
Connections

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Urban Influence by *Angela Lucier*

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Houses by *Paul Toscano*

Autumn Apples September

Judith Allen-Leventhal

In the fall
on warm sunny afternoons
like this one
I am a young girl
riding home
with my mom
after back-to-school outings.

We're on the lookout
for the roadside apple stand
and delicious green, sour apples.

We will eat them from their brown paper bag
without washing or salting them,
though we would prefer both.

We loved the sour apples
and our own shared sweetness.

I have my own daughters now
to share sweet, sour apples
and sunny autumn afternoons.

They will have their own
to share
some future sunny appled autumn afternoon.

I hope.

The Benevolent Smile

Ana Wiseman

My hands were cold. I looked up toward the sky; it was bleak, filled with shades of purple and gray. The rain poured hard on my skin chilling my bones as I walked. Suddenly, my toes began to itch, the kind of orgasmic itch that hurts when you scratch it, but feels so pleasurable you can't stop. As I looked down at my feet to relieve myself I realized there was a spider inching its long, auburn body across my toes. The small furry creature abruptly erupted in flames; minute blue-violet cinders of spider floated into the air. My eyes became blurry with tears as the fire danced on my foot. The pain was unbearable. I tried to heave the smoldering carcass from my foot, but I was paralyzed from the waist down—my whole body tingled with the sensation that had originated in my foot. I futilely wrenched forward as I attempted to call for help—my throat was so dry I could not utter a word—blood gushed from it. I awoke to the scream of my alarm clock.

While peeling the covers off of my body I turned the light on atop my nightstand beside my bed. The light flooded my room; its jovial demeanor disgusted me, stinging my retinas as my crusty eyes fought to focus with frustration on the clothes in my closet after I sleepily silenced my alarm. Looking back at my bed, I paused, wondering what the dream had meant. With a sigh I rolled my weary eyes and continued to probe the hole in my wall (I took the door down after it kept falling off) for the same old clothing I look for every day, which I can't find. The black short-sleeved shirt from the GAP, my white socks that got swallowed by the washing machine, and the lilac thong I let him “borrow” so long ago. I trudged up the steps; my feet felt like lead. My saliva tasted like the muck I smelled as my mother drove past the sewage plant to my grandparent's house, the smell

that makes you roll your window up on a beautiful summer day that you can still smell coming in through the air conditioner—the smell that makes you gag.

Entering the bathroom I turned the light on as I glared into the mirror at my pitiful reflection, insipid skin beneath bags so intense that it appeared as though I had been beaten up. To my chagrin the alarm began to scream again. I rolled my eyes, pulled my pajama top over my head, my pajama bottoms to my knees before hopping on one foot to get them completely off, then pulled my socks off, and slumped everything in the corner behind the door before sulking over to turn the water on in the shower.

The shower's spray cascaded down on me like rapid gunfire from an AK-47. The hot pellets descended and mingled with my own cool, salty bullets as I thought of the song *Angel of Mine* by Monica, our song.

Later as I harnessed my eighty-pound book bag to my back I wondered what it would be like if he wasn't in my life anymore. For the first time since I woke up I spoke, "I don't need him." The biggest lie I've repeatedly told myself. What was my problem? Why had I pushed him away?

I yelled goodbye to my mother before the dogs on her bed began barking. I let out a sigh of exasperation because they bark incessantly every day; it was amazing they had not barked until now. As I closed the door to my house, I could still hear the yapping, but my mind was on other things now. "What am I going to do?" I asked myself as I began to walk to the bus stop. We had been fortunate to be able to ride the same bus, eat lunch together, and often see each other between classes, but I didn't know how fortunate we were now. I didn't want to see him. The boy I'd given so much of my time to. The boy who made me laugh with his quirky sense of humor. The boy I still loved with all of my heart.

Time for a Change

Kristeen Olsen

I'm ready to forgive myself.
I'm ready to be what I could never allow before.
In a deep depression and self-destructing spiral,
I cry out to be forgiven.

Over and over I ask to be fine
I hate being so ugly
In my own personal hell
I just want to forget,
but who am I kidding?

In a flash back to hoplessness.
I take a drink to forget myself for a minute.
Relief found in an induced obliviousness.
Too bad it's only temporary.

More and more I'm fading
And in my mind I'm a blur
In my own personal hell
I just want to forget,
but who am I kidding?

It's too much and I want to yell.
I pop a pill chased by my drink to relax.
Feeling so much better and almost happy.
It's like palm trees for my consciousness.

I'm spending my good times
And what's been accomplished
In my own personal hell
I just want to forget,
but I'm only kidding myself.

Screw it. I just need to change it.



Ipod by *Dave Volpe*

Vanity

By *Emily Funderburk*

I once cut my hair with a turkey grinder.

I worked at the Food Lion the summer before college, my 18th summer, to be exact. I began the summer with delusions of grandeur, picturing myself walking barefoot in a pink bathing suit and probing my tongue deep into the moist recesses of vanilla ice cream cones just to make the boys' blood grow hot, rolling joints to the rhythm of Van Morrison songs, and perching sunglasses on my head just so.

