

The Plum Creek Review

Spring 2010

135 West Lorain Street
Oberlin, Ohio
Black River Watershed

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TRUE EUROPA

below you
white bull
night pulls
below you

i curl
i warp

sweat draped
star scraped
swallowed up
hollowed out

like a fish husk whittled down to dust.

Sarah Konowitz

COMMUTING

For my whole life I was my mother's
daughter. I was a hornet's nest.
I was a staircase.

When you left me, for good. I was
her mermaid.
I was a house. I was pink and green.

I was the home my mother made.
I was my mother on a train,
my hair flew around my head like hers.

Once she fainted on the subway
from standing up too long.
It was summer everyone was breathing

before they fixed up all the trains.
And a big black guy caught her in
his arms. Everybody got up and

made her sit down. They gave her
water. And did she did no
she drank it.

I was my mother's commuter,
and I tried. But
I was not good to you.

Lauren Clark



June Tate

CLASH (noun) \ˈklʌʃ\:

1. a swelling, clotting like snow clouds, welling up, a feeling first, and then the words, what did you say to me; 2. a plow swims through the snow, jolts forward, stops, jolts, the words are jargon, the words are hieroglyphs; 3. our backfires blaze, spew sparks like broken teeth, our howls, our heads, our words bulge, and we sink into the bowels of this; 4. a straitjacket, subterranean, we lock ourselves into our words, I meant it, I am ashamed of you, I want out; 5. you sulk, spin my words to meet yours, a mouse maze of prongs and planks, lather yourself with logic, you are right, you are right, you must be right; 6. a shriveling of pride, like fingertips or words, like cells.

Sarah Konowitz

FRUIT

I liked the pineapple
crown you rooted in your
bedroom in a mason jar
until you said in two or
three years it'll grow
a pineapple we can eat.
Just one? I said.
Yes just one.

Sarah Hoffman

al panti cōhāblār



ac'fucite de ilimār



(s'c)

Sam Rowe



David Greenberg



Kalan Sherrard

SONG

this swan had run herself
into a steel wire web

where streetlights hang above the running path
that drapes around our lake

two girls and their mother
called “animal police” they said

in broken English when I asked
I didn’t know the beaks of swans

turned blue for any reason but
this one’s neck had broken

gracefully, or the opposite of grace:
she was still alive in silence

opening her mouth for air each time
her head rolled and plopped staccato in the water

her vertebrae no longer formed
that immortal swan shape you would recognize

other birds around her honked
two dragged the blue beak back and forth

mercy looked to us on the sand violent
we tried to shoo them off

her dropping head was every kind of pain
not lessened by the other swans
the late animal police

least by our witness

Hope Rehak

LOCUSTS: A MUTUALLY ATTRACTED SPECIES

I am thinking maybe here could be a chance for the Rocky Mountain locust to have some god-fearing return like a hunger, raise hell here. Eighteen seventy-four: twelve point five trillion insects, twenty-seven point five million tons and hungry too, no, starving. Two hundred million dollars in crop damages in the west. Left the place barren like a handful of sand. There was already a drought. Everyone was already hungry. The sugars in the stalks made the locusts want.

Thirty years later, farmers had a hand in their extinction so that North America is the only populated continent without a major locust. Not a single one was saved. What it must have felt like to shed. What it must have felt like rejecting a body. Here, I have spent too many nights making decisions, my own body wrapped around a toilet.

Marlo Barrera

SIAMESE

Nine years old, you saw Chang and Eng
on the History Channel, and you stood on a chair
to get Mom's sewing box off the top of the fridge.

We decided to do it at the hip.
We both wanted to be on the right
and I won nose goes.

Both of our shorts rolled down to our thighs –
I giggled we could see our penises – and you stuck
the needle in soap three times, and tied a scarf

over your mouth like a doctor. And your skin
where your waistband was printed
came to a point under the needle

like a Hershey's Kiss inside out.
This might not work, you said, and I
said come on it was your idea.

