fugue

Issue 42

Fugue (ISSN 1054-6014) is a journal of new literature edited by graduate students of the University of Idaho's English and Creative Writing programs. *Fugue* is made possible by funding from the University of Idaho English Department and Creative Writing Program and is published semiannually in the winter and summer.

Subscriptions are $10 for a sample, individual copy, $18 for 2 years (2 issues), $26 for 3 years (3 issues), or $50 for 3 years (6 issues); institutional subscriptions are $26 for 2 year or $39 for 3 years. Add $4 per year for international subscriptions. To subscribe or to order back issues, visit http://uidaho.edu/fugue.

Fiction submissions are accepted September 1 through March 1, poetry and nonfiction submissions are accepted September 1 through May 1. All material received outside this period will be returned unread. Please visit http://uidaho.edu/fugue/for submission guidelines. All contributors receive payment and two complimentary copies of the journal. Please send no more than five poems, two short-shorts, one story, or one essay at a time. Submissions in more than one genre should be sent separately. We will consider simultaneous submissions (submissions that have been sent concurrently to another journal), but we will not consider multiple submissions. All multiple submissions will be returned unread. Once you have submitted a piece to us, wait for a response on this piece before submitting again.

Printed by The Sheridan Press. Designed by Warren Bromley-Vogel.

fugue

Winter-Spring, Vol. 42

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ABOUT THE ISSUE

Even a casual observer of the trends in printing and publication knows that the futures of the printed word and digitization have become, for better or worse, inextricable. Whatever is to come in the world of literary publication, we find it hard to argue with the fact that online texts are easier to share, increasing the visibility of writers and, we hope, democratizing literature. In the midst of this relative *terra incognita*, the staff of *Fugue* is proud to present to you our first online issue, free of charge. Although we have made the decision to present online material, we are nonetheless committed to printing at least one issue per year and will continue to offer subscriptions and issues for sale.

Returning readers will notice that we have retained all our standard formatting and layout practices, as though the issue were appearing on the printed page. You may also notice that we opted to present a shorter issue, which allows us to maintain our high standards for unsolicited work while offering a forum for established voices to appear alongside emerging talent, and that is just what we have done here, in issue 42, concluding our 21st year in print. f

Tessa Fontaine

IN GHANA

The baby's pupils are locked together and face their own forehead, little worshippers. Most afternoons, you stand beside this upturned crate, your well-trained eyes not staring at the baby, not sticking on the many shades of skin like continents on his mothers' face. You are nineteen and still believe enough of your love can save anything, that anything can save anything, that saving is required. To look busy, you consider the items for sale: plastic-wrapped globes of peanuts the size of the baby's eye sockets, overfilled water satchels, hard-boiled eggs, and cornea-sized neon candies on whose packages action-fighting Japanese cartoons power-kick. You buy gum, a banana. You linger, like standing close might build kinetic energy. You stand and smile, always standing and smiling.

Mostly, you feel ripped raw by the beauty here. The flick-tongued rainbow agama bobbing his head like he hears drums. Edem in the dorm room next to yours, who invites you singing Wednesdays and Sundays, who brings you a bowl of stew when she hears you're sick, before you've ever spoken. You are supposed to be sad about Africa. You are sad about Africa, sometimes, but also you feel explosively awake, all-morning, all-song, and then the mother and baby who sell goods on the crate are the snapshot of this place you insisted was wrong. Instead of sitting with them, talking, you stand, smile and wonder if when the cross-eyed baby dreams in his crate-shade nap, he sees many worlds on top of each other, everything layered and blurry with the circles that pepper your eyes after too long in the sun. Or maybe he sees nothing at all. You look. You look at the baby, the mother, baby, peanut skin, baby, rust-colored dirt, pineapple skin, mother, baby, Cedi notes, headscarf,

baby, you do this for the full year you live there. You aren't supposed to do this kind of looking. You have to do this kind of looking. This stirring in your chest wants to nest all that's hard, and that makes you like people who come here thinking they are saviors. So you stand, smile. Buy nuts. You come back every day to stare as if they were a car wreck you, disappointingly, crane your neck to see. You come back. You smile. You wait. As if the looking could unhinge all the ghosts in your throat. f

Gary Jackson

HONEY

Leaning against the car door, heavy
with whiskey-breath, you ask me if this
will last. I'd like to believe

in the power of the word—
all it takes is a voice to etch fire onto stone.
The right words salve bodies, conjure

form from smoke—wisps of curve
solid as charcoal. But words are no more permanent
than air pushing and pulling

between two mouths. Is it
any wonder why we talk like this? Always goading
each other into soothsaying, pouring

so much honey down our throats, sticky
with promises we'll come clean, even when we're aware
of the bloated silence before saying
yes.

Michaela

says it's her English name. Like all
students, sleep-deprived and hungry,
she is quiet as snowfall. While others

mutter 병신 under their breaths
and scream Korean down the halls

to comfort tongues, Michaela sits,
hands folded across her desk, sipping
cocoa from a thermos. *I don't like talking,*
she says, *even in Korean.*

I ask her what she does for fun,
when not surrounded by foreign
teachers. Michaela says

I know her friends, but she doesn't know
their English names. She looks ashamed,
as if she has forgotten the name of her country.

What she means to say
is that she knows their real names,
not names rationed out to them by Americans.

Sometimes I ask my students to tell me
their names. They look at me strange.
Teacher, it's Cindy. I shake my head—

Your real name. They tell me, teach me
how to pronounce *li hyo-chi.*

I once asked Michaela
for her real name. She told me, smiled
when I said it right. And if I could

I would tell her
to always use this name.

But I've forgotten it,
forgotten all their names.
Only their English remains.

Blair Braver

LIFE ON ICE

There is a kind of claustrophobia that comes from life in a city and another that comes from open space—though I would never have believed in the second kind until I felt it myself in Alaska, where I lived for two summers. I went as a teenager in search of wilderness, a challenge maybe: a chance to prove my own toughness. I was hoping for something a lot like adulthood, and the backcountry—far from any authority I had known—seemed a better place than most to look for it.

I worked as a guide for a glacier dogsledding company, living on solid ice a half-hour helicopter ride from Juneau. There were a dozen people, a few hundred dogs, eight canvas wall tents. Snow that stretched out for a mile, ten miles, before hitting sharp black mountains, the outlines of which I could soon conjure with my eyes closed: the triangle called Guardian, the low, smooth Saddle, the jutting tower of Split Thumb. "You been to Alaska before?" the pilot asked me the first time I flew to glacier camp. I was a kid from California with a backpack and sneakers, an empty notebook. I shook my head. "Hoo boy," said the pilot. "You have no idea what you're getting into. I mean, really. *No idea.*"

I learned fast. The glacier shifted constantly beneath and around us; fog rolled down the slope of it, collecting in dips and valleys. Startling turquoise lakes formed on its surface, lakes a

hundred feet across that were gone the next morning. I grew used to the gunshot crack of ice breaking, and the thunder of avalanches in the afternoon warmth, before sunset and the night's chill froze everything solid again. Our faces blistered and our lips scabbed over; I'd bring my hand to my mouth and pull it away bloody.

I loved the weather, the tents, the manual labor and hundred-hour workweeks. I realized that I could handle them, and for a while at least, I fell in love with my own competence. But one thing I kept expecting to grow used to, and never did, was the glacier's size —how you could look out across the ice sheet and see mountains and not know if they were a mile away or twenty. I've heard about the startling places where life can grow—in the deep sea, on volcanoes, in the guts and flesh of other animals—and maybe there *was* life like that, microscopic creatures, ice worms, whole ecosystems I couldn't see. But the place felt empty. It felt like the only breath was our own, and we, the mushers, the dogs, were the beating hearts of the glacier itself. You don't realize how you miss plants until you haven't seen one in months, or color until you've lived in black and white.

Both summers, around August, a pair of ravens joined the glacier gang, picking through our trash and kitchen supplies. We made elaborate bets on which day they'd arrive, waging our tips and salaries and other glacier luxuries like fruit and decks of cards, scanning the sky as the predicted dates grew closer. All this excitement about the ravens—it wasn't because we were bored, needing entertainment. It was because of an odd homesickness we all had by that point in the summer, a desperate need for proof that there was more to the world than snow and tents and dogs and us.

There was a game I played with the man whose kennel was

next to mine. We would imagine that some disaster had struck the rest of the planet, and we needed to find our own way off the ice. "We'll weave snowshoes from dog hair and walk to Split Thumb, then scale the mountains using ganglines for ropes," he might say. I'd think about this, and later suggest that we could sled down the tongue of the glacier to where it met the sound, then hike the beach back to Juneau. We played the game for weeks, calling out to each other between rides, strategizing as we dished out dog food. What I never admitted—maybe not even to myself, despite a list I kept of the more plausible ideas—was how serious this felt, how important the game had become. The rest of the world was simply an idea, a concept that might or might not exist at any given moment, and that it might suddenly and permanently disappear seemed an ongoing possibility. The truth, I sometimes suspected, was that it was already long gone. f

Lindsey Johnson

WHERE DOES IT BEGIN AND WHERE DOES IT END?

Mrs. White does not believe in recitals. They are for people without pain. She plays only the funerals of her friends, which—with Mrs. White half in the grave herself—occupies most of her early afternoons. Before night lessons, she taps her baton lightly to the top of the piano and her students repeat her mantra—"Without death there is no music"—then, with tip-toe to pedal, they play for her.

In the yellow house where Mrs. White and her husband live, they keep the piano room dark and unfurnished, walls white and unscuffed as a hospital corridor. Besides the piano, there is only one other piece of furniture in the room: a glider with a cross-stitched cushion. Mrs. White keeps it angled behind the piano so she can see the finger-work of her students with no trouble.

Mrs. White and her husband have never made love in this room or in any other because Mr. White has multiple sclerosis and will always. Mr. White misses the way things were when he was able to bathe himself and make love to his wife whenever he chose. He was a beautiful composer when he and Mrs. White met. He had been her professor. The ember of a young and remarkable talent such as hers flipped his heart on its side. Though she was just a child, he believed that in some years, when she was no longer a child, the two of them would make musical children in a bright bedroom. Mr. White gave her a ride home from her lesson, kissed her neck in the car, and then her mouth, and then her hand. A year later, they were married.

Students hear him yell from the back of the house, his voice carrying like a breath down the hallway and into the piano room.

If he is not yelling at the television he is yelling at his own feet, the hopeless mechanics of them, resting dysfunctionally beneath a patchwork quilt. Mrs. White does not go to him. She is quiet for a moment while the student wonders about the life Mrs. White leads in the back of her house, if the voice from the hall is a prisoner she keeps.

"From the top," she says from the glider, as if the music had been interrupted, not by an unrelated force, but only by itself.

Mrs. White believes her marriage to Mr. White is a mouse behind the wall. It is a marriage of moments, of her busying herself while she waits for him to die. Other times, though, she will take him hot broth and watch him sleep from the doorframe. In these moments, he seems to be accumulating like dust, like company that stays too long after dinner has ended.

Today, upon Mrs. White's request, a student, Lydia is learning to play the third movement of Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2 in B flat minor. Mrs. White loves this one, loves the way it floats, a flake of tree bark being carried by a current, and then it comes, stunningly, to a halt. It is as if, she explains, the song had never happened at all.

"Isn't that life," she asks, sitting behind Lydia in her glider, "like it never happened at all."

Lydia nods, situates herself on the bench. She has been taking lessons from Mrs. White for three years. Mrs. White says that Lydia plays too happily, as though there is no pain inside herself to be addressed. Lydia doesn't understand how to play any other way than the way she does. Her parents kiss by the stove, her brother likes playing Barrel of Monkeys as she does, and she has only ever broken one bone.

Mrs. White says, "Lydia, this is a funeral song. Have you ever been to a funeral?" After only a few attempts, Mrs. White is getting impatient.

"My great-uncle," Lydia says, "but I didn't know him."

"Was it sad?" Mrs. White asks.

"Yes."

Lydia takes her fingers from the piano's keys.

"My mom was crying," Lydia says, "and so was my dad."

Mrs. White leans forward in her glider, so her mouth is to Lydia's back.

