an only slightly-blurry signal. Hours after the episode ended
it was Doogie’s mother I heard
carrying the Howser family laundry down our hallway.
It was her dress that brushed against my door.
Luxurious Poverty

Coco Chanel told the diamond-clad rich
it’s like wearing your checkbook
around your neck. She liked costume jewelry best

because it was provocative,
like Baudelaire. She believed
she was the pauper beaten in his prose poem

“Knock Down the Poor!” only to strike back
to become an equal, part of the upper class.
Like Baudelaire, she’d been raised Catholic—

the nun’s habits transformed
in her black and white designs. Like Baudelaire,
she was an addict—her morphine,

his opium and wine. Like Baudelaire,
she never married. Though he was enthralled
with Jeanne Duval, the poet wrote,

“The Church wanted to disinfect (love),”
so “it created marriage.” Though Coco slept
with many powerful men, when asked

why she wouldn’t wed, she said,
There have been several Duchesses of Westminster. There is only one Chanel.

She once romanced Pierre Reverdy,
whose book of Poems O’Hara called his “heart.”
Coco and Pierre stayed friends forty years

beyond their affair. They collaborated
to write her maxims, probably including
the line, There is only one Chanel.

Coco bought Pierre’s manuscripts on the sly,
paying publishers to print them
with enough left over for royalties.

Was she bisexual? Homophobic? Both?
Was Chanel a Nazi sympathizer? A spy?
Involved in war crimes? She was a graceless

writer and liked to tell lies.
When she sold a jersey knit jacket
with rabbit fur trim to a stuck-up debutante

willing to pay what competitors charged
for wool and mink, Coco knew she’d won
her life’s real battle. She made chic

the orphanage, the ragged scarves her mother used
against asthma before she died.
Coco liked to call her look “luxurious poverty.”

Pierre’s wife, a seamstress, was actual poverty.
Picasso did the illustrations
for Pierre’s Hempen Rope, a collector’s item.

Pierre burned many of his manuscripts,
where there may have been hints
as to what he knew about Coco.

He was also disgusted
by the rich, writing The gutters
are bordered with diamonds /The birds drink them.

Yet after World War II
Coco was the richest woman in the world.
Pierre was a Catholic who believed

in redemption. Before she died at the Ritz,
Pierre wrote her a poem that ends,
If condemned/If pardoned

Know you are loved.
A bit sentimental. Much better
is the sleeping musician

in “The Poets,” playing his violin
with his severed hands
to forget poverty of any kind.
Grape

George’s Beach Deli
is the only corner store
with lemon vitaminwater

I’d stop there
whenever I’d forgotten
my Nalgene at home
or my own water
was getting warm
I could get a Styrofoam cup
of ice for just 50 cents

there’s a fiercely
protected bathroom
for customers only
and a few slabs
of sandwich meat
under the counter

I’d been avoiding George’s
since the man outside
had an epileptic seizure
and I relinquished
my chilled bottle
to place on his forehead
as I called 911

the man was phoneless
homeless as were his friends
who unscrewed the cap
to give him a drink
but a retired nurse walking by
said don’t he could choke

the corners of his mouth
bubbled with foam
the color of crashing waves
as the operator asked
for a description
and I felt self-conscious
saying black I guessed
he was in his thirties
he wore a Hawaiian shirt
with a torn pocket

a graying woman
in a pink bikini
limped towards us
calling step back I know him

as she crouched
an aquatic and faded
tramp stamp
bloomed from her thong

the homeless men
seemed enamored
with her body
the sand on her back
glistening silver
as though flicked
from a Scratch-Off

she put down her plastic cup
of beer on the cement
then took a swig
of my vitaminwater
as though she was
the one in charge now

she bent to kiss the man
on his cheek
as a squat passerby
his body tightly coiled
asked what's going on
he wore a muscle shirt that read
I FLEXED AND THE SLEEVES
FELL OFF I explained
the EMTs were on the way

he said saw it all the time
in Iraq some guys
will do anything
to get out of fighting
we heard the siren
fucker just wants attention
he muttered and wandered away

the paramedics lifted
the man onto a stretcher
where are you taking him
the graying woman sniffled
she wanted to ride
in the ambulance

the nurse and I took this
as our cue to leave
to go back and join
the cyclists the walkers
the tourists in ridiculous
kangaroo jumping stilts
I went home thirsty
put out by the woman
who drank my water
and yet happy
my phone worked
and I was part of something
in the neighborhood
my contribution
small as it was