My mother wanted me to get a summer job, but the only openings were at the Food Lion and a hair salon specializing in gum-chewing stylists complaining about broken carburetors and broken relationships. I chose the Food Lion, although its romantic possibilities were severely limited.

My boss had puffy red cheeks that looked a lot like an alcoholic Santa Claus—or my uncle. On my first day, he steered me toward the back of the store, to the deli shelves lined with “exotic” cheeses such as cheddar and parmesan. This town—my God. It's about as backwards as using Ivory soap to wash your face.

A girl with short, tousled hair and a crooked smile stood behind the counter, idly rolling a plastic fork between her hands. Her nametag read “Jessie.”

If there's one thing I hate, it's girls with short hair. It just screams “man” and certainly does not flatter a round face. And Jessie obviously had lately chopped her hair. I wanted to ask her why, but the glazed, half-conscious look in her eyes made me defer starting any conversations. Instead, I shuffled silently behind the counter to join her, shoving my hands deep within the pockets of my new red apron and praying the color didn't wash out my complexion. It was bad enough that I had to scoop

out wads of fattening potato salad, but wearing an unflattering uniform certainly wouldn't bring me any attention.

“Uh, honey, you're gonna want to put that hair up. Regulations.” The manager watched me as I wound my hair to the back of my head in one swift motion, pinning it there with a bobby pin. I hoped Jessie was watching; maybe she'd be jealous and realize her true feminine potential. The bobby pin was smeared with glittery pink nail polish, a relic of my preteen days, and was slightly bent in the middle. If truth be told, I didn't like to wear my hair up often; it made me look older. But rules were rules, and I really didn't feel like messing with old red face this early in the morning.

He nodded, satisfied. When he waddled on back to whatever space he was occupying, I finally turned to face Jessie, whose eyes were wide with unfeigned interest (and probably admiration). I knew Jessie would want to know if we went to the same high school (we didn't) or if I had a boyfriend (not recently, damn it). Jessie would expect similar questions to be asked of her, but honestly, I just didn't feel like reciprocating. So I simply stared at her, picking at my nails and lamenting that I needed a new manicure yet again.

Jessie was noticeably nervous. Most everyone who worked at Food Lion had worked there forever, and even the ones who were transient like me—the summer teenagers or the lazy employees fired whenever the managers noticed their negligence—didn't, well, look like me. For one thing, I wasn't a country bumpkin, thank you. My aspiration wasn't to rise in the ranks of the Food Lion to—gasp!—dry goods manager. And I certainly didn't color my hair with cheap Wal-Mart brand dyes or smear my eyelids in green shadow *à la* 1970. The whole damned store needed a makeover—badly. I guess I could see why a girl like Jessie wouldn't have to act around me. That still didn't mean I was going to make her any allowances, though.

“I guess we better make more sandwiches to fill the case with,” Jessie said, darting a quick glance at me like a wounded animal. Too bad I was busy staring at a crusty splotch on the upper part of Jessie’s apron, barely controlling my urge to scrape it off with my fingernails. Some people are just so slovenly. Jessie moved toward a back room, reappearing with buckets of condiments and loaves of bread.

We worked quietly, slicing bread, layering tomatoes tinged with green onto beds of lettuce, and spreading the mayonnaise in circular patterns. Jessie motioned me to watch as she sliced the meat, placing a ham hock on the machine and running its blade back and forth, back and forth. Out spilled identical, smooth slices of pink, which Jessie stacked into a clear plastic container and transferred to the back room.

She was still back there taking her sweet time when a man appeared at the counter. Inside, I panicked, but didn’t show it. No way was this greasy old guy going to get the best of me. He looked like he’d just stepped out of a coal mine, and he smelled like he’d rolled in a haystack of gasoline and beer.

“Gimme one of them breasts,” he said, jabbing at the deli counter’s glass. I wanted to laugh. Not only was he dirty—he really was a dirty old man! Nevertheless, I self-consciously folded my arms over my chest and tried to hide my giggling from him.

“Um.”

“One of them chicken breasts, the fried one.” And he directed my gaze to the bucket of fried chicken.

Oh, of course. How convenient. I watched him smear the glass with his greasy fingerprint and made a mental note to remind Jessie to wipe it down later. I gingerly reached into the bucket and poked at the chicken with a pair of tongs until the man was satisfied I’d chosen the right piece. I flashed him a big smile and handed him the bucket dark with grease. It would go right to his belly, no doubt about that.

The manager disliked me after the first week. He was a real stick in the mud, if you catch my drift, and just tried to stir up trouble because he got tired of talking about stuff like the sheriff's new dog with whoever would listen. On two separate occasions, I'd been called to task for wearing my hair down around the food and for failing to wash my hands after playing with my hair. Honestly, it wasn't my fault if my curls were falling out and they needed to be pumped up. Some people—the balding, ahem—have no appreciation for hair care. True, I purposely goaded him because I loved watching his face contort into first disapproval and then annoyance and, finally, anger. The manager must have thought me infinitely stupid since I appeared to never learn my lesson.