"What did crying sound like?" Mrs. White asks.

"I don't remember," she says, "but I hope I never hear it again."

"That's pain. I want you to play for the things you hope to never hear again," says Mrs. White.

Lydia begins again, Mrs. White tapping her baton, a makeshift metronome, on the arm of her glider. She plays a few measures, much slower than before, because it is the only way she knows to make a song less joyful. It is too slow to blend, as beauty does, and has become only the notes of which it is composed. It becomes a backbone and entirely that—structural, a pillar to support an arch.

Mrs. White strikes her baton on the end of the piano bench. Lydia stops playing.

"No," Mrs. White says, sounds exhausted, "that's too slow. Robotic. Try again."

"Mind if I use the bathroom?" Lydia asks, meekly.

Mrs. White sighs and says if she must relieve herself to do it quickly.

Lydia walks down the hallway to the bathroom on the right, a tiny half-bath with soft yellow fixtures. The vanity bulbs above the sink remind her of beautiful theatre actresses in movies she's seen, powdering their faces and wearing diamonds. Was Mrs. White ever beautiful, Lydia wonders, and does she wear makeup? She takes the mirror cabinet by its edge and opens it to see what's behind. She finds medicine for the stomach, bandages, and cold cream. If Mrs. White wears makeup, Lydia decides, she must keep it in her bedroom.

Lydia needs to know if Mrs. White was ever as beautiful as a theatre actress, if she still powders her nose in front of the mirror. This is what makes her mother happy, and Lydia needs to know the

difference between her mother and Mrs. White. Where does sadness begin and where does it end? She quietly opens the bathroom door and tip-toes just beside, to the bedroom.

The sunlight is pouring through the blinds, striping the carpet in rectangular shadows. It is, like all of the other rooms, white and barren, but this room, she finds is not the same. In the middle of the room, between two oak bedside tables with porcelain lamps, is a large bed. There is Mr. White, thin in a plaid pajama set, lying in the middle. He looks unreal, his eyes fixed on the door she has just entered, but they are not shifting, not blinking. His mouth sits slightly open and Lydia can see the edges of his teeth. Lydia gasps and covers her mouth with her palms. Above the bed is a metal contraption, like a crane, and though she does know the name of it, she knows it will no longer be of use to Mrs. White, that in some days it will be taken from beside this bed and sent someplace just as transitory. f

Sarah Vap

GHOST

We moved pretty slowly down,

then across, then up, then across, then down,

then we moved back across.

It was hard to tell what was important.

TRAVEL

The continent spread apart then the continent condensed around us. Like the continent, we made an effort to remember. Memory, we thought at first, was something like love but memory was weight. Memory was the heavy mirror of history. Was shadow falling at your face—falling at your face.

GHOST

Once we began to move like ghosts

we did not stop for a long time. A ghost,

you might think, is very heavy, and that is true.

That is really very true. It is heaviness at the heaviness pulling

within and around you.

HEAVE

We joined the tangle of heavy ghosts moaning. We pulled the ghosts up by their chains to say: We will hurt you. We will tear you the fuck apart. We will hunt down your children. We will hunt down your children's children we will never stop. The ghosts wailed.

GHOST

The road is both narrow and wide

and nobody pointed

at us or hid the mouth or whispered horror

or hallelujah as we moved by, though occasionally

they gestured to our spines as if lifting them.

As if, I thought, the spines of fish are lifted clean away.

GHOST

As we moved Lover was diminished then made of air. Once, he was even whiter, he was
even whiter than that—I was, too.

We tried to remember back that far.

TRAVEL

Sometimes when we heard the white words—especially
from the churches

especially from the advertisements,

especially from the radio,

especially when nothing else, to us, was familiar—

we mouthed them.

TRAVEL

How do you feel about that.

What do you think about that?

PALE

When our bodies twisted, it was like two gusts of air
meeting then twisting.

Like fog running into other fog

and slowly smashing it.

TRAVEL

When we moved we tried to get at the heavy ghost and when we did it always looked like one body getting at another body

and when that body did they both dissolve but the ghost doesn't go anywhere: that is the sound we all make all getting at one another across the hemisphere and never getting that is a communal wail.

TRAVEL

The pressure in the sternum—to pry it apart, to release

one single definite pressure. Then, to the one above it, the

yearslong ache at the throat.

INSTITUTION

When fog remembers back to the older fog—

the one that everyone remembers with intellect

or loathing, it thinks:

actually, we are people. We are white people.

Everywhere we go, we will remember that we are white people.

Shann Ray

BLACK KETTLE: A TRIPTYCH

He knows what lies in the darkness, and light dwells with him.
—Daniel

I. BLACK KETTLE'S DREAM

1864.

A year fresh from the century of enlightenment. A year in the cauldron of civil war. In a time of severity and struggle, Black Kettle, chief of six-hundred Cheyennes, led his people following buffalo along the Arkansas River of Kansas and Colorado. They passed through the scablands of the north, rock outcroppings and veins of sage, swells of sparse grass that led finally to land broken by coulees where a few thin cottonwoods remained even in the dry dirt. The trees looked barely alive, waiting on storms and flash rivers, roots like slender fingers seeking water in the deep underground and Black Kettle saw their withered form and continued on from there and brought the Cheyennes to Big Sandy Creek in the Colorado territory. Though they had no signed treaty, he and his people relied on good will, camping near the white man's outpost called Fort Lyon, where he meant to make peace and accept sanctuary.

In the west, John Chivington, his family having immigrated to America two generations before, raised the Third Colorado Cavalry with rough-hewn force, hodge-podge militia mixed equally of drunkenness and the wish to kill. Chivington led a band of 700 men into Fort Lyon, and gave notice of his battle plan against the nearby Cheyenne encampment. Although he was informed that the

Cheyennes under Black Kettle had already surrendered, Chivington left the garrison, directing his men to pursue Cheyenne extinction.

Black Kettle lay in his lodge on a bed of sagebrush covered with robes, warmth of his wife like a bird in the palm, and he remembered in former days how the band asked to be brought as blood into the White Man's family. He was a young soldier chief then and listening to the head chief he'd thought the request very wise: the chief asked the White leaders for one-thousand White women given as brides to the Cheyennes, to unite the Cheyennes with the White Man. The White Man, haughty, refused.

Lying still, seeing night overhead through the tipi opening, Black Kettle remembered capturing eagles as a young warrior to gather emblem-feathers for the peace chiefs. Now I am an old chief myself, thought Black Kettle, and he remembered how with singular hatred the White Man had said no to the Cheyenne request for White wives.

He whispered to his sleeping wife, "An eagle can take in nearly the whole world with his eyes and know it as clearly as a man looks at the ground by his feet." In this way Black Kettle saw the heart of the White Man, and saw it was dark. Still he hoped in the good of all men, for an end of fighting and the beginning of new days.

Black Kettle's camp meandered along the Big Sandy, 120 lodges, people of skeletal hunger, sunken eyes and burnished skin, near dead, he thought. For them he held both hope and great despair. He remembered a time when dogs licked antelope grease from the tips of his fingers and he rubbed his hands in the scruff of their fur. There were no dogs now. Everything seemed to be made of starvation and war.

In the darkness he rose and walked among the sleeping lodges. He passed the lodges of Elk Society Headsman Standing In Water, Kit Fox Headsman Two Thighs, and Yellow Shield, leader of the Bowstrings. He passed the lodges of Chiefs Yellow Wolf, Warbonnet, Sand Hill, Bear Tongue, Little Robe, Bear Man,

Blacktail Eagle, Spotted Crow, Bear Robe, White Antelope and One Eye. A strong village once, but now with so much hunger. Black Kettle's sorrow was heavy. He had fought wars with the White Man at Fremont's Orchard, and Cedar Canyon, and Buffalo Springs, where the soldiers killed Chief Starving Bear. He had made raids along the overland routes and killed the Hungates at Box Elder Creek and killed Marshall Kelly and captured his White woman Laura near Little Blue River. But the White Man only increased in number and took more Cheyenne lives. He walked the full length of the village along the north side of Sand Creek and heard the sound of the river and no one rose to greet him and he was glad of it. He sang his chief's song for he would do a good thing and he decided he would do this thing tomorrow; he'd take the people all the way into the White fort and make peace so they might receive food and not starve.

The time now was not the same as former times. It wasn't like when Wolf Tooth and the Cheyennes made peace with the Utes. Then they just came together, and each man chose a friend on the other side and gave him gifts, clothing, and moccasins, and a horse or two. Wolf Tooth had gained a Kiowa friend the same way, who gave him a good horse and some beautiful clothes, and those different moccasins the Kiowas wore with leather soles all in one piece and fringes on the heel and on top. Wolf Tooth gave the Kiowa man all his best clothes in return, and an excellent war horse he hated to give up, but he was happy to have a friend in the tribe they used to fight. The Whites were different. They gave as a group, clothing and calico and flour and sugar and coffee. One time they butchered a hundred head of cattle by a river, but the White men let the meat set too long and the Cheyennes never touched those carcasses and just let them rot. The meat tasted funny and sweet and they wouldn't eat it.

At the end of camp Black Kettle stood watching the river for a great while. In a meadow across the water he saw One Eye's black-white paint standing, a horse strong and fast, staring back at him.

Black Kettle returned to his lodge and lay down and drew his wife near again and held her as she slept and he waited for sleep.

Deep and dark the dream. Darker the waiting day.

II. CHIVINGTON'S TREACHERY

Black Kettle raised an American flag and a white flag of peace over his tipi.

Chivington raised a hand to quiet his men.

He sat astride a big-haunched pale horse on hardscrabble dirt under the gray pre-dawn sky. He was a man of thick face and eyes, small ingrown beard and wide nose, overly fat and pink-skinned like his father, far son of those unknown to him. Chivington positioned his men, along with their four howitzers, around the Cheyenne village of Black Kettle.

"Remember boys, big and little, nits grow up to make lice. Kill them all."

Children, child-wealth to the Cheyennes but to Chivington, a former clergyman, the Cheyenne children were vermin and less than dogs, worthy only to die, and worth less than his words of dispatch, and barely worthy, he thought, of the time it took to kill them.

Scream of gunfire in the waking hour. Shouts of warriors and wails of women, children awake and running in the pale half-dark over the surface of the water, to the far side of the river, the river a small barrier between the charge of the White Man on foot and horseback, the soldiers fat with bloodlust for the ill-prepared, small band of warriors putting up return fire of bow and arrow and some few guns, making time for Black Kettle to move with those he could and follow the children through the water to the other side, and take the far bank, seeking cover.

Behind Black Kettle the sleeping woke to bullet fire and White men walking like darkness painted pale, the point of knife and hatchet blade and butt of axe, bayonet and big guns in smoking

towers rolled on wheels, spitting fire on the body of the Cheyennes, herds of guns issuing malice and burning lead through flesh and bone.

Below him in the riverbed, Black Kettle's wife fell, shot multiple times in the back, and he thought her dead, and fell silent, watching. Beyond her body, he saw the White interpreter George Bent with his wife Magpie, Black Kettle's own niece. Magpie behind him, Bent emerged from his lodge near the southern point of camp, hands raised, waiving his arms. Stop! He shouted. Halt! But the White men pushed him aside and walked over him and Black Kettle thought how like a windblown young tree the man looked, bent to the ground, arms pale, leaning off to one side. He saw the hands of the attackers in hard circles in the air, striking children, killing them, shooting old men and kneeling in fierce strokes over women, the White men with vigorous knife-work, sawing roughly, desecrating the dead.

Black Kettle turned and faced uphill and shouted, "Fly! Keep alive! We gather after nightfall!"

Chivington rode engulfed by those well-armed and drunk on liquor and blood, rushing down on those who asked for restraint but who garnered only his measure of hate, his method borne of the small heart, unfit and rabid. After a day of war he wanted victory, no prisoners, and the cannons and rifles pounded the Cheyennes, and as the tribe scattered in panic many were hunted down and shot, the soldiers charging, killing all that moved. The group of Cheyenne warriors holding the river ran through the water and up the hillside, following the few who escaped. Near the far bank a single dead tree, white as bone and nearly limbless, stood in stark contrast to the black of the water. A lantern moon, full and dirty hung low in the early dark and touched the land with opaque light. Over the battlefield, winds sent a flock of black swifts swerving. They banked upward along the river and fell away, reckless with speed.

