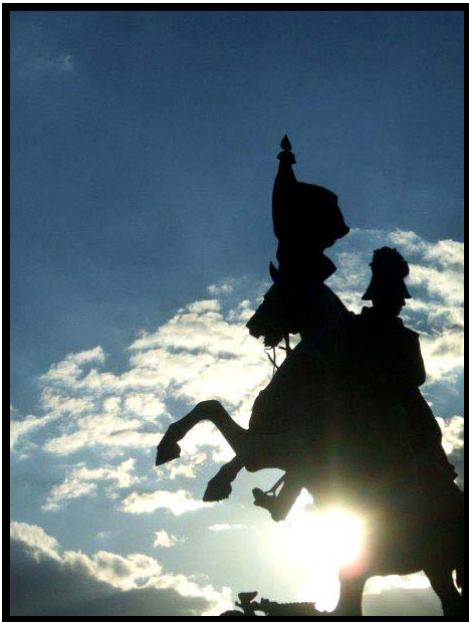


Editor's Note,

This issue is explosive. It was a joy putting it together. The content I received allowed me to compile a body of writing which proves that the Rushdie quote on the homepage was in no way ornamental. With two issues already published and being read, *The Writer's Block* is slowly beginning to establish itself as a forum in which the real-world power of the word is acknowledged and utilized as the founding principle of writing. Innovation is crucial, but never as crucial as the dialogue between author and reader. We will never spoon-feed our readers, but we won't speak to them in esoteric languages or forms either. Writing has to matter. So read, judge, and enjoy! Feel free to send any comments, rants, insults, thoughts, or mantras to the.writers.block@hotmail.com.

Ben Gehrels – Editor



Ben Gehrels – “Horse and Rider”

Poetry

Ishtar in Mourning – *Catherine M. Zagar*
Help Wanted. Poets Need Not Apply. – *Piotr Pawlowski*
The Night Auditor – *Allegra Blake*
Human Failure in Five Acts – *Liz Mochrie*
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Pessimism, Optimism & A Tautology – *Stefan Weinsheimer*

Fiction

The Lovesong of Mr. Charles Faxe – *Ben Gehrels*
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The Sounds of Childhood – *Adina Siperman*
Encounter with Greatness – *Andre Narbonne*
Vampires – *Russell Welsh*

Artwork & Photography

Julie MacLean
Ben Gehrels
Stefan Weinsheimer
Frances Tibollo
Melissa Upfold

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Ben Gehrels – “Skeletal”

Ishtar in Mourning

By Catherine M. Zagar

Because I have lost poetry because I have lost the words with which I could worship the bringing light old Babylon old gardens where I kneel over the prostration of my grief the silence of words beating words the heart the heart's poem turned by the book of the burning man because I cannot heal the words that a thousand years ago once brought you to dance to love the after thoughts of after words in the aftermath of our reckless inconsolable love war in the blind dark depths of a lost Babylon because I cannot heal the world inside myself because I cannot write this poem because I cannot raise myself in the ancient red room and say I am a poem I am beautiful I am a goddess a part of the word in the beginning I am beginning I am written writing but because I have lost poetry, I have lost love and you are no longer and we are separate and I am becoming a poem wordless godless and open.

Help Wanted. Poets Need Not Apply.

By *Piotr Pawlowski*

That's right, I say
I've been writing poetry
For the past three years
Any success? He asks
Trying to maintain seriousness
(but we both know the interview is over)
Well some people dig it
Mostly anarchists, sex fiends,
The girls I'm with
Got one published recently
About dumpster diving at the local Harvest Barn
Ah-ha, he pretends to write something down
Yeah, resourcefulness is one of my best qualities
& how would you apply that
To the position of stock associate?
Well I imagine I'd save some money
On paper & pens
A damaged case here
A note pad there
That's thievery Mr. Pala-ow-ski
You certainly wouldn't get far here
So is minimum wage
It doesn't get far anywhere
Listen, I'm afraid you've wasted my time
Oh that's nothing to be afraid of
I waste time all over the place
Oh boy, I'd say its my worst quality
Yes sir, you can write that down
I'm just nasty with it
Waste my time writing all these poems
& not getting paid for it
Shit. I could have a well paying job
Well maybe not well paying
But I could work for a check every two weeks
Slowly pay-off my student loan (speaking of waste)
Who knows, maybe even get a hair cut
Ah but that's not for me
So many wasted words, so many
Melissa,
Could you have security come
Oh no need no need
I'll show myself out
PEACE!



Stefan Weinsheimer – “Train Station”

The Night Auditor

By *Allegra Blake*

Mornings, lately, are mind over matter,
a shadow-box with gravity, now
summered with lead in its gloves.
Damn this humidity. I believe
I could almost die on this couch,

where dawdling, like an aging Cleopatra,
I dedicate a libretto to the tiny asp.
The good times have all passed:
My salad days were squandered unwisely.
Like the sullen daughter,

next door, who sasses her mama.
Her monosyllabic grunts
counterpoint to the mother's shrillness.
Launched from their dining room window,
their daily salvos puncture my sleep,

or half sleep and the half crazy dreams
of Serbian PR men pitching plans
to an enraptured congress to turn
Montenegro into a water-slide park.
And I realize I have left the TV

on and it's weaving its confounded
plots across my all-too-receptive synapses.
And what is all this drama? Why
can't I just move, get up



Ben Gehrels - "Obey"

and turn off the TV, wean myself
from its nubby narcosis that slipstreams
me to sleep every night now,
nearly a thousand nights now.
But occasionally I drink black coffee because
it's 1 a.m. and everything seems so attractive.