It hurts, you said. You put a Band-Aid
where you had pricked yourself, and you
wouldn't give the needle to me.

Sarah Hoffman



Kelly Savietta

LA VIAJERA Y SU SOMBRA. Enigma de un mediodía de otoño. Ariadna duerma. Eternamente duerme y mira con sus ojos cerrados de estatua. No sabe qué año es, ni si el viento sopla del Este o del Oeste, ni si el sol está surgiendo u ocultándose en el horizonte. No necesita saber estas cosas. Ella solo espera con urgencia el tiempo en el cual la verdad emergerá adentro de sí como un flecha. Quiere estar sola para ver, en el revés de su tristeza, qué sistema numeral comunica la anatomía humana con los sueños, el deseo con ese gran cuerpo suyo, a pesar suyo, que es el mundo. Viento, viento, y la batalla comienza terrible. Los cráneos partidos caen a tierra y es posible advertir, desperdigados, los restos de una ciudad cuadrículada y fehaciente. Extraña beatitud de los combates perdidos de antemano. Ahora el sol se detiene en lo alto, en el centro del cielo, y la estatua dormida, como un bloque de eternidad, déjà que su alma se solace en la contemplación de su ceguera, adonde ocurre toda vision.

María Negroni (Argentina)
from Buenos Aires Tour, 2003

THE TRAVELER AND HER SHADOW. Enigma of an early autumn afternoon. Ariadne, sleep. She sleeps and sees eternally with her closed statue eyes. She doesn't know what year it is, or if the wind blows from the East or from the West, or if the sun is appearing or hiding beneath the horizon. She doesn't need to know these things. She only waits with urgency for the time when the truth will emerge inside her like an arrow. She wants to be alone to see, behind her sadness, what numeral system connects the human anatomy to the dreams, desire to her great body, which is, to her regret, the world. Wind, wind, and the battle begins terribly. Cracked skulls fall to the earth and one can observe, scattered, the remains of a gridded and credible city. Strange beatitude of the battles lost beforehand. Now the sun lingers up high, in the center of the heavens, and the sleeping statue, like a block of eternity, lets her soul take pleasure in the contemplation of her blindness, source of all vision.

tr. Christina Pope



Rebecca Cohen

THE WIDOW I KNOW

wears long sleeves and sleeps
downstairs with the laundry,

stalls on the narrow
road near the hollow tree,

watches whitecaps
slap together from her window,

makes a cross on her body,
this fossil of a woman

sets and dries into the wall
like a clay eye, lid fallen.

Grandma, I ask, did you even
love him? Does it even

matter, she says,
slow as a cathedral echo.

Sarah Konowitz

RITUALS

In the mornings, my mother and I drank tea
We poured it slowly from the old black kettle
Then she went her way, and I went mine
Aging alone at either end of that old house

We poured it slowly from the old black kettle
Steam rising like a foggy curtain until my eyes lost her
Aging alone at the other end of that old house
Sometimes I crept into her bathroom to find her

Steam rose like a foggy curtain, and my eyes lost her
It smelled fresh and sharp, tea tree oil and mist and skin
Sometimes I crept into her bathroom to lose her
Often, she didn't say a word

It smelled fresh and sharp, black tea and steam and milk
We began simply, the creeping cold, burned tongues
And often, she didn't say a word
I didn't mind, just looked down and breathed in heat

We began simply, the cutting cold, burned tongues
Then she went her way, and I went mine
I didn't mind, just looked down and counted cracks
In the mornings, my mother and I drank tea.

Zoe Darsee



Kalan Sherrard

TADOUSSAC

Halfway in
the stand of black birch
flecked red, pale mitts of leaf.
The battered stones
of a ruined cistern, a field
that once was tilled.

Then the drop
toward water, transformation
of path to plank,
a whirlpool down to shore.
Wooden turret
in an ocean of air.

