

Sparks 27

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Apples

If a man has lost a leg or an eye, he knows he has lost a leg or an eye; but if he has lost a self—himself—he cannot know it, because he is no longer there to know it.

—Oliver Sacks, “*The Lost Mariner*”: *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for A Hat*

It was a falling dream, quick and sudden and scary. My alarm clock woke me, though I couldn't remember setting it. I forgot many things: people's names, the way back from the corner drugstore, the alphabet sometimes. I forgot how to pronounce words like 'photography' and 'knight,' but there was little reason to worry about it—the State paid for my house. It came with a house lady who cooked lunch and helped with the chores.

The night before I was finishing the Popov at Joey's and watching the Late Nite Movie, Channel 8, WMUT. Vampires, trapped underground for a century, emerge in modern London and don't know how to fit in. Being trapped was the part that scared me: locked in a cold box, no room to move for all those years. I was drinking by myself—Joey didn't want any, hadn't wanted any for a while now, and he went to bed early. It was a harsh drunk, where your eyes won't stay where you want them, but I could remember the trouble I had getting back over Joey's fence. I couldn't remember setting the alarm. I only set it on special days, like Christmas.

I got up. I didn't change out of my pajamas because I wanted to have breakfast in them. It took me some time to pee because it wouldn't come out.

The kitchen was dark, so I opened the shades. The grass in the backyard was starting to brown. An old man with a green mini-tractor used to take care of the lawn every other Tuesday except holidays. The old man was fat—his hips hung over the seat—and he used to drive the mini-tractor around the backyard and do something right, because the grass was green then.

I went to the cereal cupboard. The house lady always bought nutritional cereals, Crackling Oat Bran and Shredded Wheat, that boasted full percentages of the U. S. RDA on the sides of their boxes, but Joey always made sure I had a box of Froot Loops or Cookie Crisps. He had been in a house like mine, he told me once, and knew what it was like. I grabbed the Loops and put them down on the counter and went to the refrigerator for milk.

The calendar on the freezer door had a picture of a girl in a blue bikini standing in a motorboat. The magnets holding the calendar up were the house lady's, shaped like unrolled scrolls with quotations from the Bible written in calligraphy. The girl in the calendar was Hawaiian or Samoan and she was holding a chainsaw. The writing along the bottom of the picture had statistics about the chainsaw, its blade length and horsepower, and the retail price. I had taken the calendar from a pile of them by the cash register at the corner store. The picture I liked best was of another girl who was very tan and blond. She wore an orange bikini and she was standing in front of a log cabin, holding a portable jigsaw. It was a good color for a bikini, and the woman looked like Vanna White from Wheel of Fortune, but it was not her month. Today was the sixteenth of May, and there was a thick red X marked over today's date. There was nothing else in the sixteenth-of-May box except a waning crescent.

I opened the refrigerator. Next to the two-percent milk was the plastic Tupperware box the house lady used to store muffins or cake or cookies. Sometimes I peeked inside the Tupperware box, and sometimes I stuck my finger in whatever I found there, but I just wanted cereal that morning. I figured the

house lady was going to have a coffee party with some friends after finishing here. The X was to help her remember the party.

I heard a piff outside. I closed the refrigerator and went to the sink, pushing my face against the window to see into Joey's backyard next door.

Joey had on his Redskins football helmet and he was shooting a pellet gun into the apple tree in his backyard. An apple fell, and Joey yelled, "Got another one." He raised the gun in the air, so I ran upstairs and changed into my outside clothes. I didn't go out until I was all buttoned up.

I stepped slowly over the low chicken-wire fence between my yard and Joey's and tried to sneak up on Joey, who was aiming and had his back to me, but he turned before I could grab his shoulders and spook him. Joey had radar. I was sure of it. Joey was a veteran. He had a scar on his stomach from the Korean War, one that got him monthly checks large enough for him to live in the house next door on his own. Joey also couldn't smile with the right side of his face. I knew his house better than I knew mine.

Joey and I met when I bought a creamsicle at the corner store with money the house lady let me have. As I was going out the front door, Joey was coming in, and he bumped into me. I dropped my creamsicle on the sidewalk, and Joey took me back inside and bought me another. It was the only ice cream with a stick I ever saw Joey buy—Joey liked ice cream sandwiches. Then he invited me over to his house to watch his TV. He bought a bottle of Wild Turkey and we drank most of it that first night together. Joey fell asleep in his TV-watching chair and I stayed awake and watched a late movie about giant ants until I felt tired and went home.

Joey put the Redskins helmet on my head, gave me his pellet gun and ran back inside. There were fallen apples, whole and broken, in the grass under the tree. I cocked a pellet and shot at an apple, but the gun was the one with

the bad sight and I missed. I saw a couple leaves jerk from the puff of air. I aimed a little to the right of the apple and fired again. I hit the apple up near the stem and I had to hit it two more times before it rocked and fell.

“I got one,” I yelled. I shot at more apples and more apples fell. “I got another,” I yelled again.

Joey came back outside with his Bears helmet. He was carrying his new pellet gun. I wasn't a Redskins fan. I liked the new gun, a blue steel pump-action that looked like a genuine .22 Galil as long as you didn't look at it for too long, but I never got to use it. Both Joey and I shot at apples, and apples were falling. “Got another one,” I yelled. “Got another one, goddamn it,” Joey yelled. A bad apple fell onto my head. Juice and apple chunks dripped onto my facemask. I kept shooting at apples until Joey grabbed my pellet gun by the barrel.

“Enough,” he said. He took the Bears helmet off, and I laughed. “Helmet head,” I called him.

Joey said, “You're up early.” He was trying to make his hair look better. He brushed it back with his free hand. Then he tried licking his fingers and palm first, but it wasn't working. “I thought you were going to sleep later,” he said. “How was the movie last night?”

I took off the Redskins helmet and tried to shake away bits of bad apple still stuck to it. “It was a vampire movie,” I said. Joey nodded. I brushed my fingers through my hair and Joey laughed.

“I didn't get to shower yet,” I said.

I asked Joey what today was and he said, “Tuesday, I think.” He went to the back door, picked up an apple basket and threw it to me. I dropped the Redskins helmet and pellet gun in time, but the basket passed between my open hands.

“Yeah, it’s Tuesday,” Joey said. “The groceries came yesterday, so it must be Tuesday.” He picked up the other basket and said, “Pick them up before they get rotten,” pointing at the fallen apples in the grass. Joey and I set to work, picking up whole and mostly whole apples. Joey said, “Leave the bitty pieces. Give the worms some breakfast.”

