Love

I say pull,
you say push -
(that's the difference
between me and you)
but we both move
in the same direction.

Two horses
plough a brown field.

Aggie Flannery
False Starts

i possess vaults of them
a poem is no good unless it speaks to one in particular
and the painting's not real unless there is blood
seeping through its weft

and there are plays and lovers
(and the two at once)
clever dances and intricate twists of dialogue
meant to send him away forever

i am full of deliberate
misconceptions and
misrepresentations and
barbs laid to slice through the lover's first soft treads
and speed me away.

J. Lapic

On Creativity

Like the kissless virgin
Of your imagined passions
let the silence thunder
in your ears.
Let the stillness swirl
in your eyes.
Pace toward the dark sea
on your virgin garden path
as for the ocean
Let its silence thunder.

David Hoot
Harrisburg

I sit eating a
twenty-five cent bagel
with no butter
in a park
with no benches

forget-me-nots crouch
in the unthawed sod
and surely are to be forgotten

like death
I always come home to

like bus rides
and airplane flies
and death
I always come home to

Tracey E. Gass

Incident

A new river was formed today
a full brown muck
trail rushing right by
in contrast to cows
who looked scared
feet sinking into earth
across the brook
their herd divided
by the new river formed today

I drove by from work
my right eye distracted
by a kinetic rushing
not usually passing
I thought of donkey canals
and new ells equipped
to suck hay through
barn doors

When asked of the bounties
of such a fortune
a farmer said
It is up to my knees
my wife sews my pockets shut.
I am not able to gather river rocks
I use an antler for a cane
and my land is a river
completing the request of the rain

Katy Keenan

Charles Swisher
Fire Devours Air

Everything clashes - the rainbow cover on the trunk overpowers the floral design of the brown carpet, which intrudes upon the delicacy of the lace curtains on either side. The walls are still covered with the furred boards of arrowheads and spears. Other Indian relics lie scattered on the floor and tables. The window on the left seems not to belong to this collection of bone, stone and wood. It is to this she is drawn.

A breeze causes the curtain to breathe. Clicks and tinkles enter the room from the sea-chimneys suspended there. Sometimes they sound like the beating of dried bones when the large, white husks collide with the rounded bellies of the pointed shells. Now moaning waves echo from the inner hollow of each abandoned shell home. The rising sun penetrates the thinner shells and throws shadows on their undersides. Sustained by the moment, hanging by nothing but dreams, the strings wait patiently to be brought to life again. Their still white-ness melts into the lace background - except for the bulbous black shell at the top. Four stubby fingers fold in upon its center to a black core. Standing beneath this shower of shells, the woman turns the black body to see its interior. A smooth iridescent pink shine almost brings a smile to her swollen lips.

The woman stirs hard at the red ball rising on the horizon. Wrapping arms across her chest, she feels a strange comfort in heraloneness. The scant piece of silk that was once a negligee now barely covers her form. She lets the torn material fall from her shoulders and gently tugs at the spots where dried blood has fused the silk to her flesh. Shivering, she steps back from the window, leaving the gown in a heap. The woman looks at her naked body, caressing each bruise and cut, she brings her fingers to her mouth and tastes familiar blood. As if still in a dream, she moves slowly toward a mirror on the far wall. Cracks fall across her image. A bluish-red blur fills the glass as tears fill eyes she can no longer recognize. Low groans rumble from the bedroom. Her vision somewhat cleared now, she stumbles hesitantly to the back room and stops in the doorway. A man's slender body lies stretched on a large, white bed. She holds her breath and shakes her head in disbelief. For the next few moments her mind pieces together the scene of the previous night.