O god the water.

Rippling prairie
of glass – the wind, the wind.
Unchanged world born of glaciers.

Distant white hides, scarred,
break surface: an arch
a swell of whaleskin.

Below water, out
of ears' reach a fierce
moan, the call.

The dipping into air
lung full of ocean –
mist, exhale – mingling
of sky and sea,

the insatiable darkness of the firs.

Adam Beaudoin



Allison Fontaine-Capel

THE SHABBOS BRIDE

Jesse Miller

Her grandfather called to her, “Faygella,” which meant little bird, and Lainey fluttered cautiously over to the couch, the one at the corner of the room, where he had stationed his wheelchair, quietly sipping his drink and staring dully out the window. She had been listening to her mother and grandmother while they talked, sitting across the table from one another in the adjoining room. Even from where Lainey had sat at the far side of the table, she could hear that wheelchair fwump-fwumping with every movement he made. Still unaccustomed to it, she eyed the chair suspiciously, trying not to catch her grandfather’s gaze.

Her grandmother gesticulated vigorously, distorting her face so that her bulldog jowls hung low. “‘My bones ache at night,’ he says.” Her electric hair splayed out in tufts like a mad scientist’s. The whine, the woe-betide, the kvetch, the complaint, the grumble, the grouse: these were her experiments, carefully controlled, perfected to a rhetorical point. As the glacier in her glass melted, as the tide of vodka ebbed, she would even attempt complex impersonations.

“They do,” her grandfather yelled from the other room.

“Oh look now he’s listening. Like an old house, he thinks he’s got ghosts in his bones. I even have to help him into bed on cold nights. As if my joints didn’t stiffen up too,” her grandmother continued. “And then he walks around anyway.”

“I know mom,” Lainey’s mother replied. “But—”

“You don’t know Jean. I’ve heard more about legs in the past month than a hosier. And I’m no sprightly young thing myself. It’s a wonder any of the chores get done at all. It’s so hard for me now.” She shot a look in Lainey’s direction. “Are you listening to this Lainey?”

“Uh-huh,” Lainey mumbled, looking at her hands.

“You’re not going to be able to hop around outside the way you do forever. One day you’re going to wake up all grown and tired and you’ll remember listening to this conversation and you’ll say, ‘granny was right all along.’ ”

Lainey played with the bright peeling paint on her nails. She liked scraping it off better than she liked putting it on. She waited until she could feel the focus of the conversation drifting away from her like a searchlight, which, poised for a moment, illuminating a piece of ground and casting shadows upon others, moves on.



Rebecca Cohen

Then, “Faygella.” She looked up and found her grandfather staring straight at her; that old fierceness in his eyes, no longer dull glass staring through the dull glass window. The grass out there had begun to grow high; it bent under its own weight, blade backs bowed, curling into themselves. He patted his knee, and she sat down in the couch, back bent towards him. “Let me tell you something,” he said, and he spoke to her how he had all her life, in gruff hushed tones, his moustache sometimes prickling and tickling against her ear, as if nobody else in the room could know the things he told her, not her grandma, not her mother. These stories, recollections, family secrets he entrusted to her and only to her to remember.

He spoke of the boats and the birds and the people all groaning in the harbor, all sick to get out of that magical country he returned to so often in his stories. Odessa, a place where his parents baked cakes all day and every Friday night the people would gather together to sing songs and nod and bend like antennas in the breeze.

“Have I ever told you about the Shabbos bride?” he asked Lainey and she shook her head. He told her how the Shabbos bride would walk through the town on Friday night, glowing like sea froth in her wedding cake gown, a scarf wrapped around her head, hiding her hair from all but her groom. She came from the harbor and her shoes were tied with seaweed and it was said that if she followed you to your home she would let down her hair for you and you would live a life of eternal happiness. All of the children would run around her trying to catch her attention, pulling at the fringes of her wedding gown, tugging her towards their homes. Come with me, come with me. But she walked straight through the middle of the town. Never wavering, never turning.