Still dark. Light-burn on the edge of the world. Into dawn's light Chivington cantered as dust rose from the ground and bullet fire banged like hard rain around him. He led the men forward with their howitzers, up the river bed to kill those who tried to escape. The remaining Cheyennes, mostly the old and the weak, the elders, the women and children, dug small trenches in the ground, sand pits in which to conceal themselves and use what meager weapons they'd taken hurriedly from camp to counter the onslaught.

Chivington pressed forward with the Howitzers and laid down suppressing gunfire. He blew the people from their moorings. When everything grew quiet he stopped and held up his arm and again his men halted. He dismounted and took them on a tour of the dead over which he held himself and jerked each head taut, woman, child, man, and carved away their hair and opened their deerskin clothes and set his hand on their genitals and scalped women's pubic hair and carved away breasts and took the genital skin of boy and man to use and sell, coin pouches for the privileged, fine place, he thought, to carry what economy a man might have. He'd share with those Denverites he knew would turn a gleeful smile. The men followed him, spitting epithets, gathering what they willed as they ran with curved backs and took as he took and carved as he carved, pocketing grotesque treasures and laughing aloud and choking on laughter, busy building frenzy to nightfall, gathering and building their fires, their conflagrations licking like tongues, phosphorescent orange and red in the hovering dark.

Outside on the long night the remnant of the Cheyennes smoldered on the plain, largely alone, and still. Finally, they rose and moved and found one another, children of the day who bore silently the massacre that turned women to warriors and made every Cheyenne man pledge his life to kill the White Man.

See one woman. Black Kettle's wife. Shot 9 times. Left for dead, Black Kettle took her up and carried her and found refuge in the

camp of the Cheyenne Dog Soldiers at Smokey Hill River. From that day forward she was called Woman Here After. The rest who survived also joined the Dog Soldiers, and Black Kettle led them and lay down with his wife again in the healing lodge.
See the old men of the Cheyennes over their fires whispering the old words.

"A nation is not conquered
until the hearts of its women are on the ground.
Then it is finished,
no matter how brave its warriors
or how strong their weapons."

Into the dark Chief Leg-in-the-Water said, "What do we want to live for? The White Man has taken our country and killed all of our game. He was not satisfied with that, but killed our wives and children."

"Now no peace."

"We want to go and meet our families in the spirit land. We loved the Whites until we found out they lied to us, and robbed us of what we had."

"We have raised the battle axe until death."

See the women wail. See the quick speed of the Cheyenne warriors, an arrow to the heart of the White Man.

III. THE SUICIDE WARRIORS

In an avenging wildfire the Cheyennes gathered and healed their wounds and rose with vindicated eyes to find and kill White people, and on a day not long after Sand Creek they entered the battle of the Little Bighorn in southeast Montana territory where they took the gold-headed leader of the White men, called Custer, and kissed the earth with his blood.

This they did in a most unassuming way; the lowest and weakest among them gave their lives.

Of the Cheyennes, four men. The poorest ones, some young, some old, having no guns, only bow and arrow, club and hatchet, having little and having as yet won little honor. The four made a vow to the people.

"In our next engagement with the White Man, we fight until we die."

Whirlwind, son of Black Crane. Noisy Walking, son of White Bull or Ice. Cut Belly. Closed Hand. The suicide boys of the Cheyennes.

The dying dance was prepared and when the men entered the circle the people cheered them, celebrating their courage. The men danced all night, the reckless way, painted of white and dark, dancing until morning when they emerged and went out through a camp of eight-thousand Cheyenne, Sioux, and Arapaho, spread four miles along the river.

When they walked, the old men went on either side of them and the criers called out in a loud voice: "Look at these men for the last time. Today they are alive. Today they have thrown their lives away."

The four joined suicide warriors from the Sioux and together they went with the war party to the field of war. Strategically, they were last to enter the fight, diving on horseback into the enemy's final position, flying as the spear-point, piercing the enemy, fighting hand to hand, dying at gunpoint, the larger mass of warriors flowing in behind, killing Custer, routing his White soldiers, killing them all.

Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse and the combined forces of the Cheyenne, the Lakota Sioux, and the Arapaho orchestrated an advance that left Custer and his two-hundred men dead in less than an hour. A battle of two fronts, one on either side of a winding

ridge, the warriors ran the distance between and decimated their enemies.

Over two valleys of dead men, blue sky.

* * *

"Hey John," shouted a man from the balcony, "where'd you get them scalps?"

Chivington mounted the stage at the Appollo Theater in Denver. "Ladies and gentlemen," he bellowed, big-bodied, feet stamped in a wide stance. In each hand he bore flagpoles. He loved the American flag under the lights, the knot of fifty scalps tied to the tip of each pole, pubic scalps of Cheyenne women topping the mass. He pounded the poles against the stage, the bang like a gunshot, and the people jumped and hooted.

After hard mistreatment by the Whites, still Black Kettle sought peace.

Back at the Apollo. "Though our government did not see fit to reward my accomplishments, I accomplished much. What you see here is the toil of a big man!" On a low table set in front of the audience he displayed the body parts he'd gathered at Sand Creek, some few hands and feet, human fetuses, adult genitalia.

"See here!" he yelled.

"Tell us, John!" cried a fat woman in the front row.

"Gladly," he said, placing the flagpoles in their dark wood bases. He could hold a crowd. "Just the facts," he said, "I call Indian children nits, you know. Now nits make lice, so I figure we better kill em' all so as to ward off infestation."

The applause was deafening.

When the sound died a large man yelled out, "What about those men of yours, they did some clean work, didn't they?"

"Sure did," he answered. "Carved things up right."

"How'd they do it, John.?"

"Just like you think," he said. "Sat right down on the bodies

after we killed em', took out their blades and cut off the parts. Brought em' to town for braggin' rights. See for yourself." He drew his own broadknife and brandished it over the table before him and turned the knife and his head slowly side to side and stared at the faces in the crowd as they whistled and cat-called. Sweat ran from his temples, his big head felt red and hot, and he shouted, "Now, listen here!" He moved the knife quick near his neck in a gesture of throat-cutting, and the people grew quiet.

He held still and when there was total silence he said what he wanted:

"Today I declare my unequivocal desire to run for governor of Coloradah!"

The people stood and clapped wildly and hollered their approval. John Chivington had talked for God and led men, he'd conquered armies and death, but he'd never before felt the surge he felt as the crowd lifted its voice and shouted, full-throated, just for him.

On a different day, some years on, Black Kettle and his wife Woman Here After were pursued heavily, despite Black Kettle's wish for peace even to the end. They were shot and fatally killed as they fell into the water and mud of the Washita River, their bodies pocked with bullets, their bones crushed by the cavalry who rode over them.

Long days passed before Chivington was brought to justice. George Bent, the white interpreter who lived with the Cheyennes the day of the massacre was actually a half-breed. He was the man married to the Cheyenne woman named Magpie, Black Kettle's cousin. He was the very man run down by Chivington's horse, the very man who had stood in the way of the charge and raised his hands and pleaded for peace before he screamed, Halt! This man, George Bent, was trampled and lost consciousness, and when he woke with broken ribs, his own innards punctured, he found his wife dead beside him, her body mutilated. This very man reported Chivington's deeds and brought Chivington to trial.

Chivington's command was removed, his run for office derailed.

But Chivington lived a long life.

And George Bent died in sorrow, still mourning the death of Magpie. f

Carl Adamshick

ABOUT TALKING

If we had visitors from the future
come to hear what we had to say
I'm assuming the last thing
I said would be the first thing
they heard, the first sound to enter
into their soft bodies of glass
and if they kept burrowing
through time that they would hear
my first word last, then watch
as I squeeze myself into a ball
and give birth to my mother.

Anne McDuffie

FOG: A STUDY

We are asleep in the language. When the language is different, it wakes us up.
—Ilya Kaminsky

When a fog gathers, when a fog descends, it folds the landscape into a series of chambers I can walk through, unmindful of entering or leaving, as though I am a still point and the world remakes itself around me. However cold the day, the air will be soft on my face. I'll have to stop a moment and just breathe the "dearest freshness deep down things" that Hopkins named so well. I know how I watch and wait for it, but that joy comes always by surprise, as though *missing* is just another bodily function, like the blood pulsing in my veins, the silvery singing in my ears I too often mistake for silence.

This time of year, early spring, mornings will be overcast with lights of sterling and salt—or if a storm is gathering, oyster, indigo, pewter and clay. Lying in bed, I'll still need to let my eyes adjust before looking out, assessing the day. One window frames the dark edge of an eave and a wedge of sky. Our neighbors' towering spruce fills the other, and dwarfs both our houses. The trunk has split and branched into five limbs growing straight up, like waterspouts. Branches sag under the weight of more branches, and thrash in a strong wind. That's how it looks to me, an animal movement, something feral in it. Maybe "thrash" isn't the right word. When the wind comes up, I remind myself that conifers are built to move. The arborist has explained how branches absorb the violence of the wind to keep the trunk intact, that if they didn't bend and sometimes break, the force could uproot the tree. Each branch traces a circuit through air, sign of a history deeper than its roots.

Some boundaries dissolve in fog, and I have the sense of seeing into, around the edges of, underneath. Walking the neighborhood one foggy day, I notice that all the colors of my neighbors' houses have changed—seem, still, to be changing. Pinks and taupes shift and settle and shift again, one into another. Grays and blues teeter and resolve, flicker and fade, suspended until I fix them with a word. It's oddly thrilling to wait for a name to surface, to feel the lag and watch as a single color emerges from the muddle before me. Even then, I know that if I say out loud, "blue," or "gray," it won't prevent the myriad halftones from unfolding again and again before my sight: a fan flicked open, a fan snapped shut.

By its simplest definition, fog is water vapor suspended in air: a grounded cloud. Like a cloud, fog owes its *albedo*—its measure of reflected light—to those suspended water droplets, which are large enough to scatter all wavelengths equally. This gives fog its whiteness, and must affect how other colors appear.

Albedo is rooted in white, from the Latin *albus*, as is *alba*, the Spanish word for "dawn," and *albumen*, the white of an egg. The white, inner rind of a citrus fruit is also called *albedo*, and all these meanings come together in the chambers a fog makes, which touch my skin, which glow like the walls of a hollowed out orange. I can't help thinking about the Spanish poet, Federico García Lorca, who knew these in-between spaces very well. In his 1928 lecture, "On Lullabies," he describes how a child will imagine himself into the lyric of a lullaby, no matter how incomplete or cryptic it may be. He quotes this fragment:

A la nana, niño mío,	Lullaby, my child,
a la nanita y haremos	in the country we will build
en el campo una chocita	a tiny hut
y en ella nos meteremos.	and live inside.

Lorca writes:

"We must make ourselves smaller, tiny, and the walls of the little hut will touch our skin. Outside they are waiting to hurt us. We must live in a tiny place. If we can, we will live inside an orange, you and me! Even better, inside a grape!"

The image of that orange has stayed with me: bright, fragrant, hidden, and safe. It's joined now in my mind with fog, and with Virginia Woolf's first memory of "lying half-awake, half-asleep" in her nursery in St. Ives, bathed in the sound of waves breaking on the beach and the light coming in through the yellow blind: "the feeling. . . of lying in a grape and seeing through a film of semi-transparent yellow," a feeling she describes as "purest ecstasy."

A yellow we might call "buttery" on a clear day tends toward electric lemonade in a fog, and a nondescript red-orange—likely to go brown in full sun—falls somewhere between salmon and brick. The greens are the most changed, not just clear shades of spring, apple, or Kelly, but also a rusty green rising in taupe that wouldn't have drawn my eye before. Flaking lichens of jade and celadon encrust the trunks of ornamental cherry trees. Leaves lately unfurled seem to hum with sap, grass blades bristle, and the chartreuse mosses that carpet the brick walk seem actually to pulse with light, a neon brilliance that makes it hard to look at them.