Jessie never missed a day of work, mainly because her father needed all the money she earned to help pay off his girlfriend's car payment. Pretty pathetic. But Jessie didn't question it because she couldn't. So every morning and afternoon she made sandwiches, stared at customers, and bought several sodas from the employee snack room, most of which coated her teeth in a sticky brown slime by the end of her shift. I tried not to stare at Jessie's teeth, but I found myself drawn to the long brown streaks that ran down her two front teeth. They were like stalactites, only not nearly as fun.

One morning in late July, Jessie called to say she couldn't come to work, so I stood alone behind the counter, twining my hair around and around my finger. I'd heard beach bum waves were so hot for hair, and one way to attain them was by winding the hair in long coils. The manager strolled by, but I made no move to put up my hair, even though most of the condiments were close enough to catch any stray hairs.

"Elaine!" he barked. "Put that hair away. And slice some turkey. We're getting in an order later for a church banquet." I narrowed my eyes at his retreating back. What a complete

crab. Noisily, I slammed a wrapped turkey from the back room onto the meat grinder. As I bent to adjust the settings, my hair falling like a brown cascade over the turkey, I noticed a pretty disgustingly large pimple recently sprouted on my chin. The metal reflection didn't lie. My hands scrambled to my face, itching to prove the machine wrong, to magically erase the foul blemish. Apparently, I moved too fast; my hand slammed irreparably into the slice button.

With a high-pitched whiz that sounded all too clearly like a perverted death knell, the grinder sliced through my hair, sending strands of brown flying behind the deli counter. The machine choked on the bounteous hair, but rebounded and grinded higher to the nape of my neck. My life flashed before my eyes, conveniently enough: a private slideshow of drunken kisses, hiding bad grades from my parents, and road trips. Still, the thought of being eaten alive by a turkey grinder was simply too ludicrous for words. I jerked forward and pitched onto the floor, feeling as if I'd lost five pounds (hey, you can never be too thin.) The icy air froze the back of my neck for the first time in recent memory. I gingerly patted my hair, feeling its uneven length and choppy layers. Tears pricked my eyes as I thought about how horrible I'd look at Jon's barbeque this Saturday and how, from a distance, I might even be mistaken for a teenage boy!

Footsteps hurried through the aisles, dodging displays of sponges, canned goods, and cookies. The manager's shiny expanse of baldness rose, bobbing, over the top of the deli counter.

"Oh, my God! What happened? Are you all right?" The manager's eyes wildly peered over the counter at the chunks of my once-glorious hair now floating in tubs of sliced onions and cheese.

I knew he was afraid of a lawsuit, knew too he was itching to tell me, "I told you so." But honestly, I was too upset to be coherent. My crowning glory was gone, and this man was sure

to be overly concerned with salvaging his precious deli and the reputation of the Food Lion name. As if that mattered when I was practically as bald as he was!

“I was...slicing the turkey like you said...and the machine... it’s crazy! It grabbed the ends of my hair and pulled and now I’m bald!” I was in hysterics, and I didn’t care who saw. A few customers looked perturbed. The manager too looked uncomfortable, but he recovered his cool in time to usher me out from behind the counter and into the break room, commanding with his eyes that other employees clean up the mess. Let those lazy slobs mop up the hair. At least it’d keep them away from the tabloid racks for once.

I sipped a soda and watched soap operas on a fuzzy TV in the break room, breathing in the faint smell of stale cigarette smoke from past employees, but it was hardly any consolation. My hair now had the messy, tousled look of a Peter Pan look-alike. I was about as attractive as a Cabbage Patch doll. No stylist in this town had the expertise to fix such an atrocity as this—I’d have to buy a wig or a scarf. If only it were winter. At least then I could hide my head with a knit snowflake hat and no one would be the wiser.

The manager ducked his head inside the break room. “You might as well go on home for the day, get cleaned up. We’ll pay for a neater haircut so you don’t have to walk around like that.” He feebly tried to chuckle, but I met him with a blank stare. “Are you kidding me?” I said. “I quit.”

The worst part was walking into the Food Lion to pick up my last paycheck a week later. Jessie was lolling behind the deli counter as usual. She didn’t recognize me, of course. I’d done my best with the little I had to work with—a stylist in the city cleaned up the rough ends and added some color to keep me from committing hair suicide. I also invested in some hair clips, but they did little to mask my unhappiness.

“Jessie. Hey,” I said, trying to sound nonchalant. Her eyes grew wide, but she managed to eke out my name, albeit with more than a little hesitation.

