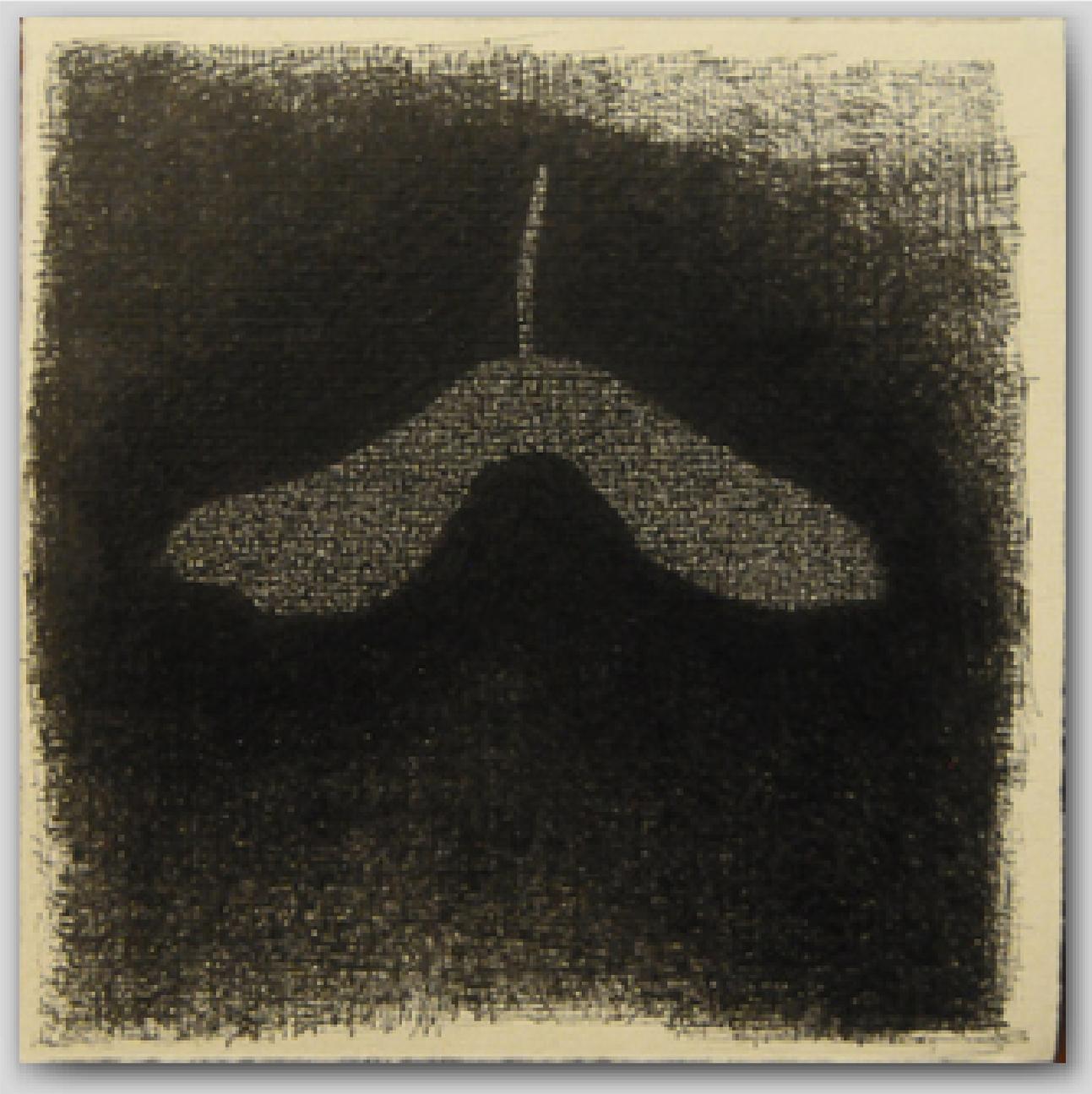


TRANSOM ISSUE 1: EMERGENCE

[wherein we gather work from nine poets' most recent projects]



Untitled. Pen & Ink. 4.75" x 4.75". Philip Miller.