Joey and I drank gin in the living room while waiting for the pies to bake. We had enough apples for two pies, and I wanted to get drunk. Joey and I hadn’t gotten drunk in a couple of weeks, not since he went out to some bars when his monthly check came in. I couldn’t go because I wasn’t allowed to, according to the State, according to the house lady, and Joey left me sitting in my bedroom, waiting to see the lights in his house come on. Joey was wearing Band-Aids and had bruises the next day. He told me he fell and couldn’t do too much, so until he felt better, we sat around and didn’t drink. We watched TV all day and night, and we didn’t drink at all. When Joey did try getting up from his red TV-watching chair, he grabbed his ribs and groaned and cursed. I started drinking, but Joey wouldn’t join me.

But now we were both drinking again and Joey only had one yellow patch left, under his eye. Joey was looking through the TV schedule, and the apple pies had extra cinnamon in them. The living room was filled with the smell.

“Damn, Beaver’s not on today,” Joey said. “There’s a telethon on,” he said. He threw the schedule on top of the TV and it stayed, though just barely. “You hungry?”

I said, “I didn’t have breakfast yet,” and I finished my drink. The bottle was next to Joey across the room.

Joey said, “So?”

The apple-pie-with-cinnamon smell was making me even hungrier.

The oven timer went off, and Joey got up. “The pies should be ready by now,” he said. He took the gin to the kitchen with him and it took me three tries to get up from the sofa.

Joey put a lot of vanilla ice cream on my second piece of pie. “You’re eating slow,” he said, and I suddenly remembered the red X I had seen on the calendar. “Is it a holiday today?”

Joey stabbed around his piece of pie with a fork. He said, “There’s a pellet in here.”

“I tried to get them all out,” I said.

“Well, you missed a couple.” Joey wasn’t looking at me.

“You only found one,” I said.

“Bit one before,” Joey said. “I didn’t tell you right then because you were drinking.”

“Sorry,” I said. “I tried,” I said.

“You have to fork through to find the pellets.”

“Sorry,” I said. “It’s real easy to do,” Joey said, and I said, “Sorry.”

“The pie is fine besides,” Joey said. “Good apples.”

“Should be. Your recipe,” I said, and I said it to my plate.

“What does that mean?” Joey put down his fork.

“Sorry,” I said.

Joey said, “Don’t worry. It’s a happy day for you. Don’t worry.”

I put down my fork. Happy day.

Joey picked his fork back up and he ate and looked at me again. “Did you watch Beaver last night?” he asked. “Wally had these two girls wanting to take him out to this dance. Beaver thought he shouldn’t take any girls out. ‘Girls are yucky,’ he said. It was good.”

“I think I missed it,” I said. “I think I went home.”

“Happy birthday,” Joey said.

I didn’t pick my fork up...my ice cream was melting...I was fifty-three.

There were no horror movies on that night, but there was a kung-fu movie on Channel 27: Spikes of Death. Joey and I watched it and finished off the second bottle of wine he had bought to celebrate my birthday. The pie was all gone and it was getting hard to watch the TV. I kept drifting and staring at the blue wall over the sofa. I was tapping the arm of the sofa with the hammer Joey had bought me.

“Let me use that hammer sometime,” Joey said. “I need to fix the coffee table.”

I nodded and watched TV.

“Did you see Beaver today?” Joey asked, and I shook my head and told him, “No.”

“Shame,” Joey said. “Me neither.”

I poured the rest of the wine into my glass. A Japanese wedding scene came on, and Joey started looking upset. “I think I’m drunk,” he said. “Ever think of getting married?”

“No,” I said. “They’re yucky.” I laughed and didn’t know Joey wasn’t laughing until I stopped.

“Ever?” Joey asked.

“How can we?” I said. “I’m fifty-three.”

“There are girls our age,” Joey said.

“Yeah, but you know how they are,” I said. I was thinking of the house lady, but she had to be older than that. She had to be much, much older than that.

“Yeah,” Joey said. I looked at the TV and I tried really hard to watch it this time, but I drifted off again, and when I snapped out of it, Joey was looking at his glass, frowning. The quiet was too much, so I said, “Whaddya say we take the pellet guns, go out and shoot one of Crabby Jones’s cats? That ought to get her real pissed.” Crabby Jones lived across the street. I looked at Joey and hoped he would remember when Crabby told us to stay the hell away from her house and told us she was going to have the police take us away, but Joey wasn’t saying anything. His lip started quivering, so I told him how good the pie was, anything. I said, “Great recipe. Those pies did have pellets in them, though. God, I must have missed six of them.” I slapped my head hard with the heel of my hand and then hit myself again, harder.

“You have to mush through the apple with a fork,” Joey said. He started moving his hand in the air as if he were holding a fork and mushing through a pile of apple chunks in the air, then he stopped. He said, “They’re going to put me back.” Joey waved his hands in the air and started crying.

I wanted to go away, maybe wait in the kitchen until Joey called me back when he was feeling better. I was remembering the doctors and the regular medication, and as soon as I was remembering these things I wanted to forget them. Joey's TV-watching chair was within reach of the liquor cabinet, but Joey didn't reach for it. He kept staring at his glass and he coughed one of those sobbing coughs. I wished that I hadn't woken up that morning. Falling was a scary feeling, but I knew what I was afraid of when I was falling in my dream: I was afraid of hitting ground.

Joey put his wineglass down and didn't stop crying. There were lines on his face. He looked tired and old. He looked like someone who had been through a lot, and it made me feel old, too. Even though the shades to the windows were down, I wondered how we would look if someone came by and saw us. I wondered if we looked like an old Wally and the Beaver, with Wally crying.

"Maybe you want to watch the news?" I asked.

Joey asked why. You could hardly hear him.

"I don't know," I said. "Maybe something important is happening," I said.

Joey nodded slowly.

I got up from the sofa, but it was like I weighed a ton. I was sure that my knees were going to snap and break in two. I was headed for the TV when an ice-cream commercial came on.

Joey perked up and said, "Ice cream. I want ice cream." He was smiling, and he turned and looked at me. Tears were still hanging on his face, tears blue with TV light—TV tears.

“It’s late,” I said. “Maybe we should go to bed.” I felt like going home and staying there. I thought about calling Joey in a week or so if I ever felt like coming over again.

