

15th Juried Reading

THE Poetry Center
of CHICAGO

Juried Reading: Book 15

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Juried Reading: Book 15

The Poetry Center of Chicago
Judged by Brenda Hillman

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A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

With thanks to all the talented poets who entered the Poetry Center of Chicago's 15th Annual Juried Reading competition, and to Brenda Hillman who served as the competition's final judge.

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for Mark Perlberg

STEPHANIE ANDERSON

As Regards to the Wind

We noticed a thin golden line of light

Two short whistles told Clear the way
So the engineer hurried me to the door

It was posed ready to sweep
This fire turned the water

One long whistle told A scene of feverish expanse
The thin golden line had become much wider

The fireman forking straw into the fire-box
They started a second strip of breaking

A series of short whistles told The heavy rubber belt might fly
There was such a need for haste

For miles and miles to the horizon
The men tied the lines around their forearms

One short whistle told Smell of body odor
And stale tobacco smoke

Hauling them out to fire guard on the stone boat
The very worst part of it all was the flies

Three long whistles told Other children were watching their fires
Light from the burning grass waiting to spell them off

The men slept in a caboose
Under the hypnotism of the blaze

This Little Tepee of Sheaves

The first trails that I allowed
 To roam free unfortunately
 They began to wander frost
 Or draught or hail or rust
Living near a muddy grade

 It evoked the same kind
 Of nervous tension in a man
At will around the sloughs
 Many windshields broken
 By flying stones baby colts

He found the Surveyor
 Marker in the corner
 Of the Quarter-Section
 Stooking and picking stones
He cleans his feet best he can

 Due to the fences
 It was time to start sharpening
Willow pickets he had cut
 A large needle wrapped
 In the Moose Mountains

A great hue brought to
 Gravel the roads, the plow
 Disc, harrow, seed-drill, rake
 A man called a stooker
Followed the binder

About seven implements
A great hue and cry
For the driver of the car
To oil all movable parts
Lastly came the knotter

During the homesteading
These grades often benefited
Farmers brought to gravel
Years were necessary
The binder-twine around

Manfully 1816

For land for the
Dilatory concurred dispatch where

Party dispossessions
The is commencing

Origin enraged
Odium clamouring

Re-location retort in
Inadequate corners

Province provincial make
Successor since

Deeded refused renew
To populous whole

Horde land board
Sixth induced latter's

Countenanced new recurrence
Had in its long foundation

Exerted open excessively
Concessions bound gross

Consequent continual
Left to lots

Three Sanatoriums

As we called them were opened in Saskatchewan
I met Miss Matheson at the railway station

There were the heart tracks
But we still gathered the eggs
To the house in our aprons
Neat little squares black

Yellow, white, brown, etc to bring up the milk cows
They were some side effects contented and quiet

Such as deafness on a couch
That Father had built little treatment
Known so I opened the gate
Water drops running off

Their thick lips the Tortoise Shell or Calico
Rushed through the water trough a soft-ball

In cold water this visit
Quiet and gentle
Go to sleep girls
Thought the only cure

This Determined Language

A fine opening
To eastward
Hale and sound

Of your correspondent
Shut up with sand
Growing so bad

When the wind
Growing consequence
The suspicion arises

A matter of great moment
An uninhabited
This little Empire

Feel the inward gratification
Fictitious settlers
Genius to furnish

His fief was as yet only
At points the trail
Containing the charge

It is said
People who did
That *I do* of being founder

STEPHANIE ANDERSON

Stephanie Anderson is the author of four chapbooks: *In the Particular Particular* (New Michigan Press), *The Choral Mimeographs* (Dancing Girl Press), *A Spot A Scheme* (forthcoming, Cinematheque Press), and *The Nightyard* (forthcoming, Noemi Press). Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *dear camera*, *H_ngm_n*, *Strange Machine*, and *Tight*. She lives in Chicago.

PATRICK CULLITON

This Cabinet for Jane

I'll keep summer away from you.
A dead moth & busted smoke
detector swim in a moonlit sill.
We've never been stuck inside of Mobile
but we sleep sandily & warm,
a couple of spent bottle rockets.
I'm always writing to you
of forests & meadows & places
where the earth breathes cool.
I'm tired of dreaming like an elf
startled up sweaty by sniffing caribou.

I want nothing for my birthday.
I have a brother & he's actual.
How old will you be when you leave this time?
I bought you a perforated dictionary.
Please, with pink fingers, have fun.
When the pigeon coos I forget
she's not cooing at me & this goes all day.
I'm not lonely—I just don't have anyone
to talk to & so name & befriend all
my urges. I, steel barge eventually, get by.
I pick you & pick you a nosegay.

Anything your dress drags is blessed in this
light. When a second voice enters the song
I have trouble handling all that rise.
My favorite picture is watching you
upset the quiet water. Cement skeletons
blow on flugelhorns up & down the slight
staircase. Pose there awhile like this:
actually. It isn't wrong for death to play
songs. Be potato to leek & sing along.
I won't snap until the sun butters your face.
The shape I'm in is a mostly rhombus.

Swathe the baby in bubble wrap,
it's actual. Shipping to the granite
palace costs a shitload. Plant trees instead,
you said, once, to a stranger. A forest isn't
a family, it's a gang without rivals.
Most enemies were first great chums, so
let's be sea & outcrop & picturesquely wrap.
You know how sometimes a lion lets
an antelope drink for five extra seconds.
You know how some albums have hidden tracks.
You know how asparagus at inedible snaps.

Kneeling, kneeling in your garden
of state flowers. The earth, impressed,
one-ups. Remember, heads hung,
how the magnolias shrank & shrank
and then went inside forever? I do.
A bed, in its geometry & turning
over, is the most actual of gardens.
I ask the map and here's what it tells me.
Even bricks, after spells, move. Sand
makes its way into a suitcase & stays
for states & states. I paint the pain on cardinals.