SPRING 2011

The Sale of the Universe

Poetry's a form
of criticism. Against
your glower-

battered names,
the wall wears
your face, a trick

that makes
your ghost mine.
Wind sounds

in the film
and the ear's
firm tread stills

the eye. I rise, close
the door. I read
for where I go,

grassy, uncontrolled.

Displacement

In a car, in the salt
flats of Utah, in us

I'm on my shoulder.
Hope is a thing with
force between us.

When you come home,
wonder on your face,
I, underwater, will.

I drift where
your voice begins,
miss the dream

between this and the last.
What virulence imagines
there in the thicket

that guards your face,
that vacancy at the center
of the face, the mouth,

spills ungodly narrative.
Enough to wake me up?

Lily Brown (issue 1) was born and raised in Massachusetts; she currently lives in Athens, Georgia, where she is pursuing a Ph.D. in English and Creative Writing. Her first book, *Rust or Go Missing*, was recently published by Cleveland State University Poetry Center, and a new chapbook, *Being One*, is available from Brave Men Press.

Brown:

These poems started--as many of my poems do--as thoughts jotted down while reading, or in the case of "The Sale of the Universe," while watching a movie. I was watching *Coco Before Chanel* with my step-sister, and there was an odd exterior scene where the characters sit outside on a sort of veranda, in fancy hats, drinking tea. My step-sister and I were both struck that while this was actually a very still scene--physically, that is--the sound of wind was mapped onto it, as if there were weather. The trees, however, were unmoving, and the characters' hats and hair weren't the least bit ruffled. The sound of wind seems to have been some sort of sound-editing mistake, but it got me thinking about sensory experience, the expectation (for example) of our eyes when our ears hear wind. I suppose the poem explores how experiences with various artistic mediums--film, literature, etc.--set the imagination to work. So, while the scene in the movie showed me something about the relationship between sound and sight (and the normative expectations of the senses), interacting with art actually frees the mind to "read" in any number of directions, and the poem thus ends on a semantically open note.

Transom:

How would you characterize the relationship that your poems end up having to the experiences that gave rise to them?

Brown:

Poems, for me, are like condensations that combine a variety of experience into a controlled space, making a tiny (visual/formal) world that hopefully exceeds its formal boundaries in its suggestions or semantic possibilities. I hope poems can suggest different meanings to different people; I hope a "literal" experience transforms into something else in the space of a poem (and in combination with other thought, felt, imagined, or sensed experience). I think poems can take us both into and out of ourselves by accommodating these various meanings, thus showing us a broader world of possibility outside of our own.

Emerson says "To think is to act." Thinking is how my poems originate and evolve. I guess a poem's relationship to the experiences that give rise to it is a layered one, then: literal referents in the world give rise to a poem, and thinking transforms those referents. That thinking is the poem.

bricktown

sometimes, a vaulted.
like we need tongue, buildings
we don't know yet.
this is big. this is bones.
this is back up vocals, winning at the rodeo.
(how gothic, our windows/these skins).
exhale the way you mean it. listen
to the radio, motown: how days sound.
(more, acanthus. say portico).
to shelter into this make: do
homemade here. it's quaint,
the bells in the distance are bridges.

the need for aged buildings

i keep taking baths here like we're allowed it.
the excess, i mean. the trouble.

at night, a bonehouse.
i think bitter or whipping.
i think sorry, cobblestone octopus.
i mean, really, how could we,
for real. we were freeways.

there were teenagers.
there are so many teenagers, beat-up or trying to
be home, remember?
brick, that stalwart brocade.
the way dirt is in winter.

or that one day in that one car at the bakery.
bread, too, is good for a place.
we were endless.
the sky looked like our mother.
it was always morning & always cold.

the weather here is quiet.

there are fewer birds on barbed wire.

you can stare at the ocean until language.
i make my baths so hot they hurt to get in.