Her grandmother stood up from the kitchen table and looked into their corner of the room where they were sitting. “Don’t torture the girl Nicolai, she doesn’t care about your stories.”

“*Shvayg yenta,*” he shouted.

“Shut yourself you old bellow.”

This set him off and he began to curse at her the way he did when she had gone too far, lashing out in a language Lainey didn’t understand, saying, things more horrible than she could imagine, things bent and guttural like the sounds of the words that contained them.

While her grandpa left off his story the bride was left there to fend for herself. The boys, who had been so well behaved, so well dressed in their dark pants and starched shirts, seemed to grow pale, their limbs and torso’s thinned, distended, shirts crackling like dried dough. The bride smiled, even as they

pulled her harder, this way and that, she’s mine, she’s mine, they shouted, fingers everywhere, pulling her to the muddy ground, which a recent rain had left moist and malleable, so that it stained her dress in places. And as her grandfather continued his tirade, straining forward in his wheelchair, body bent to topple, a boy with cheeks particularly round and apple-pink reached for the scarf wrapped around her head, just wanting to look, wanting to know about that hair, that hair, made of the stuff of dreams.

But then her grandma laughed and sat back down and picked up her glass and hobbled to the kitchen to fill it up again, and her grandpa’s voice quieted, the syllables smoothed and his story returned to Lainey’s ear.

“She would always smile,” he said, “even though she was being pulled in five directions at once, and one time I pulled at her dress so hard that a piece as pale and delicate as spiderweb came off, and still she didn’t stop,” he smiled, his eyes half closed now.

“What happened to it?” she asked.

“Still have it of course. It’s under the mattress. I’ll tell you, if you ever want to keep anything safe, that’s the place to keep it. Hold on, let me show you.” The wheelchair squeaked with excitement as he stood, quickly, comfortably. He took a step forward.

“Dad!” Jean had turned quickly to the sound. She left her mouth open at the end of the exclamation.

“Nicolai, sit.” Her grandmother said sternly, one finger pointed in his direction.

He sat, his body folding back into the chair as though with those words the sap that animated his limbs had run dry. He gripped the arms of his chair weakly. “Treat me like a dog. That’s all right. Treat me like a dog if that’s what you think I am. I’ll show it to you some other time Lainey. Before you get old. No, don’t do that. Never get old. But you’ve still got some time left.” He smiled. “I’ll show it to you some other time.”

AFTER THE EARTHQUAKE

I.

the pinprick stars
still jangle
in their shattered sockets
like eyes of a trembling
submarine.

II.

He peels away
and slips on his shirt
just as the drumbeat dies.
She feels the crater
on the bed, and says,
wait, thief—

Sarah Konowitz



Kelly Savietta

- ATION (CRE)

from the series the aching

there is a mcdonalds in harajuku close to the train station and it is a weekday tradition that her husband will pick up big macs after work. for nine months straight she eats only sodium for dinner, justifying the choice by her inflated stomach, with the distinct grease scent that makes her chest rise and fall in time with america.

every night he tugs his tie loose with one hand before presenting her feast and later does to her what spring does with the cherry trees. but japan is not where the coils of her brain were wrapped and no matter what they eat for dinner he cannot make her feel like she's sitting at the coffee table back home, smelling the orchards, recognizing faces in the paper, dandruff from her hair catching beneath his fingernails.

even on their egg box mattress pad instead of tatami she does not dream at night, thinking: *this is not where my head lives, this apartment is not sacred*. four and a half blocks away from the meiji shrine, tourists tread past barrels of sake dedicated to the land, photographing how picturesque alcohol is in the fog, and she is faithless.

never expected to have a child over here but it makes sense, really, mother, it makes so much sense in terms of time, she'll call long distance to connecticut, usa and hold the phone away from her mouth as she cries so hard that it's silent because being here is easy only when she forgets about the other places she'd rather be.

her womb has turned into a grapefruit in the winter. she watches children in the neighborhood walk to school in pairs and can't imagine what it will be like to be peeled down the middle, wondering often what animal the scar will resemble.

washi paper is made from the bark of mulberry trees she tells the women of the tokyo american union church wednesday afternoons, three pm. teaching crafts because she's always been good with her hands. *this place can become home if we make it, time turns us into who we become*, the silent mantra hovering behind silver molars as she hollows out eggs, blowing her own youth through holes on either end.