I stayed away
until this morning
when I really had to pee
inside one of the friends
of the epileptic man asked me
to buy him a slushie
he didn’t seem to remember me
so I squelched the urge
to ask about the man
on the ground
or his bikinied lady-friend
I heard myself say
don’t get involved
and I said aloud instead
what kind do you want

the man behind the counter
maybe it was George
said lady you don’t have to
and Sam I told you not to
hang around in here

Sam said orange please
and as I went to the cooler
for my lemon vitaminwater
George pulled the lever
and an artificial neon stream
swirled from the machine
and curled into a cup

I thought of Muriel Rukeyser’s
“Ballad of Orange and Grape”
her East Harlem
my Hollywood Florida
these forty years later
my tart drink Sam’s sweet

now I’m a customer Sam said
heading for the bathroom
with a supermarket bag
of clothes and maybe soap
George gave me a dirty look
and Sam said
thank you lady thank you very much
Exchange

I had this idea to write a poem
listing all the things I would buy you if I were rich—
chalets, fishing equipment, a gourmet kitchen…
I couldn’t think of much more than that

as you seem so self-contained. Maybe I would hire
a butler or a driver or some sort of gardener
who would concoct magnificent green spaces
for you to gaze upon from your window.

Then I went blank, which led me to Google
for the most extravagant presents ever given, and it seems
I finally came upon a way men have been historically
ripped off. Most of the big-time gifts were bestowed

upon women. Jewelry seems to be most popular—
Liz Taylor’s “La Peregrina Pearl” from Richard Burton.
Anna Kournikova’s pink diamond from Enrique Iglesias.
Beyonce’s 18-carat from J-Zee. Queen Victoria’s

“Mountain of Light” from Duleep Singh,
via The British East India Company.
As a wedding present, Evalyn Walsh McLean’s daddy
bought her a gem called “The Star of the East.”

Louis XIV gave his wife (and first cousin) The Queen
of Versailles a sable fur coat that dragged behind her
a whole mile long. Ravi Viswanathan acquired
a 170-year-old bottle of champagne found in a shipwreck

at the bottom of the Baltic Sea and popped it open
for his wife Julie on their tenth anniversary.
Russian oligarch Roman Abramovich bought
Alberto Giocometti’s “Femme de Venise” for his girlfriend.

Raj Kundra deeded his Bollywood honey Shilpa Shetty
an apartment in the tallest building not only in Dubia
but the world. Business tycoon Anil Ambani presented a yatch
to his wife Tina. And who wouldn’t want to be the recipient
of The Taj Mahal that Emperor Shah Jahan designed for his beloved Mumtaz? Or the medieval town of Obidos, Portugal, a gift from King Dinis to Queen Isabel? How the rich get their money is a whole other poem—

who suffers under them, whose talents go unrewarded in this world—the girl who sells her hair to buy her lover a fob for his watch, the boy who sells his watch to buy combs for her hair.

O. Henry’s couple is more representative of the way the world goes. Women get candy and flowers. Men are lucky to get a gift certificate or a tie. It’s not as though women are cheap—let’s face it, when it comes to buying power, men traditionally have been the ones with the moola. But since I have gone this far researching outlandish presents, I leave you with a few exceptions, generous over-the-top gifts from women—Victoria Beckham bought husband David a bottle of Clive Anderson No. 1, a rare cologne that takes six months to prepare and presented it to him in a tiny crystal football boot. Angelia Jolie gave Brad Pitt a waterfall in California so he could build his own version of a Frank Lloyd Wright house. And though Count Orlov gave Catherine the Great a diamond half the size of a hen’s egg, she was the one to initiate the gift cycle, building him a Marble Palace and purchasing him a country estate. I would buy you any of these things if I could—which I know you would enjoy more than this “Exchange.”