When I lived in Madrid as a student, twenty-seven years ago, I moved through each day accumulating the tokens of a new language, and this was how the words felt to me then: newly minted, each so close to its origins, so embedded in the circumstance that taught me, that its surfaces reflected back actual moments of my life. The language itself became the journal I couldn't keep.

My favorite class was *Lengua*, which means language, and also tongue. Our professor wouldn't speak until he'd lit his first cigarette of the day and taken several long drags, filling the room with an oily, blue haze. Spain smelled like its men: *tabaco negro*, crude black

tobacco, and *brillantina*, the clove-scented oil they used to slick back their hair. Our professor wore his hair and moustache long, his clothes baggy, which gave him the vague, unkempt aspect of a lifelong bachelor. His eyes were cold behind heavy glasses and he didn't take an interest in any of us or share anything about himself, but he brought to his lectures the encyclopedic knowledge of an obsessive. I found comfort in the rituals of his classroom: the ceremonies of recitation and explanation; the readings from literature that he gave to us as dictation, scenes too short to unfold that remained lodged in memory like the daily dramas I glimpsed from a bus window. Our professor told us that as foreigners we would never fully understand certain expressions or the use of the subjunctive, and I believed him. I wanted to believe him. It allowed me to think of the language as a mystical realm, which in some ways, it is.

In Spanish, the subjunctive expresses both strong feeling and uncertainty. It's a contingent, hypothetical, and subjective mood, covering all the gray areas in four tenses. *Iré caminando cuando llegue la niebla. I'll go walking when the fog comes.* The subjunctive anticipates the fog but acknowledges, delicately, that I can't be sure when or if it will arrive—a small shift in verb, a small shift in sound (*llegue* instead of *llega*), a hitch in my experience of time. The subjunctive imagines two futures simultaneously, one in which the fog arrives, and one in which it doesn't; I'm suspended between them by the verb itself. I hear in these phrases a strain of medieval superstition, a refusal to predict or presume, a refusal to tempt fate. What would I say to convey exactly that sense in English? "Whenever the fog comes?" "Whenever, God willing, the fog may come?"

What most fascinated me were the two forms of the imperfect (past) subjunctive that still co-exist. If I had taken another road: *Si hubiese ido por otro camino; si hubiera ido por otro camino.* The -se ending is older than the -ra ending, and has died out everywhere

else, but in Spain they still use both. One has the rounded contours of ancient mountains (*hubiese*); one the jagged peaks of the relatively young (*hubiera*). The difference between them, our professor said, is definite but extremely subtle, a question of *matices*, the nuances that gather around a word, that make of it a small, revolving galaxy of meaning.

The particles of a fog cloud, however small they may be, are continually sinking through the air that holds them, and unless some upward motion of that air keeps a balance against their fall, they'll reach the surface of the earth or water and disappear. A fog is always in process of formation. Without motion, it has no form.

I try to make of my own motion a form, a fog, to see what flickers there. Still-skeletal branches grow more distinct as I approach, the lines of a tree growing sharper, the essence of a line growing clearer. f

Caitlin Mackenzie

TRUST ME

Eucalyptus trees burst like church bells
when exposed to flame—fiery dominoes,

turpentine soul. I do not make this up.
Mint leaves grew big as gloves

during our summer together.
You favored the tough radishes.

I, the dandelions and gulls
gulping salted air. You admonished me

for feeding one, but she was hungry
and at least she was honest

because I grew weary of forsaking
transparency, kept skin.

Leaning into me, your breath
gin and citrus, my hands were full

and you oblivious
to our breasts touching.

I do not innovate the stories I tell:
my sky, my terrace with pepper plants,

the starfish I put on the kitchen table as a child,
drying out in violent increments.

It was the way I learned about dying—
subtle movements.

Find me on my hamstrings, neck bent,
hand entering the shallow pool of rainwash

cupped to pick up the baby swallow,
her eyes still pink and closed.

Max Somers

HITTING A WOMAN

Inside the man is a long acre
where he grew up.

Across that acre
is another man.

This other man,
the sun is setting behind him.

He's slim and dark, it's hard to say
what direction he's walking.

Our man, he's now standing
inside himself, watching this other man

who might be walking toward him.
Yes, walking toward him now. He knows

because the man is getting larger.
There is nowhere else to look.

The sun is going down.

Laura Pizzo

AN INTERVIEW WITH TODD BOSS

Email exchanges upon the release of Todd Boss's second poetry collection, *PITCH,* in 2012. Todd Boss grew up on an 80-acre farm in West Central Wisconsin, where he helped his parents in garden, pasture, field, and forest.

LAURA PIZZO

Your titles are often the first lines of your poems—how and why do you make the choice to title your poems in this way?

TODD BOSS

Economy. Also I hate titling poems, so I let the first line do it for me. Also, it's a great gimmick for getting people to read my poems; by the time they've read the title, they find they're already reading the poem, and hopefully by that time I've snagged them.

LP

Talk to me about collaboration. The Motionpoems project—where video artists work with poets in an attempt to widen the audience for poetry—started when Angella Kassube animated one of your poems. Since then, the project has expanded to include a variety of video artists and poets. How has this project altered your preconceptions about what poetry can do?

TB

For five years or so, I worked as the director of external affairs at The Playwrights' Center, a nonprofit that helps playwrights work on plays in progress with professional actors and directors in the room. During that time, I got to thinking about the solitary nature of poetry, not just the creative process of it, but the reader's experience of it, and I started wondering how poetry might be experienced/celebrated differently if there was some way for audiences to collectively participate in it. Music has radio. Theater has film and television. There are so many art forms that have taken to mass media, but poetry is still stuck in the printed book model, and that's, like, so 17th Century, you know? So when Angella offered me the opportunity to explore poetry in film, I just felt I'd stumbled on the perfect medium for obtaining that collective reach I seek for poetry.

LP

How has the Motionpoems project changed your process as a poet?

TB

I don't really know. I like to think it hasn't changed my process at all, but I suppose it probably has, somehow. I'd be hard-pressed to identify that. Motionpoems are also interesting in terms of the sculptural nature of poetry and the way poems are read versus how they look on the page.

LP

Could you elaborate on the sculptural elements in your poems? How do you choose the form a poem should take? How much influence does the sound of a poem have on these choices?

TB

I like that you use the word "sculptural" rather than "formal," first of all, because I think poets often forget that they are shaping something on the page in a kind of white space or empty theater, not just making cerebral choices about stanzas and line length. The eyes are physical, and when we read, we're touching with our eyes, so yes, there's physicality to reading, and an intimate sense that we're handling something. What we're handling can be instantly felt as delicate or wooden, heavy or weightless, organic or manufactured.

Usually it isn't sound that shapes poems for me, but subject matter. The title poem in *Yellowrocket* is written in 5-line stanzas because in that poem I refer to "five-wire fences posted in good straight lines." Some of the poems in "Overtures on an Overturned Piano" from *PITCH* are written in alternating two and three line stanzas to call a piano keyboard to mind, the black and white keys. "Marble-Tumble Toys" is a poem written so that the eye has to bounce through it like a ball falling through a tumble game. Just to give three examples. And while those might seem like very cerebral choices, I think they're equally physiological. I want my readers to have this unconscious sense that they've handled my work. That they know my subjects by feel.

LP

Do you find that certain images/sounds/words often reappear in your writing? If so, what makes them so significant?

TB

If this happens, it's not conscious. I don't set out to write toward those images or sounds or words that obsess me. It's not till after the poems are written that I look back and find themes that link them, and then those poems tend to be the ones that land together,

collected. So the linkages are also imposed. Identifying them becomes a process of sifting through imposed and unintended coincidences, and how can one know the difference?

On the other hand, you could say that poetry, like therapy, illuminates one's obsessions. I tried to boil mine down a few years ago, and they ended up as an "artistic statement," which, as it turns out, is the kind of statement that isn't much good for writing, but turns out to be valuable on resumes, in grant proposals, and in literary journal interviews. The statement runs like this: My farm roots introduced me early to the heartbreak of husbandry. My poetry is musical and accessible. I explore the noxious nature of persistent love, the fickle character of a creator God, the artistry of nature's disorder, the otherness of others, and the great nondenominational church of the past.

LP

How and when do you choose whether or not a poem should contain sections? Is this decision frequently made in the revision process?

TB

For me, I tend to create sectioned poems when individual sections can't very well stand alone. Many of my poems end up as little more than fragments, so that in order to make them worth reading I have to combine them with other fragments. I've very rarely set out to write a sectioned poem from the outset, and one of these was "Overtures on an Overturned Piano," an opening sequence in *PITCH*, and that's because I wanted it to work as a suite of musical moments, interludes, movements. It took me about three years to settle "Overtures" into the sections that finally made the cut, however. It was kind of excruciating. Not sure why.

I've just finished a new work in sections, "Fragments for the 35W Bridge," which contains thirty-five 35-word poems. That

was much easier to do, but I think it was because I didn't think of them as sections, I thought of them as fragments, and the form dictated so much. This work will be unveiled in August, on the 5th anniversary of the 35W Bridge collapse in Minneapolis, as part of a multidisciplinary installation on the Mississippi River here.

from FRAGMENTS FOR THE 35W BRIDGE

1.

Minnesota's
fifth
busiest,
freighting
140,000
vehicles
daily,
Bridge
9340
carried
eight
lanes
of
Interstate
Highway
35W
.3
miles
along
14
spans
115
feet
above
Mississippi
River

Mile
853
till
it
fell,
injuring
145,
killing
thirteen.

2.

O
set
a
man
to
watch
all
night,
watch
all
night,
watch
all
night.
Set
a
man
to
watch
all
night,
my
fair
lady.
And
if

the
man
should
fall
asleep,
fall
asleep,
fall
asleep?

3.

And
where
were
they
going,
those
thirteen
gone?
- Dinner
with
a
friend.
- Bakery
customers
all
over
town.
- Greek
folk
dancing
lessons
beneath
Saint
Mary's
Greek
Orthodox

dome.
- Home.
- Home.
- Home.
- Home.
- Home.
- Home.
- Home.

4.

Instantly
America's
awash
in
CNN's
spiraling
streaming,
its
star
spangled
graphics
interrupting
for
insurance
and
erectile
dysfunction
commercials.
When
does
patriotism
become
a
waking
dreaming?
O'er

the
ramparts
we
watch
at
the
twilight's
last
gleaming.

5.

A
worn
gusset
plate.
A
few
cruddy
bolts.
A
single
lousy
joint.
What
a
stealthy
terrorist,
Time!
Her
work
is
never
through.
She
spiders
forth
her

spools
of
rust
and
with
it
re-threads
every
screw.

6.

By
7
it's
clear
who
can
be
saved
and
who
is
gone
by
who
is
found
down
amongst
the
half
sunk
wrecks
and
suck
pocked
rocks

and
by
whose
lucks,
like
fickle
flocks,
are
flown.

7.

Each
one
as
sturdy
as
the
next,
come
scores
of
prayers
like
rescue
floats.
What
gods
did
guide
those
fragile
boats?
and
why'd
some
take
up

living
freight
and
others
come
for
some
too
late?

8.

Twenty
minutes
was
the
spell
between
my
crossing
and
when
it
fell.
Twenty
minutes
ordering
files.
Twenty
minutes
buying
meat.
Twenty
choices,
street
to
street.
To

beat
survival's
twenty
questions
"twenty
minutes"
doesn't
answer
well.

9.

I
love
finding
crossings
where
stones
are
true
but
few
enough
that
every
move
gives
rise
to
new
themes
upon
which
(swiftness,
for
instance,
or
balance,

or
the
relative
depth
of
the
drink)
to
think.

10.

Innocent,
is
it,
this
instinct
to
toss
some
speck
into
water,
to
mark
with
sprig
or
twig
that
ever
shifting
glass,
to
sprinkle
pulled
grass,
to

petal
it. . .
as
if
we
might
somehow
settle
it?

11.

Poetry
rarely
commands
the
respect
afforded
the
sciences,
but
engineering
is
a
science
and
at
least
I
can
say
no
badly
aging
load
bearing
metaphor
of

mine
ever
collapsed
during
rush
hour
and
killed
anyone.

12.