Nicole Balin

- ATION (NARR)

from the series the aching

neekoru neekoru neekoru neekoru
l's become r's elle becomes ours she is ours this girl is ours
the only girl from her country behind
glass is ours *neekoru neekoru neekoru*
nurses cannot pronounce
her name the doctor who
made the first cut cannot pronounce her name
we are the only ones in this hospital
who can pronounce our baby's name but they think she's something
pointing her out to impatient pacing fathers *neekoru neekoru*
 impatient blossoms pacing venetian blinds
peak season through windows
 and the swallows think she's something too

Nicole Balin



Maia Brown

THERE, THE MURMUR, CAN YOU HEAR IT?

And my mother said that they are prayers—
sung one word at a time in sounds that whispers out roar because,
Sweetheart, you could use a few more talks with God, she says,
wondering if I'm already too far from earth.
And I lie on my mattress,
like still water,
listening to my veins and I hear
the flutter of butterfly wings after each beat.

And the doctor said that they are mistakes—soft,
wrong notes where they shouldn't be, thudding like paper drums,
confused and persistent.
I hold that stainless, sterile stethoscope,
press the cold part against my chest,
hear the echoes and think
of wooden, worn spoons in each hand, partly crushed colanders,
and dented copper pots splayed about the summer warm floor tiles,
metal sparkling like fireflies,
creation ricocheting and resonating invisibly through the house.

And she will not say anything—
her palm a small burning star against my ribs, one smooth ear held
to my chest and I can feel a corner of her lip tickle my skin as it curves up
into an even lovelier thing.
Then she will pull herself up to where she can watch the thoughts
bloom like spring clouds behind my eyes
and her mouth will settle against the edges of my lips.
Then I will translate—simply, directly, perfectly,
speaking a language as eloquent as rain,
just what it is this heart is murmuring about.

Alexandra Sharabianlou



Faith Hays

NIGHT ROBBERS

*

Fireflies are lazy
 sparks above the cornfield
All our crops are possessed by some saint's fire
Foxes under the cornstalks,
 cornhusks, whisper to us
"No more life for the living
no more life for the dead"

*

Like a bite, some pain is simple, mechanical
Like a sting, some pain evolves,
 takes new forms,
 turns towards our chest and
 holds us close to be fully known
Now it is a stone in our hand

*

Between green rows, there must be
 some stray feathers, loosed, sown
Can taste be illusion?
Everything that grows from this ground
 tastes of necessity, but the foxes
don't hear their own whispers rising

*

Moon swinging across our paths like
the needle of a compass, orients us:
 pendulum, weight, moon
Feels like south and south and south,
Feels like love
There are two points on a map, fixed
 yet inexplicably diverging

Katarina Lunde



David Greenberg

HOW THE BODY SLEEPS

i knew to call it suspect the night i awoke to the wind
moseying up my hollows
breath blue on my collarbone

it's curious my body
weeping
welcomed it at her doorstep
just for the night
she said
just for

it isn't the treachery that troubles me
but how does my body sleep
knowing the wind will whisper away her fingers knowing
the wind rising off concrete
rising off clotheslines
rising off cooked meat

i remember when i learned the word altar
the stress on the inclusive
the ending black and impressionable
a echoing a in symmetry that can only be stomached by god
and other things
we worship

it's curious the wind's careful swigs of my skin
of my forearms my larynx the cast of my jawbone
who knew the body so soft
could harden in dreams
as though cast in iron
that flickers
as it dries

i flicker in sleep
the way blood gets brighter in water
as though saying 'this
is where i come from'

Galen Beebe

ABEDNEGO

I fell in love with Abednego.