Catherine the Great said she didn’t really know much about gifts—I understand what she meant—she said it always felt as though she was giving too little or too much.
Herself to Thank

Later, she’ll say of the occasion,
I took a fall,

as though she’d stood browsing the available falls
displayed for her and the entire world’s population,

inveterate shoppers all,
crowding and jostling, elbowing each other aside,

till she turned and slipped between them,
latching on to a particular fall

she must have liked the look of
(as much as she could see,

so crumpled and tight they’re set,
as though to conceal any flaws or freakish features—
gaps or fissures, perhaps,
or several falls conjoined, inseparable).

But what kind did she grasp in her haste,
since it was time, past time to choose—
classic corporeal dry, from a bed or ladder?
Classic corporeal wet, down some well or waterfall?

Thermal, into chills and ague?
Moral or metaphorical, into what depths?

She knows only that her neighbors are stepping back
to grant her more breath, or themselves a better view,

since no one can anticipate
how much labor may be required;

she’ll have only herself to thank
for the whole of the long unfolding.
Advection

Certain mental states behave like weather, descending upon entire populations as though resting mid-flight.

The Imposter Syndrome, for example, everyone suddenly staggering in paroxysms of self-doubt—

except the actual imposter, whose soul just as suddenly expands, relaxes:

haven't these always been his people? Hasn't this always been his home?
Anonymous

When AA offered us
the use of their Big Blue Book,
we respectfully declined, though
never have our lives not been
either unmanageable
or about to become so
in subtle, indeterminate ways
we have no names for.
We know that twelve steps
would prove impossible,
beyond Herculean;
six, overwhelming;
in fact, even a single step
would surely undo us,
so we’ve been holding out
for a smaller book,
the size of a thumbnail,
only one word per page,
not blue but clear
all the way through,
the letters surging up
through layers of transparency
like phosphorescent fish
ready to mistake our fingers
for bread crumbs.
This visual buoyancy would,
we hope, induce in
us a micro-vertigo
constituting an anti-step,
a stagger, a stumble—
something akin to a fall,
though full-body contact
with the actual ground
might not, we hope,
be required.
Pavane for a Dead Princess (at Ikea)

Do not be surprised, that title has nothing to do with the composition.
I simply liked the sound of those words and I put them there, c'est tout.
–Maurice Ravel

Once upon a wintry time in Colorado, we drove our 4WD to Ikea
in a softly accumulating Scandinavian snow to buy Ikea
paraphernalia to assemble back home, if we ever got back home. Ikea!
we said lovingly, for Sweden, perhaps, for the sexy architectural designs Ikea
touts in its tautological showrooms that led us around until the word Ikea
rang like Satan’s surname and we knew ourselves defeated, senses stuffed Ikeally
with faux real wood and air and a New Year’s brunch made only in Ikea’s
kitchen (kök) by snowshoeshod chefs famous for their Ikean
spices (kryddor). We circled without hope or escape hatch, Ikea-
betrothed, valiant rats mazed-out on tiny meatballs, O, Ikea,
when, suddenly and without warning, we broke free from that fractal (Ikea)
into a day that had changed to a night, look!, frothy with fog, and without Ikea’s
dazzling disastrous dross. Stunned by freedom, frantic from Ikea,
we carried our booty away from that measuring(dip)stick, Ikea,
into parking structures, onto icy highways, promising never to darken Ikea’s
lustrosity again. But we did, the way humans wander into oblivion (see Ikea)
of textile and futon in the kingdom of Ikea, then peer back, unabashed.
Infidel

Tell the Queen you wish to play with me and I bet she’ll vet you. I can’t figure out the meaning of what some might call being in the dark (what, yin?) or whistling low because of pseudonyms or pets you’ve named yourself after. Now I nudge junipers as they gnarl and ignore me, aka you. The way we pretend to know the meaning of stuff. The painstaking pain of it: Murmur murmur. Murmur, murmur. Because someone’s phony name/nym found a way to delete delete.

What voodoo erases us? Whose pets are we? Now throw yourself beneath a train (of wedding dresses). See the temporary face I had as a girl? Burning up the place and can’t do a thing about it?