My love of sleep withstanding,
there is a certain vague light at this cusp,
when the cat deserts you, the dog's long gone.
A cool light that seems to levitate kitchen
appliances, opens closets and the bottom

drawers of desks. But fear your mementos mori.
Don't kid yourself; they haven't gone anywhere.
Tamper not with the seals of your sarcophagi.
And even so, some things will
creep out anyway: a lighter

with the initials of a long-dead love
engraved in slim untarnished silver,
his molecules in the belly of salmon
or ashes, still, floating west
toward a ruby-heart sun, Shiva's

arms giving balm to his furious soul.
And his peace is one of the few things
I've actually prayed for—the foxhole
for the quick against the dead. Even then,
the good things are shell-shocked,
the real love—nearly all of it gone.

Human Failure in Five Acts

By *Liz Mochrie*

ACT I. *[enter God]*

Pierce the world on a shard of a
broken teacup,
drink shards of China
pinkies up, singing
Oh God save the world
but he's in the living room
of the average American
giving you the finger.

Fuck you. *[action]*

ACT II. *[enter two homeless
people]*

Naked in a churchyard
wrestling off sweatpants
let's consummate our misery
high school kids watch,
mouths hanging



Ben Gehrels - "Mark 11:15"

Caves inside their chests, cavities where souls used to be, burned away with Listerine. It kills germs.

Can you disinfect their insides?
Purge this thing called memory
Maybe that's why
Finesse hairspray is consumed
in packs of six, maximum.
They want to style their highs
sculpt happiness from chemicals
(Wine is for those bastards who wear turtlenecks and sit on yachts
"Would you like some Bach with that?")

He asks me for whiskey but we don't sell any. It's a grocery store, sorry Johnny, here's a sandwich. Digest some good will but don't let it constipate you.

ACT III. I see babies giving birth to babies
let's have sex and repeat
until we populate the earth with AIDS

ACT IV.
(just let me forget)
we are Atlas
but we're getting too fat
(god damn trans fat)
can't hold this weight

ACT V.
Pinkies up, let's drink to this.
Singing

Oh God. *[exeunt]*



Ben Gehrels - "Headless"

The Lovesong of Mr. Charles Faxa

By Ben Gehrels

—I'm an old man, Winston, said Mr. Faxa through a bluish-grey cloud of cigar smoke. My bones ache and my knees sound a drumroll every step.

Silent concussions. Reprocussions. Thigh-cushioned but barely. Hear-feel them every footfall. Falling feet. Failing feet, more like. Hark:

Crickacracka crickacracka.

—Cricket cracker, cricket cracker, mimed Winston jollily, gesturing for a drag from the old man's sixth finger. It's this soft October night that's done it. Jellied you like a doughnut, plain and simple.

—Grow it, roll it myself. Real black like, said Mr Faxa, solemn, nodding.

Winston took a pull (puffa puffa) and pulled a face, pulling up his cheeks to meet his tearing squint.

—Murder! he gasped. Foul murder!

—Like it black, I do, nodded Mr. Faxa, puffa-puffing solemnly. Grow it, roll it myself. Real black like.

—Strange and unnatural!

—Blackest in all the county they say.

—Safe bet, wheezed White-faced Winston. S'poison!

Puffapuffa.

Crickacracka.

Lookie here. Royal Oak. Fine pint of stout for a fella served cold. Yes-a-yes. Catcha bite mayhaps.

—What say we puff the magic flagon? proposed Faxblack Faxa.

—I'm rankly abused, coughed poisoned Winston, whining. Could probably abuse some wine real fierce like.

The two men entered the pub and seated themselves at a table. A young waiter, waiting, waited on their pleasures, which included mighty ale-thirst and a mutual desire for ham sandwiches. In the corner a young woman was singing softly, beautifully, accompanied by a large-nosed man on a battered black piano:

*Hither page and stand by me if
thou knowst it telling*

*Yonder peasant, who is he, where
and what his dwelling?*

Speech paused momentarily on Faxa's lips as he pondered her birdsweet notes in smoky silence.



Ben Gehrels - "Pier 21"

Puffa puffa puffa.

—She’s beautiful, he murmured, inadvertently blowing smoke out the side of his mouth at the younger man.

—Abusive fumes! hacked Winston gasp-hacker. Puff-puffed right into the porches of my ear!

His buttery hands seized a butter knife and flourished it wildly:

—Vengeance!

—Slag off with your vengeance, muttered Mister Faxe, intent on the warbling piano-thrush.

Sire, he lives a good league hence, underneath the mountain,

Right against the forest fence, by Saint Agnes’ fountain.

Puffa puffa, puffa puffa.

Cough cough, cough cough.

Her voice meandered and wove itself playfully in and around the boisterous rumble of drunks and diners like a sinuous yellow fog in the pub’s dim-lighting. It stroked his beard and tickled him maddeningly under his chin. Faster then slower then higher then lower then verse verse chorus verse chorus bridge and still onwards on to the next and the next rubbing licking nuzzling his fancy.

—Not your type, declared Winston, beer-smacking frothy lips definitively.

Mr. Faxe, frowning brownly, took objection:

—All I said was she’s beautiful. Listen to those pipes she’s trilling out of, by God! And whaddya mean anyway? Not my type...

—I mean you’d’ve been caressin’ that beauty five minutes ago out back somewheres if you was twenty years greener!

Do I dare?

—An old man’s still got his tricks.

—Does he now?

Faxe, furious, drained the rest of his pint and wiped the froth from his greying beard.

—Watch and learn, he declared, clinking his empty pint-glass down on the table and getting to his feet.

—Oh I’ll be watching alright, chuckled Winston.

With a determined stride, Mr. Faxe headed off in her direction.

Cricka cracka, cricka cracka.

I grow old, I grow old.

Puffa puffa, cough cough (Winston: round two with the black and deadly, discarded and smouldering on the table).

Wait in the corner till she’s finished. Then smoothly as you please: good evening ma’am. Charles Faxe. Just wanted to compliment you on your ethereal. No. Exquisitely beautiful, singing voice. You remind me, by the by, of this woman I heard in Paris...

Nothing easier.

Yet what if she looks up and sees only my bald spot? What if she thinks ‘how thin his hair is?’ ‘How old this man is?’ Do I dare? Do I dare?