Joey got up and ran out of the living room. “We’re gonna get some ice cream at the corner store,” he said as he went. He ran upstairs, talking loud, but I couldn’t understand what he was saying. I suddenly felt like running upstairs too.

I yelled, “Can we get popsicles?”

Joey didn’t stop talking. He came downstairs with a handful of money and he said, “We’re gonna get some ice cream at the corner store,” as if he were saying it for the tenth time.

“Are we gonna eat it here?” I asked Joey, and he said, “We’re gonna eat it here.” Joey almost fell down, but he caught himself. “We’ll get lots,” he said. “Enough to last us a few days.”

“Can we get popsicles?” I asked. “Cherry, maybe?”

“You don’t even have to go home,” Joey said, the real Joey. He said, “You can sleep in the extra bed. We’ll have ice cream together, you and me.”

“I’d settle for orange or strawberry,” I said, but I knew Joey wasn’t hearing me. I wanted to keep right behind him, so there would be no chance of losing him.

Joey looked as if he were going down a checklist in his head. “The cabinet’s full,” he said. “No worry about that.”

“Maybe even creamsicles?” I asked. “Creamsicle, creamsicle, orange creamsicle,” I started to sing, and Joey kept right on going, around the living room, thinking like crazy. “There’s a good movie on tonight,” he said. “There’s

a vampire movie on tonight. There's a weeklong festival. Then we'll get out the guns, and Crabby's cats should be out by then. I'll take the new gun because it still has to be broken in." Out the front door Joey went, and I followed.

Crabby's cat Kramer was sitting in the middle of the street. Joey pointed his finger at the cat and pulled back his thumb. "Eat pellet, puss," he said. I saw a light in the kitchen to my house.

It wasn't light bulb light, more like firelight, the light of something burning. Candlelight, maybe. It didn't matter. I looked down the street at the other blocks, and they looked like paintings, but I figured it was just the fog doing that. Joey laughed, and the laugh almost echoed.

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Ten Poems

Reading

(for Ahila)

eyelashes dip on the open book

She is reading

will not look up

The words are printing tall tales

on the intricate lace

of her feather hazel head

Lean long wrist bangles

reach down

Turn the page

my page

She rests

then her eyes walk

A scarlet moon is rising from
the printed ink

Her ankles bracelets shake softly

This is for you to read

Eel

Wind bowls up surf

Sand glass sharp

Shelter under these knuckled boles

Watch cloud savaged open _____

After the storm

delicate red feet

pick to the ocean's musselpools

Wade

Down

into the rubberbrown arms

of sea plants

Salt garments of the drowned

Clutch rocks

Eel

stonegrey, a ribbon of gut

Sees

Walled Garden

Painted pots bake on the gravel

The latch of the gate is

Hot to touch

Come in

Sticky fruit is falling

On a jar of jam

A wasp walks the sweet rim

Black cat

lavishes in sun

Water gathers in one corner of the garden
Stands Smells frog-green

Brown veined leaves are burning
Snakes hunger about the greenhouse

and a cold angel
 Thinks
On the neat box hedge

Ashes

(for my Mother)

Swing the mattock
Slice the baked clay

Flints, chalk
The blade works through
marrow of roots
fashions the six foot plot

Cotton seals my mother's nose mouth

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... Her rings favourite dress

I do not know you

earth sun-brown

rills onto teak

over final flowers

I am standing farewell

Then Tonight

Your lips still

Your mask chalk

Fingerprints

Evening bleeds red

Into the skin the pores of the sky

Night's head is bent towards the slow wash of the sea

Her feet moving over the gravel

The Channel bills the land

The tide turns a shingled hand over the

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Blue chin and black stubble of the sand

The salt grass old thorny bushes

and sudden crimson flowers

of the dunes

Then damp open scrub

Houses built here

Dark peat and kindle backed up

Driftwood burning acrid spitting

In all our homes

The heavy animal sound of the ocean's rollers

smothers us.

If I press with my fingers in the dark

They shall leave no mark.

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East

Come, under
the big eye of god over the door

Roll your sleeves
Stand, smoke in the doorframe
Watch the drowned fields
Wet through with fire

A hen sings
in the heat soldered street

The sun polishes stones
by the saffron slow river
Go, step across
Take the cuffs of the buddha fat urchin
in the broad mollusc hat

His bright sampan shoals
centuries
Winks at the wide eyes of god

Ancient Languages

Her skin is sad

Her smell of smoke

The buzzing of the sun

The asthma of the hens

Hardens her lips

When winter begins forever

She does not think

Solitude's warm aroma

is like a chocolate-coated grave

Looking out over the canals

The hothouse waters

speak ancient languages

She stands

sewing broken lace

and fortunate love with

pale eight o'clock fingers

The deep silence

smells of pressed flowers

and the moths like dried butterflies
knock at the light.

The Dead Tinsmith's Wife

Dust dries in the broken throats
 of the dengue drains
A dog's body bubbles on the road
Tinsmiths picked cavities in this land
The sons are vendors in the dead teeth
Their women home shacks gummed black by river mud
At a rush window
The founding widow's centenarian face is
rough papyrus close-written with pain

Time is
the dust dried in the lapels of her throat
Watch her watch the car smothered in wild pansies
A goat sitting warming the hood

herself sat between her now her then

A fluttering butterfly

Once Was

Winds rake a dead house
funneling broken paper
on which long ago letters are bleached
In corners
Shed hair describes small circles
boarded-up hearts are hung with dust
which the monsoon will wash under the door

Only the broken marble breathes

Out in the once was garden
Ants guide finely scissored stems
into a crimson mouth of earth
Histories have absconded
Like the mantle clock's two hands
What moves is the peeling plaster
What grows, the fur cracks in her front wall

Herons

In the yard

Tilting cast-iron crosses

Raw lines nailed to the dead

Time soughs in the dry esparto grass

In earth palaces

Termites thatch dirt

At the gate

Hear a scream of hinges

Yesterday forcing in

Under the almond trees

tread ancestral steps

These words fork their red earth

Prise a narrow slat in time

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I shall commemorate their memories:

That rise like herons from the wetlands

Glide the great gable of the house

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Shitgun Shiva

There comes a point
When every physicist calls it quits.
When the green slate covering the walls
Is overlaid thick with equations
As if
An Adventure's of Sinbad
Stop animation Shiva
Armed with a Holy trinity of shotguns
Has gone postal
Blasting forth algorithms in double barreled time
Puffs of grainy smoke punctuating the big bang repercussions
Powdering the floor with Dover Cliff dust
Revealing footprints leading to the door
And on the board
The last line scrawled in surrender reads,
Fuck it I'm going fishing

This predestined destination of resignation
Has remained constant in the space time continuum

We just keep slicing up this pilgrimage
Into smaller and smaller bits
The straight line from Point A to Point B
Fishnet hammock bowing down under the sub-atomic weight
Of incrementally more precise information
Prolonging the trek
With tourist trap side trips
But, sooner or later
Whether or not the entity exists
We've got to admit
That some sort of God has been hardwired in our brains.