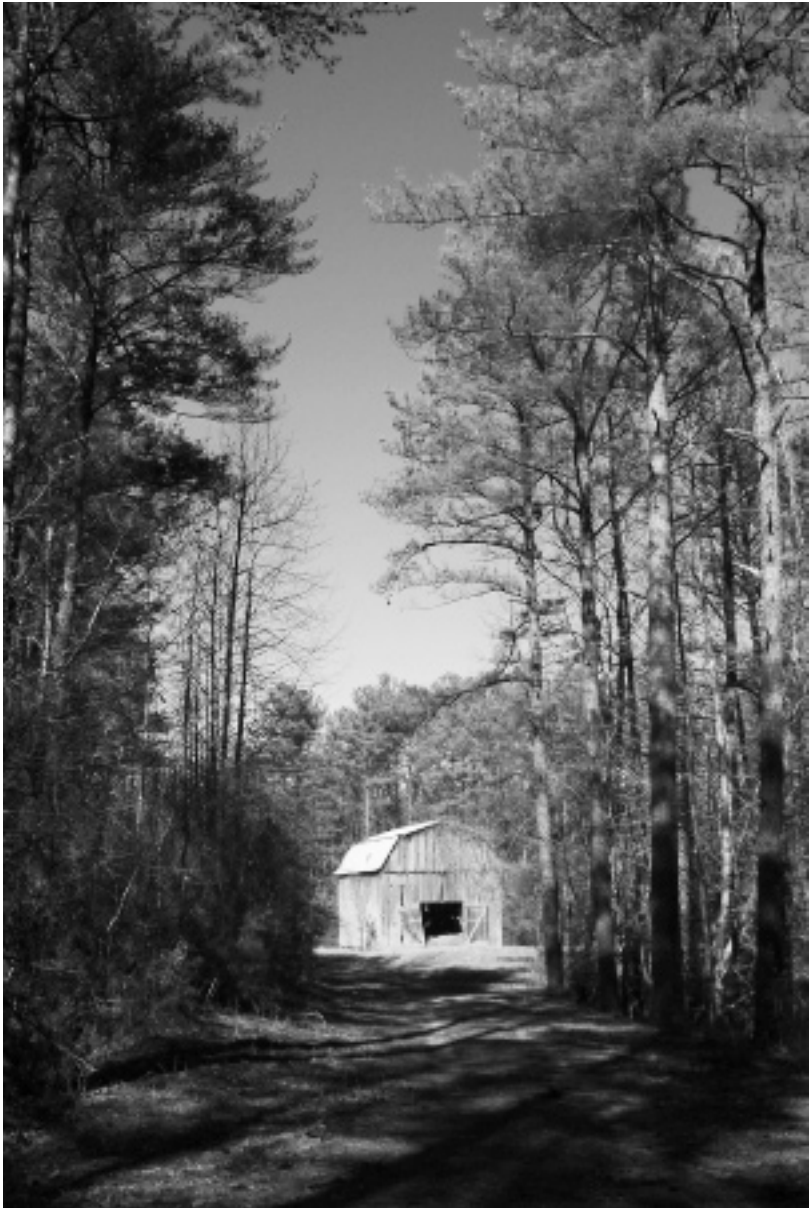
“I like your hair,” she said with genuine pleasure. I grimaced. If Jessie liked it, if Jessie, who had an even worse haircut than mine and about as much interest in her appearance as I had in changing a flat tire, liked it, then I was in big trouble.

“Thanks,” I muttered. On my way out, I passed a gleaming metal case filled with rows of milk. I stared into it, and a tanned, gleaming, pristine goddess stared back. Wow. This didn’t look half bad. In fact, maybe if I put in some reddish highlights, maybe brush some blush onto my upper cheekbones...

Just then, I spotted Jon hauling a bag of charcoal up a side aisle, obviously making preparations for Saturday’s barbeque. I looked straight at him and smiled, tilting my head to make sure he got a good look at my hair.

“Dude,” I heard the guy next to him say. “That guy is totally staring at you. Let’s go.”

Great.



Barn by Mary Tippett

Bitter Wind

Bill Judge

A bitter wind bit my fingers as I let the cattle in
They were lowing and listless and I thought it better
To bring them close when it turned so cold
And they are dumb as stumps in December.

They are my responsibility and I am master
They depend on me for their food and water
I lay the hay and roll the bale and they follow after
A night's long work between us and it grows no shorter.

In winter the weather begs for coal beyond my means
I wish I had a finger of gold, and better prospects
Than the patches in my jeans and cow pie heels
And a Wrangler four by four with dirty jets.

A couple of buddies worked near north of town,
The Bradford stamping plant, they made the cans
And cartons for my beer, when we had time to drink,
They worked loud and hard and lived hand to hand.

They were laid off and have nowhere to go but left.
Sometimes they drive by the plant as if by habit
And look at the darkened windows and empty lot
And the jobs they had. The company still makes a profit.

They closed the doors and turned them to the cold
That blows around in winter—it's a lonely sound
Of wind and chill, and hardened dreams that know
There's little to eat along the grass and frozen ground.

I still ride to the upper pasture and look after
The cows that milk so little and eat alfalfa.
Sometimes I wish they didn't calf another
And leave no profit but the wind and my heart to master.



Peeking by *Robin Karis*

I Learned

Allan Goddard

I have learned from cows
Not to lead them in open fields
But if you do you need eye shields

Because when they get spooked
There's no stopping now
Hold on
Hold tight
Don't let the cow win the fight

You may be mad about being drug
But you will always have a funny story to tell your buds

In Pace Requiescat

Benjamin Krause

Love conquers all...
Even in death?
Does a mad man's tortured mind,
Silence itself with a last breath?
Does pure evil,
Meet endless darkness?
Or pure light,
Meet harmonic tranquility?
However the question that should be asked is,
Does a soul know that life truly ends?

