

*The Brown Literary Review*

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*Volume III, Issue i*

*Fall 2009*

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The *Brown Literary Review* displays the literature of Brown University writers on a semesterly basis. Contributions are considered from undergraduates, graduate students, faculty, and alumni/ae. Submission deadlines are October 12<sup>th</sup> for the fall issue and March 8<sup>th</sup> for the spring issue. Please forward all submissions or inquiries to [brownliteraryreview@gmail.com](mailto:brownliteraryreview@gmail.com). No simultaneous submissions please.

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CREATIVE ARTS COUNCIL

BROWN UNIVERSITY

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# *The Brown Literary Review*

*In return from 2007-2009 hiatus*

Fall 2009

Volume III, Issue i



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Arc

*by Xue Di (translated by Hil Anderson and Keith Waldrop)*

Pure in spirit  
two feet walk into society

Seeing life many-layered  
seeing in silence

a celibate walk away  
emaciated body

disturbed by pure thought  
And one naturally precise utterance

makes experienced travelers happy  
makes the ambient light grow weak

Lonely creator, in recollection, sees  
standing on high the purveyor of words

Vegetarians, in a polished  
abstract poem, see spirit

while a few others in the collective craziness  
grumble. The communal life

early risers slurping deplorable coffee  
under pressure to get the garbage organized

breathe in new viruses. No matter where  
alarms scream everywhere

Seeing in the sky  
that slack rope full of tight knots

turning bodily another direction, I sense  
collapse, a mood of hopelessness

Madame Psychosis

*by Rachel Arndt*

A shank painter among us and  
“I hope your family’s still happy”—  
drew from our shanks plaque, fables  
pregnant by jeopardy; who’s fated  
to free each runaway, fathered the gun  
hand, mothered our cigarettes.  
In Chelsea, manhole covers spill: “But St.  
Peter” (prior to disgrace, epistolary crusades)  
“wanted supine women lifted” beneath  
schema, moaning wordsmith, moneyed alibi.  
We were platinum Westinghouse, we slept with  
dirtmen-streetsweepers, stunk of burned basil,  
Versailles trapped in artistry and scar,  
an empty branch becoming. God wills  
it to Constantinople beneath a bonnet,  
prowling his latest conquest. Were craft  
named a whore name, (peapods raining) this  
towel could shed its drool;  
Anubis shook his coat dry.

## Where Our Feet Once Dragged

*by Kate Doyle*

I remember clearly each summer evening's walk to the far corner of the yard, to the small niche along the ragged wood's edge where the swing set stood and still stands today: I cross the damp grass as the warm dusk falls; fireflies burst to life around me in a show of neon light as crickets screech. Fluttering wings carry tiny fruit bats through the air, their forms in dark relief against the pink-gray sky. My feet move carefully, choosing their path between the places where the rotting roots of a long-gone willow have left well-hidden traps in the overgrown grass—the earth likely to collapse over these small, empty pockets. My fists clench, clutching the chains that tether my swing to the sturdy beam of swing set above me; and beside me, Maggie swings, sweeping the earth with her bare feet, her heels carving a deep rut in the soft ground below.

She is my younger sister by two years and twelve days, both of us born in the month of July. We spend the summer days of our childhood clambering over monkey bars, hanging by our knees from the trapeze swing, perching on the swing set's solid wooden beams as we plot out the details of the many universes in which we pass our time. Our feet leave deeper and deeper marks in the ground beneath us, and we swing higher and higher. We have our respective places: on the swings, hers is to the left, mine, the right. At dinner each night, we face each other, her back turned to the door and mine to the windows; in the car, she sits behind the driver's seat, and I behind the passenger's.

The rule holds firm even during the summer of my sophomore year, when we spend ten days traveling with our parents over the winding country roads of Ireland. Our dad steers from the opposite side of the car and drives on the opposite side of the road; likewise we reverse our designated seats, sharing a set of earphones as we take in the rolling green hills that flash past our window, the wild purple rhododendrons that spill over the hillsides and weep over the roads, and the stubborn white sheep that stand stoically along the roadside.