What
if
metaphor—
misshapen
connector
of
shores,
sinister
nectar
of
synapse
that
fuses
one
thing
to
another—
is
the
mother
of
collapse?
What
if
it's
essentially

our
sheer
desire
to
order
disorder
that
eventually
snaps?

Jamaica Ritcher

AN INTERVIEW WITH LIA PURPURA

Lia Purpura is a poet, essayist and translator whose body of work includes the poetry collection *King Baby* (Alice James Books, 2008), the essay collection *On Looking* (Sarabande Books, 2006), and her most recent collection of essays, *Rough Likeness*, also from Sarabande Books (2012). Her writing is quiet, poetic and startling in both its clarity of language and range in subject matter. When one is reading a piece by Lia Purpura, they are spending time with a person looking closely at the world.

Last summer, *Fugue* published Lia Purpura's essay "Playing with Imperfection," including it in a themed issue on the subject of "play" (issue 40). Contributors approached and explored "play" in terms of content, form, and genre. As the conception of the issue developed, and as the editors at the time worked through the artistic process of putting together contributed pieces into a cohesive volume, they too were inspired to explore possibilities in "play"—especially in terms of juxtaposition and interstitial spaces—with a piece by Michael Martone appearing as footnotes across the other poems, essays, and stories within the issue.

Lia Purpura was among the first to let us know we might have reached—or rather breached—an apogee in editorial bounds. The reaction that came out of the issue and the ensuing discussion gave the editorial staff a lot to think about in terms of, among other things, the writer/editor relationship, control, and collaboration. Our editorial staff is comprised entirely of students; as such, we are always learning.

In Lia Purpura's written response to issue 40, she suggested reprinting her essay without the inserted voice of Michael Martone's footnoted essay and this is something we are more than happy to do.

But she had also raised a number of other issues that, as this year's nonfiction editor—and as a reader and writer—I wanted to know more about.

Lia Purpura graciously agreed to continue a conversation with me, and what follows are some of her ideas about process, collaboration, authorial control, and potential in art. Her responses come from our email exchange conducted last March.

JAMAICA RITCHER

In your response to Fugue's "play" issue, you wrote about "the distracted skimming that constitutes so much of our daily reading life. The footnotes distract, pitch a reader out of the moment as I've constructed it." I was especially taken with this idea of "moments"—not just the moment preserved on the page, but the moment created when a reader sits down with that page. I found myself wanting to know more about your writing process, especially in terms of your sense of purpose as a writer. Do you feel like you have a particular sense of purpose, and would you tell me about that?

LIA PURPURA

For me, having a sense of purpose is distinct from a sense of intentionality. The former is more an ethos, and the latter is more a compositional hazard (again, for me—not necessarily for others).

In terms of the ethos: Probably four years ago now I read an elegiac article in *Rolling Stone* about David Foster Wallace, in which Jonathan Franzen says that he and Wallace decided that fiction ought to be good for something and the thing it was good for was combating loneliness. I understand what they mean by that—there's a sense of keeping alive the notion of an "other" and an "elsewhere" and that is important—both for the writer and for the reader. I do think of my essays as epistolary at their cores. But to make something profound, to speak to others who are generous enough to

give me their time (amid all else that's competing for their attention) and to say something, to converse in some way, about this fleeting, luminous sense of being alive, to use the language well, beautifully, and as a challenge, out at the edge of my reach, these are some elements that constitute my "purpose."

But my "intention" as a writer? I don't want to know what I'm up to in any given essay or poem for a very long time. I don't work well with "projects"—I thrive on inklings and leanings as I work. Too much intention makes for a set of parameters to fulfill. As soon as a direction firms up in that way, I feel like I'm filling in a coloring book.

JR

What effect do you want your essays or poems to have on a reader, and what type of interaction do you hope your readers will have with your text?

LP

I hope that readers feel I'm speaking very directly to them. I hope they stay with the unfurling of an idea long enough to get the full sense that I'm shaping. My work does make demands; ideas do take their good time layering up. I'm not really offering a narrative, plot-oriented thing, or a memoir based on stories or scenes of a life. In many ways the essays move about like large poems, making similar leaps and connections. So, I'd hope that a reader is willing to devote poem-time to them, by which I mean a slower, deeper kind of patient time.

JR

Does artistic collaboration change or influence those goals? I ask this with a recent review in mind—Mark Athitakis's review of your

latest book, *Rough Likeness*, in which he writes, "Nobody writes about what Purpura does, and nobody writes like her." I would take this as tremendous praise, and yet it also suggests a solitude to your writing practice—do you agree with this? Does that solitude preclude collaboration?

LP

Some of the most exciting work—the most immediately rewarding and challenging (I mean hair-tearing and high-wire challenging), the most useful-feeling work I've done has been in collaboration. Living for a year on a Fulbright fellowship in Poland translating the work of four young Polish poets, changed my life as a writer in ways that are still deeply significant. The questions one must ask of oneself—moral, aesthetic, grammatical, utilitarian—the ways you're aware of guarding language (both your own and the original) from bad choices, the ways you learn to stretch language on one hand and behave with a sense of fidelity on the other. . . the sense of plain loss in certain circumstances and of a happier letting go in others, of allowing the imperfect here but not there. . . the way you learn patience, and options, and how much "inspiration" really has to do with the disciplined hunting down of a line or word or formal "solution."

The lessons of collaboration are powerful, and the collaborative work of translation was a full-body writing experience. I know of no better education for a writer. Real collaboration (with a living, participating writer) requires listening very carefully to another's ideas and constantly, simultaneously, holding and asserting, shifting and growing towards a vision that neither you nor your partner have yet encountered. This new vision can only be reached by way of relationship.

JR

One of the concerns that came out of the "play" issue also had to do with relationships—writer/reader as well as writer/editor. Of course, in terms of writer/reader, when an artist puts something out to the public, he or she ceases to control the work, how it will be received, interpreted, and used. The "gag rule" in many writing workshops, in which the author whose work is being discussed and interpreted must remain silent, is of course an enactment of that dynamic. But the relationship with an editor is different—the editor often asks for changes from the author and over the course of a revision process the piece one initially submitted might, in publication, look quite different. To what extent are you willing to let a piece change through the editorial process? What advice to young or emerging writers can you offer about the post-acceptance revision process?

LP

Every writer I know has to deal with, for example, book covers they've hated. Typeface that isn't quite what they'd hoped for. Weird or wrong colors and spacing issues. You do what you can, have as many conversations as it takes to get your thoughts across, advocate for your preferences, and then, well, in the end, it's often out of your hands and you let it go. As for having any kind of control over how your work is received? You don't have much control at all over that either.

I've been really lucky to work with a few editors who are so precise, challenging, perceptive and generous in their commentary that, at the end of a discussion, I wonder how I can possibly go on without them hovering and gently nudging. Very often, their suggestions are "minor"—but so careful and helpful that the solutions they offer seem, in hindsight, inevitable. Obvious. And I'm stunned by my own misperception or stunted ear or illogic.

So, I'm absolutely open to commentary and grateful for it. Editors have the job of saving writers from themselves in so many

ways: prying them from chapters or poems or pieces that just don't belong in a collection despite deep attachments a writer might feel or suggesting that you've written way past a more effective ending.

I'm also sort of amazed by the lack of editorial guidance. So many magazines just send proofs without any commentary at all. I know how deeply mired in soul-numbing administrative duties people are. . . how much unwieldy paperwork there is to contend with. It's overwhelming. To be an editor requires superhuman stamina. But it seems to me that both magazines and writers would benefit if somehow that relationship could be reinstated. Magazines that are utterly engaged this way? *Agni, Orion, Field, Georgia Review*: these have an ethos, a generous, broad but definable aesthetic, and editors who work for the good of the work.

JR

Since it's the concept of "play" that brought this conversation on, I'm curious: how do you define literary play? What authors do you admire or recommend reading for their literary play or innovation?

LP

Nabokov—everything, but for the purposes of this discussion, his memoir *Speak Memory* and *Nikolai Gogol* (a biography). Borges—*The Labyrinth,* for example. Zbignew Herbert's *Mr. Cogito.* Bob Hicok. Lydia Davis. Albert Goldbarth, whose essays invite fiction in and playfully launch suppositions that, fictionally expressed, are still fully essayistic without taunting the reader or messing with the reader's sense of "reality."

Flannery O'Connor—a playfulness so deep that "holy" may be the better term. Ander Monson—in all directions and genres. Marianne Moore. Madeline DeFrees. Mary Reufle. Amy Leach. Larry Sutin. Artists? Musicians? Paul Klee. Duchamp, of course. Arthur Ganson, an artist who makes miniature, very poetic machines. I could go on and on. . .

So what is play? Finding a way to approach the authentic, the powerful (sometimes the way-powerful—a subject or stance that threatens, that might silence) that's inventive. Play can work with form or vocal register, or expectations about form and register, and context in ways that illuminate, surprise, and burn back to clarity.

Play for me is unselfconscious, wholly absorbing, not a gimmick, and not a trick that only a few are in on. It's hard to define because the most potent characteristic of play is a lack of self-consciousness about the moves you're making—you're just. . . making them. Of course there's shaping and controlling going on too, but hopefully the play is an impulse strong enough to withstand the forces of hindsight—or it's an impulse that keeps being available, so that much of the work you do to shape a thing (call it "revision" if you want) doesn't feel as if it's taking place at a distance.

To be "playful" is more a sensibility than a conscious gesture. It's not a choice as much as a temperament. Play isn't about "the light-hearted"—though lightness and quickness might be defining gestures.

JR

I'm interested in the way your response emphasizes the process over the outcome or product. Do you think it's fair to say then that all art in which the artist seeks to, as you say, "illuminate, surprise, burn back to clarity," is engaging in "play"? Is it possible too much is made of the term?

LP

One spends a lot of time as an artist (writer, musician, etc) figuring out how set up a generative situation—by this I mean a work life, family life, life of the body—that allows for consistent attention to work. It's not easy. For me, "time" and "space" are ways of saying "situations in which I can be free enough to be surprised." As Frost

says in "The Figure a Poem Makes," "No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader; no surprise for the writer, no surprise for the reader."

There's a quality of wildness that hums in work that's truly alive—and that can't be faked (by "most alive" I mean in any form—sonnet, essay, fragmented thing that refuses categories). "Play" is, for me, what happens when I can be in this clear space. It's the great and generative tension between wandering and fixing one's sights, being led and staying on the path. It's the way this engagement remains when a piece is finished that registers as "playful." f

Lia Purpura

PLAYING WITH IMPERFECTION

A voice might have a timbre like an awl that runs right through your head. A torso might be very like a pigeon's breast. A person might have one eyebrow gone grey or a mark on a cheek like a pinkish Brazil—which makes nearly every passerby look twice. Many things just helplessly *are*, that is, their imperfections lend them a quality of singularity. Flaws, as we tend to call them—intrinsic/organic moves conceived in the act of making—also mark the artist, and, I'd suggest, add substatially to what we come to consider a *sensibility.*

I'm not advocating a sloppy, haphazard kind of imperfection, born of carelessness, but rather suggesting that *allowing* certain forms of imperfection is vital to art, and that such helplessness makes for a warm and beating heart. James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is wildly—passionately, gorgeously, ecstatically —flawed, according to the author. He fears much at the outset (with characteristic bravura): "If I bore you, that is that, if I am clumsy that may indicate partly the difficulty of my subject, and the seriousness with which I am trying to take what hold I can of it; more certainly it will indicate my youth, my lack of mastery of my so-called art or craft, my lack of talent." He even resists calling his book a "book," such are his ambitions for it. It's exactly the excesses of ambition, shame, adoration of language/people/justice that make the work the force it is—a relentless, lyrical striving-toward, a set of assertions commingled with admissions of failure. A velocity. A rage. An unabashed epic.

Art slackens in spots, as any game does. Play slackens, as it must, in order to progress and refine its own rules. When things get dull, kids add a second rope and Double Dutch is born. Or they straighten the rope and call it "Chinese." Reconstitute "lasso."