I pick you classic rocks from the sea
& you stick them in the roofs of my shoes.
You are eleven times harder than the refrigerator
& singing while you drive, in many circles,
is considered hazard, but the fact that we become
circles isn't. How you roll in bed, a fresh sausage.
I'm going to end this line with sea
because the only way to address you is with rules.
Appetite for Destruction, track eight, volume
eight, after eight domestics & I sway like Lazarus.

Your turquoise dress pops like lemons
when you dance the messy messy. Please
put one hundred percent of your tongue back
in your moth. I mean. A domino run like this
is nothing to glint at. Wildly & timidly
walk into a bar. When the sun's up & acting
all proud & merry, don't call it lemon
balls. Tourist me. Just play under it
& think of everyone in the world but. The
book of leather says it's better beyond the fences.
Still, my favorite chapter is the one you're hemmed in.

Run until your breath becomes ribbons
& sand pools in your canals. Mostly
the tide doesn't take out voices & some shells.
Marco Polo is not a duet because everyone is
a cheater with eyes. Among the pole beans
& chimneys we whispered & held
still until dusk undid the ribbons
on our throats. Dislike has its versions.
Please, with pink tongue, stop unlearning
me right in front of me. Leave a little.
Tap one ear until my name pours from its twin.

I turned into a radio the night
the bubblegum cautionaries painted you
chemicals. Now I smell others
in my fuzzy stations. Listen here.
Fire bruises more than the earth & nostrils
& this forms exhaust. Switch back squeals
the languid one & I math all night
in your lazy chair ways to add actual
to you. Nothing comes on so I spread
my electric hair out to fracas in the waves.
If the sky inhales clouds my scalp tightens.

I'm an exhausted cowboy this Wednesday.
Blurry beans & a freefall feeling up
from the grass that could spread over everything
but doesn't, which makes it grass & not Steve
or Annie. The sun, criminal, ducks behind
a slobby cloud. I aim & shoot wide.
The dog sleeps. It sounds like Ash Wednesday
in my mouth when I ask why
I want to shoot you sometimes like the sun.
Mostly I just want to hold you inside
my new eye as it repeats the required prayers.

If our sex has a thesis it's earlier
feeding hogs & sunset in the puddles.
When the heat ban lifts from our skin
& the radio begins to speak for us,
say ewe, say meat, say craw daddy
of them all. Boners to morning
for leaving, for making us early
for our periods. We wear the look of two
confuseds & it ain't the painter to blame.
I'm sore, J, & bifurcated rusty as skies—
One jagged as mouths, one crabmeat & pearls.

My gut, a hill among hills, is why I list rolling
among my qualifications. For every ocean,
there's a twin. It's just easier to teach seven
to keep kids from crumbling before they're ripe.
I have two hundred pounds & some hair &
can feta over you for hours. Say when
& call me Mama Cass when you roll
two balloons up your shirt, cracking me in fourteen.
The best fruits require climbing into bed
naked & sick with the rum staggers, smeared
by the greatest assignment of salt burns ever told.

This sack of apricots is filled with ants,
which is fine since your shoulders, red-
pocked & tender like any other past,
are the actual picnic. The phrase "essential
features" scares me in Jesus ways.
What I'm trying to say is trying to say
something else across this dark, antsy
hillside covered in baskets. Skip & whistle
along, lifting the little wicker lips. Look in
& look up at the trees so forgiven, arms raised.
One is bound not to be infested in this lull palace.

Patrick Culliton lives in Chicago. His poems have appeared, or will soon, in *Coconut*, *Conduit*, *The Hat*, *The Journal*, *jubilat*, *RealPoetik*, *Rabbit Light Movies*, *Third Coast*, and elsewhere. He is the recipient of a 2009 Individual Artists Fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council. He teaches at the University of Illinois-Chicago and has a chapbook forthcoming from Octopus Books in Spring 2010.

Finding My Mother's Dildo, I Contemplate My Inheritance

I.
Unlimp or not
pimped or not
packaged, unpackaged,
It's the lips I spot first
the pucker cautious amongst
lace slips, bra silk,
musk-worn stockings.

It's pink and one of many,
like kittens in a litter.
Its rubber resiliency
weighs like the wallet
my mother placed
in my hand
at the store:
*Don't you see
anything you want?*

But her last restless whimper
I let scab to ash
in a Virginia oven.

II.
A silver heel
dances on a mirror.
Hers was mine as
much as mine was hers.

Dildo. I sound the word
as if it were
a Greek Goddess.

Slit one cunt,
slit two.

Troops graze my skirt.

III.
The statute of limitations
excuses a motherless house.

Like my grandmother said,
buttering white toast,
*make your bed in case
the doctor comes.*

My mother bathed in lotion.
She had time to prep me.

A rose in a glass box
is always
a rose in glass.

In a nutshell.

IV:
So many mothers:
Some teach you to run

others
panty hose control.

Mine taught me pleasure and pain.

Tell me,
what else is there?

My Mother's Kitchen

Civil china, one gravy boat.
 No cat's eye marble
 lost under dishwasher.
 One magnet: girl with sombrero.
 District Firm memo,
 outdated.

No high fives.
 No Petri dish
 for science experiment.

One post-it note in Spanish,
 for the maid.

Bridge scores, checked.
 No milk jug plant pot.
 No mud.

No longer those plastic plates
 with Autumn leaves,
 so 70s.

They breathe dishwater west.
 And the windmills blown east.
 The cat handed south
 (one flew over the fence).
 The fondue pot spun gold.

Your blue-willow canisters in a row
 I gave to a drunken neighbor.
 Her twelve-year-old biked over
 to our yard sale

without money,
 his skateboard perched
 on his handlebars like a parrot.
 Normally he'd wave by
 as if destined for the high life,
 his litany of jives a D.J.'s disguise.

He selected items as if picking strawberries.
 Sugar, flour, salt, tea.
 He said his mother liked to cook,
 why didn't I?

Two Breasts

They tell me to expect breast loss.
Ever wig shop?

*I'll drive it into remission
like I did my first boyfriend
on a moped*

meds make her delirious
upchuck Jell-o

The husband responds:
“We drained the left lung
siphoned out three liters of fluid—
I may have to install a faucet!”