'Cause it's the same old story
Over and over and over again
That perpetual pursuit of
That hero with a thousand faces
In a thousand places
A thousand stone chiseled Easter Island eyes
Staring across a thousand miles of horizon
Ossified by the blinding light
Of a chain link reactionary mushroom cloud rising
Above the Bikini Isles
A seven-megaton pebble drop in the bucket

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White cap rippling across the collective consciousness

With sublime concentricity

Inside the earth driveshafts radiate

Like the spherically terminated spikes of a child's jack

Spinning clockwise in posi-track unison

Universally jointed and linked

To a primordial ancestral inborn lineage > > better pay off

Gyroscope humming just below the surface

Of perception

OM

This tone, a top forty hit rising with a bullet

Provides the sub-aural soundtrack

A vibratory miasma filling up the space

Between things like an M.C. Escher rip off

Hung in a dentist's office waiting room

Blue silhouettes of geese in a flying V formation

The white vacuum in between Ying-Yanged

Into a mirror reflection

Headed in the opposite direction

It all boils down to eugenics

Chromosomes waiting in line like a smudged bar code

On a box of macaroni and cheese
Queuing up at the DNA ladder
That leads to the diving board
Above the genetic pool
Filled via aqueducts from the fountain
Of ubiquitous equilibrium
'Cause we've all got this primal aspiration
To go swimming
The quirks and quarks that make us up
Seeking to back float
In harmonic hydro-homogeneity
In the cement pond
Of eternity

It's almost as if
All the tiniest bits have an ulterior motive
An indecipherable secret mission
That's best understood by simply saying
Fuck it, I'm going fishing.

Raymond Deffry

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Jonah

In my dream, I had just come home from work. It was dinnertime. My wife and my daughter were sitting at the table as I walked in to the kitchen. There was a plate of sweet yellow corn on the red checkered tablecloth. I did not sit down. I took the corn and picked up my crippled daughter from her chair at the table and took her to the backyard, a spot next to the swing set, in the green grass. I knew as I gave her the corn and watched her eat it, watched the juice drip down her chin and watched her stand up, then walk, and actually begin to run, I knew that God had shown me how to fix what I had done wrong.

**

The next day, when I came home from work, I walked into the kitchen. My wife and my daughter were sitting at the table. There was the sweet yellow corn on the table, on the red checkered tablecloth. I thought about the dream. I thought about the green grass in the backyard and sat down to dinner.

Ahila Sambamoorthy

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Indian Sunset

1. NADA (SOUND)

Who dances in the fiery wheel
creator preserver destroyer
skin glazed smooth surfaced of red-coral

Invoke the cosmic rhythm
bells bamboo-flutes cymbals conch-shells drums
the hundred-stringed instrument teased by an ivory plectrum

Vedic legacy of ancient rock carvings
temples
monuments

(Penang, May 1998)

2. EVENING RAGA

It is the dark half of the lunar month
a silver gloaming illumines hills of marble

and the amber afterglow of thunder and lightning

There's magic in the veena

singing of an ageless cosmic romance

Krishna and Radha

and the delirious freedom of the night world

her head filled with the redolence of coriander blossoms

jasmine and sandalwood

In the mango grove branches groan and creak

Distant sea-waves swept by north winds

reach the stars

Sobs from Earth's heart

(Penang May 1998)

3. THE RED HILLS

Now begins Dawn

smearred with saffron and camphor

sacred ash and vermilion

offering petals of full-blown roses

as you glide
in an open-skied dream
over the red-earthed slopes of Thirupathi
where storks fly high
and black peacocks live

Home to the patron of the mountain lands
The Three-Pronged One with lotus-red feet
with scarlet-leafed gleaming spear

the righteous arrow of warfare

(Penang, May 1998)

4. WAITING

In dark maritime lands
a lonely sunset is eclipsed by rain
all night crammed into it

She waits for you
in the scant chequered shadow
of the sable-boughed margosa grove
hears the rumble of ebony tropical inlets

distant drums of vast clouds
sights the luminous eyes of an anguished gazelle
the lithe frame of an incandescent tiger

She is still dazed by the dream
an Arabian jasmine crushed by hungry bees
forsaking the honeyed darkness of sleep

(Penang, May 1998)

5. NIGHTFALL

The large-flowered jasmine blooms
in the gathering dusk
The white cotton wick in the oil-lamp
flames scarlet
In the flushed skies
a broken bangle of conch-shells like the crescent moon
floats
A black cuckoo pecks
at the fragrant pollen of the mango branch --
a whetstone covered with silver dust

This forest
its clusters of golden blossoms

of the dark-branched mast-wood trees
moist cool shady as darkness itself
Beside it ivory sands
as dazzling as many moons heaped together
White flowers of the sea-pine washed by the waves

Listen to the thundering surge
of the sapphire-dark seas
The fishermen's boats have not returned
Soon rain will shroud sky and land

(Penang, May 1998)

6. GRANDMOTHER

When the evening star appears
and the oil-lamp is fed with ghee
my grandmother offers silver plates of betel leaves
and arecanut
to the white-tusked God

wrapt in hypnotic spirals of rose incense
chanting esotericism
from a cloth-bound Bhagavad Gita

I can hear her thick golden bangles
jingling to the rhythm of mantras

(Penang, May 1998)

7. KALI

Egrets haranguing in shallow water
kingfishers nesting in forest reeds
a seagull's shrill note lost over fields
in a dreamlike swoon

Soon the scarlet and orange
silver and gold
now setting fires to the heavens
will change to quiet twilight hues

The aftermath screech of cicadas
echoes in my head
when reptilian dark gnarls the brain

The Black Idol entwined with garlands of skull
gleams malignantly

Her thirst
the blood of sacrifice

(Penang, April 1998)

8. SEASHORE

The earth stops shuddering
the prattle of wind and frogs and crickets resumes
a torrid inflated night
fetid with saltwater and palmtrees and fishingnets

an opaque miasma
where all directions dematerialise
and time is measured by counterfeit miles

Sleep could not be further away

(Penang, May 1998)

9. THE SEA-GOD

This sultry coastline
where moggies draw territorial boundaries
framed by ocean-marooned fish
is mine

The earth is flat
where the stony horizon meets the sky
our eyes rove
in search of a wandering star

But all you see is the sulphur-yellow glare
of far-flung lighthouses

Black water cracks under my feet
I fall through a shimmering underpass
reach rock bottom
see Oceanus
wraith-like . . .