This is the undisclosed story of an infidel in the throes of her soul’s infidelity. How she wants all these stanzas to herself, doe-eyed and bra be gone, how she threw her pink spats and saddle shoes onto the toes of any old beautiful believer she could find. Or, what are the chances our ten toes will lie together on a bed of petunias someday, playing footsies?
Tit, with Cannabis

That’s my kind of chemo, someone says. (Not me, of course.) (But if it were me, so what?) I’m colder than a witch’s tit

in a brass bra on The Carousel of Happiness in Nederland, Colorado, and you’re here beside me, Ginsberg, giddy

with your rainbow of transcendental verses, your festive little marijuana dispensary. Tonight the witch’s tit

is a puckered blob. It’s missing whole centimeters of bright cold titness, wilting glacially in its old snow globe

or warming on the windowsill beside the irrational pie. Now it shimmers in its pretend and reconstructed self, abides

transcendentally in the gloaming. And you’re here beside me, Ginsberg, cancer and cannabis sprouting o’er the land.
If Not Joy

When it’s 55 degrees in Florida it’s time to take out the Uggs. The tile on the apartment floor is icy and my heat is basically like a hairdryer turned on low. But I digress—weather is such a first world/boring topic. What I wanted to tell you is that after all these years of thinking all life forms need phosphorus, scientists have found “life” made from arsenic instead. There’s such a microorganism in California’s Mono Lake, which looks like another planet—speaking of which, we have to rethink life in the cosmos, right? I had mono as a teenager and slept for a week straight but never dreamt of arsenic. What is life if not carbon? What is weather if not sun or rain? What is writing if not free association?

I love that you started in Florida with a digression, Denise, then spiraled until you landed in that arsenic-laced lake called Mono, saltier than the beloved sea we both dodge in December while tourists paddle around as if they have feathers and gulls’ feet and could never get frostbite in a million years. (Or seven days.) Twenty-thousand creationists met Sunday near Boulder, where I now sit wrapped in wool and writing to you from a real winter. Those zany literalists. Those disembodied Darwin debunkers. We don’t have to rethink anything, as it turns out, but today I drove straight into the Rockies to see if I’ve evolved past my reptilian fear of black ice and avalanches and angry God people. Just me, the snow, the mountains.

On my way to Ohio in just a few minutes! But before I go I have to tell you about the naturalist who led my recent adventure to the Galápagos. He was asked the question—has any one come on this trip with religious conviction that Darwin was wrong? Oh yes, he replied. When pressed he said he negotiated the question straight up. I get it, I’m from Ecuador, a Catholic country, but I’m a scientist and religion is a nice fairy tale. I was shocked that he didn’t try to make us feel any better
about death or divine purpose, but relieved too.
I hate those willy-nilly types that say
religion and science compliment each other
even though on some days I am that
willy-nilly myself. I love that you are
in the mountains. I am at sea level
about to rise in the air on Southwest.

I never had mono, but I sure tried hard
to get it my freshman year in college (Catholic),
and all those boys I kissed were fervent
evolutionists (revolutionists). (It was the sixties.)
Now Francis agrees with his former popes
that evolution and creation go hand in hand. Okay.
That God is not a magician. What?
Just look at those giant tortoises. That
photo of you smiling beside one proves
both Darwin and some crazy cat somewhere
possessed wild imaginations. (Magic wands.)
Not to mention the Blue-Footed Booby!
And the red-footed one! And the two of us
colliding over the Hudson, bursting with words,
so long ago we must be ancient by now.
How did it feel to inhabit the same air
as an ancient tortoise on a mythical island?
Thank you, Denise, for the word: archipelago.

I believe I caught mono from taking a sip
from a water bottle, not from a boy's lips.
I called in sick for the first time in my life, thinking
I had a cold or a hangover then fell asleep
and when I woke up it was a different month.
Did you hear about these new flu strains
resistant to antibiotics? Doctors are blaming
the people of India who give their infants
antibiotics because of the poor sanitation.
Well, doctors are really blaming the dirty
drinking water, the germs that live on
even after they have been boiled. It is hard
to think about being on life's spectrum,
our life and death no big deal in the long run.
That is what it felt like on the Galápagos,
the sea and wind blasting, the volcanoes
and lava rock reminders of destruction,
renewal. All the documentaries, the books,
couldn't prepare me for that.