Georgia Howers lies in a bed,
One she has dreamt of often.
It is neither that of friend or lover,
But is the bed where she will sleep her last sleep.
She has seen it and knows what it is,
Powerless to defend her weakening,
Aging body.
It is with major distress and protest,
That she is finally forced to sleep,
When in her mind she knows...
Oh she knows,
Or doesn't know where she will go.
Does a soul know when life truly ends?

Bryant Little is losing a battle,
Against drugs and addiction.
He has been told the laws,
The statistics,
The facts.
But why should he worry,
When life is drunk from a bottle.
He drives on slick roads,
Although his legs won't hold him.
When finally reality hits him in the form of a ditch,
He knows...
Yes he knows that a cross will be put there tomorrow.
Does a soul know how life truly ends?

Alex Travers feels his young life,
Trickling away from his wound.
Clear across the world,
From his loving home,
He lies dying on foreign sand.
Nothing is felt from the waist down,
And there is so much blood,
He is afraid he will drown.
Combat continues to claim his brothers,
As his thoughts drift away to a father and mother.
As he lies in his own blood he knows...
By the screams he knows that the end is not far away.
Does a soul know where life truly ends?

Roy Walters watches the traffic below,
Cars that seem as passing toys,
From a ledge of a window,
Hundreds of feet up.
Luck has not been on this man's side,
Neither has health, wealth, or love.
He decides that here it must end,
In a premature fathomed suicide.
The wind beats his hair,
As he begins to propel himself towards the ground below.
For he doesn't know,
But maybe he does that such an end leads to only one...
Does a soul know why life truly ends?

If the soul does not know,
When the body passes,
Who will be there to tell it?
Who will be there to guide it from the life it has known?
If no one does,
What will happen when this soul does not realize,
Does not see,
Does not accept that it is past the end?

With these words to the dead should hear
Rest in peace and fear no more.
Rest in peace and crave no more.
Rest in peace and fight no more.
Rest in peace and stress no more.
Rest in peace!
In pace requiescat!

CONNECTIONS FEATURE

An Interview With Poet Martín Espada

Mary J. Lohnes



Home of La Cueca dancing, spectacular scenery and the renowned poet Pablo Neruda, Chile was also the backdrop of a bloody coup led by General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte. During the 17 years of Pinochet's rule, more than 3,000 citizens were murdered and another 30,000 were forced to leave the country. Those who remained were often tortured or imprisoned in what the government called an effort to return order to the nation. The destruction of justice and the redemptive power of the human spirit are the foundations of Puerto Rican poet Martín Espada's *The Republic of Poetry*.

Espada read selections from the *The Republic of Poetry* as part of the College of Southern Maryland's Connections Literary Series November 2.

Espada is the author of eight poetry collections including *Alabanza: New and Selected Poems 1982-2002*, *Rebellion Is the Circle of a Lover's Hands*, *Imagine the Angels of Bread*, *City*

of Coughing and Dead Radiators, and the audio book *Now the Dead Will Dance the Mambo*. He is the recipient of numerous awards, including the Robert Creeley Award, an Independent Publisher Book Award, the Paterson Poetry Prize, the PEN/Revson Fellowship, two NEA Fellowships, and a 2006 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. His poems have appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times Book Review* and *The Nation*. A former tenant lawyer, Espada is a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst.

In preparation for CSM's Connections program, Espada discussed war, poetry, and finding a voice in poetry and in life.

CSM: In your commencement address to students at Hampshire College this year (http://www.martinespada.net/new_page_13.htm), you noted that “phrases like ‘weapons of mass destruction,’ ‘shock and awe,’ and ‘collateral damage’ are clichés, bad poetry by bad poets,” and that people no longer believe the words because they have been bled of all meaning. You encouraged the students to “reconcile language with meaning,” and to “restore the blood to words...” In a world where “truthiness,” sound bytes, and blurbs have replaced authentic dialog between people, how can the blood, life, or true meaning of words be returned to language?

Espada: Poets can take responsibility for restoring the blood to words by returning the meaning of words to language. The language of poetry is powerful precisely because it is not the language of power. This may seem self-evident, but we should use language to communicate rather than control, to clarify rather than obscure, in contrast with the language of power. Saying exactly what we mean—clearly, concretely, urgently—is necessary but not sufficient. We must also have something to say, telling the untold tales, speaking on behalf of those who

lack the opportunity to be heard. Remember what [Walt] Whitman said in section 24 of *Song of Myself* about “the rights of them the others are down upon?” That’s the goal.

CSM: In your poetry you give voice to characters who are often perceived as “invisible” and “silent” in society—the tenement renters, the poor and the war ravaged. Yet, in several of the poems in *The Republic of Poetry* there are lamentations from characters and even poets about not having the right words to describe what they are seeing happening around them. Do you find there are circumstances when words fail even you, and how do you go about regaining your voice?

Espada: In my more recent work I have begun to explore not only the power of poetry, but also the limits of poetry. There are times when words fail me, which is true of any poet. Poetry is not magic; there are times when words will not console. We should deal openly with this awareness. How do I regain my voice? I keep trying.

CSM: You worked as a legal aid lawyer for a number of years and many of your earlier poems are filled with frustration over the blindness of the justice system. Have you found poetry to be a better tool of justice than the law?

