



TULE REVIEW

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## Table of Contents

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Michael Meinhoff • Transitional Forms • <b>3</b>
Christopher Mulrooney • the barbarian at the gates • <b>4</b>
Colette Jonopulos • Taking Stock • <b>5</b>
Sabine Miller • Elegy • <b>6</b>
John Grey • A Preoccupation with Sex • <b>8</b>
John Grey • Your Dead Friends • <b>10</b>
Dane Cervine • Second Christmas Absent My Father • <b>11</b>
Gary Lundy • fault • <b>12</b>
Rich Luftig • At the Dollar Store • <b>13</b>
Patricia Anne Killelea • snapshots: american river • <b>14</b>
Patricia Anne Killelea • even this • <b>15</b>
Patricia Anne Killelea • merge • <b>16</b>
Eric Paul Shaffer • Reckless As Botchan • <b>17</b>
Matthew Nagin • Self-Portrait • <b>18</b>
Quinton Duval • Surprise • <b>19</b>
Jordan Reynolds • Astrology • <b>20</b>
E. G. Burrows • Portrait in a Gilded Frame • <b>21</b>
Gwen Ellis • Rosemary Days • <b>22</b>
Carl Wiener • Amur Darya • <b>23</b>
Joyce Odam • Ghost • <b>24</b>
Andrew Oerke • Jacob Redux • <b>25</b>
Greg Gregory • Sojourn • <b>27</b>
Mel C. Thompson • Excerpt # 23: Notes from Christian Song Leader • <b>28</b>
Shari O'Brien • Disturb the Peace • <b>29</b>
Joan Payne Kincaid • Clam Bar III • <b>30</b>
James Proffitt • Notes on the Notes & Letters You Send Me • <b>31</b>

## Notes on the Notes & Letters You Send Me

You'd tether me with words drummed off tombstones  
like *With Jesus Now & Always in Our Hearts*.  
But not off cigarette packs, like  
*Causes Death & Complicates Pregnancy*.  
Your missives, crumpled inside paper scraps  
cross my soulfields like coyotes wending through tall grass:  
tentative, hungry, filled with keen desires  
& waiting, always, for opportunity.  
Who could know what dormant force makes its way  
suddenly, viciously into your syntax, its teeth  
into your verbiage so awfully, terribly.  
But true, if truth can ride on text, if text can ride on instinct.  
If the ink from your claws dries before dusk  
then take me for what I'm worth.  
Bones & visceral dredge, the body's dregs  
left in the shade of tall timber, Chinese honeysuckle.  
The moon's wincing smile.

### Clam Bar III

We went to the clam bar but it was closed  
when it was calm as rehab and we were close  
the day the young Blue Jay was found on the ground:

we always like the small harbor almost a pretend one  
it was when you tried to get the truth  
anyway, here come an Osprey sawing:

can a lovely moment be savored with anyone? Proust  
thought not and rambling with friends searching for anything  
with its little black masque close to you

and studying you before it circles  
trying to find time for the dying cat to stay awhile:

beer must be served in salt air  
it was closed and the outcome is best forgotten  
but you can see in the many photos how well we enjoy each other  
over lobster  
and the wind sweeping up the cliff from the west

like a stage of painted colors...purple cadmium, etc.  
the cat and dog  
next to each other under lilac perennials.

### Transitional Forms

Overlooking the Coarsegold Creek  
in a secluded section of the Sierra foothills,  
granite boulders are reclining sea lions.

A few frogs are throwing green words  
containing flies and rubber feelings  
back and forth like Ping-Pong balls.

The creek itself is a football stadium  
filled to capacity with minuscule ripples  
all cheering, but for whom?

The white moon is a one-eyed god,  
a nocturnal orb of pale curiosity,  
staring at me in broad daylight.

And with the medicinal hands of the sun  
draped across my back and limbs,  
I am trying, without trying,

to grow like a tree.

### the barbarian at the gates

he comes in whistling the same old tune  
my lawyers will have it drawn up for you soon

### Disturb the Peace

It was peaceful, they whisper.  
She just slipped away

from the hushed tepid grayness  
of a coma  
to the still frozen blackness  
of a casket,  
tiny, white, and lined with pink  
where she lies,  
folded hands  
as rigid and membrane-thin  
as two empty eggshells.

I think how her hands fluttered when she talked,  
like two warm, soft, boisterous baby chicks.

God wants another angel, someone sighs,  
and I want to raise an army of demons  
to disturb the peace—  
storm heaven—  
draw angel blood—  
assassinate God—  
and jerk her back to life—

## Excerpt # 23: Notes from Christian Song Leader

Faith is the hope of things the eye sees not.  
Hope is the vanity of that heroin horse kick.  
Vanity, you sweet, sexy thing, I love you.