He breathed the colors of flames
into my hair
when he was stoned

and spent hours attempting to separate
the red and gold
with his fingers.
Silly boy was only stained with oranges

and once the autumn pigment
shamed me too much to look at,
I turned the furnace up seven times,
and threw him in.

I don't burn bridges.
I am the gasoline
who makes friends with souls
who carry matches in their pockets.

We drank poison in the name of tea,
made love in the name of friendship.
I'd forgive your shut-eyed ignorance
through your wind-slaughtered voice

as the moans break
on your ash,
kindled coldly with the loving snow.
But my shut-eyed ignorance offers
no response, no reply.

Water of a god---less
No god would rain on this.
Kisses of your singed frame,
now falling gray and silent
by discrete rejection
that would eat the flesh
over our snowing faces.

The snow falling on Abednego's grave
scares me as it buries and compresses
and bruises
the body that isn't there.

They will mourn, saying he sleeps
in the motherly arms of fate,
but it is the flickering charcoal pride that ate
Abednego and I.

Emily Wilson



ZIP

Allison Fontaine-Capel



Adam Chambers

WHAT WILL REMAIN

if you woke, old man, and rose up
open eyes I'd ask you what
you'd see out on the world now.
because today they see
the lasting boys the brothers last
ing children last
ing granding father man today:
is what they see
but only one,
a single failing
raining
sunshine baking
bread the day, a kind of waste
ed daughter dies, a kind
of midnight last, midlast
and on and on and
going on? and others
other midnight dawn in midsound bells that chime
and later ask if whether now the lovely
two
the hours past
a sister, and the day
a time track add
the train track rail
a link in life times only when
the *we* were young
and so we're old
we're young
we are.
and never kiss
and never touch
the kidling man of which
he is and what he's lost
soon ten years old
it's all the same:
for now, what cold we see: within
us only brothers fatherman
can't know
he knows
and always knew
that ever where he's going is

Alex Tamaki



Faith Hays

HEAVEN PANTOUM

When I decide it's time for heaven,
God will make me toast
with peanut butter scooped from big band horns,
and jazz riffs dipped in mom's Jif jars.

Yes, God will make me toast
to blues licks spread on whole wheat bread,
to jazz riffs dipped in mom's Jif jars, to
jams, to chords all crisp from burning notes.

Blues licks spread on whole wheat bread, and
have you heard of jazz en-
jambéd? of chords all crisp, or burning notes?
My teeth will hear, my ears will chew—for

have you heard of jazz en-
grained in peanut butter scooped from horns?
My teeth will hear, my ears will chew
when I decide it's time for heaven.

Connor Stratton



Adam Chambers



Anthony Weiss

THESE FRUITS IN HER HAT (WHEN SHE DANCED)

pined a pull to
water me lonesome
said can't elope, straw barely strewn,
 come quick, squat
piece me an ache
said grasp me be right here
men go, went, will continue to go, to mate
oh, we ran gentle
 evoked cadences
 a prime caught catch
bare-backed, said don't be lacking
 keys we paired, preserved
lie me, let me on
 grappled apart
 hand-fed parts ,
painted away in banter and amble
said honey,
 do palms grant me this?

Nicole Balin

LAY OUT POEM

1. Cut three pages from this book. One for the inside of your pillowcase, one for the back pocket of your jeans. Fold the third and sail it downstream.
2. Gather stones to mark the boundaries of your land. Lay them out.
3. Lay out your bones in a field, between the grasses.

Adam Beaudoin & Rosemary Bateman
Layout Editors

?CR

Set in Garamond & Baskerville.

“The type was crisp, the paper smooth and pale.”
— typophile.com/node/12622