Kristin Hatch (issue 1) has an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and currently lives in San Francisco. Her poems have recently appeared or are forthcoming in Bat City Review; Black Warrior Review; Court Green; Fence; and Forklift, Ohio.

from brim terrain

At the level of merchandise. Grounded in exchange. How should the buyer select a set of wind chimes? Is numbness a normal response? Day compressed and limnal. Oaks dropped such fine sparrow. A commission formed. On the table a photograph: something public, a face pressed against glass. He stands there holding a hand beyond the frame. 4:55 through-cloud sun dispersing.

In a suburb or territory. Frost on the gorse. Damaged lodges of the aristocracy they were or snow was a salve for. An errant wire distributed sparks near the wedding. It was a surface terror. Ignition's limit. A city: thousands of fully developed lives reduced to flashes. She only claimed to be barefoot. Next morning she stood scraping patches of paint from the hull.

from brim terrain

Thinking breath
an aspirate
only,

air's availing
or pleasure
mechanics of a mouth
in common –

And not to translate –

Not to sort –

What is in whisper's
enclosure equally
furled, trans-
fired:

sleep-salve desire
sleep-salve duress

from brim terrain

Thinking breath
not burial but
force –

warp
in the aquifer's
whirlout,

the chambers
flooded, warmth,

remaining air –

had been water-breathing
and had held
breath –

had not thought
burial, not
of –

nor of interment's
dumb-time fleshed
through –

durations of
the tomb –

Andy Stallings (issue 1, issue 8) lives in Deerfield, Massachusetts, and teaches at Deerfield Academy. His first book, *To the Heart of the World*, is out in fall 2014 from Rescue Press.

Stallings:

Two different forms, obviously, or types of poem. Both, though, part of a project in which (when things work) I've relied on following a rhythm or pattern of hesitation from beginning to end -- less deliberate than other poems or types of poem I've worked on. It seems odd to say it now (since there is so clearly a distinct speaker operating in the poems, an "I" though not the pronoun), but my intention was to speak from nowhere. One thing I was thinking (having just completed a manuscript in which I had a lot to say) was have less to say.

Transom:

Hesitation as starting point? Hesitation as a musical structure? Yes, please. In sound-based poems, we tend to think about repetition as an operative structure, but maybe it's hesitation. The little silences and hitches of breath. What you've foregrounded is the negative space, in a way. And it's good to think about the other side of the mask, the part that faces away from us.

Stallings:

I do think the two go together -- hesitation as a form of repetition, perhaps, more than the other way around. In that hesitation (stuttering comes to mind as an extreme example) implies doubling back, re-iterating, etc.

from Notes on Melancholia

[future]

the robot walking to confession with his head down

the robot who waters the mistress' flowers

the robot dejected smiling

the painting of the robot gesturing toward the painter

the robot without ears saying huh

the russian robot translating romantic verse

the evil robot stealing peppers from the garden

the naked robot on the roof of the car

the robot his mouth full of pistachios looking beyond you into the rainfall

the robot cemetery on I-80 the robot state the robot coast

the robot massaging your shoulders looking out the window

the brand new robot seeing only language and the glass knight hopping in the field

the robot dream of the robot running from the wolf

at night the robots getting together

the robot snow-angel well-lit

the robot sliding down the hill the old man laughing on his back

the robot reaching out for the other robot

the robot named Nullius Filius the other robot also named Nullis Filius

from Notes on Melancholia

[trouble]

the mermaids making promises again

the night when her body on the ship named nightingale

honey-milk the world surrounding the infant hidden in the infant's song

the polygamy of eurynome's daughters

the air in love with the lute of the evangelist

canal girls their pale smile

heliodorus the inbred one

madeleine who loves barbary horse

dolores vagrant her hand reaching out for the cock of the young expat

one wing what spiders love

sluttish neglected habit

simple paper the breast of winter loosening the tongue of the poet

the three friends in the video game trench

molotov cocktails flying like ripe strawberries

blue helmets where the blue wall should be

and the ghastly portion of himself which made her moan

the ear the erotic appendage

the tax upon the study of light

the maestro confessing with a silent mandolin

so lovely the tutor teaching about affection

fur

the chestnut droppings of the interpreter

according to chrysostom the canopy of the mind of fire

the artist mustachioed giving kisses

dear flowered faces your flowered faces are huge

M.A. Vizsolyi (issue 1) grew up in Pennsylvania. His first book of poems, *The Lamp with Wings*, was selected by Ilya Kaminsky for the National Poetry Series, and is forthcoming in the fall 2011. His poems have appeared in many journals, including *Poetry International*, *6x6*, *Slice Magazine*, and *BOMB*. He teaches ice hockey and ice skating lessons in Central Park, and lives in Brooklyn.