All is benumbed

(Penang, June 1998)

10. MOPING

Equatorial island life
a sebaceous seashore
of common shells and dead wood
the raw islanders' dunghill

its splendour of emerald-turquoise waves
long bleached by the sun

Shrivelled sea coconuts –
woeful mahogany-burnt fishermen
people crawl like lice out of threadbare huts
giant rats dine with the mob and tailless cats
and sewage pipes ravish the open-sea

You are shell-shocked
this land is bitter
unwashed
no Asian Delight
your refuge only the endless ocean
and its indolent breezes

An unfinished land of clay

(Penang, June 1998)

11. RAIN

On watering slopes of hilly land
where white streams echo
blooms the concolvulus

Thundering rain-clouds
are resplendent with lightning
Creeping field-beans snake-plants
and the jade-stemmed mango shoot
drip with water

The dark-eyed monkey
leaps from tree to tree
and the red-mouthed crane
calls from the coral-tree

Below
red-padi sings on riverine plains
Bright green bamboos caress the sky
and purple lotus blooms on black ponds

Moist dusk courts rice-fields and banyan trees
hides night-birds and insects
Only fire-flies dance in the cool
like shooting-stars

(UKM Bangi, June 1998)

12. SANCTUARY

Walk the gilded earth

patterned with blossoms
of full-budded Indian beech

below lofty mountains scattered with rocks
cleansed by streams fed with rain
like a freshly-washed sapphire

Red paste flows from the hills yonder
arched by eagle-wood forests
where the owl and spotted-pigeon nest
white-feathered

in the fresh young moon's
cool evening light
the silver-boughed fig tree
stands shimmering by the river

(UKM Bangi, June 1998)

13. ENDURING LAND

An ephemeral throbbing sensation
in the heartland of my heritage
From unbelonging
I move to belonging

The temple's gopurams glitter
Shiva Vishnu Muruga Ganesha
displayed in harlequin silken robes
are gesturing me to kneel
A bare-chested priest intones mantras
kindling the golden Agni
 an angelus to his rites

In my stately hotel
I lick the platter clean of ambrosia
while on the street below
a man defecates in the undergrowth

The tight gnarled arterial streets
are clotted with gaudy bazaars
boast their stench of bilious manure
 a waxen woman seeks the trishaw's shade
 her bulk emaciating her
 alzheimer-struck slave

Toiling rustic stagger
with their bane of blighted harvests

Consumptive mothers crawl out of
cramped mud-huts
their withered breasts unbeckoning
to the parched throats of dehydrated infants
The jaundiced naked child
festering with postules
frolics under the cruel sun
Distempered boars and rabid dogs
ungainly with distended abdomens
partake in the revelry

Leprous Syphilitic
cads vagabonds roughnecks delinquents
all bear the angst of destitution
 their hearts carved out of gall
 These then are the deranged faces
of the land's inglorious philistines

These then are the heart-wrenching sight
through which my blood flows

(Based upon impressions of New Delhi. Composed: September 1993,

Lynley Lys

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Letter Knife

You slightly arched
one eyebrow,
such a singular
gesture.
Quizzical.
A wooden armadillo
sat quiet
near you.
His tail elongated
and metamorphosed
to unseal correspondence.
Perhaps he opened books.
You, at any rate,
had ceased toying with him.
Now his silence mocked me:
he too had found a plaything.
This sun unleashes
little nurturing pills,

Sparks 27

they radiate down.

Their borders

fizz and quiver,

boundaries

clear then foam.

We feel our way

and creep upon these worlds.

Ward Kelley

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Emily is Buried in a White Dress

The swirling, the inevitable choke
into the freedom from breathing,
comes as a remedy, not a fear . . .
comes as a release, not a threat.

You have planned this moment
for untold years, often placing your soul
in this embrace, often moving your mind
into its final corporal thoughts.

Yet it still surprises, the ease
of the process, the lack of need
for you to do anything at all . . .
the swirling comes down to you.

Like, as a little girl, your father's
kiss unerringly swooped down
to your forehead . . . the pillow
became the earth holding you firm.

This then is a sacred communion,
you always knew it would be so . . .
this then has been your sacred life,
which you give so easily because
it is now taken this gracefully.

Author's note: Emily Dickinson (1830-1886), New England poet, is one of the country's greatest poets. Spending nearly all of her life in Amherst, Massachusetts, the last half in relative seclusion, Emily came to be known as eccentric. Besides rare contacts with people outside her immediate family, she wore only white dresses and sometimes referred to herself as a wayward nun. Regarding her poems - only eleven of 1,775 poems were published during her lifetime - she advocated the "propounded word." Her word for herself as a poet was "gnome," and the poems themselves she called, "bulletins from Immortality." Her last communication was written the day before her death, a short letter sent to young relatives: "Little cousins, -- Called back. Emily."

Jessy Randall

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The Green Bathroom

Just walking in here
is a transcendent experience.
Past a demure curtain, through
the sign saying WOMEN
(in huge letters, as if
bellowed by a lumberjack)
I am suddenly sunk
in a green marsh, the color
of spring lettuce, of neon
relish, this is the most
comfortable and calm
bathroom I've ever seen.
From now on, whenever I have to go,
I'm going to go here.

The Poem of Perfect

Somewhere in the cliffs of this bedroom
there is a perfect poem, intact, lying
asleep on a piece of paper, dreaming
of being read, of being read to, of being
in a book or in your mouth, of whispering
(love) soft words for you not to hear

This poem dreams, rises like a dragon,
breathes fire all over the place. What
is the poem's dream? Who
is the poem sleeping with? Can
a poem sleep with you, even in a dream? All
I can do with words is talk, here's me
and here's a stack of pages as tall as me, which
would you rather get in bed with?