But her voice, drifting foggily, yellowed, over the general buzz of conversation and laughter drove him onward:

Just give me your hand

And I’ll walk with you

Cricka cracka, cricka.

Nothing easier.

But the waiter, waiting for payment, made an assumption and blocked his path.

—Excuse me, sir, but I must insist on you paying for your meal.

—My meal! blustered Mr. Falterfafa, faltering. I haven't even eaten my meal yet!

You haven't even brought it out to me yet! And besides...

(He wrapped his coat about him and placed his hand delicately upon his breast)

—Besides...I was not leaving. I was...

But she was watching him now. All were watching. Her voice pulsed questioningly in his ears. Her beautiful bird-eyes looked down at him, beautiful, curious.

I grow old.

—I was heading for the toilet.

Without a word, the waiter, waiting, pointed back the way he had come to a sign upon which was spelled in bold red lettering:

TOILET.

—Ah, said Mr. Furnace Fafa, blazing, blazing. Quite right.

He about-faced and blazed by broad-smiling Winston into the deserted men's room, gripping the faucet handles and full-blasting hot and cold TCHHHHHHHHH H both at once. Spray shot up all around as he ran his hands rigorously under the torrent.

Yonder peasant, who is he? A bloomin' fool, can't you see? I

grow old! I grow old! Going to compliment this fine young lady on her singing, should have said. No need bother yourself 'bout me, sir, should have said. Big tip coming your way from me, sir, yeah right!

As if cued, her voice filtered through the door and wedged its way past the noise of the faucet into his boiling red ears.

The winter's passed and the leaves are green

The time is passed that we have seen

I grow old.

Without closing the faucet Mr. Fafa left the men's room, limping away to the drumroll of his aging body.

Cricka-cracka, crick.



Melissa Upfold - Untitled

Later

By *Anne Simpson*

Soon it will cover the fields with sleep.

Recurring dream
of winter,

earth as cloud. Our snowshoe tracks,
teardrop on teardrop,
from the barn to the trees.

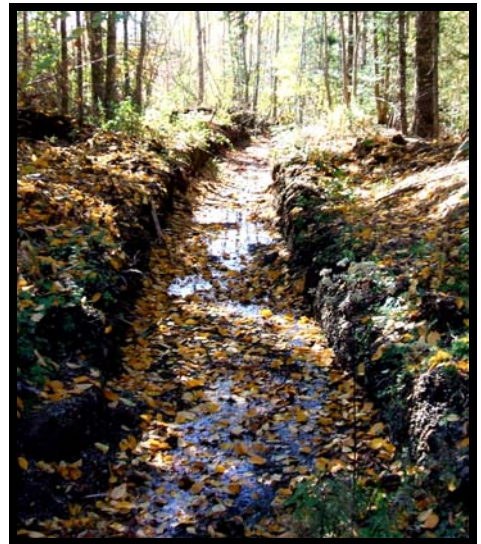
Whiteness

softened with blue. How simple
life's become, she says.

Between gloved hills, a stream,
hidden. The same one we find in the woods, later,

breaking free of the ice. Fluid
strands of speech,
whiskey-gold over stones, under the bridge. Gone—

the friend who had an aneurysm
a week before. A rush of dark blood, pluming
through his brain.



Ben Gehrels - "Leafy Rut"

At a curve in the path,
one beech among laden spruce.

A hundred papery spirits
quiver on a branch. Thinnest leaves,
twirled by wind.

At Your Service and Disposal

By *Amberlee Boulton*

They hide their fear with fig leaves,
laughing at “Reflections,”
congratulating “Perceptions,”
covering behind bland smiles and lipstick—
fat cats purring social change
in white caps and white gowns,
clutching salaries given to coerce them
into aiding those they so easily despise.

Their silence shuns
the Other.

The Love Song of Aloysius Gretsch

By *Mitch R. Murray*

This is not for us.
These black umbrellas dripping rain’s
pathetic fallacy
on a procession of black and pant-spatter,
the implacable emigration of
these dummies to these
ghost towns.
Let us go, please, and leave this crowd.

This is a good vintage it’s making me mimsy.
How ‘bout another?

There will always be the green fog that make
impatiently through the city streets,
that clops its pale hoof.
The fog that dresses in a trench coat and
circles about the garbage-strewn slums,
that raps its knuckle on the
penthouse windows,
sees me and you and them and smiles.

There is no time.
I have never seen an Oslo skyline
or the violence of a



Melissa Upfold - Untitled

New Zealand rugby pitch.
No time before my sinewy arms
will sag and before kegels will be useless
against my imminent mutation.
There is no time. Will I squeeze it in?:
a hot air balloon over Machu Picchu,
the mountains of Banff.

This is a good vintage it's making me mimsy.
How 'bout another?

I have no interest in
 coffee-stained literature.
In the nights, mornings, noons and after, in the
evenings I have studied
girls' perfect clefts
on my bed
under my painting of Venus.
Myself, I am too fidgety to pose for a portrait but
if a prayer could save I would do it.

And I have known the eyes that fix on me—
have known the teeth that bite
 lower lips, nipping
for GQ metrosexuality
(They say: That suit is Boss.),
the nostrils that whiff my international pheromone,
model hair and abs,
(Saying: He smells like Heracles.) though
I am Achilles.

This is a good vintage it's making me mimsy.
How 'bout another?

That relentless watchman plods
 at my heel.
But who will watch him? I cannot.
Put simply, I am afraid of his clocking pace;
the sharks who, plashing through puddles
of advertisement catch the scent of blood;
 they frenzy me.

But will it be worth it, after all,
after the wines and oceans of flannel—
and after this
 quasar of life,
will it be worth it all? when we see the lights out.