How unfair to get sick from the cold lip
of a water bottle! Or from water itself—
my heart breaks even as life's
spectrum seems so bright to me now—
prismatic and rainbowy, all those
sparkling solstice lights warming December,
me and the grandson having our
lucky lives together. At Arches,
Utah, I photographed 300 million years
of salt and sandstone and shale,
a layer cake of geological history, proving
we will all be squished like bugs one day
and added to the bone pile. Sometimes
I’m okay with that. Today, tooth #21
was yanked from my mouth to Procol Harum.
Then I came home and ate grits with Velveeta,
a word I thought I’d never use in a poem,
but there you go: one more indisputable bone.

I'm so sorry to hear about your tooth
gone from your mouth. Our teeth last
even longer than our bones, but where
are pulled teeth scattered? And what
will a future explorer make of one lone tooth
without its partners? I once wore earrings
made from a boyfriend’s wisdom
teeth. He wrapped them in a wire loop
and everyone agreed it was gruesome
except him. And me. Death seemed far away
and ironic. We were in college in Boston,
but soon he transferred and I can’t remember
why. How can our hearts smash and then,
in the repairing, forget? I love grits.
I love Velveeta. I love baby food desserts
that come in tiny jars. I used to heat Gerber
Blueberry Buckle in a pan of water
for my nieces and, when they’d had enough,
I'd run my finger inside the glass—
it tasted like pie filling, only better.
I have no idea where those earrings are now.

And bones, I bet, come in brilliant colors
in other more precocious dimensions. And teeth
glow beneath black light in the back room
of Buddha’s and Goudha’s smoke shop.
Today is Christmas and our children
are comatose with delight. Last night
a young woman was raped at knife-point,
her bones rattling in her ears.
Follow your inner moonlight, said Ginsberg,
in touch at once with magic and ache.
A heart holds so much more than we think it can,
or more than we think it should. Now there’s
a baby meeting a snowman for the first time
and I long for the kind of justice
a woman needs whose spirit has been snuffed.
Thumpity thump thump, thumpity thump.
I send her to you surrounded by light.
My bones are blue with grief.

O, Maureen, sometimes I squelch my happiness—
the thought of rape just around the corner,
then the actual rape. People we love. I hate cop
shows—a man in blue determined
to find the young girl’s murderer.
(Why are the dead on TV so young and beautiful?) And at the end of an hour justice is served, except the girl is still dead. And every woman watching is reminded again how the world is ready to treat her. So I send a sword of light which is nothing like the light from a screen. I send light that makes a protective shield around that young woman’s magenta aura. Remember when you stopped my asthma attack with your warm palms? We were in a cab. I was choking, and you put your hands on my back and I stopped? I once saw pink rising like heat from your fingers. In the Amazon I saw a shrunken head, and as a guide explained the technique—the boiling, the taking the skin from the skull in one piece—I took flight with a red-bellied macaw.

To actually leave our bodies is no easy trick, yet we excel at it—like soldiers in combat. I saw no foreshadowing of violence in our poem, did you? Maybe dogma. Maybe teeth in a trash bin. It’s winter, so what? This rape occurred in the South where oaks hold their leaves and bow to each other across centuries. When your breath eased on that ride through Manhattan, I was so deep inside my body I could hear my blood and yours—the cab a hallowed space. Maybe evolution does violence to our molecules, reordering, replicating, coercing us to morph. Now I’ve got my opposable thumbs, I’m upright as a bass, I know how to wear underwear made of silk to protect my bones in snow. What to do with our outrageous capabilities? I’ve wanted to tell you how, here in Colorado, winter geese are everywhere, ribboning the entire sky and honking with purpose, if not joy.
My Life