Vizsolyi:

I have always had an interest in psychology, in particular, psychoanalysis. I've been reading many case studies from actual sessions, some famous, some not so famous, and have been composing poems based on those or taking on the form of the case study. These poems are what I imagine as notes of psychoanalysts, but not limited to the therapist only. Aphorisms of the mad I'd like to think, each line its own little poem/story.

Transom:

Carl Jung said that a symbol "has a wider 'unconscious' aspect that is never precisely defined or fully explained. Nor can one hope to define or explain it. As the mind explores the symbol, it is led to ideas that lie beyond the grasp of reason." Do you think of these lines, or these poems, as symbolic in this way?

Vizsolyi:

I do think it is interesting to think of the lines as "symbols," and the symbol in psychoanalytic terms is, of course, more interesting than the standard question of what lies between the symbol and what's symbolized. Freud defines it, basically, as an association with unconscious desire/fear.

Moreover, there eventually becomes an inherent disjunct between the symbol and the emotion/idea it elicits. Meaning, we begin to react to the symbol, forgetting the origin of our association to it. I would argue that all poetry operates in this way. In terms of the lines in my poems here, I'd like to think they operate along those lines as well. I love Ernest Jones' definition of the symbol: "Only that which is repressed is symbolized and only that which is repressed requires symbolization." Needless to say, I repress much.

A Study of Lightning

there must be a way to measure
a wish a way
to shape a cloud without
having to contain it

[the pressure that cradled
you in terms of release
unsatisfied]:

a way of reaching without:

[that series of broken
bottles cemented in fence tops]

on the porch mid morning
waiting for an approach
a change in sound
that pitch-signal secured
by language or salvage

[the way a cut is satisfied]:

that much of our daily truth
she said is just words to fill
a silence tell me she said

a day you want to remember

~

The love you've been given doesn't correspond
—a paper flower tossed in the kettle
with wildflowers—
Where are its un-imaginables?

The chaotic
its color and error, its

but that you hope is as it should be, saying,
Look, that hole in the sky, isn't that
the version of paradise you remember?

The north peak's upward thrust shoulders
the clouds, separates their load into manageable systems.

Pieces of ash descend. Dust, pollen,
In the beginning...

what is it that plumes makes its empty
cursive from your mouth

Won't you find
it takes something deeply—something personal
unknown even by you?

[mended, amended, words redux by folds in paper]

The injustice of process and yield.

[the poem bare not barren]

How in the beginning...
early then—you left your wife naked
smelling the woods the darkness of her soil

through her shoulder—
you slipped the cold cut-offs stiff
over your knees illuminating every root

of hair, the linen shirt smelling
of lake-rot and walked barefoot in camouflage

the grass feeling the earth sink where the animals'
holes were to the lake the canoe the cold

aluminum slimy first against your palm
and then your feet and legs pushing off

from shore and pulling, pulling what
...out? pulling to a point in fog where nothing

is unduly reciprocated by its other side—
your shadow marking the surface equal

on all borders as you oar or unoar
against...

Psychelegy

Happiness is the delusion of reprieve.
So says my pathogen soup.
The etiology of a buttered handshake.
Toast. I wish I could live at the same time.
You never have what you know until you know nothing.
The body breaks under the anticipatory anxiety.
The bread is broken.
You did not purchase the extended warranty.
This getting older a wish each grass shaft
was a straw through which to suck the sweet juice of perdition.
Time to nurture your inner shrub time.
To hang onto your underwater bookshelf.
Is there anything really to believe in
or merely the feeling one must believe in something?
Squeak goes the couch.
Ashtray flavored coffee break.
The no meaning, no meaninglessness tantrum.
The problem is.
An unfelt apology is like
cabbage
soy sauce
butter
hot sauce
boiled
litter being thrown on the sidewalk.
ground beef
If I could just distract your attention for a silence.
I could paint you psychic portraits.
The problem is-lessness.
The fugitive child.
The kinky faith of my wife.