They had been at a favorite bar. Luke got angry when an old boyfriend asked her to dance. She refused, but the subject still hung above their heads like a half-open door threatening to slam down. When they got home, the argument flared again, but now his anger turned to drunken violence. He couldn't bring himself to strike her, so he smashed the things around her instead. The first thing to go was the mirror with the pink flamingos and the palm tree painted on it. Her mother had given it to her. He dropped some plants just for the hell of it. The camel saddle which she had brought back from Damascus was next. He threw it against a table on which his own assembled stones lay. As he bent over to collect the scattered rocks, she moved from the corner chair where she sat curled and defenseless to the bedroom and shut the door. Undressing she became suspicious of the silence on the other side of the wall. Suddenly she found door slammed. All concern and fear evaporated as she pulled the thick quilt up to her chin and fell into a deep sleep. Thoughts room crept half-deserted streets of her mind as she slept. Regrets mingled with hopes in dimly lit hallways; fantasies floated quickly around corners, up unknown stairwells, in gutters. Visions rose and sank and rose again. First there were only eyes, then the details of a man's figure emerged from the shadows. She called out to him, but he seemed not to hear her. She called louder with desperation rising in her voice.

Luke was awakened by the woman's cries and sat up on the couch where he had passed out earlier. His wide shoulders slumped forward and formed supple folds in his otherwise taut chest. He pushed the balls of his large hands onto his eyelids, but it didn't help; there was a fire burning behind his eyes which he couldn't extinguish. He slid his spread fingers through his hair; it stood straight up in the thickest parts and fell limply to one side where it was thinnest. When he opened his mouth his tongue peeled off of the roof and landed dully on the bottom where it lay pulsing against his teeth. He was thirsty for something. He rose slowly and walked unsteadily to the bedroom. A faint half-smile crept upon her face as she continued to mumble incoherently. He watched her silken breasts rise and slowly fall. He moved closer. As he rolled on top of her and his calloused hands came to rest on her warm flesh, she began whispering one word over and over; he could not tell what, but when her unconscious lips formed the name clearly, his passion turned to rage and he began shaking her roughly.

The snapping action of her head forward against her chest and backward toward her shoulders seemed to push her nearer consciousness. She opened her eyes only to see a clenched fist move in to slam them again. White shocks flashed behind her lids. Colors bounced off the walls in the darkened room as more blows landed about her face and chest. She could not breathe; she dared not cry. She felt like a trapped animal being eaten alive by prey. Time trickled sluggishly.

Finally Luke's brute strength gave way to exhaustion, and he collapsed in a snore. She lay motionless upon the bloodstains and the wrinkles. An involuntary whimper escaped from somewhere beyond her body, from some dark alley smothered in fog. She could hear it still, that irrepressible moan, even now as she gathered some clothing. Quickly she dressed, being careful not to awaken him, and stole from the room.

The sun was up full now, throwing slants of light across a room full of shattered memories. She paused to take one final look at the remains. Only the seashells by the open window were alive, worth saving; they called to her. She removed them from their hook, held them close to her quivered breast, and turned to leave.

Outside, the warm, dew-soaked morning had forced some unexpected flowers early out of their green, so that a bush of pink honeysuckle reached its branches out over the walkway. The perfume tempted her as she brushed by. She slowed to let the sweetness envelop her, but couldn't resist stopping to pinch just one flower. She sucked the juice deeply, and the nectar felt cool on her tongue, but before she knew it, the whole pink flower was drawn to the back of her throat. She swallowed, smiled wide, and walked on.

Aggie Flannery
A dried flower
pressed against my mirror
speaks for itself.

J. Gilbert

I Know What The Man Meant When He Said
i know what the man meant when he said
that my nights
turn into your mornings

night time
(and his brother liquor)
are subtle enemies
they coddle me in their humid down
and - opiate - gently float me in their womb
and let me

and when my trust is absolute
and when my stories are told
they leave me

and then it's you and i
and it's your morning

i knew a man once who let me

J. Lapic

A Summer Night

dinner outside,
trying to escape the heat,
yellow corn on the cob,
with rivers of melting butter.

the smell of charcoal;
strong and crisp.
cool glasses with
mountains of ice-cubes.
filled with iced tea,
sweet and refreshing;
soothes the dryness in my throat.

falling on my knees,
watermelon and tears.
long way home,
my Mom with
a new slice of watermelon,
my knees;
band-aids for them both.