Sometimes, being a monk was the lousiest thing one could imagine. All you had was a leaky backhoe, night terrors, cold gazpacho, monkey mind, nine cavities, & a cranky lama erasing your confidence. Oh, & When your ran out of gas, it’s simple, you were screwed. I kept committing myself to emptiness. My self was a scab I picked at, picked. Damn turpentine migraines, damn clusters of swearwords cursing old blueprints. There was hardly enough time to protect the roosters. There wasn’t enough time to corral grains of rest. All you had was your small life to concentrate on & breathe into. You were always busy screwing up bent lumber, customizing drywall, sanitizing sliced fingers pinking the wash basin. If ya ask me, damn lousy!
Occasionally, on mild and sunny afternoons, My Anger will take a book and a blanket and walk so far into our field I can’t see her anymore. Blue jays quarrel in the oaks while a rhythmic insect buzz surrounds the house. A cricket calls from the hot garage. I almost forget My Anger out there in all that green. When she comes back, flushed and quiet, she shakes out her blanket and asks me to check her for ticks. She is so polite, so small and pliable then, it is easy to do what she asks. The smell of lilacs rises up as I brush her hair. She might let me kiss her, lightly. She might let me pull the sheet up to her chin.
Ordinary Objects, Extraordinary Emotions

Dear Kathleen McGookey, Thank you for submitting your deceased mother’s eyeglasses, straw fishing hat she wore as a child, and vial of four wisdom teeth for the Grand Rapids Public Museum’s juried Day of the Dead exhibition “Ordinary Objects, Extraordinary Emotions.” We carefully examined your loved one’s belongings, but found they weren’t quite what we were looking for. We received 7,562 items, with eyeglasses, hearing aids, dentures, and pipes topping the list. In fact, we considered commissioning an installation composed entirely of these articles, but as most people wanted their property returned, logistics overwhelmed us. While the selection committee sympathizes with the universal plight of how to dispose of emotionally charged artifacts, we regret we cannot take them into our collection, even temporarily. However, we wanted you to know your materials made it to the final round of consideration and the committee read your cover letter with interest. When they learned you still have your mother’s blonde braids, cut off when she was twelve, her blue strapless prom dress, and perfect plaster reproductions of her feet, made when she was fitted for orthopedic shoes, the committee felt you did not submit your best objects. We are returning them in the postage-paid mailer you provided, and we wish you the best of luck placing them elsewhere.
Second Interview

What do you regret?
Clocks and mops. The sparkly birthday bracelet that began to unravel just after my friend fastened it on.

How long have you been in your current position?
In August, I put six ripe peaches in a wooden bowl. By morning, mold cocooned where they touched.

When do you plan to have children?
Even children know the gorilla, wolf, and lioness do not speak to one another after hours at the zoo.

What do you remember of childhood?
The sudden smell of Sweet William as I rode my bike home. The playground’s far corner, where we dug up glass beads. A bunny-shaped Easter sucker. A deer’s picked-clean jawbone under the pines.

Are you trustworthy?
Every afternoon, four wild turkeys—scaly, prehistoric, their shadows large as dogs—come to my feeder. And still we whisper and tiptoe so we don’t scare them away.

What is a better title for your life?
In Which Uncertainty Reigns, or, Never Be the Expert.

How do you catalog your nightmares?
Alphabetically. The murky bottles glow on my bookshelf. I like to know where they are.
Flashbacks

I can’t tell the difference
between what’s dripping from the gutter
and what’s dripping from the corner of my mouth
onto the pale green kitchen counter.

There’s a dead foot, or mouse,
or just a piece of provolone
that fell behind the stove.
And milk splattered on the wall
next to the fridge.

The sweat on my face is sour.
Murder is baking at 475 degrees.
Both racks in the oven are about to collapse.

My father must be getting home from work
any minute now. The phone on the wall next to the sink
rings. And, my mother’s ghost arrives to answer it.
Notes

When my father died, I carried a weight
the size and shape of an empty room.
If nothing could be personal, it would
be a place like this. It would have a lamp
on a desk with a blank sheet of paper
and the thought of what it wanted to say.
If snow fell outside the window there,
so too the pallor of page after page.
But we are here now, and doing something
irrevocable. A tall man made of no one
tells me that, how attention is a thing
we pay. When my father died, I listened.
In the wind-field I was what the wind
was not. Together we made the sound of wind.
Hair

Sleep is the wind I walk through with my hair
thrown into the clash and manic patterns
I love, outside at least, the here and there
of leaves that gives a city its change of seasons.
Morning slits a curtain with its knife,
and the warm blood of the wilderness
lies down in gardens that are wild enough.
When I was young, I was a beast like this.
I called it need: the buttons coming loose
until there were none, and hands unbuttoned
hands because it's what they knew. And who.
When I was young, I lay alone and listened.
I longed, in vain, to plow, to split the seam
between the reeds and the wind that combs them.
The Frogs