This micrometer calibrated for confusion.
Let 'em go! the foreman screams.
Happiness is a delusion of reprieve.
Yawn.

Chas. Kuo-Speck (issue 1) is a musician, writer, and painter living in Tucson with his wife. He is a graduate from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop. His poems have appeared in The Colorado Review, Pool, and Thermos.

Kuo-Speck:

Writing for me has always been a kind of spiritual practice. To my own detriment. I was reading recently that when a person first begins to meditate, they shouldn't chastise their mind for the thoughts that they have, that they should instead acknowledge that they are there, but not try to eliminate them.

I think the example used in the book was to think of them as clouds passing by. I tend to do this with information in my poems. There's often the editor in me who goes back into a poem like these and tries to cut cut cut. But I like the clouds. They seem to be as important as the emptiness they seem to be leading toward. When I say these are a detriment to my own writing, I guess I mean that often people will say, "you should cut this section, it isn't doing substantial service to the poem." To me though, they are. Not serving the "poem" can be as important as serving the "poem."

Transom:

Are there any particular kinds of language that tend to crop up as those clouds more frequently?

Kuo-Speck:

I often try to honor conversations I have with other people in my work. If my work is somehow a representation of who I am, the conversations that shape this "am" is equally as important. Now that I think of it, the line "I wish I could live at the same time" comes from a conversation I had with a second grader in Okoboji where I was talking to him about one of his poems. I asked about a line about his father. He said, "well, my my mom died last year, I wish I could live at the same time as both of my parents." It broke my heart. I had to honor that.

Flames

Elder, but I don't want to burn in the hereafter;
I'd rather exit this makeshift stage
in your courtyard
and turn back into fire on the sand hills near Brooksville,
consume wire grass
and pine needles, the plant
called toothache.
Boy, put on the gas mask
and sing for us, you say, and they sure better be
songs of praise.
There among the trees, Abbot,
I only obey the wind, I eat
what I eat
and then shit ash—
turkey oak bark
is rougher than your face
and doesn't sneer, the winter sky more
astonishingly blue than the slits you have for eyes.
Put your bowlegs
together, you growl.
I spare nothing
but gopher tortoises,
their burrows, red-cockaded
woodpeckers, their dead pines, destruction and regeneration
the same.
You whisper,
Try to belly-breathe...
If the land gets too wet and the humid air stills,
I'd gladly die there
before making it to the river.

Breathe! you shout.
At last, death, fucker, slut, death at last.
Now go!

Winter 2012

I am dying, Lord, of thirst. The tap won't run;
the tub I filled with water's nearly dry.
Why have you forsaken me? Down

came the power grid in a cascade of failures
when solar flares auroraed the skies of LA,
Miami, Quito. I'm out of canned wild salmon

and tamarind candy. And your fluids I crave,
Gregory-tested, -approved, moon-colored,
from the enema that leaves me windswept

as a dune. As the rule of law. Looters are
storming the floors below. Before my last breath
one more wish: mend my soul. Stare

down my lust till it burns away like mist.
Or shackle, suckle me with eternity, I'd be chaste.

Greg Wrenn (issue 1)'s poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in The American Poetry Review, Gulf Coast, The Yale Review, Pleiades, Boston Review, FIELD, and elsewhere. His chapbook, *Off the Fire Road* (Green Tower Press, 2009), won the 2008 Midwest Chapbook Series Contest and features a long poem about a man who travels to Brazil to be surgically transformed into a centaur. Currently he is a Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University.