Try life as a twin. Make themselves three-legged and run. Kids make new things right in the moment, no neat transitions, *just because*. Play (and by this I mean participation in heedless, non-utilitarian ventures, like jotting or sketching) is a powerful endeavor unto itself, not merely *prep* for a life more serious and more real. Whitman had no *plan,* it seems, for his notes from the war ("blotch'd here and there with more than one bloodstain, hurriedly written. . ." he says) and more to the point, seems reluctant to begin compiling them, late in life. What became "Specimen Days," a long patchwork essay on his experiences nursing wounded soldiers, begins with a wobbly journal entry meant to frame up the collection:

"*Down in the Woods, July 2nd, 1882*

If I do it at all, I must delay no longer. Incongruous and full of skips and jumps as is that huddle of diary-jottings . . .all bundled up and tied with a big string, the resolution and indeed mandate comes to me this day. . . (and what a day! what an hour just passing! the luxury of riant grass and blowing breeze with all the shows of sun and sky and perfect temperature never before so filling me body and soul. . .) to go home, untie the bundle, reel out diary scraps and memoranda just as they are, large or small one after another into print-pages and let the melange's lackings and wants of connection take care of themselves."

Hear him get all distracted by that beautiful day? (the selection above is *much* elided.) It sounds like he'd rather stick with the day's unfolding, describe it, be in it, rather than compile "memoranda" which at one time, too, were immediate and freshly conceived. I like very much the inclusion of that ambivalence; it honors the original impulse, defines his discomfort with fussy organizing, engages his drive to unfurl into the real and present moment (drives also realized in the poems).

I recently visited The Russian Museum in Saint Petersburg, and saw for the first time Rapine's studies of battlefields, peasants-in-

fields, his low, cold slants of weak winter light (mirroring precisely the afternoon, right there, just outside the window – frozen Neva! hovering, snow-heavy grey bridge, sky, lamp posts!) And the replicate palace interiors, yes, sure, the gold-leafed, inlaid, crystaled *everything* was highly atmospheric. But—I can't help it—it was the "folk art" that truly excited me. Objects so close to their making, retaining the gestures of the tools that touched them, and the forces bent on ruining them: the worn beams of a house, carved into the shape of a horse's head; wooden bowls (now isolated in their glass cases and far from the rough hunks of bread they once held, but that, if you bent close, showed spots polished smooth where hands must've rubbed). When I shift my sight from such things to plastic mass-produced crap, I can feel the dullness, the muteness settle in. On the flight over, for instance, the sudden realization of how much trash a single plane produces was chilling—but not in the obvious eco-disaster way (remember this has to do with *play*, that stance at the heart of making, a friendliness towards imperfection.) Consider the paper cups alone: let's say, conservatively, 7 per person x at least 300 people, during a ten hour flight, New York to Moscow. It's that after you've discarded the third or fourth cup, you give up even the slightest relationship to it—a cup that you have to hold on to/ keep safe throughout the 10 hour flight, is a *different* cup than the one you toss after one use, and then have replaced by another and another and another of the same. If cups are endless, why bother feeling anything for them, trusting, relying, *relating* to yours? With even the smallest, insignificant things, caring *for* makes you care *about*. Having to hold on to the same cup would mean emptying it out after coffee, the imperfect swishing of water leaving a little coffee scent behind (not unpleasant, just historical); squashing it in the fold with the magazines might dent it a bit and cause you to drink in a new, funny way. Either way, you'd have to *engage*. You'd have to *attend*. You'd have to *play around* with it. You might work your way toward *gratitude* for the cup.

Imperfect things move me because they've been worked on by

weather, time, tides, wind, water, air, soil. As we all are. The word "diurnal" applies to them, as it applies to us. Such things show signs of wear and use and human contact—if allowed to. Hands and breath and microbes apply. Such worn things are messy in a biological way, are subject-to and will be gone. And because they remind me everything's passing—they feel, paradoxically, more alive.

An imperfectly made thing can lay bare its flaws and go on living with them just fine. Gogol's *Dead Souls* is certainly "imperfect." About the second part, Gogol himself writes "I have tortured myself, forced myself to write, suffered severe pains when I saw my impotence. . . eveything came out forced and inferior." Indeed he *began* openly enough "without setting myself any detailed plan, without having taken into account what, precisely, the hero himself should be. . . I simply thought the humourous project that Chichikov undertakes would itself lead me to various persons." If *Dead Souls* falls apart in the second section, one gets instead, still, overall, something enormous, sustaining, essential, something like, as Nabokov wrote, "the idea of Russia as Gogol saw Russia (a peculiar landscape, a special atmosphere, a symbol, a long, long road. . .)" and one hardly cares, closes the book, floats back to the long, extraordinary part one, unharmed. Just as one learns to deftly work the pit free while enjoying the olive, enjoying that is, the awkward matter of gnawing and disposal, which slows conversation, which concentrates the brief pleasures of brine and taut flesh. Pitted olives go way too fast and always feel empty, domesticated, for babies.

In an interview I conducted with poet Gerald Stern a few years ago he said: "One of the things I'm trying to do in my poetry is to become one with the *person* in the poetry. I don't know if that is possible. Ideally, at last, you reach out and just talk. This is not for all poets. You reach out and you talk or you sneeze and it becomes a poem. I don't know if I can ever achieve that. . . " which doesn't mean *everything* is a poem, that a sneeze *unto itself* is a poem, that *anything at all* is art. It isn't. It's that the roughest, most daily gestures can *become* poems if one is able to make use of them, to get close

enough to use them, to be beckoned by that which you hadn't imagined might be poem-worthy.

I guess it's that I care about a piece—story, essay, poem—only if the author cares enough to *make* something, to *try* to make a thing (I fear this is abundantly obvious—*writers make things*—then, more fearful still, realize it may not be at all) and to hand it over fried, boiled, shirred, decanted, slapped around, dressed up, chained—*somethinged*. Touched by an actual hand. Shaped. Worn. Made from nothing-at-first and failing in parts, for moments, for stretches, but then! and then, *despite!*—since that is, of course, what it means to endure.

There are many ways to short-circuit the making—the cut/paste/splice phenomenon is popular today; the severing of words from their authors, so that words may float free is another. But *arranging* is not *making*. A Jello mold is an arrangement. It's funny/jiggly/bright and can be fancifully layered—but Jello is not, say, kim chee (a work in progress with tiny wild bio-partners bubbling away in a lab you share). Arranging a Jello mold is boring: let set, repour. Let set, repour. To end up with stripes, one does this all day. The procedure is rote, like a paint-by-numbers kit. Made things are imperfect; why not face that? They get a little overcast. There's a fuzziness here, a meandering bit there. One part's too well-done, one's not fully seared. But made things *use* those moments. Take them in. Make them part-of. Stir, fold, flambe. To *make* (and true making involves play, that openness to imperfection) is to know the hand will slip, nick, chip. Flaws will reside alongside areas of balance. Imperfect things accept their place as one in a series, always en route. Not the first, not the last. A thing put down and picked up again the next day, with new rules born of necessity. Thus they stay in motion, alive. And though things may launch in a wobbly way, a trajectory slip. . . remember marbles? The ground was bumpy, the drawn circle went all elliptical, or got erased at a crucial moment by anxious knees, the shooters got chipped, your nose dripped in the cold, itched in the heat. . . and all of it was part of the game. f

Joshua Unikel

TWENTY-FIVE FACTS FOR PEOPLE WHO MIGHT ENJOY TAKING A BATH WHILE DYING

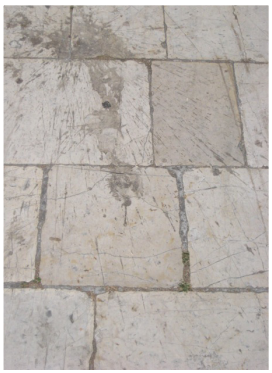
1 **In ketchup, no one can hear you screaming.** No one could hear him screaming, I imagine, when he fell into the stainless steel vat filled with the ruddy condiment. His job at the H. J. Heinz plant in Pittsburgh was to do quality control over the ketchup-filled cylinder, or so the story goes among Pittsburgh natives. A man walked around a circular cat-walk in his pale blue coveralls, watching the metal agitator move the thick liquid down in the vat, and he swore he saw something come to the surface. A stone or a piece of something.

He leaned forward, leaned off the catwalk, and fell into the vat. The distance of the fall and his weight made him sink into the thickness. I imagine he screamed while the acidic dark surrounded him. I imagine he reached for anything to grab and wanting to but not wanting to, he opened his mouth and tried to scream again. His mouth filled with the jelly-like stuff. A thickness that filled his throat and slid, burning with enough acid to take rust off of a car battery.

Then, he stopped flailing against the heavy liquid. He stopped reaching up. He opened his mouth and let it stay open, letting the liquid in. He let the thickness make his skin feel semi-solid. It let him feel the absence of weight, and an absence of skin, and an absence of anything to set limits for his body.

[Cue: The sound your cell phone wants to make whenever it's not ringing but might be.]

2. Deaths—like songs on the Billboard Music Chart or the Top Forty Countdown—have a ranking based on popularity. Perhaps Casey Kasem also voiced the Center for Disease Control's 2007 list of fifteen "Leading Causes of Death." Perhaps it's easier to hear statistics about deaths in Casey's throaty tenor, his crooning voice that tells us, "For all you music lovers and lovers of all things popular, here are some highlights from this year's top of the top, the Top Fifteen Countdown." Perhaps there's a Doors song playing quietly behind Casey's voice. Or maybe it's just muzak of some sort.



"Up this year by three point six percent," Casey says in his almost swarthy smoothness, "'Intentional self-harm (suicide)' comes in at number eleven with 34,598 deaths. That's right between 'Septicemia' with 34,828 deaths and 'Chronic liver disease and cirrhosis' with 29,165 on our Countdown." Casey pauses for effect, letting the music fill a bit of the silence.

[Cue: The sound of fluorescent tube lights humming across the ceiling of an office building.]

3. I can't find the man amid the ketchup. The closest thing I can find is dead men at the bottom of a tomato paste vat at the Heinz Plant. Three men were assigned to clean the vat after taking out most of the paste with a vacuum. Some of the paste remained, so the men were told to climb down into the vat. The first man went in, became light-headed, and collapsed.

The second man realized that it was the excess of nitrogen in the air so he jumped in after his co-worker. He knew that the nitrogen

had been pumped into the vats to keep the paste from turning brown. Still, the nitrogen overloaded his lungs, and he also collapsed against the stainless steel vat.

A third worker entered the tank wearing a gas mask with an oxygen hose attached, but it wasn't enough. The nitrogen seeped into his mask, and he collapsed as well. His mask was meant to keep out only poisonous gas, not nitrogen, not the most prevalent gas in everyday air.

[Cue: The sound of ballet dancers dancing without music. Just the turning, pressing of their toe shoes into the studio floor.]

4. Virginia Woolf had the help of stones. Despite the success of her novel, *Orlando,* in 1928, Woolf was deeply depressed by the start of World War II in 1939. When she finished her last novel, *Between The Acts,* in 1941, she was disenchanted with its banality, its irrelevance in a time of war.

Germany had just invaded northwest Europe in 1940. France had just fallen. The Blitz had just begun. By the following year, Virginia and her husband, Leonard, lived mostly in their country home. Virginia left a note for Leonard on her writing pad a year after that. The year that Germany invaded the USSR and the Japanese destroyed a US Fleet at Pearl Harbor. The year that the US entered the War and the year that Joyce died. The year that, on a late March afternoon, Virginia didn't return to the small wooden house in the country.

She walked across the lawn with her walking stick in her hand and went down to the nearby River Ouse. She looked out at the hills just past the river, picked up a stone or a few stones, put them into her coat pockets, and threw herself into the water.

Leonard found her note later in the afternoon. When he searched for her by the river, he found only her walking stick. A thorough search for her body was to no avail. Her body was found nearly three weeks later. I like to think that Woolf lived other lives in alternating

sexes like her character Orlando. I like to think that Woolf lived as a boy before she was born as a girl.

[Cue: The sound of wood burning in a fireplace or in a bonfire.]

5. I find a man who drowned, just not in ketchup. I find a man's body secreted by the Atlantic Ocean. I find Benjamin Guggenheim, the son of the original Guggenheim patriarch, Meyer. I find the facts that killed Benjamin, a founder of the Guggenheim fortune.