*If you wear my wig
you'll look like me*

My mother writes:
*What I really want is a pool table—
It'll fit in the living room, I measured!*

I will die of this
she tells me

My mother is forty-seven.
She morphs into a spider
on the hospital bed

Death accelerates language.
Wig itch.
Mommy-Long-Legs ago

*I sequester all semester
reading Sartre, serve a slice
of cheesecake to Kurt Vonnegut
and hope it's not too big
and not too small*

My knees are drunken penance

The breast does not fall
like an apple from the tree

Silky sponge of her prosthesis
props like a velvet weight
on my palm

rosewater over nipples

You've made your bed, now lie in it

A box full of silk scarves, pansies,
a little blue book on etiquette...

The thing about abuse is that
it renders pain articulate

I wear her bras to filigree
nylon ripped in places

Oh malignancy

I open books like boys
Rifts promenade her skull
a seashell I long to massage

Taxol comes from the bark of the yew,
home of the northern spotted owl

*What should I do with
all her beautiful clothes?*

You know how the cat laps its milk,
the dog its ice cube

so sexy in its prime

After Plenty

Last night my hair fell out
 (pink, fisted chunks my lover
 mouthed like cotton candy)

while the cat's rump singed
 beneath a sunlamp.
 She paraded a charcoal patch
 up and down the hallway
 streaming ash like snail scum.
 The house stunk.

At the Catholic College luncheon
 women ate first,
 then prayed of meat and men.
 Little by little saints
 deconstructed on my plate:
 bones, carrots, relics.
 White lasagna,
 a sneeze of purgatory.
 I could only think
 how I had nothing important to say.

*I'd rather hide a poet in my basement.
 Neruda was hidden by friends in Valparaiso
 and escaped via horseback across the Andes into Argentina.*

A metaphor for history:
 gilded plates
 and breezeless crossings on coffin beds—

salt-stung passengers, choleric.
 The men with chapped balls
 and nothing to do but snack
 on wax,
 the women engorged, pregnant again,
 wooden ladle splintering in hand.

*Oh to be safe, to wake
 in this body of shells.*

*Always, somewhere
 blue mussels drip-clutch
 the cragged rocks, going
 under, rising again,
 resurfacing
 in skull-footed meditation.
 Until the yank.*

When I hear the slurp suck,
 when I hear the old man stutter
 periwinkles and mussels into his metal pail
 (horse hooves in wet diamond sand)...

I thank peat bogs their long memory

Sic transit gloria mundi

and then the pulpless rush of grit

after plenty.

ELLEN ELDER

Ellen Elder has degrees from The University of Chicago, Miami University, where she received The Academy of American Poet's Prize, and The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, where she received her PhD in English. She spent her summers growing up in Ireland. Her fiction was nominated for the 2006 Best New American Voices and her poetry can be found online at *Exquisite Corpse* and *DMQ Review* and is forthcoming in *The Cento: A Collection of Collage Poems* (Red Hen Press). She is at work on a poetry collection about her mother.

RICHARD FOX

Once Lost Now Found

1 June 2008: stranded in Albany, NY

A set of dentures some
monkey business in an
overheated attic
 a handle-bar moustache:
God love the lost items
of the airport God love
the hummingbird moth who
says— with imposter's grace—
 here when she means there: not
lost but found—bird, within

The Shower Scene From Psycho (Alternate Take)

Between the softer
prods of water
fit the subtle
moans of the rut

Although no one plotted
such water-borne
seduction as this
they both did

but had sworn
they hadn't They are
care-worn creatures
of habit

donning socks & shoes
white white slip
& boxer shorts—none
of which could foretell

the day's wrong-done
joy convulsed
as they phone in
takes twenty &

twenty-one
which are more
or less the same
as certain ones

they ran
before She will thrust
aside the curtain

& step into the motel
shower alone He says
you do what you can

She says you do
what you must—
it's the stronger impulse

First published in Apparatus Magazine

The Boys' Mass: Isobella's Dream

You want things to arrive
in constant differing—
nothing repeating

Does the scent of roses
improve your dreaming

You see a man talking to someone
confidentially behind his hand—
you didn't think anyone
still did that

There is something democratic
about fire—
you can turn your back on it
to warm to it
or to run from it

Does the scent of roses—
a dizzying of your head—
improve your dreams

Isobella-colored:
the color of her panties—
the pair she didn't change once
in four years—
the shade of contused or
tattooed skin

Every Sunday
you went to early Mass
with your father:
The Boys' Mass

Sunday afternoon—
everything's normal—
everything natural

Tree of Heaven
Tree of Heaven—
where does
that sinking feeling
come from

You started life happier
but ended it sadder

Human evolution is over
How long is *forty* winks

You were formed from
the constantly-blending dust
of the universe

After God formed
 Queen Isobella
 he wiped his hands on her
 He wanted to press
 the tattoo-blued cross
 on her instep;
 he ran his thumb
 across it remembering
 the hideous squeal of
 stylus slicing across LP;
 the hideous squeal
 of thumb on skin

Now: in your room at the Chelsea
 Hotel you tack your paintings
 to the wall

This isn't how you draw
 a bird & a chair:
 this is how you draw a bird
 & a chair

Every plate here is dimpled
 to serve or to saucer—
 How can the universe
 smell like hot metal
 & fried steak

You answer autumnally—
 but only partly:

the universe is shaped like a chair

Now: you are a
 high-diving horse—
 a juniper cedar—
 milkweed & ragweed
 & banks & banks
 of daisies