Julie Maclean - Untitled

They Said He Needed A Vacation

By Teilo Moore

Resolution

The dog leash was slack, tied to one of the beams that ran across the roof of the garage. There was a clatter and a chair crashed to the floor. The leash went taut and swung jerkily from side to side like a pendulum. It slowed over the course of an hour and had stopped completely when the door creaked open.

Character

They said he needed a vacation. One of his colleagues had a cabin by Lake Superior. It was well-stocked, had its own generator for electricity, and even came equipped with a couple kayaks just for fun. Jason loved boating. Since he was only a junior partner in the firm, he didn't have the money to own a place like this. The first day he was at the cabin, he settled in but on the second day he was out on the lake. It was a beautiful, sunny day, a few clouds in the sky, and a nice breeze running over the lake that was welcome relief from the heat. He

put on a pair of sunglasses taking them off often to see the shoreline more clearly. It was full of dense evergreen forests separated by rocky outcrops. He enjoyed the loneliness. Sometimes he'd pass over an enormous rock that rested just a few feet beneath the surface and abruptly cut off into a murky depth. There were schools of fish that would swim underneath the kayak and, occasionally, one would leap out of the water to catch a dragonfly that was buzzing too near the surface. Jason calmly paddled along, feeling relaxed and at home. Maybe this vacation from his life in Toronto was exactly what he needed.

Setting

Jason had been out on the lake for a few hours and the wind had picked up. He put on his jacket to keep himself warm. Looking up at the sky, he noticed a string of dark clouds moving towards him. They were clearly thunderheads. He turned the kayak around to start paddling back to the cabin. He looked behind. The clouds were gaining on him too quickly. It didn't look as though he'd make it back in time. He was well out on the water, away from the cabin, and decided to try to make a landing and wait the storm out. The wind picked up. Now the water was full of waves. They weren't big enough to give him trouble yet but he was worried about what was coming behind them. He knew the waves could get well above six feet on Lake Superior, even close to shore. They were called "The Three Sisters". The waves would come in threes, the first being the largest but not by much. He paddled harder, straining to pick up speed over the waves that were growing bigger by the minute. He was powerfully built and was succeeding; the shore coming closer second by second. Just then the wind howled anew and he felt the first of the raindrops splatter on his head. The water raged as they pelted down.

Conflict

His daughter, Julia, had gone to bed an hour ago and was probably asleep. His wife, Allison, was out of town, visiting her mother who was dying of cancer. Jason climbed up the stairs. Julia was 14 years old and had just started high school. He wasn't sure if she'd tried any drugs or alcohol yet. He hadn't smelled any weed on her or any alcohol on her breath. He checked whenever she came home. He realized that he was an overprotective father but he



didn't care. He loved Julia, thought that she was the most beautiful girl in the whole world. He walked down the hall. He knew what it had been like for him in high school. He hadn't been the best student, was normally stoned out of his mind in class and drunk on the weekends. His mother had had to convince his stepfather to pay for the law school. He'd gotten into university on a baseball scholarship and cleaned up his act there. He knew the sort of trouble that you could get into in high school. He didn't want Julia screwing up her life that way. He stopped in front of her door. He was sure that she wasn't a virgin though. He opened the door and slipped through quietly. She wasn't asleep yet and had a reading lamp on beside the bed.

Frances Tibollo – "Thumbelina"

“Daddy?”

He shushed her, moved over to the lamp and turned it off. He pulled off his shirt and slipped into bed with her.

“No, Daddy, please . . .”

He reached over to her and slowly pulled her nightgown up, easing its way over her hips, her breasts, and finally lifting her arms so he could pull it over her head.

“Julia, this is a part of growing up. Everyone goes through this.”

He unbuckled his pants and took them off, along with his underwear.

“Don’t worry, it’s ok.”

He could feel her trembling and pulled her close.

Climax

Jason was late for an appointment with a client. He’d taken a nap and overslept. He rushed through getting ready, pulled on a suit, and grabbed his papers. He entered the garage and staggered. Hanging from a dog leash tied to a beam on the roof was his daughter. Julia’s face was blue and her head was at an odd angle with her body. The end of the leash was tied tightly around her neck. His beautiful girl was dead. Jason stood there in shock for a few moments and then fell to his knees. Why did she do it? Out of the corner of his eye he noticed a piece of paper tucked under the windshield wiper of Allison’s van. He walked over and picked it up, making sure his back was facing her. It was written to his wife, telling her all about the nights he had spent alone with Julia. That was the reason his beautiful girl was dead. That was what she had written. Jason stuffed the note in his pocket and walked stiffly back out through the garage door and into the kitchen where he called his office to tell the client he wouldn’t be showing up, then he called the police and, finally, Allison.

Catharsis

The storm had passed, blown quickly along by the wind. The sun was back in the sky, shining brightly. There were no clouds anymore. The evergreen trees on the shore swayed slightly in a small breeze that made small ripples on the surface of the lake. The dragonflies came back out over the water, searching for mosquitoes and black flies to eat. The fish started to leap out of the water to catch some food. Out drifting on the lake was an overturned kayak. The storm was past and the day was beautiful again.



Julie Maclean - Untitled

Cree Maiden

By Richard L. Provencher

Not a scenic sight in
1967
when tourists
shouted eagerly as if it
was normal entertainment
to see a native lady
fighting the law
in Moosonee Ontario

holding up the
Polar Bear Express
brochures named the train
but going nowhere
this very moment
her hands tight around
railway steel