I'm singing to get my rocks off tonight.  
I'm singing to that drug in my veins  
Pouring out of every pore of my skin.

Dominique, if you can hear across this,  
Our continent of white American loneliness,  
I will shout my little gospel song to you.

Jesus is just one head of a three-headed God  
Who bears us in hard-labored child birth,  
Loves us like a mama with a shotgun heart

And then fries us up like Shiva do before  
He fires off that semen seed that starts  
The heavy, hot, game of life and death,

All over again. Oh mercy me, I think I'm  
Overloading those Crown Shakra circuits  
With too many megabytes of poetic data.

Ten thousand miles of shoreline rip past my  
Mind's eye and crowd my gray matter with  
The filth and froth of the five hundred cities

I've walked every street of till a closet full  
Of every kind of shoe lay worn to the sole,  
As I am worn now to the soul. "Nearer

My God to Thee," may I walk my hippie  
Way, a path that sometimes excludes You.  
My Love, My love, I was never quite true.

Pleasant Hill, 11-10-2007.

## Taking Stock

history

odd, they said, to watch a child run headlong into walls, her eyes  
fixed on what lies beyond, density of body an unexpected liability

now

amid fine triple-o paintbrushes, charcoal nubs, half-written  
haibun, I consider meaning in a house with two bedrooms,  
a rat that nightly eats the dogs' small nugget food

omen

someone tells me: you will never be happy until you understand your  
own emotions; how to gauge mood within this unequal length  
of days, cold descent toward equinox, one rat nibbling?

retreat

on the wall, Jesus falls three times in the ninth station of the cross,  
like when I stood reaching, fell hands-first from my 50's stroller,  
sting of gravel embedded in the tender pad of skin just above my  
wrist

confession

a circle of men pause at my request, surprised by my impromptu  
need  
to confess; on this holy ground, my sensual animal body succumbs  
to taking stock of temperament, relearns how to tally the damage

## Elegy

for Lillian Stoller Miller, 1918-2001

A woman  
alone  
with her demons

is not alone.  
Perhaps  
that is why

she keeps  
inviting  
them in.

A cup  
of wine  
for Torment,

crumcake  
for the Angst  
Fakir,

cozy  
in the inner  
chambers.

A year  
or two of  
carousing

with fear...  
enough!  
Listen, dear

woman  
to Love's  
silent

## Sojourn

We all travel in  
the direction of earth's  
rotation. Like water  
we never  
escape the gravity  
of ourselves.  
We get pulled through  
invisible holes into  
other sides of our  
lives in unexpected  
seasons, under unexpected  
skies, moving like  
a sleeping dog  
softly barking in  
its dreams. Awake  
the mirror is  
never the same  
from morning  
to morning, the afterimages,  
like Koi when you tap  
the pond's edge,  
swimming up  
for food.

I've heard he's proud of the limp  
the angel cracked him  
for a built-in souvenir  
cause he wouldn't buckle under and say "Uncle."

singing:  
meet her  
at half-

past plum,  
wrap  
yourself

in wintered  
sun.  
There's a

party  
in the  
garden—

there's a  
blossom  
in the

stone.

## A Preoccupation with Sex

I've got to say  
 how dark the penis is,  
 how dark the world is  
 for making the penis possible,  
 how like a traffic cop  
 it just stands in one spot  
 directing the parts of the body  
 this way and that way.  
 I have to remember  
 that there were snowmen  
 and gushing streams  
 and ducks resplendent in  
 their green feathers,  
 how the world was young  
 and young-hearted  
 in the great solar dazzle  
 of its corn-rows,  
 the leaf-red roofs  
 of its farm-houses.  
 But I must confess  
 how each man lives alone with his penis,  
 how it is a jailer as well,  
 allowing him visitors  
 but only for the one thing.  
 He's as alone  
 as the afternoon end to the sky,  
 as alone as the rooster crow  
 on the chilliest morning.  
 He's alone as last year's election poster  
 flapping on a pole,  
 promising, like a penis,  
 what never did eventuate.  
 Still new grass flaps with rain,  
 children sit giddy on stone fences,  
 wagging their legs,  
 the world turns to sidewalks and faces  
 and window glass,  
 to suits and hats and  
 squirrels darting across highways.

## Jacob Redux

His right- and left-handed knuckles  
 Indian-wrestle their ten fingers  
 as hard as they can in isometric prayer.  
 And his brain's a cabbage head he cooks  
 in the kettle of his migraine skull.

His hands had hoped to dig for uranium,  
 to fission a dynamite future,  
 not this exhaustion of Russian roulette,  
 not the perfectly evasive clue  
 of his shadow sparring with him,  
 bobbing and weaving fast,  
 blocking every jab and hook,  
 and the big power punches.

His hair stands on end  
 like a porcupine's quill of arrows  
 shooting out of his skin  
 and shooting right back in,  
 and nothing has changed.