Wrenn:

Seventeenth-century religious poets like Herbert, Traherne, Vaughn, and Donne—with their clear-eyed rendering of psycho-spiritual realms as well as their naturalness of tone—are my poetic heroes, and I increasingly see my poems as devotional lyrics aspiring to embody those ideals. The earth, as a disappointing theater in which greed and decay perform, is utterly ordinary to them, at times dangerous, and they seek out a transcendent being to console them. A little like Vaughn's Holy-Land despondency in "The Search," I also

desired

To see the Temple, but was shown
A little dust, and for the Town
A heap of ashes, where some said
A small bright sparkle was a bed... (14-17)

God, for lack of a better word, can be awfully elusive; and the impermanence of conditioned things, whether numinous relics or lawn rubbish, is a universal law. Just as one glimpses love, it turns into indifference or anger, which I find inexorably seeks transformation back into love by a Beloved, by some bearded Master. I'm afraid the cycle of depravity and redemption never exhausts itself. I'm afraid I'm tired.

Wrenn:

My own devotion, though, is not exclusively Judeo-Christian, and extends outward (inward?) toward a largely unknown Other, a force that is difficult for me to name, whose body is made of intense emotion and harsh music. He —“it” feels absolutely male to me—is a frightening deity or father or religious taskmaster, invisible in space-time but "visible" inside me. Intuition, what Gertrude Stein might have called "secret with a bestow a bestow reed, a reed to be a reed to be, in a reed to be." Hypomania, chakras synchronizing and faltering, the mind-body process fluttering at breakneck speed and producing its own sort of "heat" that feels figural, powerful, limitless. Both of us awkwardly attempt to establish loving contact with one another, but it is largely in vain, because our inchoate connection soon becomes frayed by intimations of aggression, sex, and humiliation. It is the sort of failed communion that generates poetry but not peace.

Dinwiddie pg. 1996 Diphtheria

To build a life-like diorama, kill the bird first.
I grab the bent neck of a swan,
arrange artificial foliage, a hand-woven nest.
Paint and light complete the illusion
of frozen mid-flight along The New River,

purportedly the oldest river under thunderbolts.
Look through a small opening from a great distance
to safely view a total eclipse of the past,
a contagious disease in fission on a glass slide,
or what's framed in a transparent casket.

On display in a department store window,
five identical girls, ten identical shoes beneath
matching sets of petticoats. Their lives began
in incubators, continued on cobbled streets.
The hour before midnight a man passes,

raises a lantern to their startled faces, says,
I'm searching for someone honest, actual.
He's partially serious; the sun cannot be contained
or concealed in a box, cannot become the darkness
of an uncharitable sky or your hand

over my eyes. If an orange is an orange
in a magician's palm and premises are true or false:
—All birds speak French
—Swans are birds, therefore, says the youth,
—Swans speak French and will kill

or should be killed. If you were asked to deliver a letter
that would hasten the start of a war, would you
take a short cut or linger in the woods,
purposely become lost? Your fever not high exactly,
but your pulse rapid as you count and pray upon

a chain of poisonous berries plucked from vines
at the river's shore. How many swans have to die
to prove there's no song at the moment of death?
How come I can't stop making false forms,
can't tell the difference between a bird and a god?

Diorama pg. 1997 Diorama

Her hand around the necks of both swans—
the handle of an intricately carved pastry wheel,
a tusk whittled to purpose. Every graven line
made by the scrimshander's hands,
he thought of her, turned bone to dust, to two swans

with a single body harnessed to a cart with one roller
—a plow through dough,
the bow of a ship scything waves,
water, like the swans' necks, curved
in the direction of the cleave while her hand

is where his hand was when he began
such unrest with his knife. Three years at sea,
memories of the first and only time he saw her.
This gift used for seven times as long
as he was gone, then discarded. Later, found

and framed in a box lidded by glass.
To make the display, the birds must be put to rest.
The sweetest sound is one unheard. That unseen:
what's palmed by the large hands of a magician
—is that you? Make an orange disappear until

all I want is pith and zest. What's in my hand
is what I want to give you: fish from Lethe
—have I given them before?—
the flash of scales under the surface of water
struck by sun. I give them to you

again and again. What else? Pie and candy,
the sweetness of parched lips. I slip the last five letters
of your name in my pocket, forget them with cob nuts,
pens and found feathers. With an unsteady hand
I construct us in miniature, in a shoebox railway station,

I frame myself in the train's window, my palm
touches glass, not your face. On the platform
you stand—raincoat tight to throat, the silence
of wheels, the unchartable sky of pinpricked stars
—you wave an endless goodbye.