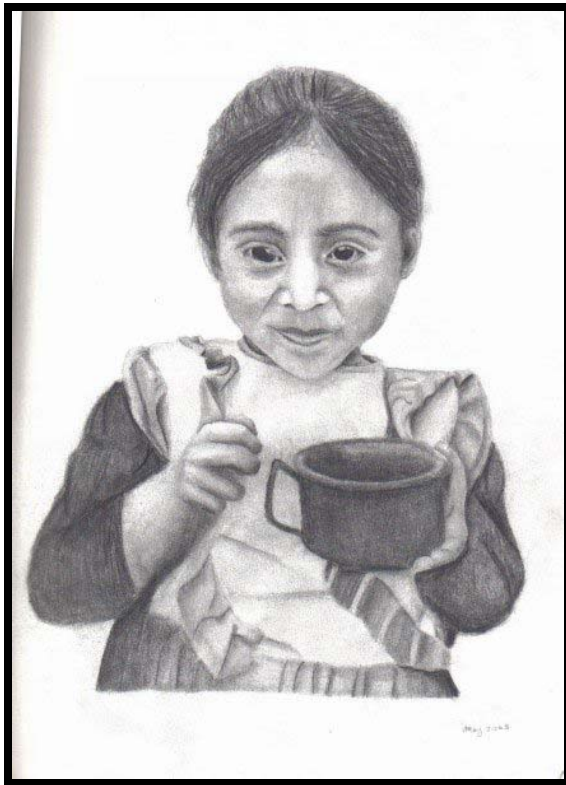
a muscled grip keeping two
OPP constables
sweating through tunics
while grappling with
firm fingers

train anxious with its horn
crowd in no hurry to depart
and I could hear
her huffing with each
push against her
shoulders and arms
burly uniforms unable to
unclench fingers
locked in an ancient battle.

I quietly cheered her
stubbornness
and raised my hand
in support of her success
delaying the train
and preventing these people
from returning to worlds
beyond her village

of canvas tents
and woe-begotten dreams.

I trembled in her defiance
of the White Man's influence
and I too mouthed words
she was able to shout:
This is my land.
This is my land.



Julie Maclean - Untitled

The Sounds of Childhood

By Adina Siperman

No one knew what to expect from Saturday mornings. I would open my ears before I opened my eyes. The best was the scratchy, smoky voice of Bob Dylan. To wake up and be asked, “How many roads must a man walk down?” was to have found my own private Eden. I would ignore my plagued teeth, my tousled hair and my wrinkled pajamas, and I would pitter patter down the stairs of my childhood home. The best was when my sister was still sleeping and my mom was frying eggs in the kitchen. My dad would be sitting on the far left of our checkered sofa, tapping his foot to the wane of the harmonica and

sipping black coffee from an etched glass mug. My heart soared as I knew the attention about to be lavished upon me. I would climb onto his majestic knee and bounce to the music or twirl my finger in the tapestry of his beard. Sometimes he began with stories of Odysseus and the Cyclops or Jacob and the angel. Sometimes with stories of his childhood memories of paper airplanes and boy scout adventures. But the best – the best, the best, the best- were the stories about me. He would remind me about how he had favourite green marbles, but he had donated them to the Adina Green-Eye Foundation. And he would warn me not to go outside. Curators at the Louvre had been given word of my existence, and they were planning on putting me in their permanent collection. He didn't want to have

to buy a plane ticket and wait in a long line and deal with the French just to see his own creation. Sitting there, I would hear Dylan sing, “I’m ready to go anywhere; I’m ready for to fade,” and I had no idea what he meant.

But then there was another type of Saturday morning. The rumbling would start from the basement with the sounds of coins falling. Quarters, pennies, nickels would infiltrate my dreams until I could no longer pretend to sleep. And though there were two floors separating me and the record player, it felt like Roger Waters was in bed next to me, thrashing under the covers and moaning, “Money.” I would prepare myself by pretending to dress in armour. It covered every bare inch of skin, with double layers around my heart. Achilles would have been jealous and in awe of the craftsmanship.

Slowly, hesitantly and unable to avoid the inevitable, I would clang down the carpeted steps to the first floor and then down the rickety, wooden steps to the basement. In the dim light with the faint odour of books, there he would be in the small bathroom in

front of the mirror playing air guitar to Pink Floyd, or if it was really a bad time, Jimi Hendrix. I would stand in the shadows for twenty, thirty, forty minutes and though my armour clanked and I made noises to indicate the arrival of his most grand masterpiece, he never heard me. He would play the same songs over and over and then sprint past me to paint in red and orange and yellow. And then race upstairs and yell and slam doors and leave. I would still be there in the shadows of the basement. And even though I donned impenetrable armour, it still hurt.



Ben Gehrels - "Flick-Switch"

But those weren’t even the worst kinds of Saturday mornings. There were many, many mornings when I would wake up to the sound of birds chirping and children playing outside. My heart would sink. I knew that once I opened my bedroom door, I was walking out into air as thick and swampy as the Amazon. The silence would be deafening and unbearable. I would prepare myself by pretending to put on sunglasses that obliterated my peripheral vision.

Quickly, voraciously and in an effort to make as much noise as possible, I would dart from my room, straight to my sister’s, pull her from her wrist, wrestle her down the stairs and set us in front of a TV blaring *Shira Princess of Power*. I never looked into the room next to mine, because I know what I would see. The blinds would be drawn, the lights would be off, the speakers would be silent. He would be slung over the bed with his eyes staring straight up at the ceiling. Nothing could rouse him for days, weeks and sometimes, months. And though I hated Jimi Hendrix, I would pray for the Saturday mornings when his guitar would shriek from the speakers. Noise, any noise, was better than the sound of silence.

as it is

By adam macdonald

in heavens name
a trampled walmart worker
in the name of christ

as it is
thy
will be done on earth
forgive us not our trespasses
forgive us not

Hair Shirt

By Lisa Fiorindi

Leave me alone. I don't want to
be scrutinized, especially not at
4 o'clock in the morning you said as
I laughed into your back.
Rilke's mother too wanted him
to be a girl and being caught
between the Magnum
P.I. and the hairless super-
model generation is difficult,
I know.

Hair winding thick round
your shoulders, back,
black hair, a hair shirt as in
the Middle Ages you said, as in
used for torture except I can't
take mine off. And that's what got
me
laughing, your cleverness, your wit,
not the hair, full curls of it,
tufted, soft.