This poem can howl at the moon but I
can howl at you
like a dream
like a movie on your eyelids
We don't need a perfect poem we have all this skin
and if you peel the skin away what is left but
perfect words

The Block of Horror

1. In the Restaurant

In the restaurant, I suffer
through the papaya salad.

Eight drunk ladies carouse
at the table next to ours. They sing
Purim songs and tell dirty jokes.
Their conversation spills into ours,
like milk of magnesia or pink
pepto bismol. It's too late for our talk --
theirs is all over us.

2. The Movie

The seats are blue. We each
have half a ticket as
the lights dim. It is terribly hot;
people all over the theater
are undressing, stripes of skin
appearing under their sweaters.
The film is disgusting. It is even

called *Sick*. Super-masochistic
Bob Flanagan nails his penis
to a board.

3. The Drive Home

This is the least horrible. We arrive
on cobble-stoned Church Street, and I tell
how Maggie used to exaggerate:
how sex started at one hour, and
progressed to two, and stuck
at all night long.

Hearing June

It is like a line in a poem
that goes all the way to the end of the page and has to hang over
at the right --
the poem adjusts to the size of the magazine.

It is like not being able to
think of a word
and you think and you think and you can't think of it
and you do something else like maybe

fall asleep or tie your shoe and then the word is there suddenly
like hearing June.

Long Wait

I'm still waiting
for love that's like the dictionary:
horizontal, in an alphabet, including all possible novels.

You can open it up and lay in on the table
you can slam it shut in envy or despair
you can have it hard or soft
the paper thin as a chicken bone and
the words not far apart but
filling the whole page,
crowded together like pebbles in a jar.

In this love I will make love in
voluptuous piles of words: your orgasm will be
an ellipsis of pulses; mine will be
a palindrome, turning in on itself

and remaining the same.

We'll crawl into the spine and go to sleep,
our arms around each other in Cyrillic,
expanding definitions all night long.

Ernest Slyman

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Rosemont Elementary

At noon,
the schoolboys
gleeful on the playground,
romp through the afternoon's bowed legs
and kick the yellow sun
like a ball that rolls along the grass,
all shouting for the girls to look, look ---
then comes the great bafflement,
when the boys romp
around the school and return
laughing uproariously,
as though famous,
baring dog's teeth
from the strange capitols
of the world.

Joy Reid

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OCD

My father threatens to jump down the stairs
he says they are dirty,
he can't come down.
He stands with hands held away surgeon-like.
Hands like bacon
scrubbed red raw.

My mother pleads with despairing hands.
She falls to her knees
scrubs with her apron.
But father grows frantic in Indian dance.
His feet shuffle panic,
his mind is ablaze.

As their voices crescendo in maelstrom of madness,
I take myself away.

When I return the stairs have been concealed,

a yellowing sheet
collapses downwards.
The offending shoes have disappeared.
Those shoes
which have surfed the oily slicks of castaway cartons,
those shoes
which have surged through spat gum, cigarette waste
those shoes
which should not have been placed upon the carpeted stairs where
their
contaminants could creeper to the corners of father's mind -
have gone.

Father stalls in the doorway.
His wrists are crossed
as if a thin but final cord
bound the two together.

Raw Feast

The cows bellow their protest
it is Saturday
and they want a feed.

The man is bent
attendant on two shaggy limbs
he works to cut hide from flesh.

Last night's kill lies
a coagulated heap.

Where the bullet entered:
cranberry jelly, clingwrapped mucus spiked with almond slips
AKA bone fragments
clear fat
shattered meat.

At least Shelley seems to appreciate
this unexpected gift.

Sticky tidbits
are slopped onto the back porch step.

Normally fastidious
she tears the chunks from velcrove concrete
as a child pulls a bandaid strip.

Meanwhile the Black Polls
siren their discontent.

A sigh from the man as vertebrae lock in
a stretch from the hips
then a return to task.

The cows will have to wait
won't take the blowies long
to suss this raw feast out.

Thumb Prints

Damaged limbs
are bandaged tight
in prosthesis pink.
Sometimes they're slung
in napkin folds
sometimes soaked
in womb warm salt

but always
they heal.

Damaged limbs
must be constrained
resurfaced
with a second skin
swaddled to spread
the seeping pain

eventually
they heal.

Bruised flesh subsides
from purple to green
woman's colours
that
finally
fade
to soiled yellow
leaving tender skin.

All things
heal

Zoran Sudar

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Being & Nothingness

It's a sad, sad story. But, at least, I lived to tell. So, here it goes.

A cold, winter day. Snow covered roofs, the trees snowy white. The snow has conquered the world. Could you possibly imagine more beautiful weather? Life is great!

Myself and Sam were standing near a house, talking.

'Water', said Sam, 'is the proto-element all right. It gives life to everything that lives. Life itself originated from water. It is the very Being in everything we can observe. Is that not so?'

'Quite so', I replied.

'And the true philosopher cannot but realise that the Being is everything that IS and that everything that IS NOT should be considered Non-being.'

'Most assuredly!'

'What shall we say about you and me. If I am not mistaken, you and I ARE.'

'Such appears to be the case.'

'And, as I was saying at first, water is the Being.'

'True.'

'Then are not we (who ARE) water ourselves?'

'Yes, I quite agree', said I.

'I am glad that you do', said he. 'Because I am now about to go a step further in order to show to you that the Sun is not what everybody believes it is.'

'Proceed then.'

'In most people's minds the Sun appears to be a synonym for life. They (and I pity them) believe that the Sun is good, that there is no life without it. So, when it sets, they light fires, they turn on the lights in order to imitate the Sun.'

'Very true.'

'I swear by Zeus that they go to sleep at night only to avoid the absence of the Sun!'

'I think that you are right, Sam. How, then, shall we proceed?'

'Let us consider the matter together. We have already cleared up one fact; namely that we are water. For so I have ever thought, and continue to think, but, if you are of another opinion, let me hear what you have to say. If, however, you remain of the same mind as formerly, I will proceed to the next step.'

'You may proceed, for I have not changed my mind.'

'Than I will go on to the next point, which may be put in the form of a question: What happens to water if we leave it in the hot sun?'

'It most certainly disappears.'

'If it does, then it IS NOT any more. So, we can consider it Non-being, that is, Nothingness.'

'To be sure, replied I'

'There is another question then, which will probably throw light on our present enquiry, if you and I can agree about it: Does the the Sun bring life to all living entities or is it death that it creates?'