I find the fact that he was on board the Titanic and the fact that when the ship struck ice, Benjamin's valet woke him up and told him to get dressed. The fact that Benjamin and his secretary dressed in formal evening clothes instead of thick sweaters and lifebelts. Benjamin's valet, John Johnson, asked him why, and Benjamin said, "We've dressed in our best and are prepared to go down like gentlemen."

During a brief exchange, Benjamin said that his valet must deliver a message to his wife, Florette. "Tell her, Johnson, that I played the game straight to the end and that no woman was left on board this ship because Ben Guggenheim was a coward. Tell her my last thoughts will be of her and our girls." Benjamin and Florette had three daughters: nineteen-year-old Benita, sixteen-year-old Marguerite "Peggy," and twelve-year-old Barbara.

[Cue: Dogs barking in different houses across a neighborhood, as if they're talking across the blocks, through the streets.]

6. Casey Kasem is the Angel of Death. The Doors song or the muzak quiets on the radio, and Casey goes on in that slightly oily voice. He says, "Topping this year's Countdown is 'Diseases of Heart (heart disease)' with 616,067 deaths. Falling to number fifteen on our top fifteen is 'Assault (homicide)' with 18,361 deaths." Casey takes another calm, pronounced pause. "Here's the latest hit single from *Diseases of Heart*, a song that's up two spots, making it the number

one hit on our Countdown." The song starts quietly in the background.

"That's it for our Top Fifteen Countdown, and that's it for me, America," he says, lulling us with that voice. He looks down at the fact sheet on his desk in the sound studio but doesn't read anything more. "This is Casey Kasem with your Top Fifteen Countdown," he says while the music that's been playing in the background gets louder and takes over.

[Cue: The metal pot and pan you banged on as a child with a plastic spatula or wooden spoon.]

7. Perhaps Virginia was a boy before she was a woman. Perhaps she was born earlier as Grigori Yefimovich in Prokovskoye, Siberia. When she, when Grigori, was barely eight, he was playing with his little brother, Dimitri, down in the river near his family's little cottage. The boys were playing a game, and Dimitri got caught in an undertow. Grigori could do nothing to help his little brother, under the surface of the water in their rural Siberian town where no one was in earshot. Grigori yelled, and yelled, and thought he could see Dimitri then knew he could not see Dimitri.

After Dimitri was gone, after Grigori knew there was nothing anyone could do and Dimitri was pronounced dead in 1879, Grigori kept to himself. He stayed inside. He barely spoke even to his parents. When he finally came around two years later, his parents noticed how changed he was. He was beginning to show that he could read people's minds. He could tell people what they were thinking without them saying anything. When some of the family's farm animals became ill, ten-year-old Grigori laid hands on them and showed his parents that he could heal the animals.

[Cue: A phonograph turning its cylinder, wailing out an unknown, garbled tune.]

8. Some bathtubs are made by hand. My girlfriend and I stood in front of an onyx canvas at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh, my hometown. We admired its particularity. We agreed that it was like constellations in the night sky. One of us said that there was an engaging obsessiveness to itsdots and to the work in general.

We walked on and into a room that looked empty. The tall pale walls of a gallery without anything but their paleness. I thought about making out with Margaret, my girlfriend, against a wall or seeing how much time we could spend down each other's pants before security came. But we didn't and I didn't because there was something across the room.

A dark circle that looked like a large seeing eye-hole. I forgot about the thrill of fooling around in a museum. I walked toward the dark circle and started to see it was a drain.

"This sign says that Robert Gober, an American artist, made that drain himself," Margaret said, reading from the artist's statement that must've been behind me. "It's made out of hand-cast pewter."

I stared at the silver circular drain and watched as the wall in front of me became the bottom of a bath. I felt like the gravity in the room was going to shift, and remember itself, and toss me against the wall which would soon become the bottom of the bath, the floor.

I looked behind me at Margaret over by the entrance. Her short black hair, folded arms. I looked at all the track-lit space behind me, between me and the other walls of the gallery, the bath. There was so much space between the walls, between me and the walls, too much space, a space that

would've been comfortable—even to lie face-down in—if it would've been smaller, easier for me to fill with my body and fill with warm water.

[Cue: The constant, almost comforting sound of a jet engine heard from inside an airplane.]

9. Virginia came home soaked. About ten days before she drowned, Virginia came back to the Woolf's country home from a walk, soaking wet. She claimed to have fallen in a dyke during her walk in the country. She wrote to her sister a few days later, just five days before she drowned: "It is just as it was the first time, I am always hearing voices, and I know I shant get over it now."

[Cue: The sound of a back being cracked or knuckles being cracked.]

10. Even Casey Kasem, the Archangel of Croon and Doom, couldn't make the CDC's Table 12 sound sexy. Table 12 is titled "Number of deaths from 113 selected causes. . . ." It gives an exact breakdown of suicidal deaths in relation to sex, though not gender. It tells that 34,598 people died by "Intentional self-harm (suicide)" in 2007, the last year of finalized data.

Of that group of suicidals, 27,269 were male and 7,329 were female. 15,181 males and 2,171 females died "by discharge of firearms." 12,088 males and 5,158 females died "by other and unspecified means and their sequelae." In other words, more men used a gun to commit suicide than all other means collectively.

For females, however, there were more suicides by other means than by use of a gun. The leading cause of death for all females, it turns out, is poisoning. Female suicide by poisoning has been higher than suicide by firearm since 2001. Perhaps these numbers and Table 12 support the theory that men commit suicide differently than women. That men are more likely to mutilate their bodies than women.

Though, Table 12 doesn't clarify what the "other and unspecified means and their sequelae" are exactly. It doesn't clarify how the numbers breakdown and how many of those 5,158 females committed suicide by mutilating means versus non-mutilating means. How many females failed to kill themselves using mutilation and how many of the males failed to kill themselves in non-mutilating ways. I can't find any studies relating suicide to mutilation or non-mutilation, to sex or gender.

[Cue: Family members downstairs or neighbors in the next apartment arguing on the other side of the wall.]

11. The same year Grigori Yefimovich was re-born as a girl and named "Adeline Virginia," Grigori was also re-named "Rasputin," or "The Dissolute." Despite his pilgrimages across Russia and his eventual status as a mystic, Rasputin was also something of a ladies' man. He believed in free love and made that known, using his abilities and his glaring eyes to attract the attention of women in hoards.

One woman wasn't so pleased with our beloved Rasputin, however. When she showed up at his door one night, he didn't even recognize her. Her face and body were horribly disfigured by syphilis, a disease that she claimed Rasputin had given her. Before they could talk or sort out details, she drew a knife and cut Rasputin down the torso, deeply enough for his organs to show.

Perhaps while he bled and held his organs in, Rasputin could see an image of his little brother, Dimitri, for a moment or two. By then, the woman was gone. She ran away from the doorstep where Rasputin stood with his massive knife wound and bleeding. The wound would've been severe enough to kill any other man but not him, not our Rasputin.

[Cue: The sound of a faucet dripping, and dripping again, and almost making some kind of regular pattern.]

12. The likelihood of successful suicide is based on two criteria: first, the level of lethality implied by the suicidal act; and second, the likelihood of the suicidal person being found during or after the suicidal act.

If someone cuts his wrists an hour before a girlfriend comes home from work, the likelihood of successful suicide is relatively low. Cutting has a low lethality, and it's highly likely that he will be found before he bleeds to death. Bleeding to death takes quite a bit of time.

If someone, however, drives out into the woods in the middle of winter with a loaded .44, the likelihood of successful suicide is very high. Though someone can shoot themselves in the head and simply blow a hole through the back of their throat, shooting yourself has a high lethality and being alone in the woods creates a low likelihood of being found during or after the suicidal act.

[Cue: The sound of your breathing, of you trying to catch your breath.]

13. Suicide was Virginia Woolf's familiar. A year before she drowned, Virginia and Leonard, her husband, prepared themselves to commit suicide. It was common in their left-leaning intellectual circle during the late Thirties, during all of the bombings. Bombings that destroyed the Woolf's home in London.

The Woolf's knew that if the Nazis invaded England, they couldn't hide from who they were: Leonard was Jewish, and they were both leading leftist intellectuals. Leonard began to stockpile petroleum at their country home where Virginia would drown herself a year later. Leonard was preserving the possibility of letting him and his wife breathe in the fumes from their car while it ran and ran. While it used so much of the petroleum he'd saved for them. They would be

allowed to asphyxiate and control their asphyxiation rather than die by Nazi bombing, or gunning, or gassing.

[Cue: The sound that radio waves would make if they weren't low-frequency light waves.]

14. There are types of suicidals. After college, I started seeing a counselor for anxiety and obsessive thoughts. My counselor, Marilyn, was a forty-something with round glasses. She was always in a business suit but always able to turn things into a joke.

During one of our earlier meetings, she told me that I was a "Type Two Suicidal." I was the second type because I had a single plan that I imagined repeatedly, but I hadn't carried it out, at least not successfully. When she told me, I heard it first as a challenge. I imagined myself barging out of the room, mid-session, leaving the office and going to my apartment across the lakeside Upstate New York city, going to my bathroom. But I didn't leave Marilyn's office. Instead, I shifted in my seat.

"It's not just medicine that I'd use, though," I told Marilyn, looking at the kid's games in the cabinet in her office. I could see Mouse Trap and Memory, Chutes & Ladders and Pictionary.

"There's a bottle of vodka in the freezer," I told Marilyn. "Smirnov Red or maybe I thought enough ahead to get something better. Chopin potato vodka, maybe." I wanted to open the cabinet in Marilyn's office and take out the Mouse Trap game. I still remembered how most of the board looked from when I was a kid. I wanted to set up the whole thing on the floor, mid-conversation. I kept imagining the green plastic man that gets flipped into a bathtub, eventually, on the Mouse Trap board.

[Cue: The phone ringing at home, throughout the whole house, on cordless phones or phones with long, tangled cords attached to walls, and no one is picking it up.]

15. Rasputin was the Don Juan of Russian mystics who never bathed. His powers of attraction had no limits, it seemed. Felix Yusupov, a twenty-nine year old prince from one of the most noble Russian families of the era, joined the hoard of those pursuing Rasputin. Yusupov was known for being emotionally unstable and for having doubts about his sexuality and, therefore, having a thing for Rasputin. It was sexual—those eyes and that beard on Rasputin—but it was also political. Yusupov knew how close Rasputin had gotten to the Romanov Czar and Czarina.

Rasputin had been secretly tending to the Romanov's son and only heir, Alexis, who battled with hemophilia. Yusupov saw Rasputin as a way into the history books and into the Romanov's favor. Yusupov knew how much of a free lover Rasputin was, so he threw himself at the mystical man but to no avail. Rasputin, for all of his carnal extra-curriculars, wasn't interested in men. Yusupov—hurt, angry, vengeful—left and started plotting against the man who had rejected him so fully.

[Cue: A rollercoaster bounding through the bottom of its first curve.]

16. Virginia fell years before she thought of drowning. In 1904, almost forty years before she drowned, Virginia jumped from a window on a May afternoon. She survived because the window wasn't high enough to be fatal. She jumped because of her debilitating headaches and because of her stepbrother, George. "He never lets one alone for a moment," she wrote in *Moments of Being.* "Very well meant, but wearisome."

What most people don't discuss, what is harder to deal with is her stepbrother George's hands and his late night visits. "It was long past midnight that I got into bed and sat reading. . . ," Virginia wrote.

"There would be a tap at the door; the light would be turned out and George would throw himself on my bed, cuddling and kissing and otherwise embracing me."

[Cue: A fax machine wailing, connecting with its squeal.]

17. Perhaps the bathtub is superfluous. I stared at the crème carpeting in Marilyn's office, thinking about that game in her cabinet, the game Mouse Trap.

"Do you know why it's *that* particular way of doing it?" Marilyn asked me.

"This might sound odd, I guess," I said, looking at a magnetic paperweight on her desk beside the clock. Little metal circles held against each other in a pile. "I think I imagine it with the pills, and vodka, and warm bath because I know that I couldn't possibly survive it."