English Sparrow pg. 2360 Engraving

I'm nothing but a monkey-shaped silhouette
in this ship's rigging. Shanghaied for want
of a haircut and quick drink: temporary pleasures
—how quickly the locks lengthen, how fast to sober.
Not so the finality of the pull of a trapdoor lever,

the fall to mattress—not out of kindness;
there is no courtesy but towards currency.
The figurehead's direction charted
by the captain with ancient instruments,
dead matter. My orders: fix lines etched against sky

same color as water, hard to tell where the horizon;
where Lot's wife looked back, dissolved;
where seabirds' wings unfold: spars and sails:
how quickly the word spread. First paper,
thus printing. Credit the Chinese,

pull an impression from wood blocks. Everything backwards
until the proof. Compare this capture
to the choice of making a pilgrimage,
the comfort of a catch-all saint. How strong my mettle,
St. Christopher's sheen against my breast?

For a brief moment, soaked in salt and sweat,
I succumb to seasickness. Across my face, my ghost
—most likely to be left in some city
with an unfamiliar alphabet; where was home anyway?
Where the roots of those related too weak in soil

with so few boot prints? Do I say, now,
exile or adventure? Did the rat,
the English sparrow? Not a true sparrow.
A dull-colored bird carried from continent
to another. Caught in the crow's nest, some twigs,

spotted eggs. These birds, these vermin.
The hazards of travel. Of easy transport.
Of open ports. This is how disease spreads,
how songbirds gone. How pests. How all that's left
is a short, shrill chirp, not pleasant to hear.

Dina Hardy (issue 1), recipient of a Stegner Fellowship from Stanford University, is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, where she attended on a Maytag Fellowship. She was a finalist for the Poets & Writers' New Voices in California Contest, named one of Los Angeles's Newer Voices and published in Meridian's Best New Poets anthology. Her work appears in numerous journals and anthologies, including Agni, Black Warrior Review, POOL and Southeast Review.

Hardy:

These three poems are part of a larger series I've been working on...for awhile. The inspiration for this collection comes from an incomplete set of The World Book Encyclopedias published in 1947.

I randomly grab an Encyclopedia volume from the shelf (where they, unlike my other books, are not alphabetized) and open to a random page. Faced with disparate entries, I figure out how to fit them together. Is there a link? Or does the vibration happen in the variance: English Sparrows and Engraving, Dinwiddie and Diphtheria—like sewing machines and umbrellas?

I like to supplement the 1947 Encyclopedia entries with research I do on the (infinite and sometimes erroneous) Internet. I'm fascinated by facts and trivia—the more outrageous and outdated, the better. I was once told you shouldn't include information in a poem. I still don't know what that means.

from "December Songs"

You think why now. Why again. Meaning. Yes. Your own breath smells stupid. Meaning. Your eyes stuff themselves. Ragged cloths in a drawer. Drawer of drawers. You become. Your mother brings tea in the living room. Her smile a fist opened. A peppermint. Yes. You love your mother and your life. You love your past and its stench. You think you are making a cheese. For a moment. Of yourself for the world. What will it taste like. You wonder. Silence. The cheese. When it's complete. Your mother. Sips her tea. Black and scalding. Silence. About you. So tell me.

from "December Songs"

You get messy. And tangled in colored light. The house was bigger in your memory. Felt. Like a steak house. Thrones around the table. Forks and candles long as your arm. An elm. Your father's guitar. Silence. Fresh snow of doilies. Your mother beautiful and full of holes. Your mother the comb. The seer. Rest. The phone rings here. There are things to be said. Like hold on he's in the basement. And. The girls arrive tomorrow. And. Yes. The recovery. Haven't you heard. Our friend in the hospital hit by a car. Recognizes me. Silence. Swirls her good eye.