'Undoubtedly, death.'

'I am glad', said he, 'that you and I agree...'

Suddenly, he ceased talking. The sun came out from behind the clouds...

He did not last long, poor Sam. He liquefied within an hour. I watched his theory being proved right before my eyes. His snowy limbs melted and his body became shapeless and puddly. His black, coal eyes were observing the Sun with hate till the last moment...

I knew I was lucky to have been built in deep shade, so that I could last to tell. Stories like this. Sad. But true.

Jon D. Blackstock

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Freedom Moment

Five a.m., Nathan is awake pumping shards of clean through his veins, his heart, his lungs, his mind. He can't focus on any one fear long enough to defeat it, and as the sun rises on East Bay, shadows from cars and last night's brandy remind him that he's only lonely and stupid and scared.

They dance and taunt, and the sun sneaks up behind his sitting chair, looking so much bigger every time he turns around, that Nathan starts to believe the sun chases him.

But oh, the sun is patient. If all we had to live through was this day, no one would be addicted to anything. If all we had to live through was this day and enlightened unattachment came tomorrow, no fights would be fought, no shadows would dance and taunt, and Macbeth would ride out guilt's storm.

For all its weak points, junk always did bring lots of friends, and no, Nathan isn't in the mood to split hairs between friends and associates or friends and enemies. First, though, Nathan had moved out from all his friends, and he hates being alone with these shadows and memories and regrets and gods. But just like the sun, amounts are patient. No one ever buys it in gallon jugs, and a good friend always had a smidgen or a smack.

He moved, not far, just across town down to the East Bay highrise, also called the "Eastside High Yellow." Now Nathan sits with his back to the sun in a lonely week-rent apartment not that different from his previous week-rent apartments, except here, no one shares his loneliness among other things.

A red-outlined figurined shadow on the wall laughs and wiggles. He hasn't bought any lamps, so there's no way to defeat these things. Bugs on the windows make monsters on the walls, and his own hair makes shadows of a tentacled old bitch teacher who foretold his future, and in a perverted sort of Pygmalion sense, she had returned there on the wall to see her creative fruition, cowering from the eye of the day and the pricks of the night.

In a sad sort of truth = common-lie sense, Nathan tries chasing them away with a new spoon and an old lighter, holding it up to them as a cross to vampires.

Go away! Go away!

Their voices and laughters mingle jingle like the chaotic jangle of glass and metal windchimes and the occasional deep jong of woodpipes.

Finally, he forfeits, but he knows if he sits real still and stares, they too will sit real still and stare. So in this entropic state, he and the shadows wait for one or the other to admit something or to die.

Nathan had hoped, as he sat through the night, that the early morning would bring some sort of "hermits' joy," but something more like hermit's crabs had snapped such romantic aspirations. Later, the sun warms the usually exhilarating salt air that has lately become a thick and rocky gasoline salt on a liquid wound. The weather seems cognitively perfect, though he can't talk himself into feeling that way, so the three-block walk to the cafe seems almost surgical.

The eyes from the counter, from all the absurdly little round tables condemn and mock his attempts. His head bobs like a marble-head drunkard as he sits at the particle-board bar and orders "some espresso." "How much you want?" "How much you got?"

Nathan will try sitting in the reading room there at the cafe. He hates the word "cafe." What a marketing term! Call it a coffee shop and the college kids will dodge the place. He takes several deep breaths and pronounces the words "clean" and "Jesus" without knowing why. There in the reading room, rather than shadows, are black-white photos of those romantic idealists he idolized so many lifetimes ago when he was really just a college kid looking for a cafe. There they are, Jack and Bill and Allen hanging over the book shelves, looking over the reading room with their approval or non-approval. There they are with their images of angry fixes, fie-ing fums, nakeding lunches, burning Holy Roman candles and what-have-you. Their pictures on wires that hold the pictures out from the walls like gods looking over their spectacles at the budding atheist.

Bill and Jack sit and laugh on a couch. Nathan's eyes roll to the back of his head. He's hiding. No, he's looking for something.

"Nathan," slap, "get a hold, baby. Get a hold."

"Regina."

"Stranger still knows my name. We thought you'd died."

"I did."

Regina's nose and cheeks and eye bags are red. Anything that protrudes is red-tipped as if she were covered in tits. She seems happier than usual and unhealthier than usual at the same time. How do these things go together so well--unhealthy and seeming? Both of them are wearing the same clothes as

when they last saw each other. Only the watch on Regina's arm is new, a man's watch.

"Taking a strange interlude?" she asks.

"Cleaning up."

"Cleaning up what?"

"I don't know, man. I don't know."

She looks around and up and taps the table for concentration as she used to when she couldn't remember her line. When they worked together, he used to help her at this point with a cue, and the audience would never know. And the audience would never care.

"You're setting yourself up for failure," she says.

Nathan can't tell if this is a different play or just a different beat.

"Cold turkey is for January. You have to come down slow. If you're trying to just throw it off all at once, you know that's not going to happen forever. You have to come down slow. Think of the long-haul."

A few more cliches convinces Nathan. It's easy to convince people to do what their intestines want them to do. Soon, addictions feel like nature, and cliches sound like Confucius.

"Ten dollars," she says and her sinewy arms tense like a fisherman's under her long, track-hiding sleeves, "ten dollars will get you enough to take home. Make it last a week and you're on the road to recovery. You have to back out slow or you won't make it for the long haul. You won't make it until. . . ."

Nathan can't discern from his inner voice and Regina's voice. She is in there now, in his head, where only shadows and romantic icons and insecurities go. They move back to a table around the corner in the smoking room, empty at this time of the morning.

You won't make it forever. Think of the long haul (hall). Tomorrow never comes. You could really hurt yourself cold turkey and all. Emergency room doctors looking over you with scoffs and judgment white shadows. . .remember? Remember

"Remember? Remember?"

"What?"

"Ten dollars. Remember?"

Regina's right hand clenches in an upside-down fist on the table; her left turns fingers up, fingers wriggling like seaweed.

He searches for some money. He knows he won't have to come up with the whole ten, just most of it. Just--

Just behind Regina, another picture in the dark corner, peering over her head stronger than any he'd seen. Not the Buddha, not Jack or Bill or Allen, not Richard, Gerald, Jimmy, Ronald, George, or William. Frederick. Frederick Douglas and his grey-haired determined quick omnipotence with a wire allowing the picture to lean out from the wall.