Hey, I didn't mean to hurt
your feelings but still you



Julie Maclean - Untitled

ignored me, my desire to
touch your small, perfectly-
proportioned body, delicate hands,
wrists that fit easily within my circled
fingers, almost like a child's.

Have you ever read *Venus in Furs*?
I'll lend you my copy you had said, in one
of those first conversations where anything
is possible, even love. Sacher-Masoch
and poor little Rilke entering into
my vocabulary, thoughts as I begin
to contemplate the plight of St. Joachim,
your hometown's namesake, his
existence as the father
of the Virgin, so apocryphal.

Sex is volatile and someone can
get hurt. And I don't want to
hurt you Lisa, I don't want to hurt
anyone. That is what you said,
tap tapping the inside
hollow between cunt and thigh or
pressing firm down on
the small of my back
trying to make me understand
the imperfection of my arch.

You don't know what it's like
to be a social outcast do you?
To live alone with no one to talk to,
not even your mother. Sadistic bitch
that she is. Or masochistic, depending
on the day and position she is forced
to take up. How I hated her
stupid purple swollen face, lip
eye and the way she pulled on my
hair when she was mad.

But after a month you'll be begging
me, doing strange things with
kitchen utensils, it'll be the only way
you can get off because it's never
hard enough and sometimes you
just want to fuck
the ugly fat girl.

Adolescence, I see, is still full of angst.

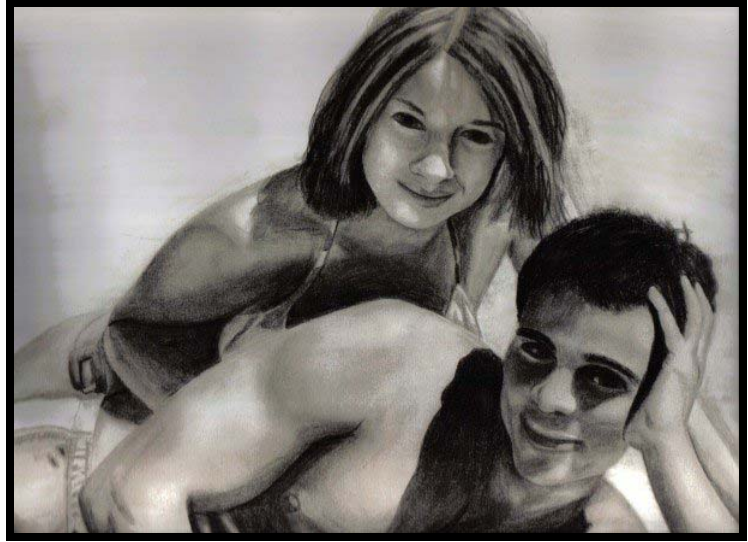
God how I loved
to take my shirt off
in the summer, I used to get so
brown and tanned, it wasn't till
my early 20s that I got all this
disgusting hair. I don't care if
you like it, it's coming off
only it's so hard to
wax my own back.
Do you know anything
about electrolysis?

But I do have a fantasy,
it is about bathing you.
Holding you there between my
legs,
spread thighs, your back
wet warm against my belly,
breasts
lather of the fig leaf soap I bought
to share slippery between us.
Scrubbing you, washing
your hair, the thinning ones
on top of your head and the ones
on your body, tilt your head back,
trust me, I will not let it sting your eyes.
Carefully, so carefully I will
rinse away your pain.

Just a fantasy. And the fantasy world
should not be mixed with reality otherwise
people have trouble functioning, just
ask Laura Rümelin, she will tell you.

Common among the ascetics,
this quest for perfection and desire
for penance, you are not the first.
But as I say, sometimes the wounded
child just needs to let go
of the hurt carried for so long,
guarded up like a treasure.
After all, it's not your fault
that thunderstorms are scary.

I do not believe in
gobbling up my strawberries
all at once or counting on



Julie Maclean - Untitled

the fix of a drug, the most
immediate way to feel,
power over another. I do not
believe that love is always
and only mush and
this, as I've said before,
has nothing to do with
monogamy.

But as you say, it doesn't matter
what I like, you are the one
who has to wear the shirt, and
you will do what you deem
fit with your pain, only I
will not accept your hair-stuffed
pillow touted back from
the aesthetician's (no matter how much
I likecravewant your smell).

I am not among
those who say
St. Joachim never
existed. I am
intimate with the
small girl he left,
alone
at the Temple.



Julie Maclean - Untitled

The New Roman Circus

By Brendan Abern

Saints line their pockets and use charity for ratings
One Big Give. Plasma screens for everyone.
See real people make fools of themselves,
or be emotionally destroyed for a chance to be idolized.
Self-esteem is important yes? So get skinny, and stay stupid.
A generation brought up like Bratz
TV and the magazines told me to do it,
Golden Calves now on mass production.
Game time!
Watch as tonight's contestant jeopardizes relationships with family and friends
for a chance to win Big Cash Prizes.
The Moment of Truth! Final Question: Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader?

Monuments to our generation.
Dignity and pride are gleefully surrendered.
Those things have a price, and the price is \$500 000;
Which in all likeliness, you will not receive.
Thanks for playing,
at least you got to be on the TV.
The pilgrimage is over
15 minutes in Mecca.
The spotlight has shifted
Now get back to work.
Everyone is entertained.
The empire crumbles while temperature and death toll rise with the ratings.
Giving the people what they want;
this is the New Roman Circus.



Ben Gehrels - "Guardian"

Encounter with Greatness

By Andre Narbonne

I butted a cigarette on the sizzling asphalt and said, "Enough." As always the SUVs that passed had single occupants. No doubt the air was frigid inside. I got angry. I had "The Cremation of Sam McGee" lodged in my head. Probably because it mocked me.

"Enough," I said. "I quit..."

I guessed I meant smoking, but I wasn't certain how the sentence was meant to end. Smoking was only one of the things I quit that summer.