He'd like to know the starting point  
 where all time was invented  
 and the clock hands point in at their navel,  
 the zero, where everything's nothing,  
 and all has the same sum  
 in any direction.

A silence slices right through him  
 with a sliver of silver broken out  
 of the mirror's copycat lens.  
 Fragmented, he listens to the echo-shards  
 of a tremendous delirium tremens.

Yet Jacob keeps struggling  
 to climb the angelic ladder  
 but falls off again and again.

## Ghost

Your bones seem made of silver light  
as you dance toward me, transparent,  
your arms holding outward.

I am not yet frightened of you;  
you are so graceful and deliberate  
and made of such melancholy.

I don't yet feel the music you feel,  
though I move accordingly  
to your slow and intensive rhythm.

How long must we dance like this  
in the swimming moonlight,  
wrapping around each other like loss?

It is a pure world  
like all worlds within worlds  
must be to survive.  
It convinces itself  
that the penis is another heartbeat  
but without the heart.

## Your Dead Friends

There was one who hit the pole  
at eighty miles an hour.  
Another emptied the bottle  
of purple pills down her  
desperate throat.  
A third fell down a flight of stairs,  
smacked her head on concrete.  
A fourth watched the lump  
on her shoulder  
slowly swallow the rest of her.

Always, with your kisses,  
there's the sense that  
you know what could happen.  
So your touch is gentle.  
Your words are kind.  
You spend your days, your nights,  
being what no one dies of.

∞Carl Wiener∞

## Amur Darya

A watchdog:  
I hear the signs of night and vigilance  
in its forbidding, apotropaic bark  
and the movement of its chain  
across the gravel. The river,  
beyond and below,  
afternoon sunlight spread on it,  
is as calm as a lake  
and seems to give no indication of which way it flows.

The sources of all I can see,  
sand, stones, the river, and even the sun,  
are remote and hidden  
somewhere in the ten directions,

and in the struggle for my own attentiveness  
I lose to this immensity. I  
enter the antechambers of the dream  
just long enough to hear myself say,  
"I will follow you,"  
whoever, wherever and whatever I mean by that.

## Rosemary Days

You lean  
back on your  
sole pillow,

cry (you're good at it now)

get up, pay bills,  
drag garbage

out, forget  
everything—

frozen cranberries  
congeal in the disposal,

nails never get filed  
because you're donating  
his Crater Lake coffee mugs,

and for Saturnalia  
you look pretty silly,  
twigs in hand,

bent over sideyard rosemary  
pruning for company

## Second Christmas Absent My Father Santa Cruz, California 2003

Palm trees in the grey drizzle, looking sheepish.  
Beach volleyball courts circled round by mounds of sand  
bulldozed against the coming storm. Across the street,  
stores advertise bikinis, sunglasses, sandals, shorts—  
the blue lifeguard towers stand just as vacant, staring out to sea.  
There is an allure to emptiness, making room.

Yesterday, the Pacific tectonic plate pushed under  
the North American again, raising the coastal mountains  
almost a foot. In Paso Robles, another clock tower,  
another historic brick building fell, killing two.  
One thing shifts into another, pushing continents,  
pushing time forward. I feel myself exhale, impatient  
to get home, let my children tumble me to the floor  
before we forget such things are possible.

Tonight, my sister arrives from Hawaii for the holidays,  
joining mother, my two brothers. Sometimes there is so much  
longing: tangled, rooted, hungry. I will take them downtown,  
show them restored buildings from our own quake,  
the new mixed with the old, sturdier. Show them  
the ceramic surf-Santa that looks like dad—  
how he whispered to me, cruising in the Woody,  
surfboard stuck out the top, whistling a tune  
impossible to name.

## fault

the wine was not enough  
the deep red wine  
dry wine cheap wine  
was not enough to  
hold our love together  
our old love passion  
love love lost love  
in the late night  
night love was not enough  
the wine dry  
deep red fine wine  
cheap saturday night wine  
was not enough  
to hold our love  
together past one hour  
or two in the twilit  
moonlit after midnight  
dumb fuck stupor moment  
past or two for forgetting  
the years or more  
dividing us in two  
where we once knew we'd  
out last at least  
geronimo's raid but the  
fine deep red dry  
cheap wine couldn't  
hold us together  
our love was gone  
and that's it

## Portrait in a Gilded Frame

When the warehouse and the office burned,  
the woman who kept accounts  
billowed out from the conflagration,  
the painting that hung in the boardroom  
snugged under one arm.

It was her husband, of course,  
his last likeness in oils  
by the country artist  
who was also the barber and postmaster.

All honor to my grandmother  
who could do sums.  
It was not the portrait she cherished  
but the frame.