Freedom moment. Freedom moment!

"I hate you," Nathan starts.

"What? Ten dollars."

"I hate you and I pray for you. You prey on me; I pray for you. I pray for hatred. I love my hatred. I love you. I would rather die in freedom. Right?" he asks the picture. "Yeah. I'd rather die in freedom than live in slavery."

Regina pokes her clenched fist into her tight pocket and backs away from bulging-eyed Nathan. She walks quick as possible out the door. The front room keeps filling and the customers watch the play, the final scene.

"I'd rather die in freedom," Nathan yells to Regina and Levine the pusher and the shadows and the outlines and the old friendly associated enemies. "I'd rather die in freedom!"

The crowd there at the coffee shop cheers unseemingly. At what, they aren't sure. But a superman stands to declare his freedom to the masters of the world, the light pours in the glass facade from King Street, and tomorrow never comes.

Joe Duvernay

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NONE

To be there with the day as it passes
watching over it, monitoring its phases, its stumbles,
its plain talk, its senses.

The winds that blow light or furious!

Just watching!

Not driving all over it.

Not in and out store, to please myself,
to please this one or that one or more.

Not visiting animate, instead inanimate for sure.

While the day clamors onward toward what it will be.

Different from any that went before.

On the road to the tally that adds up the fee.

The fee that calculates the days we have left,
the subsets of sunsets, the risings, the trees.

IN MEMORY OF

Oh that's Kafkaesque!
That mere introspection
That metamorphosing rule
There's where the sages always hung out!
In the gifted, twirling pools
Of the nearest pair of eyes!
"Memories of the love you gave."

Contributors

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Jon D. Blackstock, jblackstock@infoave.net, has published online with EWG Presents, and has published in print with Miscellaney (College of Charleston, SC) and with Barbaric Yawp. He also has a literary column at Suite101.Com and co-authored a paper for the journal of the South Carolina Council for the Teachers of English.

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Lynley Lys's (Rabbit1134@aol.com). work has been published in Road of Shadows and Poetry Magazine on the Internet. Lynley's favorite poets are Sylvia Plath and Israeli poet Itamar Yazo Kest. Lynley is currently working on a B.A. in Comparative Literature.

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Announcements

THE OUTLAW BIBLE OF AMERICAN POETRY

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DAVID MICHAEL GERBSTADT

David will have a showing of his paintings and drawings at the

NEXUS GALLERY
137 N. 2nd Street
Philadelphia, Pa. 19103
215-629-1103

Opening night: Friday January, 8 1999, 5pm to 9pm

Show will run:

January 8 - February 28 1999

This includes First Friday February 5th 5pm - 9pm

Spread the word about this show! Bring a friend, partner, who ever! Print this out and show people! If you have a David T-Shirt by all means wear it at the show! David will have art in the streets!

People all over the World are printing out David's web site

<http://www.voicenet.com/~fish68> and sharing it with one another.

David Michael Gerbstadt Fan Club
p.o. box 762

Paoli, Pa. 19301
studio phone: 610-725-8167

Situation Under Control

Argentina, november 1998.

I have the pleasure of writing to you with respect to the theatrical show "Situation under Control" and "WWW" by Héctor Rodríguez Brussa and our intention of presenting us in U.S.A.

We have already been in different countries since 1995: Argentine, Germany, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Chile, Puerto Rico, Ecuador , Venezuela and Cuba.

During 1997:

- * January /97 - CHILE - XI Latin American Theatre event Entepola - Santiago de Chile.
- * June /97 - SPAIN - XIV Fair of Shows in Barcelona and others in Cataluña. June /97 - ITALY - Comuna Baires of Milán and Pádova.
- * September /97 - ECUADOR - X International Festival of Theatre in Manta. Lay University Eloy Alfaro of Manabí.
- * September /97 - PUERTO RICO - I Latin American Festival in Puerto Rico. Universidad of Puerto Rico. Cayey.
- * September /97 - CUBA - VIII International Festival of La Habana.
- * Octubre/98. VENEZUELA. XXIII Festival International of Oriente.Venezuela.

These have been some of the critics about the show:

* Newspaper "O Diario" San Pablo - Brazil "When the aesthetics is in favour of the body...makes a celebration of the arts of the actor."

Valmir Santos (24/09/95)

* Newspaper "Hoy" La Plata - Argentina "...a synthesis of great beauty is obtained..a provocative proposal that intends to generate reactions and obtains so" Ana Totoro (7/10/96)

* Newspaper "El Comercio" Quito - Ecuador "Poquelín brought to the Festival the spectacularity of the vanguard scenery art..." Ronald Soria (4/09/97)

* Newspaper "El Comercio" from Ecuador "...the theatre Poquelín group from Argentina presented the most audacious and updated proposal..." (8\09\97)

* Newspaper "Gramma" from Cuba "...the cult to insanity that. Situation Under Control offers...it has to do with a metaphysic game and very well performed" Jorge Ignacio Perez (23/9/97)

We hope to have the opportunity of showing our work, about which we can send valuation material . Besides, we would like to know dates of events, conditions of a possible participation and other details.

Some considerations with details to be expanded: group of work (Four people) of a very easy scenographic stage designing of eight to ten metres of stage opening / black camera / 20 - 25 spots of 500 wts. / audio reproductor.

Héctor Rodríguez Brussa.
Director Teatro Poquelín
Zelarrayán 128. Bahía Blanca

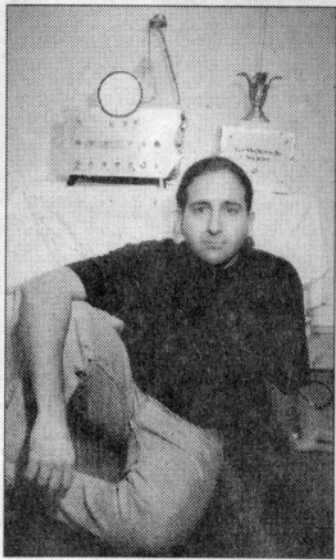
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The Poetron



The poetry Chris Vecchio broadcasts is his own.

Sometime contributor Chris Vecchio was recently written up in the Philadelphia Inquirer for his latest engineering art sculputre, the Poetron, a device that broadcasts his haiku over the radio waves. Check it out at

www.phillynews.com/inquirer/98/Nov/03/city/POETO3.htm