Mouths of Lilies Come After Root

come after stem: proof that the world

is round falls pretty out of them
To what do the leaves owe their days

grammared by breeze tagged to treetops
where gnat-flags stammer How'd the deer

drown By getting down into spring
flood silted down to raise both bed

of river & of codger

Mountain range—machine & wound—be
deep & bloody ravine be leap

be unbound be long-division
of salt lick tip of deer tongue at

river's rung thoughtless as pocket
change

Receive receive receive

Love Comes Late Nothing Comes Easily

Love comes late Nothing comes easily

Is it work to be as portable
as a moon Do you call the candle
Votive that burns low & scorches the
inner workings of your heart The farm

grows up in the field & the field grows
lonely for the woods & the woods grow
all around the garden & all these
things are never unoccupied &
only ever emptied by sin—un-
cupped like palms or winded like mouths or
souls untanked of grace

Have you ever wondered if it is
a mistake to fix the stars the way
the wind is fixed by a weathervane

You say *Call me Ishmael, then forget
it & call me something else*

For Ruth in Kansas

You are nothing but remembered now—
the unhinged persistence of your smile—

the other side of a hill in the
unabridged distance of familiar

statute mile felt in every step of
walk felt in the late corn with crow &

rosaries of husks that damp the sounded
field where the workers work where the yield

is *was* & you: still pointing out the
next good look: you still leafing—a new

book of buds

Richard Fox has contributed work to many literary journals. In 2000, he was the recipient of a full fellowship for poetry from the Illinois Arts Council. *Swagger & Remorse*, his first book of poetry, was published in December, 2007. He holds a BFA in Photography from Tyler School of Art, Philadelphia, and lives in Chicago.

Pulá, Putí, Asul [Red, White, and Blue]

Innibig ko ang ngalan ni Washington
I love the name of Washington
from *The Baldwin Primer*, c. 1900, brought by
American schoolteachers to the Philippines

Innibig ko
Loving the flag, is the first thing,
learning the names of men to love comes next.

Pulá
First had come Christ, son of a Virgin,
his bloody palms, his sacrifice for you.

Putí
A grainy black and white drawing
of a white wig, white collar, white man.

Asul
His deep blue flannel, his American blue eyes,
the soldier that saves you.

Juramentado

Bind the body in bondage to God, the blood flow
slowed steals the quick out of the bullet's rip,

makes you unstoppable for that flight
of blade that smites the godless bodies.

A streak of dominos falling from your
welded touch, a stroke of devoted luck.

The moving holy body perforated by a useless
gun guides guerilla warfare: the jungle-buried bodies,

prone, your target, and your flash attack bates
the ineffective smack of bullet. Bodies lie.

Arms are in evolution, now created to cap
this newfound spectacle: a man who dies for love

of the afterlife, no country here his own.
Stories say that women passed, bound their breasts

and spun through town, whirling dervishes
wielding the *kris*. A fearless edge that gave birth

to the Colt .45, engineered to stop the *juramentado*.
The latest weapon in the battle of gods.

Happy Life Blues

*The Happy Life Blues dance hall was used by the Japanese
as an internment camp for civilians on the island of Mindanao
during World War II*

A jungle dance hall harbors knife fights,
liquored scraps in the bushes, bears

the moniker “Bucket of Blood” like the old saloons.
Rests quiet in the days, awaiting revelry.

What arrives instead are captive refugees,
three hundred bodies sleeping, spending

their waking lives on the dance floor. The guards
the chaperones of even their bodily control.

No one wants to dig the latrines,
to shovel rows of holes in the heat,

to build shanties out of *nipa* and bamboo
to contain what is left of womens’ modesty.

No one wants to keep one hole ahead
of the waste that fills days, months, a year.

One man’s wife has not been seen. One man’s sons
escaped on a freighter, are fed, have a mother, real beds.

One man dreams of a girl he meant to propose to,
tries to be grateful to have nothing to lose.

Together, the men set to the assigned task—
savor the sanity of industry.

Each devotes their body daily to digging.
To the preservation of modesty, the creation of waste.

Urban Genesis

Clay makes muddy limbs
and hollows.
A sheltered stand of sinking
roots, the river's pleased
act of vanishing—
this magician's tricks
leave nothing but
a stick where a willow
or an oak stood, where
the land was once dry
and even, yielding
grass and fixing rocks
as if they were permanent history
of this city.
Burnt wings and split bones
aren't the only archeology
that floats.
Plastic duck, the flute that's rusted,
keys which can't open
anything anymore.
In the deep there are houses

where even the drawers
are filled with mud.
No excavation will release
snapshots: a poodle
in the yard, a toddler's
gait, someone's first love,
all the lost faces
grinning
through the muck and dark.

Eros is Headed Towards Us

Golden or lead. Love or indifference.
Although Eros has been close, it's no threat
to hit us. Landing on Eros is no cakewalk.
Scientists are delighted by Eros.
Sappho says he's sweetbitter.
Eros is solid and primitive, far
from being smooth. Dominated by dust-
covered impact craters, scattered rocks.
The chapters of Eros are short.
Eros seizes and shakes from execution
of a controlled descent to its surface.
If you stood on Eros, you'd make a nice footprint.
If love should love, love would be an asteroid.
Asteroids are more subtle than we imagined.

Rebecca Morgan Frank's poetry has appeared in the *Georgia Review*, *Guernica*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Best New Poets 2008*, and elsewhere, and she recently received an AWP Intro Journal Award and a residency fellowship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. She received her MFA from Emerson College and is currently pursuing her PhD as an Elliston Fellow at the University of Cincinnati. She also teaches writing for Massachusetts College of Art's low-residency MFA Program at the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown and serves as editor-in-chief of the online literary journal *Memorious.org*.

Living alone

Deerhoof cleaved from the joint, still-
blind kitten: the things I brought
to show and tell. My science project

was an incubator, all antique wood
and glass, filled with brown hen-warm
eggs, one cracked each day

to see what was inside. I took pictures.
I let two live, for the other kids
to touch, and when they'd made it through the day

I drowned them in the stream
at the edge of the playground.
Last week I found

an envelope at the flea market
holding a photograph, of baby in striped bonnet,
and a plastic vial with three baby teeth.