Espada: I wouldn’t say that poetry is a better tool of justice than the law. It’s different. As a tenant lawyer, I could prevent an eviction or compel a landlord to exterminate rats. As a poet, I may be able to persuade a tenant to take a part in a rent strike, or to convince a landlord to turn on the heat. Of course, it’s usually much more difficult to quantify the impact of poems on the world. A political poem is an act of faith.

CSM: In several of your poems, including *Not Here*, the voice of the poem tries to disassociate from what is happening around it. In an interview you recently did with Bill Moyers (<http://www.pbs.org/moyers/journal/07202007/watch2.html>), you mentioned that the “war in Iraq is probably the single most important issue facing Latinos.” With only 1 percent of the population directly affected by the war in Iraq, is it frustrating as a writer of humanist poetry to see people failing to acknowledge what is bound to have a huge impact on their future?

Espada: The impact of the war in Iraq goes well beyond the one percent who are directly affected. We’re all affected. The Latino community is particularly impacted. There are the higher casualty rates, the greater tendency of Latinos to become cannon fodder. There are the billions of dollars in governmental resources being drained away from communities in need, like the Latino community, which could go instead to education or health care. Finally, there is the scapegoating of the Latino community, in terms of the immigrant issue and its use by the Republican Party as a diversionary tactic, calling attention away from this increasingly unpopular war. The Latino community is aware of these issues. That’s why there are now polls showing that two-thirds of Latinos are in favor of an end to the war and an immediate withdrawal.

CSM: What is the thing that excites you the most about being a poet?

Espada: Being a poet is exciting in many ways. I’m not sure I can single out any one thing. Simply finishing a poem provides a level of satisfaction for me that few other experiences can equal. There are times when I write a poem for or about a particular person. If they’re excited about it, that’s great for me.

CSM: There is an amazing image in the poem *The Republic of Poetry* “... everyone in the courtyard /rushes to grab a poem/ fluttering from the sky,/ blinded by weeping.” Could you talk about it?

Espada: That image is a very specific reference. A few years ago, a group of young poets in Chile called Casagrande actually rented a helicopter and bombarded the courtyard of La Moneda, the national presidential palace in Santiago, with poems on bookmarks. Many years prior to this, on September 11, 1973, the Chilean Air Force dropped bombs on La Moneda, announcing the commencement of the military coup that brought General Pinochet to power. President Salvador Allende died that day at La Moneda. As you can imagine, then, the “bombing” of La Moneda with poetry was a very emotional moment for those gathered there. I’ve seen a video of this event, which shows people in the courtyard crying and reaching for bookmarks as they floated through the air. Casagrande dropped a huge number of bookmarks that day; by the time it was over, there were no bookmarks left in the courtyard of La Moneda. No one had to sweep up. Imagine that.



Price Is Right by Angela Lucier

difference

Darren Longley

should I ignore the call
of the sea the laughter
of the rain when I know
there and only there in
the midst of that pain
I lost myself in you
for what is weakness if
not a strength of conviction
sour or not I loved you
like passion in my blood
I loved you like that like
passion in my blood

maybe part of me
wanted needed it
to hurt and didn't the
call of the sea the
laughter of the rain tell
me warn me there was
an iciness weakness about
you who told me the
words never felt the
feelings

should I listen now
would it make a difference

Sand Through My Fingers

Faith H. Tydings

I sit here on my beach alone, thinking. I bury my feet in the cool sand. I help myself to fistfuls, and watch as it slips through my fingers. I feel the warmth of my skin as the mid-afternoon sun rests upon me. I beckon the rays to take away the chill inside me, but it's to no avail—I am alone here, thinking.

He asked and I ignored him, hoping he would think I didn't hear. He asked again, louder, this time taking my hands in his. I was silent, trying to ignore him, again, but he saw the answer in my eyes. The sadness in his face echoed in my mind, but I ignored that, too. The conversation was over, for now, but I knew he'd return again with the same pleading eyes.

He reached out to me and I pushed him away. All he wanted was to talk, maybe to tell me about his day. Maybe to enlighten me on the subject of electricity, maybe just to hear me talk. For whatever reason I pushed him away. "I'm too busy right now," I assured him. "We'll talk tonight," I promised, but tonight never came and neither did our talk, because when the sun set I ignored him and pushed him away.

He tried to love me and all I wanted was to be alone. In my heart I wanted to love him and feel his love in return. In my soul I needed to be submerged in love—by his love, but I ignored him, pushed him away, and demanded to be alone.

He walked out and I watched in silence as he went. In my heart I screamed, "Stop! Please don't leave," but the words never touched my lips. "I'll change," I should've said, but would I? So many nights I promised myself I would be different in the morning, but when the sun rose there was no change. "It'll be different tomorrow," I told myself. "Today is a bad day, it'll be different tomorrow." I'm still waiting for tomorrow to come.

So I sit here, on my beach, alone—thinking. Thinking about all the tomorrows that came and went. All those tomorrows that slipped through my fingers. The people who slipped through my fingers because I chose to ignore and push them away. I sit here, on my beach, alone. I pick up the sand and feel it slip through my fingers. I sit here, cold and alone.