Marilyn nodded, as if she almost wanted to make a joke, but she didn't make a joke. She barely kept eye contact, looking at my shoulder then my hands.

I told myself that I just damaged the room, as if I made the wallpaper in her office more serious and the furniture more stayed. "There's no possible way I could get myself out of that bathtub after taking all those pills and drinking all that vodka," I told her. "I've saved bottles of all kinds of sedatives from surgeries and illnesses. Tylenol Three with Codein, Vicodin, Xanax, Fiorocet. Even if everything inside me wanted me to move, and get up, and take a huge breath of air, it wouldn't matter. I'd still be lying face-down in the bath."

"Yeah, at that point, the bathtub is almost cosmetic, unnecessary, don't you think?"

I stared at the paperweight on her desk, the metal circles stuck in a pile. I nodded.

[Cue: Cars keeping pace during the end of rush hour.]

18. If you get invited down into someone's basement and offered cream cakes, don't eat them. Yusupov gathered a group of co-conspirators and invited Rasputin to a dinner party at his luxurious home. Rasputin knew that Yusupov often had parties like these. Parties where royalty and the wealthy mingled and drank.

Rasputin followed Yusupov down into his basement where the party would start. A storage cellar that had been converted into a temporary dining room just for that night. The two men sat at the table and talked. Yusupov offered Rasputin cream cakes and poured him wine from a carafe. Rasputin ate and drank, not knowing that one of Yusupov's co-conspirators was a doctor and had laced each cake with enough cyanide to kill a man. The doctor put cyanide in the wine as well, just for good measure. But it didn't work, none of it worked. Rasputin just kept on eating, and drinking, and talking.

Yusupov excused himself. He went upstairs to a room where the doctor and the rest of his co-conspirators were. "It's not working! It's not working!" he told them, pointing at the doctor among them. Then Yusupov knew what he had to do. He knew which of the men had a weapon, and he reached into the other man's coat, pulled the pistol from his waistband, and ran back downstairs to the basement.

[Cue: The sound of a key in the ignition held all the way forward, grinding mechanisms, pressing, almost breaking the engine's starter.]

19. I fixate on bathtubs, but I'm terrified of them as well. I don't like to look at bathtubs for too long. I try not to look down when I'm taking showers, and I took only showers for years after that night in the bathtub when I was fourteen, and I almost killed myself.

I try not to face the pale curve of bathtubs, the solid way that the hard ceramic underneath feels against the bony edges of my shoulder blades. The way that some of them slant more at their back wall so you can lie against them and relax.

[Cue: The sound of a garbage disposal with a fork or spoon caught in it.]

20. If you ever come back from the dead, do it with surprise and panache. When Yusupov returned to the basement and Rasputin, he demanded that Rasputin stare at a gold cross he was wearing. He thought it would keep the demons inside Rasputin from protecting the witchy man. When Yusupov could tell that Rasputin was looking at the cross, he shot Rasputin as many times as he could, watching the bearded mystic fall out of his chair and hit the concrete floor.

Yusupov ran back upstairs to his co-conspirators and said, "I've done it! I've done it! I've done it! He's dead!" They celebrated, and cheered, and laughed. Then, for whatever reason, Yusupov needed to return to the basement, to the body of Rasputin.

In the basement, Yusupov looked at Rasputin's gaunt, unwashed form. Those glaring eyes that were now closed and quiet. The beard that no longer seemed so thick and powerful.

Yusupov laughed and laughed at Rasputin, lying there beneath him. Yusupov laughed into Rasputin's face, a face with eyes that shot open and glared right into Yusupov. Rasputin wasn't dead, he was pissed.

"Bad boy!" Rasputin said, grabbing Yusupov by the throat, choking him, getting up to his feet, then shoving Yusupov across the room.

Then Rasputin made a run for it. He managed to hobble out into one of the palace's courtyards where Yusupov and company drew pistols again and fired on Rasputin. Enough shots grazed the mystical man to slow him down more, slow him down enough for the crew of conspirators to catch him and bind his arms and legs, take him down to a bridge by a half-frozen river.

[Cue: A gas stove trying to light but not quite able to light.]

21. It's the quiet I'm after. I've always adored the way it sounds in a bathtub, under the water, the way it garbles the world. The way that physicists love to point out the counter-intuitive fact that sound travels better in water and even better in solids than it travels in air.

I adore the way that all sound is a disturbance and somehow these facts feel reassuring to me when I think about them. It feels like they justify something for me—maybe it encourages me to keep my ears under water. And under there, I tell myself I'm hearing everything better than I normally do.

[Cue: A fighter jet entering sonic boom, to break the sound barrier.]

22. His hands shocked her memory for years afterward. Later in *Moments of Being,* Virginia writes of being sixteen and living in Talland House with her siblings and stepsiblings. She writes of its "pale yellow, silver, and green" colors and its "elastic, gummy air." She writes of being sixteen in that house and "there was a slab outside the dining room door for standing dishes upon. Once when I was very small Gerald Duckworth lifted me on to this, and as I sat there he began to explore my body.

"I can remember the feel of his hand going under my clothes; going firmly and steadily lower and lower. I remember how I hoped that he would stop; how I stiffened and wriggled as his hand approached my private parts. But it did not stop. His hand explored my private parts too. I remember resenting, disliking it—what is the word for so dumb and mixed a feeling? It must have been strong, since I still recall it."

[Cue: The sound that human memory would make if it were audible or some kind of song.]

23. The Ice-Capades presents "Rasputin: The Man Who Wouldn't Die—Live, On Ice." Viggo Mortensen would have to play Rasputin, whether it's on ice or in a film. The two men look alarmingly similar. Though, I'm not sure if Viggo can ice-skate. Also, Rasputin has a bit more of a maniacal, Charles Manson stare than the chiseled but pretty face of Viggo.

If the Ice-Capades' Rasputin tour got signed, Viggo would have to learn to ice-skate if he doesn't already know. He'd also have to learn how to be killed a lot. Not only all of the assassination attempts on his life but the execution itself. The executioners would skate slowly over to Viggo-as-Rasputin and bind his body. They would wrap him up in a rug and pitch him off a bridge.

A sound-effect of splashing would clatter through speakers somewhere in the arena. Rasputin would be sent into the freezing water of the Neva River below.

[Cue: The sound of someone doing an impression of your voice and gestures.]

24. On a major college campus in the U.S., one out of every 10,000 students successfully commits suicide each year. The head psychologist in the student counseling office at my graduate school told me this fact and others. She told me that on a campus like ours of 40,000 students, three to four students commit suicide each year.

Mostly all of the students who commit suicide on our campus jump from buildings, she told me. She told me which buildings they typically jump from, and I thought of the six story heights, the gray stone surfaces. I thought that jumping is appealing to me only during the fall, the weightlessness of it and the way the wind would block out almost all other sounds. But I never like to imagine hitting the ground. I always redirect my thoughts. I find out later that 731 people died by suicidal "fall" in 2007, twice the number of people who drowned themselves that year.

Though, I can't keep the thought out of my head that you can break your legs and arms, you can break your spine and paralyze yourself jumping off of a building, and you can survive the fall. I can't imagine that pain and having to hear your own body make that sound, feeling it make that slight bounce off of concrete. I can't imagine surviving.

[Cue: The sound of atoms moving under the microscope of Werner Heisenberg.]

25. No one cares what happened to Rasputin's body. When they found Rasputin's body down-river three days after his drowning, his hands were frozen like a small, scared little animal. His fingers were curled and clawing at nothing, at air afterward, but they'd clearly been clawing at ice that kept him under, and below freezing, and unable to breathe or keep his body warm enough. Those hands, frozen into little paws, fingers stuck and bent, a body that must've thrashed and gasped, gulping subzero water instead of air, a body that didn't even have the solace of warm water when it drowned. f

CONTRIBUTORS

Carl Adamshick received the 2010 Walt Whitman Award from the Academy of American Poets judged by Marvin Bell. His book, *Curses and Wishes*, is published by Louisiana State University Press. His poems and essays have appeared in *Narrative, American Poetry Review, Tin House, The Harvard Review,* and elsewhere. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

Todd Boss's poetry collections are *PITCH* (2012) and *Yellowrocket* (W. W. Norton, 2008). His MFA is from the University of Alaska–Anchorage. His poems have appeared in *Poetry, The New Yorker, The London Times, NPR,* and *Best American Poetry.* Todd is the founding co-director of Motionpoems, a poetry film initiative.

Blair Braver is an Arts Fellow at the University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program. Her essays have appeared in *Orion, Agni, The Best Women's Travel Writing,* and elsewhere, and came in first place in *The Atlantic*'s 2011 Student Writing Contest.

Tessa Fontaine is from the Redwood forests of California, but now lives in the kudzu jungles of Tuscaloosa, Alabama, where's she chipping away at her MFA. She's the former nonfiction editor at *Black Warrior Review,* and has work in *Creative Nonfiction, The Normal School, [PANK], Brevity, Used Furniture Review, Hot Metal Bridge* and several anthologies, including the brand new *Tuscaloosa Runs This.* She currently teaches with the Alabama Prison Arts and Education Program.

Gary Jackson was born and raised in Topeka, Kansas, and is the winner of the 2009 Cave Canem Poetry Prize for his first book *Missing You, Metropolis*. He was nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and his poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Laurel Review, Callaloo, Tin House, Blue Mesa Review, Pilgrimage, BorderSenses* and elsewhere. He has been a fierce lover of comics for over twenty years.

Lindsey Johnson is an MFA candidate at George Mason University. Her fiction has twice been a finalist in contests held by *Glimmer Train Stories*. She lives in Fairfax, Virginia, where she teaches literature.

Caitlin Mackenzie's poetry has been included in *Plain Spoke, MiPOesias, Glass,* and *Forge*, among others. After graduating from the Bennington Writing Seminars, she moved to Eugene, Oregon where she currently lives and works in academic book publishing.

Anne McDuffie's work has appeared in *Colorado Review, Crab Creek Review, A River and Sound Review, Rattle, American Book Review* and the anthology *Short Takes: Brief Encounters with Contemporary Nonfiction* (Norton, 2005). She lives in Seattle, Washington. "Fog: A Study" was written as part of the Jack Straw Writers Program.

Lia Purpura is the author of seven collections of essays, poems and translations, including *On Looking (Essays)* a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award and most recently, *Rough Likeness*. Her awards include a 2012 Guggenheim Foundation Fellowship, as well as NEA and Fulbright Fellowships, and four Pushcart prizes. Her work appears in *The New Yorker, The New Republic, Orion,* and *The Paris Review.* She is Writer-in-Residence at Loyola University, Baltimore, MD and teaches in the Rainier Writing Workshop in Tacoma, WA.

Shann Ray's work has appeared in *Montana Quarterly, Narrative, McSweeney's,* and *Story Quarterly* among other venues. Honors include a National Endowment for the Arts Fellowship, the Breadloaf Writers' Conference Bakeless Prize, the Subterrain Poetry Prize, and the Crab Creek Review Fiction Award. He is the author of *American Masculine* (Graywolf), and *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity* (Rowman & Littlefield). For his wife and daughters he wishes the garment of praise instead of the spirit of despair.

Max Somers was born and raised in Indiana. He's worked in film production—in front of and behind the camera. He's raced motorcycles. He's also been a political campaign copywriter, a short-order cook, and a teacher. He was a runner-up for the 2012 "Discovery"/*Boston Review* Poetry Prize. Currently, he lives in a renovated Airstream trailer with his girlfriend, the poet, Sara Gelston. You can find his recent work in or forthcoming from P*rairie Schooner, [PANK], Ninth Letter,* and *The Greensboro Review.*

Joshua Unikel has an MFA from the University of Iowa's Nonfiction Writing Program. He is an entering MFA candidate in the University at Buffalo's Visual Studies Program. Unikel also currently serves as the assistant editor of *The Seneca Review*. His work has recently appeared in *TriQuarterly Online, The Normal School, Drunken Boat, Booth,* and other literary journals.

Sarah Vap's fourth and fifth collections, *Arco Iris* (Saturnalia Books) and *End of the Sentimental Journey* (Noemi Books) are forthcoming in 2012.

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