Rachel called twice a day. She could be lonely, nostalgic, angry,

defensive. Mostly she was poverty-stricken. I'd hear her smoking on the other end of the receiver—Players Extra Light. I'd hear the scratch of a match, the sudden flare followed by the sound of her inhaling. Then she'd let the telephone hang down just a bit lower because it interfered with the path of her cigarette and her voice would become remote.

It bothered me that I loved her now in a way that meant I no longer knew her. I only knew her well enough to predict a collection of phrases and the timing of the match. I didn't know her well enough to sue for peace, to demand she let me return to her or that she return to me.

I told her on the phone one day, “I have no faith in the past if this is what it’s brought me.” The statement was incredibly vague for the damage it caused. I should have said something more concrete.

“You fucking bastard,” said Rachel.

Why hadn’t I expected that?

Every day, my insignificance seemed to take on the weight of the quiet clay in that Service poem. And the weight of something dead was inside me. It entered the way idle thoughts enter, through some process of association over which I had no control. The world was wasted, jaundiced in the prickly heat. I saw that wasteland and the truth of it came inside, until the truth was that I was the wasteland, the quiet clay. I could only rescue myself by delving deeper into nothingness, by being a ghost.

To make matters worse, I was in a delirium of withdrawal—my own fault for having started smoking at fourteen. I was in the grip of a monster.

That grip loosened only a little as I spent an entire day pruning in the tub—my only respite from the heat. I tried to imagine what to propose to my thesis advisor. I’d gotten into Western for my PhD on an application to theorize “The Canadian Tragic”—*The Black Donnellys*, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. I was optimistic back then. Now I was trivial and starting to grasp the necessity of irony. And not just the dramatic sort of irony that sticks it to kings while the audience sighs. I wanted the sort of irony that builds rather than defeats. I wanted comedy.

But nobody cared about comedy.

I lay in the water that never seemed to cool. I thought about my triviality as though *it* were the monster and I saw myself wrestling with it. I thought for maybe eight hours. Then I rose up out of the tepid waters, dirty and unblessed.

Rachel asked me out for dinner. She wanted to know why, if I had ever loved her, I’d exchanged her old life for this damaged one. I waved off her questions. I wouldn’t answer. I told her to say something straight, to tell me her opinion, a memory or a story. Don’t give me any more questions, I said. They disturbed my meal.

Still she prodded. I deflected. She asked questions in a way that made them into statements. She pushed and pulled at the same time.

I just ate.

When I was done I thanked her for asking me out and then said good-night.

“Wait,” she pulled something from her bag, a stained glass figure. “It’s for you.”

I held her present to the light. It was a curious piece, a naked person—seemingly half man, half woman. When I said as much she replied, “No, it’s a castrated man. See the red drops on his leg. Blood. I thought of you when I made it.”

“That’s good,” I replied. “I’ll hang it in my office. It will probably improve my chances of getting hired.”

And then I left. For some reason this time I did not look back, as I always did, no matter how unkind the fight. It was politic. This time I simply left.

In the hot darkness, the emptiness of withdrawal, I walked to a nearby oval-track. En route, the sweat beaded on my brow. I stared at my feet, imagined them taking me to some place of mending, step-by-step, until the flat space with its dirt track in an otherwise crowded cityscape emerged beneath a ring of lights that were shut off. It’s no good waiting to quit, I had decided in the tub. I would have to take action, would have to meet the monster on my own terms. I decided to go jogging.

The field was quiet. I took off my shirt, emptied my pockets into it and laid them by a post. I thought of the monster. “Okay,” I told it, “you’re ahead of me. I’m running

through you.” I inhaled. I imagined the end, and started out tentatively, felt the weight of my legs, the force of the earth pushing back. I increased the length of my stride, and in doing so felt the first pulse of hope I’d felt for weeks. I was running back to some place I had left mistakenly, some past fork in the road.

I heard him before I saw him, heard his breath, the pounding of his feet. He bore down on me with speed. I was in his track, his feet as furiously predictable in their motion as the connecting rods of an express.

In a moment he was gone. He didn’t turn or turn around, didn’t acknowledge me. I’d been reduced. I had come to the oval on a vengeful mission of recovery. I had come in order to discover a new standard of health and in becoming healthy to recover my emotions, my despair at my triviality. And I had been demolished. It was as though he and I were of a different species.

I stopped running before I’d even made the first turn. I was already pasted in sweat. I imagined myself in the eyes of me. I watched me. Saw the fiery intensity of a man in jeans plodding slowly forward while a real runner—a Lycra-attired athlete—approached swiftly from behind. I gauged the dramatic irony, the stuff of tragedy—Oedipus cursing himself and carrying on blindly.

As the man disappeared from my vision, I fell down in the soft grass, laughing.

My Air

By Greg MacLean

i woke up
and the sound was like
the march of trees
as they deracinated their roots from the cement
and dragged their terrifying weight
toward me
taking my air from me
so that all that entered my lungs
was their dust.

i need this to live.
without the dust of others, i empty
at a faster pace than their sounds fill me
as though i am wrapped in skin that is not
my own, and over my mouth is stitched
the hose into which
that dust may pour.

my life has been a long, slow, wrenching inhalation

Vampires

By Russell Welsh

Sex! Sex! They lured me with sex! I was fooled by them. The courtly maidens of the eighties generation. Madonna! Sharon Stone! Pamela Anderson! Modern-day vampires! And their master? The drug-crazy pimps of the lonely streets of Hell!

They were the ones who ruled. True beauty became extinct and death prospered around every corner. Where was Jean Harlow? Where was Valentino? Where was Marilyn Monroe when we needed her the most? Objects of desire cloaked in pinafores of pity! No longer did they rule but something much more virulent. Cheap sex, cheap drugs and lowlife comedy acts!

How could Hollywood do this to us? We idolized her. Trusted her. And put her above all things! We were her followers. Her children. Our notions of God even came from her. But then we were betrayed! Eddie Murphy! Andrew Dice-Clay! Roseanne Barr!