Silent Night

Sarah Vance

The crickets are screeching their endless song.
Soft playing strings.
My sweetheart's steady breath sighs next to me.
A strong beat.
A tiny angel calls from her lonely room.
Sweet vocals.
A little dude kicks his way into my bed.
A splendid dance.

Creaking floors.
Whirring fans.
Electric hums.
Midnight flushes.
Homestead's twilight orchestra.

I lay awake listening,
And happy not to be missing
A silent night.



Tree by *Adam Miedzinski*

Vertebrae

Courtney Birst

Each vertebrae tells a story—
each bone a testament
to what I've done and seen and been,
who I am and who I will become.

This bone here, low and strong,
began to curve and tilt
at thirteen,
and depending on how
you look at it,
is either the
beginning or the end.

Curling up,
an extra space resides here,
allowing the nerves
that lie inside
to twist and bend,
sending electric sensations
to my fingertips when I run.

This smooth slope,
the outside of my “C” curve,
where the muscle
is stretched tautly
and pulses under my skin.

Here, the concave side,
the “inside” of the C,
where muscles lie
crunched and atrophied,
holding on to one another,
clinging together
unable to stretch out
they become one small, solid
knot of unused muscle.

As it straightens near the top,
holding one shoulder
defiantly higher than the other,
I am reminded
each vertebrae tells a story—
each bone a testament
to what I’ve done and seen and been,
who I am and who I will become.

My mother's hands

Gwyneth J. Saunders

My mother's hands moved lightly over the folds in the sheet. Her fingers fidgeted with the material, moving along them as if she were about to sew the seams together.

I watched her, thinking that was what her hands looked like when she was quilting with my grandmother, so many years ago. Now she was dying, a malevolent disease eating away at her life, making her so small and frail that she looked much older than her 82 years.

Those hands did so much.

They played the trombone in high school. They had played the piano and organ for so many years that the sheet music on her shelves at home were as worn and frail as she.

They made meals for her father, sisters and brother when their mother died in her early 40s. They dialed her Aunt Ruth for help when she didn't know how to make something her father wanted for dinner.

They were courted and held by my father. They made a home in Louisiana when he went to flight training. They waved good-bye when he left for the Far East during World War II and they welcomed him back after it was over.

Her fingers sewed quilts with his mother while he was away and then finished needlework kits when she had the time years later. Then they made homes in apartments while my father was going to seminary and in church rectories after he was ordained.

Her hands raised three children, cooked thousands of meals, baked almost as many sugar cookies and decorated numerous birthday cakes.

Her hands scrubbed dishes, kitchen floors, sticky kids and dirty clothes.

They sliced watermelon, cooked chicken, shucked corn and shelled lima beans as she watched her youngsters and then her grandchildren running around her backyard.

Her hands fed and cared for five cocker spaniels, one cat, two Great Danes, a handful of mutts, a couple of visiting cats and numerous small creatures that children are wont to crave.

They entertained bishops, teachers, church wardens, choir members, young people, relatives and friends in her home, summer cottages and church halls.

Her hands held those of sick children, dear relatives and a dying husband.

Now they were nearing the end of their own usefulness and yet they could not rest.

They were still strong, soft and feeling the need to work.

They were my mother's hands.

Mother to Daughter, Mary Cassatt's Little Girl in a Blue Armchair (1878)

Megan Snider

Silly little girl, Mama told you not to play
in your best dress clothes, pooling the mud
on Grandmere's good silken rugs from China, far away.

I'm not scolding, darling, but you surely must
know better than to run around like a puppy,
like Charles; like a vagrant or a fool.

Don't slouch so, baby; we've pressed and pressed
your good linens to be ready and I need you
to be ready—this way.

Just stay here, my lovely; rest until we call for you
to chase away the cobwebs of today with the song
that we've prepared. Ah, the piano is here—I'll play.

The Demise of Harry Potter

Ernie Wormwood

She's the baby I read *Pat the Bunny* to in utero,
My last daughter who has recently gotten her driver's license,
And has broken up with her boyfriend of one year.

She suggests we eat breakfast together,
Has her first office job for the summer researching titles at
the courthouse
And wants to return a pair of \$13.69 capris, black, because

"It's different when you have to pay yourself."
An onion bagel falls in the toaster, pesto pasta in plastic
for lunch.
She's conserving \$ again, don't you know.

I slide my slice of organic bread into the empty toaster slot
As she dashes upstairs to find her car keys.
Runs back, wraps the bagel in foil, drops it in her purse.

I see in the newspaper the bedlam at midnight to grab the new
Harry Potter.
Is she going to read the new *Harry Potter*?
"There's a new *Harry Potter*?" she says,

As she disappears out the door after our semi-annual
breakfast together.
She who told her teacher at ten, "I love books, they take you to
another world,"
She who still eats her ice cream with a yellow plastic baby spoon.

She, who used to fall asleep with Harry Potter.