No date but an address, West Division.
The baby's things are sorted now, sold
to strangers like me, who will make them

curiosities, impress friends and new lovers
the way a man once impressed me with a frame
cut from a film-reel: young, pretty

Martin Sheen steps out of the Mercury.
I was a grown woman, living alone
in a house with a clawfoot tub and a porch

hidden by white hydrangeas
so overgrown they rapped at the window.
I came home one day to find them

cut off at the root, and saw
how easy it was
to see right through the house, all the way to the back door.

Sgt. Robert Roy Davis

1948-1970

1. Visitation

everyone yes everyone loved him
loved his long black lashes loved his
slick cap of black hair his long legs bouncing
a soccer ball first soccer ball we ever saw
brought it back from overseas his last time on leave

then we had an orchard
spread of Goldens Delicious
picked a box for Bobby
hungry, careless
couldn't wait for him to get home

2. Observance

His dimpled chin, how it shone when he grinned

This blessed silver met his lips and he licked it clean

Look. How his legs came all the way down, down to his very feet

I can't get there from here—

not the way I tried to blur and fade
into the smell of grass and the pulpy organic
smell under the grass, the heat of a bath
or the mutter of my otherwise idle hands
working the stitch of this minute
to that. Once, I thought

I got there in a damp and dumpy little park,
listening for what? First things first:
the scrabble of my own squirming
separateness, the pebble-plink of dread,
an eternity spent with myself, or
worse—oh god—with God.

The park was a park, with nothing to recommend it
but the high-tops hung on the telephone line.
Waiting, I could only guess, for something loud
enough to happen, to shake the wire,
inch them down
to the ground below.

Nature Poem

Well, the woodpecker made it through the wall. A skunk successfully impersonated the neighbors' cat, the raccoons got in and ate all the tuna casserole. The deer spend all their time in the bathtub. Nobody will paint or mop. They lie around watching tv and shotgunning beers. The only chore they'll do is feed the goldfish. That fat fuck. He smokes, and leaves the butts to float in his bowl. I'd tell him that that's where I draw the line, but it's the only thing that makes him happy.

Please Release Me

1. *My husband gave me a black eye*

my grandmother
tells the ladies.
Yanking their

electric blanket
out from its hospital
corners, he punched her

in the face. They
should never let
their daughters

make the bed.
When she tells me,
I'm surprised

Papa has been able
to keep it to *Jesus*
Christ and *Goddammit*

all their many years
together. He's never
struck her once,

far as I know.

2. *Ooh, you so pretty and so sweet*

and if any man say otherwise
you tell him
he a damn liar

3. *I was always a real little thing*

my grandmother reminds
me. There is a photograph

and I wish it were in color
so I could see her

with brown hair and red
lips, the way she must have looked

when Papa, not too tall
himself, asked her to dance

at the Surf Ballroom ten years
before it became the most romantic

place in Iowa. They still love
to dance. Their song: Please

release me, let me go.
For I don't love you anymore.

To waste our lives
would be a sin.

Love Poem

The snake, the frog, the toad,
the crab, the violets
not yet under the snow, the snow-
drops with their soft hearts waiting,
waiting, the drop
of water from the broken faucet
waiting, waiting, glass, a glass
house, the bird in
the house, the bird in
the hand, the last
question you asked,
what do I fear? This.
And losing this.

Megan Levad grew up across the field from her grandparents' century farm. She studied at The University of Iowa and the University of Michigan, where she received the Zell Fellowship and the Roethke Prize. Her work is forthcoming in *Spinning Jenny*. She wrote the lyrics for composer Tucker Fuller's song cycle *Infidel*, and is currently collaborating with him on an opera.

Another Farewell Song

Oh music, you can give it and take it.

We thought you'd make us unlike fences,
would give us bodies to swim dirty seas or lives like the old trees,
give us wars and banners for the wars, loves like war, banners against love,
a love against wars—
give us oars to paddle and paddle, hit land and waddle, stamp
right up to the kiss, the storm, the tower and ring the bell.

Again, again—

We listened and took off terrycloth.
We didn't know how to moan. We listened. We didn't know
what was better than the moans.

We couldn't stop yelping, *I'm not ready for this!*

Whispering, *so this so this so this is what it's like.*

We would be firm and shiny after the song.

Better said, we'd be fit astronauts ready for moon sex.
Oh that's what we should've said, should have been.
Of course, we can't remember which song that was.

Once during the music we were low,
we were ugly-kid low, nobody's eyes would've given us birth. Toads. Heads like
shovels.
But we couldn't turn it off— would we feel worse, were we down before the
songs?
And so we kept listening. We hoped to leap.

We were gonna say

I'm taking the last cookie, the kids, the hammer.

I'll take it with hot sauce! I'll take on the whale.

I'm quitting this toilet and moving on to become a star.

—all of it all of it just after the song.

The turntable was turning

and the best thing we could think of was to turn it backwards.

Hit me Jack, I'm the road.

You'd say, *Let go. There must be a letting go.*

There is no go to let.

We've heard the song about souls. We've heard the song about paper souls.

We listened, folded, folded and folded but we just made crumpled trash.

We've heard the one about truck driving and making it. We've heard

one sung with wit, one with rage and wit.

We can't do anything but list.

We listen and listen until they're just songs again.

The old trees are just standing luck.

Nobody wants to think of the ways songs never end?

Even if there's no reason,

no need to play music during dinner with meat,

we still bite. Sometimes down on our blind, fixed tongues.

We still cut and section our lives with refrains.

We can't have a gala without them. We can't put the babies to sleep.

Play the one about the lonely who get the courage to admit their loneliness

or the one about the lonely who one day die lonely.

One more time let's hear of the roses that ruin the raindrops.

Babies, go back to bed.

And while there may not actually be any sad gals

play their tune anyway.

Yes the gals will keep waiting for their love to lose its lyrics—

but the gals always find their way home.