Jodi McGartland
April, 23, 1980

Like grapes hanging heavy upon their vine
I am leaning ov’re
Looking for the perfect spot
To fall
Inside I cling tightly so
That I do not fall too soon
But the sun has found me now
Soon my skin will burst for I
am so very ripe
And overladen
No one walking by has seen me
offering myself and so
The bells have already rung
And my beauty begins its demise
As I have stretched myself
to the limit
Already mourning I fall
Face to face with my soul
I watch myself wither as
I float away free
laughing over my condition
I finally start to see

Lisa Goodman
Slipper Study

I am confident
that the lamp will not catch fire
no matter how frayed and skimpy the cord is.
I'm sitting right here,
What fire would be so bold!
Anyway, if the light is out
the dancer will snatch the slippers
from the wall
(hanging silky
feet almost still inside
whose shimmer relies strongly on this lamp.)
"You know,"
he bellowed
"a basic aesthetic contingency."
Well I say
yelling into a funnel is the only way you can shrink anything
except pie on windowsill,
and a dancer's fall shatters a different earth
than ours.
She must use the funnel to cry into,
I whisper.
Turning around, the fire has begun,
the slippers are kindling
and fire,
the parasite of friction.

Katy Keenan

Harvest Fumes

Branches matted high
against the sky
of bordering woods
begin to decay like
droplets of rain caught
in the grey of screens.
A light near my window
attracts small wings
and somewhere,
an insect sounds its scratching chords
against leaves
hesitating green upon another season.

A harvest moon
lowered in orange and full
stills the shadows of trees toward midnight.
A bird exposed itself to sound, chopping,
slurring its call between pines.
Silver posts gather moths
to feast on light.
This is what August cools its nights for.

Crickets scatter a rhythm in grasses,
breeding in borrowed weeds,
tinged by cornfields and
wheat fumes.

In the distance, the corn
laced in rows and someone
furrowed a seam.
There I stepped,
arching toes into darker macadam before
feeling the ground away from the road
bleached dry and lumpy beneath my feet.
Trees ahead, etched along a tainted night sky,
devoir car lights among a solid shadow of roofs
while forest and hills thickly block behind me.
A leaf falls to close my left eye.

Wind selects a stalk
to scratch,
to nod madly alone
as if insane
from sun's neglect.

Maggie Lewis
Mr. X is watching
Merv Griffin on TV
He blindly stares, quite unaware
that there's nothing there to see

He gazes from his sanctuary
and watches the world go by
Little kids amuse him
He laughs at them and cries

The TV and the radio
are false but steady friends
He can see the road behind
but he can't see where it ends

He stands alone, surrounded by
his petty hates and fears
How can he change an attitude
That's chained him all these years

How long Mr. X,
How long will it take
before you realize
You must awake in darkness
to see the red sun rise?

Mike Ward

Matinee

Boston baked beans
my only nourishment in a long
movie theater adventure
dating clearly back to age seven
still remain with me
they ruin my dinner and
cost my fortune
and are available in only one
unwieldy size
as are memories
both too small and quick
rolling out uncontrollably
into my hand
some continue on to the slanted
concrete floor
lopsided little forms
wobbling down toward
the stage
the urge still living in me
as at nine to dash up
either of the two sets of
stairs
short sets only four or five curving
where only famous
people go
behind the swaying velvet curtains
kidnapped in my seat
it all begins and ends
And outside there has been a gap in time
the sun is at a different place
almost dark
always the most quiet ride home

Katy Keenan
Main Street

Reflections in the window
break the church across the street
beyond repair.
Trucks and cars pass like contractions,
their headlights strip the grass
pulsing beneath a full moon . . .
less romantic.

Knowing the songs of passing drunks,
shoulders pressed,
starting at sidewalk cracks
to lift a rhythm
left years before.
Windows smear with condensing luck.
Shallow coughs interrupt my clock's pace of hours.

Morning sifts shadows between chimneys
smothered with new tar at their base,
cooled stiff like sap in a frost.
Roofs lose their glaze
to movement below.

Workmen are bred in towns like this,
mud layered thick and calloused
on boot rims
while caps expose baldness dripping grey.

The farmers are weeping for rain,
their salty tears hollow wrinkles in their cheeks,
to reproduce
moods of drying corn.

Maggie Lewis

Witnessing The Fall Migration: Two Flocks

one. That familiar honking music comes from out
of nowhere.
Distant at first, then, in a few moments,
closer,
passing by overhead, unseen,
heading south.

two. A silver-gray U
moves silently at a distance
against thick black clouds
and disappears deep into the southern sky.
The sun tells them to.