Sky/Building by *Dave Volpe*

CALUMET 2-16-02

Mary J. Lohnes

~ the man at the end of the bar is shaken but doesn't stir / he penetrates the olive with a thin, black straw / manipulates it / copulates / fornicates with the olive / he dreams of the women seated next to him / around the orange Formica corner / how he'd love to apply his face / to their lavish young breasts, thighs, flesh / press their youth against the crevice holes of age / to erase what vodka exacerbates / they are exciting and exiting / he bites the olive off the straw / crushes it with his teeth and tongue / till all that remains / is the slight / pimento rectangle / which hangs off his tongue / like a ripe, cherry nipple / he lifts his glass in salute to it / to me, to the guy seated next to me / he washes it down / and for a moment stares ahead.

~ he knows I'm writing about him / his head nods in my direction / his eyes roll over me/ he'd like to slam my face into the bar / break my fragileness / ram the contempt out of my heart / press his seeded pores into mine / taste the bitter residue of oil on my neck / he knows my glances are for information / that I care not what happens beyond the page.

~ he argues with a musician / why did Willie write *Romeo and Juliet?* / to make money off of love and death / why did Willie write *MacBeth?* / to make money off of sex and death / why does man long to ply the flesh? / to die during sex?

~ he's fond of Schubert / he hums it in my ears / believes I'm paying attention / Kundera, noting my book, is so depressing / why are you here, alone?/ jazz / Nick Hoffman / Grant Wilson/

you could listen at home / no need to go to bars, alone / he's
drowning out the jazz / my free time / free night / he likes to
rhyme / calls himself a Philistine / reminds me of the sacredness
/ the biblical reference of my name / my name is biblical / I finish
my drink / motion for another / less ice / Van Gogh has his own
/ frosted bottle of vodka / it rests on a green glass shelf / framed
by polished oak / backed by mirrors that would remind him of
his missing ear.

~ the man tugs at his clipped gray hair / his left hand passes /
occasionally knocks / against his ear / his daughter/ an actuary/
lives in Barcelona / his son lives in Maryland / where I don't
live / my name is biblical / my name is cynical / my name is sin
/ redemption / he doesn't see them much / I shouldn't be alone
/ women shouldn't drink, alone / he wants to knock / my head
against the bar / press his flesh close to mine / his breath screams
/ volumes in my ears / he suspects I will leave / he tells me my
name is biblical / that I'm a writer / that he's a writer / that
Willie was a writer.

~ why did Willie write *MacBeth*? / to make money off of sex
and death / to pay for death and sex / to write is to want / to
want is to read / to read is to want to write / to want / to write /
is to ignore the kitsch / Willie sold out for money / he seeks out
money / he writes documents to keep people happy / but writ-
ing doesn't work as he planned / as I plan / as Willie planned /
he never wanted to be a lawyer / it just happened/ he can't cut
himself from it.

~ why leave so soon, ado, Mary / sweet Mary / Mary of sin / do
not worry / mother Mary / marry another / merry mother / I'm
within crawling distance of home.

CONTRIBUTOR NOTES

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EMILY FUNDERBURK, 24, has been writing, reading, and acting out stories for as long as she can remember. Currently, she works as a writer/editor for a local defense contractor and volunteers at a community theater in her spare time.

ALLAN GODDARD is currently a student at CSM and has been a member of the Tudor Hall 4-H Club for the past ten years.

BILL JUDGE is a husband of a wonderful wife and the father of five children/young adults ranging in age from 8 to 20. When he was younger, he wrote poetry but then shelved it for about 20 years. He is currently working on his master's degree and is in his second to the last semester at the University of St. Louis.

ROBIN KARIS lives in Charles County and enjoys photography and writing. She is currently working on her family tree, hoping she finds a relative somewhere in a land far, far away, who maybe has a castle.

BENJAMIN KRAUSE wrote this poem about two years ago. This was inspired by the last few words of Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Cask of Amontillado" in which the narrator finishes the story with the words "May he rest in peace. In Pace Requiescat!" The Latin phrase generally translates to "Rest In Peace;" famous last words on many tombstones and an ominous reminder of death.

MARY J. LOHNES is the media relations specialist and an occasional English instructor for the College of Southern Maryland. She is working on a collection of short stories about people who are not writers or artists or attempting to be any of the above. Currently, she can't decide whether her favorite quote is, "I feel like I am taking crazy pills!" or "A human can very well do what he wants, but cannot will what he wants."

DARREN LONGLEY has been with CSM for a little over a year. He writes to remember...

ANGELA LUCIER is currently studying art at the College of Southern Maryland, with an emphasis on photography. She enjoys shooting landscapes, urban and rural scenes, and things in their natural environment. She also shoots concert photography and event photography in her spare time.

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KRISTEEN OLSEN is currently a student at CSM's Prince Frederick Campus. She originally went to a trade school to be a mechanic, but after five years in the work force, she realized that a traditional degree was necessary to move up in management. "So it is back to school for me!" She intends to transfer to a university upon completion of her associate's degree.

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ANA WISEMAN, is being published for the first time in *Connections*.

ERNIE WORMWOOD lives in Leonardtown, Maryland. This fall she will have work in the anthology *Poem Revised* from Marion Street Press and in a tribute to Walt Whitman from All-books entitled *Primal Sanities*. She recently appeared on Grace Cavalieri's program for the Library of Congress, "The Poet and the Poem," which can be heard at <http://www.loc.gov/poetry/po-etpoem.html>.