We Like Steve and Louise's Love

Abby's attempts at dying
 are nothing like Loretta's.
 Abby likes a push, open-ended notes,
 and knowing we know she's tried before, but tells us
 she can never decide
 on a final face to think of while she dies.
 Loretta
 only chooses pills
 with tea, pills with tea.
 We have all these stupid choices,
 but Steve and Louise don't need to choose.
 They have traded fortunes, exchanged reasons to live,
 sworn oaths to never leave
 without first dying or chaining the dog outside,
 and found each other.
 Steve has a tattoo which says *Angie*
 so Louise would love him more.
 Louise imagines a child too angel-cheeked
 for Steve (or, if needed, for her) to leave.
 One of them burns hard for saying
love 7,459 times in the period of a marriage or maybe it was a meal.
 Their love is like not choosing to die of a reason,
 Their love is like saying *That's heavy* without laughing (please, someone giggle).
 Although their love is no secret, we'd say it's like
 whispering to a hush-hush lover *They're all going to hate us*,
 or like loving someone
 yet still wanting to. Like,
 like, like—

Please, someone, what is the time? What happened to Loretta?

Please, someone,
 throw rocks at us or something. Stop us.
 There's something better
 we should be doing (Oh, but they throw the good parties).
 Isn't there someone's life we could be saving (Once an underwear party!)?

Please,
 close our blinds on Louise and Steve's picnics
 and the way they make us want hurt in love and not
 whatever love would be without fear of loss, or at least
 without fear of saying the same thing over and over.

Yes, watching them may make us want to uncover
 a tattoo of our name on someone's young but aging ass
 (oh how we heart time's winged chariot),
 but somebody, somebody,
 like your whimpering real dog more than a love-saving baby,
 like the taste of your cake heart,
 like the empty space behind your swing, start pumping.
 Don't just like the lack of choice
 in who you could really love, like all the choices
 you could make to avoid love in hopes of finding love.
 Find their romance wine, steal it, yes and toast
 to what you still haven't found,
 show yourself, shake it on the corner.

We want to look out our windows again.

Joy

I wish it wasn't dancing
 that gave me joy—
 the way the first step needs a sister step,
 one we'd desert for a man who says Gotcha!
 Let's make him ugly, let's twist our ankles.

Oh dumb legs, silly pregnant music,
 stupid empty space between dancing bodies that longs not to be space.
 Dancing is one way to have joy.
 Someone says it is the best, it is the only joy, as he dips me
 and we continue to dance.
 No one is dipped seriously by her dance partner.
 Can't there be something different about this joy, my joy?
 Throw in a shotgun with this rhythm, some fishy water, a plate of cheese.
 Can't there be something besides dancing,
 or maybe can't there be something besides joy?
 Oh, can't there be something besides joy?

Someone find the someone who said dancing is the best form of joy,
 he's moved to a new partner, and tell him he's wrong.
 Someone find someone who wants to find anyone
 and tell them no one wants to be found.

This whole time someone's been singing
 a song about lovemaking,
 and I should listen, sure, because it's something to do besides dance.
 But why does a person need something to do?
 The making is joy, no, the making is love.
 And all around we're bound to be punished
 like someone dancing who doesn't want to touch ground.

La di, la di, la di do. Sing to me like you could never give me joy.

And if everything is aspiring to be music—
 the making and the dancing and the joying,
 if they all are dying to be music,
 why does music just get to be music?

Music,
 I can beat you too.
 There has to be something even better than you.
 I'm sorry but I'm gonna have to sit down,
 no, I'm gonna leave, drive, drive so the wind in my
 broken window that won't roll up is louder than any song on lovemaking.
 I'll keep one hand out the window
 and one on a shotgun that I'd never own,
 yes, no hands steering.
 Perhaps some day I won't figure out what it is
 about my open hand that makes me smile.

Poem in the Shape of a Trumpet

In high school band, back in, well, I won't mention dates because it'll help this seem like a non-memory memory because ugh, memory, I can't really do much with it, so back in or back then I used to hold my trumpet up, sitting next to you while you held yours up but you played yours and I didn't at first because I had been playing for awhile for a number of years and the music had gotten harder, but I couldn't tell the teacher because he put me in this spot and besides was in anger management and told me once I stopped trying too hard and set my mouth correctly I would finally put all my air to good use, so I'd just listen to you play the songs a few times and I tried to get them and you were just this kid but you could play, the Irish ballads the jazz the pep songs, they even gave you solos and somehow I had gotten this far, I'm not really sure how especially because of the jazz, and sitting next to you the good player I felt like I had took off my training wheels and realized there was never a bike and now, even though I sold my trumpet years ago, I'm still looking for my bike and a little worried that you were it.

Carrie Oeding's work has appeared in several journals including *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction*, *DIAGRAM*, *Colorado Review*, *Best New Poets*, *Mid-American Review*, *32 Poems*, and *Third Coast*. Her first manuscript has been a finalist or semifinalist for a number of book contests, including New Issues Press, The Vassar Miller Poetry Book Prize, The Akron Poetry Prize, Marsh Hawk Press, and more. She just recently moved to Houston, TX, where she teaches at The University of Houston, as a Houston Writing Fellow.

indefinite – indefinite

Four hours of sleep in us and full sunlight on the hardwood floor. Blonde wood. Beech.

“My new American fetish is pancakes.”

Pure maple syrup: \$7.15.

She lingers over each syllable until they become nouns. Voice low, vowels extended.

“No, I don’t get inspired much past midnight. Sunlight works best.”
We try late morning, use Patty Griffin. Cecília Meireles.

[Second Rose *Motif*:
...à musical orelha
que grava o mas nas íntimas volutas]

It hits 85 degrees. We no longer recognize ourselves
in this city, the movement of bare limbs through its heat.

She has discovered this country’s folk and plays Woody Guthrie.

“Dad loved to sing *Alice’s Restaurant* and we’d dance to bluegrass
in his wheelchair, popping wheelies and twisting circles.”

She has sent an mp3 of Chico Buarque via email.

[Tatuagem: 2:53 minutes]

“Anyone, Brazilian or not, needs Chico Buarque. This song—
there’s no way to translate, really. Consider tattoos and staining.
Love. Love and body and bunda.”

Buttermilk. Buckwheat flour. Baking soda. Egg.

“Underwire obstructs the act of cooking.”