J. Gilbert

Lisa Goodmat

Dave Nash
Against God We Are Always In The Wrong

Scurry skitter foot in slime
Past ammonia smelling holes,
Gray as gray grime grease on dust.
Paper trash on pavement
"Beer on tap"
Under fallen plywood through a hole
Bite on bum's coat
Wheel and skate
Skid on tile to the wall
Hop in corners to the crack.
If they see you miss the rock
Wait beside the trash can for a while.

David Hoot

bright red
blood red
ruby red
glossy, the two nails were icy
as they put pressure under
her lower lip
as if
to stop
the shaking inside.

Bill Marash
Never On A Sundae

"Is how much? Twenty thousand? I call you back."
"Is too much." came Pop's voice from the middle room.
"Not you mean?" Mom said.
"Vere ve get twenty thousand dollar? Henthhh! Maybe you like me rob bank like Beety Duey?"
"No Pop, we get money. I pray. You see. You see."
The next week, Mom dragged Pop into the countryside every day. Each day she said she had forgotten to "peek something up." Pop of course knew better. Their daily route was identical, out of Williamstown, west on highway 355 to the farmer's market. Inevitably, Mom would leave a tremendous sigh when the ice cream stand came into view. The large neon placard, the littered parking lot, the crudely stained windows, and other signs of decay made Mom swell with pride. This was the embodiment of a dream. In five foot four letters she saw the name, "MOM'S."

Pop knew of this but never let on. It would have been pointless. If forty three years had taught him anything, it was not to stand in the way of Mom's rainbows. Pop over Pop." Mom commanded.
"Pop obeyed."
The ancient Plymouth ground to a halt. It was warm for September and a light breeze whipped Mom's blue prime dress around her legs. Keen hazel eyes surveyed the stand in an almost military fashion. A strand of gray escaped the confinement of the babushka tied tightly around her head. Pop stood at ease while Mom proudly marched over the asphalt parade ground just as she was about to speak, she stumbled on a beer can.

"Damn kids, van day someone break der neck." Mom seethed. "You wish Pop, no kids being around my place, wah wah. Ed day want ice cream shoole, but no hingeing around." Pop smiled vacantly in spite of himself. Her mood had a familiar ring to it. He began to worry.
"Pop, wake up. Wake up you bum."
Pop rolled over on the bed and grudgingly gazed at the bedside clock. It was nearly seven. He had decided to take a short nap after dinner, and Mom had let him sleep. But she wanted him—NOW.
Mom was adjusting the old Zenith when Pop entered the living room. A cherubic face in Marine dress blues deadpanned proudly from a picture above the television.
"Mom, Vy you not call me like I ask?"
"Shush Pop, I listening to TV. "For what?"
"Vell" Mom said, "Today is eleventh years since Sonny go into service."
"So what."
"So, I take day of most tewen end poor sit number of years firetheen.""Mom, I no see..."
"Pop you beeg dunstey. Today I play number."
"You what?" Pop said in mock astonishment.
"I play number. Mom repeated.
"How much?" asked Pop, fearing the worst.
"Vell, I go to bank, I take feeety dollar. I go to drug store, Mr. McLaughlin say 'Anna you crazy' but I bet money anyway Pop."
"Mom you..." his voice trailed into silence. Mom wasn't listening.
"Good evening ladies and gentlemen, the proceeds from tonight's lottery will benefit senior citizens. Selecting tonight's number will be Mrs. Wilma Shoemaker of Springfield. "Mrs. Shoemaker."
The machines were activated, and ping pong balls fought feuriously to gain the荣幸 of the ascending tube.
"The first digit is ONE."
Pop coughed. Mom tensed.
"The second digit is seveth FIVE."
Pop grabbed Mom's hand and shot a glance at the deadpanned face of his son. He crossed his fingers.
"The final digit is SEVEN. 157 is our lucky number for tonight. If you've got it, come and get it. Tune in tomorrow..."