MRB Chelko (issue 1) is a recent graduate of The University of New Hampshire's MFA program and Assistant Editor of the unbound journal, Tuesday; An Art Project. She has poems in current or forthcoming issues of AGNI Online; Bateau; Forklift, Ohio; The Laurel Review; Sixth Finch; and Washington Square among others. Chelko has two chapbooks: The World after Czeslaw Milosz (Dream Horse Press, 2011), which won the 2010 Dream Horse Press National Chapbook Prize, and What to Tell the Sleeping Babies (sunnyoutside, 2010). She lives in Central Harlem with her husband, Nick, and dog, Chuck.

Chelko:

“December Songs” is a series of 100 word prose poems. They came out of a vague frustration I have had for some time now with the lack of music in prose poems. They are wintry attempts at / explorations in prose music.

Transom:

What do you think characterizes prose music?

Chelko:

Well, let me begin by saying that, of course, not all prose poems lack music. “December Songs” came out of a frustration I had/have with the prose poems I have encountered recently—in journals, etc. Moreover, I do not claim to have read all the prose poems out there—nor do I dislike all the prose poems out there. It's just I can't help but ask myself, upon reading one of the linebreakless bastards, Why this form? Admittedly, prose poems have always been a bit mysterious to me. Perhaps because what I love most about poetry, on a technical level, is the tension between sentence and line—the suspense, sonic play, and torque it affords language. This tension, on a fundamental level, distinguishes poetry from prose, right? So, what happens when the line is removed, but the poem remains? The prose poem? I feel like that's what I've been encountering too often lately, but the prose poem can't be that simple. It can't be that boring! While writing “December Songs” I was interested in what technical maneuvers I could employ as, for lack of a better term, 'stand-ins' for the tension between sentence and line. The result is perhaps, simply, an overly fragmented, repetitious, and often inverted prose. But I like. Prose music. The way it sounds.

After Lu Yu

Petals dot
my cup

of
green wine,

light-
ly tramps

the skinny
horse through yellow

dust,
great lines

of poetry
I pass by.

•

Dead friends
call on me

at night. I ask
to be sent

to the front:
itch for

the fight's
still on me.

Old man
in the mirror.

•

A cool morning, pleasant, little paperwork.
I sit at my desk by the window and listen to thunder.

After Lu Yu

Rain tats
the boat's

awning, this
wine's wearing

off, oil gutters
in the lamp—

we both
feel low.

Luck and being
known are nothing.

I rely only
on the cold

river's tides:
morning, evening.

Morning.

The Canadian playwright and poet Nico Alvarado (issue 1, issue 9) overcame debilitating childhood phobias (fear of flutes, fear of gold, fear of the moon) to study mathematics at the Sorbonne and eventually became a widely recognized pioneer in the field of quantitative analysis. After having a vision while paragliding off Mykonos, he abandoned the finance industry and returned to Cape Breton, where he began work on a seven-play cycle called *The Decisions*, or, *White Stars, Green Triangles, No Mountains Appear*. It remains unproduced.

Alvarado:

These poems are versions of versions of versions of translations done by Burton Watson and David M. Gordon. I love how Lu Yu gets translated by Watson in this straightforward pretty way and by Gordon in this strange and stilted way, and reading the two of them together makes me want to rewrite them in a flagrantly self-gratifying way that probably has very little to do with the actual poems of Lu Yu. So they're not really mine but they're not really his but they're not translations either. I don't know. The brilliant poet and translator Michael O'Brien (who has a gorgeous version of an oft-translated Lu Yu poem in his book *Sleeping and Waking*) is also an influence.

Transom:

Robert Lowell, whose *Imitations* might be a kind of forefather to this work, said he created his versions of great foreign poems during dry spells in his regular writing process. What relationship has this project had to your writing poems that are less complicatedly your own?

Alvarado:

Lowell's relationship, exactly. I mess with Lu Yu's poems (and no one else's, for some reason; it's something to do with how he in particular gets translated) when I don't have any traction in poems that are, as you nicely put, less complicatedly my own. It's the pleasure of procedural work, I guess, except I have no real procedure. But the principle's (roughly) the same.