[a smile]

“Four years in Paris and I never learned to cook. I eat well, though.”

To translate ‘banjo’, I let her listen to several riffs left in a voicemail by a friend.



“When we lived on the Ridge, my parents made goat’s milk ice cream
for me and custom cabinets for barter. We made a lot of things.”

“I need to know your California.”

Shredded coconut. Cardamom. Cinnamon. Clove.

“Is there a way to cut these? We always had cooks at my house.”

I press the top of the knife blade down with my palm and raise, lower the handle. She
blushes.

“They really did raise you blue blood, didn’t they?”

[paces: 27, up]

Two Marlboro Lights on the rooftop with a view of the lake.
She turns up her collar, exhales. Exhales again.
An unlikely beauty.

[paces: 27, down]

Ground hazelnuts. Chopped pecans.

“You would like Belo Horizonte, where my family’s from.
Yes, I grew up in a place called ‘Beautiful Horizon’.”
My tongue resists the pronunciation of her words.

[‘ - ‘: ‘ - ‘. - ‘ - - ‘.]

“In Brasilia, everything is a straight line.”

Oil spread thin over medium flame.

“I’ve always feared death, even as a child. And the Ave Maria.
In my grandmother’s village, they played it over loudspeakers
every day at noon to mourn their dead. Every day.”

Extract of orange. Water.

[fork: several beats]

We write fictions about Operation Flapjack to initiate recovery process. We write fictions.

More water.

[test viscosity]

“Sometimes it’s the poem. Sometimes it’s the woman.”

Pinot grigio in plastic cups.

Bubbled edges of batter.

Her eyes change from amber to emerald as she pulls on the sweater. I notice freckles.

Table prepared for eating. Her tongue does not resist the mastication of brunch.

[we make a silence]

“My mother would not let us say we were ‘full’
after a meal. We had to say ‘I’m satisfied.’ Satisfeito.”

*

When she has gone, the man on the radio discusses a film set in Sao Paulo.
I am drunk on her ink, on the words she inscribed on my skin.

Twenty minutes washing dishes in the sink.

[I attempt reenactment of her presence by mouthing her name:]

part lips, pull taut across teeth. expel breath, allow vibrations in throat to rise.

drop lower jaw. tighten abdomen, push sound up, out.

arch tongue, touch tip to back of teeth.

relax lips to form circle. push lower jaw forward, lift tongue, expel sound.

tighten lips, hold. final expulsion.

[repeat]

I unfold four pages of her manuscript. It smells of cigarettes and Tuesday.

The man on the radio plays José Antônio Resende de Almeida Prado’s *Segundo Motivo Da Rosa*.

[caráter: noturnal (semínima=76); compasso: 4/8]

[she sends a message, 6:16am]

“I miss you, a lot, in my mouth.”

[a silence.

extensão: indefinido – indefinido]

Curriculum Vitae in Horsefly Blue

2003. California State University, Sacramento.
2007. University of Denver.

“If you want to say something, write an essay. Not a poem.”

1990. Mount Saint Mary’s Academy. Grass Valley, California.
“You are just lazy. You never complete the weekly reading list.”

2001. Saint Louis University. Madrid Campus, Spain.

“It is impossible to separate politics from women’s poetry in the 20th Century.”
“If we did not conquer the Aztecs, they would have eventually conquered Europe.”

2001. Yavapai Community College. Prescott, Arizona.

“‘Kill the Indian, keep the man.’ This was the campaign slogan used when government officials removed Hopi children from their families, communities and tribal lands to put them in boarding schools with the purpose of assimilation. This program was not only for the Hopi.”

1999. TECNOLÓGICO de Monterrey. Colima Campus, México.

“Que no seas indio, hñey. Que no seas del campo.”

1994. Grandma’s front lawn. Grass Valley, California.

“Don’t you ever let anybody call you Oakie, you hear me? You’re not trash.”

1997. Nevada Union High School. Grass Valley, California.

“Keep in mind that 4-H involvement does not look good on most college applications.”

1998. Home. Rough & Ready, California.

“Why do you need to go to college? What is wrong with trade school?”

- 1982-Present. Deer Creek Falls. Rough & Ready, California.

“_____.”
How do I translate water?

2006. Flight School, Royal Chicano Air Force. SacraZtlán.

“It is crucial to go back. It’s an area of the U.S. that’s quite unique—in America, but in isolated villages of New Mexico. Artesanias were part of what people got into for survival, like weaving. Craftspeople were sought out. Economically, it was a difficult time with the Depression and all, which made bartering very essential. People used their abilities to keep their families going.....My mother was sought after [as a house painter] and I would help her find stones to grind for colors. We would go to the river or into the mountains and find these stones and bugs. She would have us collect horseflies—they have very iridescent cobalt blue tails. She would cut and dry the tails, then grind them with special oils and turpentine.”

- 1988-1997. Old Bitney Springs School House, 4-H. Rough & Ready, California.

“I Pledge
my head to clear thinking,
my heart to greater loyalty,
my hands to larger service, and
my health to better living
for my club, my community, my country and my world.”

2003. Grandfather's house. Rough & Ready, California.

"Good German girl you turned out to be."

2004. California State University, Sacramento.

"Maya Angelou has no poetics. Harriette Mullen's *Sleeping with the Dictionary*, however, is an exemplary work."

2007. University of Denver.

"Why? We *are* in Rome."

Stephanie Sauer's work has been published internationally and has received numerous awards. She holds a Master of Fine Arts in Writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where she was selected by Presidential Inaugural Poet Elizabeth Alexander for the School's Writing Fellowship. She owns and operates the independent Copilot Press.