He was drowned out in a series of shouts that recalled VJ day.
Two weeks later, they stood amidst a sweet tooth's paradise, hip deep in cones and chrome. Pop scratched his head and looked about with silent pride.
"In nice Pop. Its reel nice. Ve make out too, you see. Van been boxes come from factory, dry vill say 'Luke new place, let's stop' and veen day come en dry vill say 'How clean, such fest service end such good ice cream.' You see Pop almost four tery. Some people come home from verk. You see. Dey stop."
"Duddy, I'm hunnagry. Let's stop somewhere."
"For Christ's sake, Judy you just had a slice of pizza fifteen minutes ago."
"I know Duddy but now I want ice cream. Look there's a place."
"Judy, don't you see the sign? That place is closed down. Oh well there's a McDonald's up ahead."

Michael Ward
October

I have seen death come
withering, shaking
riding on home.

I can watch death's destruction
the toll it takes
on everyone

mirrored hatred
a bleeding cunt
and sunken bones

yet in writhing
sweating sex
comfort does not come

but the search
goes on
as arms and legs untwine

in my mind
I have fooled no one
nor am I dry

and tears flow
and cramping grabs
my organs and squeezes

the disgust is my own
for not being able to
ease death's pain

when death takes so long
to conquer
the grotesque

must this distortion
be mangled with liquor
weed and beds

shooting sperm
and jerking heads
and blood rushed gasps

I heave at death
and shake and quiver
at its coldness

it corrodes the flesh
and leaves a shell
and barely a mind to speak

I can't explain the need I have
to be held, caressed
—the release.

Tracey E. Gass

Patricia Gleisberg
Indian Love Song

Hey you big cloud caught between us
good-bye today I'm waving in your ear
and talking to the tear
in your eye
don't you know
letting that pool stay in your eye
makes the skyline the only line
and a bird and fish must
come to a compromise
like survivors on some desert isle
after trading feather for fin
both realize
"we are bound here"
my dear.
I feel lucky for evolutions
eccentricities and ethos
because echoes only tell white lies
and history is only human
one small bean a day would
feed the hunger of your tears
my sweet little nothing
wrapped tightly in the awning
of your eyes

Katy Keenan

Photographed

You cannot see the weather vane,
not the sky like white pants overhead,
not a baby sucking milk inside the house,
not a room wallpapered with slight flowers,
just a man asleep under his hat
and a store front fading toward the margins.
He leans his soft summer trousers against a dull car.
The song of sweet sulfur is in his throat.

Something has brought out the seams
between the sidewalk and the street.
The instructions read:
find love in this picture
and then count the tones of gray.

You can assume it is a sunny day.
You can hardly hear the muffled counting
from the dark windows
or the obscure transaction
of the man's wife paying for food.

Kathryn Burak
could we even try to count
the number of corks that bounced off these faded yellow ceilings
our cheap champagne erupting to the sound of impatient giggles
mismatched glasses clinking in anticipation
we toast another thought up for the moment occasion
gulping bubbled dreams of how we'll someday be.
our bouts of confession, too often prompted by emptied bottles
of dry white wine, could fill scandalous volumes
we've known each other's tear-stained cheeks
but compensated for them with unparalleled laughter.
you've packed away your antique clock
which ticked away the days of our camaraderie
i've given back your wooden crate
now jammed with memories of a journey near at end.
the chilled champagne awaits our delayed farewell
we toast to future celebrations of our reminiscences.
The Habit Of Wanting

For twelve days, I have heard you call
each night around seven.
With the sun gone, Arcturus risen,
your voice comes
tilting the air at the edge of my ear.

I seem to answer,
saying yes to the slowly arcing hills,
to your face
covered with dark arms.
I think you are like a child
and wish to see you curled with Fred cat,
and I want to tell you
that when you come
I will buy long strands of red licorice,
It will be autumn,
some autumns from now.

Of the twenty sounds I can name
at this moment,
your voice is absent,
except for Arcturus,
hard and nailed to the cyan sky.
I expect the sound
of sudden water in an empty house,
your child’s voice softly scratching
at my head.

Another night I will return at dusk.
Your only word will brush the west,
and I will tell you that
the summer birds are all gone
with your last yellow dress,
and the woods
wear the smocking of orange age.
I listen to my reply;
this time, noticing that I say nothing,
noticing the little feet
walking with me.

Kathryn Butak