Who gave these people the right to insult? To confuse? To prey on the minds of Children?

Pornography! Was it ever so bad? What happened with the eighties? Why did Dorothy Stratten have to die?

Questions! Questions! We are plagued by questions! John Belushi! John Candy! Michael Jackson! Why were they so good? Why did we love them so much? Mike Tyson! Ben Johnson! Anna Nicole! Thank God I live in Antigonish!

Pessimism, Optimism & A Tautology

By Stefan Weinsheimer

It is hard to stand life
When life can't stand you.
People say, it's bad luck
To dream,
Yet, what else do we have
But the hope for a better future?

Get up! Get up!
Go out and live!
Gone with the wind
Is the day you spent!
Take a chance and say hello!
There is more to life than ...

Only those who see what's there,
See what's there.



Ben Gehrels - "Broken Plates"

Contributors

Richard L. Provencher's Chapbook, 'In the Light of Day' is available from: www.mercutiopress.com. He has poems in Creekwalker, The Dublin Quarterly, Skyline Poetry, Ottawa Arts Review, Sky Forest, Creekwalker, The Ranfurly Review and others. Richard and his wife, Esther, live in Truro, Nova Scotia, They also co-authored three novels now available from: www.synergebooks.com.

André Narbonne is a writer living in London, Ontario. His work has been published in numerous journals including the Antigonish Review, Queen's Quarterly and Rampike and has won several literary prizes, most recently the 2008 David Adams Richards prize for an unpublished collection of short stories.

Lisa Fiorindi grew up in Windsor, Ontario where she graduated with her MA in English and Creative Writing. She recently completed her PhD in Comparative Literature and Women and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto. Her most recent writing can be found in the anthology *Re:Generations: Canadian Women Poets in Conversation* (Black Moss 2005), in the Pocket Canon Series (Misprints Press Toronto), and on *ditch*, the poetry that matters. She is a mother of two.

adam k macdonald grew up in Antigonish, Nova Scotia where he completed two scenic degrees at St. Francis Xavier University. He now lives in Fernie, British Columbia with his partner Annie and their Lab Retriever, Lexi. Adam belongs to several writing groups and some of the places his work can be found are the *Xaverian Weekly*, *Inscribed*, and *The Fernie Fix*.

Anne Simpson has written two novels, the most recent of which is *Falling*, as well as three books of poetry. She will soon publish a book of essays, *The Marram Grass: Poetry and Otherness*.

Allegra Blake teaches at Central Michigan University. She has been published in the *New Orleans Review*, *Hubbub*, *Blue Unicorn* among others.

Born in Poland, **Piotr Pawlowski** has been writing poetry ever since he dropped out of university, which he did twice. Currently unemployed he enjoys dumpster diving, gardening, biking, guerrilla art and zine making. He resides in St. Catharines, Ontario, where is part of an ever-growing activist community.

Mitch R. Murray is from Stellarton, Nova Scotia. He is currently studying at St. Francis Xavier University towards an HBA in English and is editor of *The Poet Grow-Op*.

Julie MacLean is currently a 4th year student at Saint Francis Xavier University about to complete her BA in Music with Honours. She is originally hails from Fredericton, New Brunswick. She is an artist, musician, actor, dancer and all around supporter and lover of the arts. She currently works as a teaching assistant in the St. FX art department. To her knowledge she's never had any of her artwork published before.

Adina Siperman was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, but her parents had the sense enough to move to the slightly less snowy city of Toronto. She got two beautiful degrees from York University in Classics and Humanities, only to discover that they translate into nothing in the "Real World." So, she is currently living in Mexico, spattering in Spanish and drinking a delicious concoction of beer and Worcestershire sauce (*salsa inglés, en español*).

Ben Gehrels is currently studying at St. Francis Xavier University towards an HBA in English Literature. He is a fiction reader for the *Antigonish Review*, and has had his poetry, prose, essays and photography published in magazines such as *All Rights Reserved*, *Inscribed*, *The Poet Grow-Op*, *ditch*, *The Southernmost Review*, *The Writer's Block*, and the *Frequent and Vigorous Quarterly*. An essay of his was published in *Elder and Leemaur's Challenge the Experts*, and he has a review of Julia McCarthy's *Stormthrower* forthcoming in the *Antigonish Review*.

Catherine M. Zagar grew up in Sudbury, Ontario, and is currently working towards her combined degree in English and Anthropology at McMaster University. Although she found her (one true)love of poetry in high school, she is now also aspiring to combine her love of writing with a career in archaeology. She writes for Incite Magazine and spends whatever free time she has creating bizarre artwork to shock her unsuspecting roommates.

Liz Mochrie was born and grew up at the end of the highway in north-western Ontario, and tells this fact to every person she meets because she thinks it adds to her character. She is currently finishing her second year at StFX and is hoping to complete an Honours in English with a Subsidiary in History. She specializes in eating everything in sight, bursting into bad accents and becoming inordinately excited over Tim Horton's coffee, especially if she wins things on her roll-up rim.

Amberlee Boulton is a fourth year student at the University of Waterloo. Originally from Guelph, Amberlee celebrates subversion and looks forward to consorting with more Wiccans about their sex lives to finish her thesis.

Frances Alexandria Tibollo... is currently a full time student at St. Francis Xavier in Antigonish, Nova Scotia where she is in her third year of her Bachelor of Arts Degree in Honours Political Science and International Development Studies. She is the Founder and President of the Oaklands Foundation, a not for profit organization concerned with education and development in impoverished nations, and enjoys politics, reading, writing, and singing. Frances holds a second-degree black belt in the martial art of Teakwon-Do, and is fluent in English, Italian, Spanish and French and aspires to study Mandarin. She hopes to encourage other youth to be active and involved members of not only their home communities, but also called to be active members of their global community.

Teilo Moore was born and grew up in Southern Ontario. He is currently completing his 4th year of an Honours BA in English at STFX.