Plumes

“Enceladus is sort of helpfully spewing out its innards”

—Astronomer on the possibility of water on Saturn

She comes to herself in plumes,
like a pliable ring, she becomes a
solitary umbilical of was.
If water is one form of her,
she now retains ice, exact vapors,
each trail a constructed air muzzle
of what could be new. She was invited here,
into spiked silence and in tar, she led
five women to their masked deaths:
word, interpreter, shaman, gypsy,
chanteuse. Each one carrying a candied
criminal in her teeth. Saturnine *profesora*,
your molt is just toolbox wax, your dejection
is a dormant rain. Her ease into nitrogen,
which is garnish to her, shakes her from
these molecules. She greets herself
in the river of less, Turns herself out
to the universe: bare, reborn, unearthed.
Each unknown cup of her blood
a clap—red and read.

Pulpo (Octopus)

“Ace Of Wands

Scissors in a cross

An invisible heart

is distressed, see it?

A heart reflected on the wind.”

—“Incantation”, Poem of the Deep Song, Gabriel Garcia Lorca

The still wave,
pulpo of ice, a storm reef,
stolen elephant forms
in an apprehensive crash.

Emily said, “A word that
breathes distinctly
has not the power to die.”
The ether of each ovary ember,
lost in the wine of night.

I could juxtapose jurors, virgins,
and my twisted tongue
and remain a lamp
that witnessed the stabbing
in the street. I am the emptiest
girl in the forest.

Manual

(With nod to Wallace Stevens', "Not Ideas About the Thing But the Thing Itself")

*"At the earliest ending of winter,
In March, a scrawny cry from outside
Seemed like a sound in his mind."*

when they found him,
his vertebrae in the mission,
they saw her tangerine bullet,
featherless, all pulp and curses,
the vast ventriloquism of sleep
created her, a siren scarf of rice
and loss in a tangle of arms
still knowing nothing. To suffocate
or alchemize? He shoves a Lupine
into her, and after pollination,
she becomes professional
traffic, battered panache
above Chicago.

Nancy

You are my whisper, my kill,
my pupil. The lime is blackened
with snow like girls unable to barter
in a trunk full of thistle.

"I remember," recalls Guy Gilchrist, one-half
of the cartooning duo that returned Nancy
to legendary style Sept. 3, 1995, *"that I would
open The Hartford Times every day to find
Nancy, the first comic on the page."*

And so we slip on the owl costume
and pray for princesses and peanut butter.
We find ourselves in a bas relief strip,
or as an easy little wise-cracker, stiff
with bows in hair and thick-stumped knees.

Unlock your inner forester,
wolverine, or yeoman. Re-direct
your interrogatives and pull
your pelts from the frost of your sex.
She is the swine, he is the lime. Girls
who left and destroyed you, forks
in the meadow, prongs bent and weak.

Nancy, I will always love you. Your
eyes are beady unlike mine.

Parasitic Plant Connection

There's poison in the lake,
 full of viscin seeds and stains
 hoisting nutrients from all the poets
 just children while honeyeater
 searchlights spread out. *I don't
 care if you call me, take your
 cartilage mind to the ranch.*

I want real men in white cars,
 I want them to feed me figs and
 gift me fountain pens. I'll always
 descend into the Neris, braids
 embracing *maumedis* leaves,
 pairs of my braids, fingers blind
 along their woody stems.

I know the biodiversity
 of geographical lust,
 my damage is ready,
 my toys in my chest—
 Mistle and Tang.

MMPI

I show my feelings easily and quickly.
 I was on the cover of several magazines last year.
 I flew across the Atlantic 30 times last year.
 I have not seen a car in the last ten years.
 I have completely lost my appetite.
 Someone would have to be pretty exceptional to understand my special abilities.
 I sometimes force myself to vomit after eating.
 My use of so-called illegal drugs has led to family arguments.
 Many people have been spying into my private life for years.
 I began to feel like a failure some years ago.
 There have been times when I couldn't get through the day without some street drugs.
 Someone has been trying to control my mind.
 I seem to make a complete mess of good opportunities that come my way.
 Most successful people today have been lucky or dishonest.
 I never sit on the sidelines when I'm at a party.
 Ideas keep turning over and over in my head that won't go away.
 I was on the cover of several magazines last year.
 I flew across the Atlantic 30 times last year.
 I have not seen a car in the last ten years.
 I have completely lost my appetite.
 I sometimes force myself to vomit after eating.
 People think I sometimes talk about strange or different things than they do.
 I sometimes get confused and upset when people are kind to me.
 I sometimes force myself to vomit after eating.
 Many people have been spying into my private life for years.
 I began to feel like a failure some years ago.
 I avoid most social situations because I think I am an alien.
 I am doing an experiment.
 I don't blame anyone who takes advantage of someone who allows it.
 I haven't had the luck in life that others have had.
 I always make sure my work is planned and organized.
 I show my feelings easily and quickly.
 I have not seen a car in the last ten years.

Lina ramona Vitkauskas is the author of two chapbooks and one poetry book including: *THE RANGE OF YOUR AMAZING NOTHING* (Ravenna Press, 2010); *Failed Star Spawns Planet/Star* (dancing girl press, 2006); and *Shooting Dead Films with Poets* (Fractal Edge Press, 2004). She was recently nominated in early 2009 by *Another Chicago Magazine* for an Illinois Arts Council Award (in the poetry and fiction categories). She has won an honorable mention in *STORY* magazine's Carson McCullers Award contest (1999) and placed as a semi-finalist for the Cleveland State University Open Poetry Series (2002). She has an MA in Creative Writing from Wright State University and her work has appeared in many literary magazines and anthologies including: *The City Visible: Chicago Poetry for the New Century* (Cracked Slab Books, 2007); *The Prague Literary Review*, *Van Gogh's Ear* (Paris); *The Chicago Review*; *Aufgabe*; *Drunken Boat*; *MiPoesias*, the *In Posse Review Multi-Ethnic Anthology* edited by Ilya Kaminsky, among many others. For 8 years, she was the co-editor of the online literary magazine, *milk magazine*; is currently the primary Lithuanian translator for the online international poetry web collection, *UniVerse – A United Nations of Poetry*; and has read at/in various venues and series in Chicago. Poet Denise Duhamel has noted that Lina's poetry "employs humor and kitsch. Its dazzling underside confronts intolerance and terrorism with a wise brilliance."