## Astrology

placemat showing when you were born  
which animals were midwives

pulling back your hair I knew you were the year of the horse  
nibble marks on the nape of your neck

you pointed out marks around my eyes  
where the rooster danced on my face begging breath

year of the bear presenting itself on two legs  
a gentian furry with moonlight

always wanting a year of the crow  
year of the pigeon

year of the insignificant dandelion and milkweed  
year of the cloud

a pig conducting a trail of monkeys  
devouring years as brackish slop

a goat will eat anything you know  
chomping away at year of the rusted tin can

## At the Dollar Store

Some of this stuff  
may even be worth  
fifty cents. Party hats,  
computer games with 64K,  
the occasional funnel, spatula,  
tire gauge, off-brand aluminum  
foil all thrown together like dishes  
at the church pot luck supper.  
And over in the book section  
with the five year -old almanacs,  
the biography of that aging actress,  
a book predicting the fall  
of the Berlin Wall- the thin,  
mint condition book  
of poems never read.

## snapshots: american river

this current  
spilled its cold  
from Sierras  
to quench July

hardly believed  
in tadpoles  
until now

refuse  
to describe  
smooth  
wet stones  
in detail:

go there

her mouth  
still tastes  
of river

## Surprise

The faces in the cancer ward fit  
lives you've known or dreamed.  
Impossible, but there they are,  
grape-stained collars and age-spotted  
hands that grow more familiar  
with each breath and beat of your heart.

You were going to say racing heart  
as your heart used to race when,  
walking through the woods,  
you'd be attending something  
to the side and wander  
into a spider's web that wrapped  
your face and blurred your vision.  
And you prayed you saw, through the scrim  
over your eyes, the black and yellow  
spider's retreat. Surprise!

Oh, the times you've looked up  
to see what you did not pray for  
or held the telephone in broad daylight  
to hear the doctor's foreign tongue, the voice  
of doom to the seventh power: You'll live  
but you won't be able to dance  
any better than you ever could.

So when you gather the courage  
to look up, to answer the phone,  
to open the brown paper bag to see  
what lurks in your lunch today,  
and it's white bread, yellow cheese, and salve,  
you take a little bite and – surprise –  
you like it, goddamn it, you like it.

## Self-Portrait

I'm a broken-down wheel. A set of steak knives without a drawer. I'm the metaphors that don't fit. The NO PARKING sign your forget to read. I'm the blade of grass that the cow moves his bowels on.

I'm the semen that dries up and dies. I'm the needle sticking out of the garbage bin. I'm the guy you look at and wonder.

I'm the Martian who comes down to earth and cries. The man who hates himself. The guy inside a Petri dish. I'm the monster who doesn't even scare.

I'm the crab's claw. The marker's felt tip. The end of the line in front of the bakery, the guy they won't let in.

I'm time after it loses value. Space in a closet. Hope when you're dying. Despair when you've got no more pills, no more prayers.

I'm your answer, only there are no more questions. I'm your guts, only there are no more battles to be won. I'm a cockroach and all you do is crush me. All you do. All you do. And because.

## even this

after slough fire  
all this world  
black  
for two days

then green stubble:  
cattails  
anise  
reeds

they bullied past  
soot grains  
ashy things

two months  
and all is back  
tall and breathing  
green deep to the west  
it seems beautiful

i cannot feel  
even this

merge

we are the first  
tule reeds pushing up mud

or we are kayaking Peytonia  
again cutting the muck  
water merging with morning fog

i should not call it muck water  
why have I seen myself  
more clearly in the slough  
than in the smoothest mirror

it has something to do with  
the reeds

we will stop after the next bend  
when we become fog  
hovering over brown waters  
we will stop

when we can move without touching

☪Eric Paul Shaffer☪

## Reckless As Botchan

Coming to Okinawa, I am reckless  
as Botchan leaping from the second floor  
proving he could fly without dying  
or slicing a thumb to try the bite of the blade.

What do I know of Japan?  
Nothing but my address in Shuri, the number of my bus,  
how to apologize, count my change, excuse myself, greet my neighbors,  
and who is on the thousand-yen bill.

The people who live here warn me, "You will never be Japanese."  
Fine, but I know where I am.  
I only want to be native anyway--  
to drink Orion or *awamori* and watch the moon,  
gaze into the green and deep dragon waters of *Ryu-tan*,  
know the birds, the trees, the rivers, the back roads, and the beaches.

No matter how hard I scrub my feet in the public bath  
there is American dirt worn into the heel.  
I won't wear shoes here either.

I know I'll never walk down the street in my own neighborhood  
without taxis tooting  
or finding myself the point at the end of a child's finger--  
a curious man from a curious land.

"That's the way it is," I say to the children  
standing at the bus stop  
staring at the sky in my eyes,  
"you are what you are."

But when I go back to America, I want my face  
on the five-dollar bill  
just like Soseki on the *sen'en-satsu*.