I never saw them. Only heard the music.
They were the little gods I knew were there.
I searched, being human, the park creek,
deliberate as stones I walked in the water.
Always that chirping somewhere up ahead.
But underfoot nothing. Silent as I was
and calm, the afflatus of my silence followed.
And the frogs and I were bound by this
stillness between us, this thing that held back
something, some heartbeat in the thicket.
And as I left late through the tall grass,
I kept parting the choir, as bodies must,
kept arriving the way a breath of silence
arrives, refreshed, to take the darkness in.
What did I think we were doing?

(Orin Izenberg)

Though I could not now explain
why I took what I took
from what she left when she left,
I had good cause then to say
what I said to what she said
when I asked what she meant
when she said what she said.
I confessed what I confessed
after I did what I did,
but kept secret what I keep secret
because I wanted what I wanted.
Good reason was not the real reason
why I left what I left
when I took what I took.
And after that?

(Victor LaValle)

After that? After what? After what had already begun began?
After that, of course.
After that, everything that happened had to happen.
After that, what was bound to take place took place.
After that, that first long conversation.
After that, after that first first kiss, each kiss a first kiss.
After that, the taken twinned the given.
After that, yes.
After that, rain settled in.
After that, on one side of old-growth cedars, moss.
After that, rot, rotting, rotten.
After that, less and less.
After that, gulls repeating the far horizon.

After that, awry, askew, amiss.
Text for A Bunny Opera in Three Acts

Act I (Happiness)
Bunny is hopping along, sun overhead, birds chirping, but she is lonely in the forest.
Wait! What does she see near the swamp?
There He is half lying in the sun, the crocodile of her dreams.
He is partly in water but it is HIM—
She would know Him anywhere.
So long—
So cool—
So silent—
This is crocodile energy.
Oh no, he goes into the water but OH yes! He reappears.
Her bunny heart soars. All is possible. Now He is emerging fully from the water. Is He taunting her? Does he notice Her?
Is his one eye open or closed?
He moves His tail ever so slightly. This means He does see her.
He snaps his tail. This must mean He does love her.
All the birds in the forest are happy. The sun glows. Love is everywhere.

Act II (Consternation)
The crocodile submerges
The sun goes behind a cloud.
What did she do wrong? Naturally she blames herself. This is very sad.
Should she wait? Pretend she doesn’t care?
Should she look carefree and nibble on a carrot?
Ignore him if he emerges?
She is getting on in years and so wants a bunny baby but would he?
He does look older, maybe by 100 years or so
But older crocs are very sweet she heard. No snapping at the slightest thing.
Is he a Republican? Oh no. He goes under because they are biracial?
Gender issues? Both creatures of the same forest?
(Denouement)
Bunny, overcome with self-doubt, jumps into water after Him,
She gasps, bubbles and sinks.
Bunny has a near death experience. Bunny angles lift her ashore.
She comes to her senses. She has a spiritual awakening
No crocodile is worth a bunny’s life.
(Restore birds and sun to the set)

Bunny is drying in the sun.
She looks about her at all there is to love.
The day is spread before her like a golden feast,
Carrots and green fern.
She can live alone with her new spiritual life.
Oh

The Croc is crawling up from water slowly,
Head first
Now his long manly scales, one by one, glisten in the sun
Oh how she wants to climb on and ride so high
How she wants to have Him flip is tail just once.
He's on the land now coming closer.
Now He stops.

He seems to fall asleep
Does he notice her? Should she go closer?
Bunny waves a bunch of daisies and tickles his long snout.
(She dances a Latin dance) (optional)
He opens one eye.
She has his attention.
He opens the other eye.
Now he opens his wide masculine mouth.WIDE.
Oh so soft and pink inside,
Like a barley patch at sunset.
She cannot help herself.
She climbs inside his sweet mouth and settles in. Finally safe.
Let the other bunnies talk. She can make her own decisions

He snaps his jaws violently.
Boom! Closed!
The Bunny has her Crocodile.
At Last.

THE END.