Late into the night on my seventeenth birthday, on a second trip to Ireland two years later, the sounds of Dublin's Temple Bar drift through our open windows and neither Maggie nor I can sleep. Our hotel room is stifflingly warm, and we sprawl on our backs on pushed-together twin beds, a tiny fan on the bedside table whirring through the darkness. We string the headphones between us once again and count the passing minutes. Though I'm born at

9:02 at night, we're now five hours ahead, so I won't really be seventeen until 2:02 a.m.

"Two o'clock." Maggie counts down the passing moments as music courses through the shared headphones and into our ears. "2:01." A wave of muted clicks leaves her iPod as she spins its dial, searching for the next song, and for an instant, the glow from the screen lights up her face. She pauses, considering the screen, and in the fleeting second of inactivity, the backlight switches off and we are plunged into blackness once again.

Her voice floats towards me, disembodied. "We should listen to 'Sixteen Going on Seventeen,'" she says. She presses the play button, and the familiar orchestral notes fill my ear. "2:02," she adds—I'm seventeen. Moments of more than ten years past rush back to me—leaping around the living room furniture as Liesl around her gazebo, singing to myself as I scamper the length of the upstairs landing in a beige silk slip that fits my small form like Liesl's organza dress. In the present darkness, we listen in companionable silence, and I wonder that I should now be too old to sing the song I've so long idolized.

"I'm older than she is," I say quietly.

"Yes," my sister agrees. "Yes, you are."

One recent midsummer's night, I find myself making the still-familiar walk to the now seldom-visited swing set. My small cousin, Sarah, runs ahead, desperate for a chance at the monkey bars, my cousin Erica at my side, her hand clutching tightly to my own. The fireflies spark around us, as ever, and she frets as she spies a lone bat flapping through the shadowy stillness.

"Don't worry," I assure, squeezing her small hand. "They're harmless."

At the swing set, I glimpse, through the dim twilight, the deep marks where our feet once dragged, now completely enveloped by a mossy layer of soft grass. I allow myself a few great swings, arching forward and back, forward and back – but I'm merely dizzy, and my legs are now too long. My sister is not at my side, yet I can see her profile in the golden glow from her two bedroom windows, side-by-side, overlooking the darkened backyard now echoing with the cheerful voices of my two cousins as they scramble up ladders and clamber over monkey bars. And there – just audible below their laughter – there, clear and quiet, are the strains of her music, drifting from her speakers, floating through the screen windows, and sweeping out over the dew-dampened grass to the swing set, where they reach my ears as I move, lightly, gently, back and forth.

## Morning

*by Sarah Kay*

Sometimes in the early morning  
when the light through my eyelids  
is still pink,  
I think I am anywhere but here.

Depending on the day:  
my childhood bed,  
a hotel room in Santa Cruz,  
a sleeping bag, a tent,  
my brother's down comforter,

after I have wandered down the hall  
and found my place on the cooler side  
of the mattress,

I nudge the pillow next to me  
to remind him it is time to get up.

## Three for September

by Lisa Starr

### *i. Birds*

And when, dear one, you are so weary  
you are ready to give up,  
think then of the Canada Geese—  
the way all day  
they shout back at the beating,  
broken heart of the world  
“I am lonely too.  
Keep flying. Keep flying.  
I am lonely too.”

### *ii. Bugs*

These days, even spiders  
have gone lovely and all day long,  
I dodge their delicate webs,  
and just today I walked the labyrinth with dragonflies.  
I'd never noticed how they latch,  
horizontally, to the flowers—  
how they defy gravity,  
how their needle noses  
play the wildflowers like trumpets.

### *iii. Blessings*

Whoever said God is a man was wrong,  
just like whoever said God is a woman.  
Clearly, God is September,  
the apostles are goldenrod,  
and the psalms are the breeze that stirs the field.  
And if, even now, you still question your own belief,  
maybe now is the time to take a look at your one, good life—  
and the way you, too, sometimes shine and sway  
just like those weeds in the meadow, gone mad with yellow.

## A Bull in the Night

by *Michael Gonda*

I was almost finished with high school in Los Angeles when I told my Hungarian grandparents I had been accepted into a university on the East Coast. I said it so that they heard it through their hearing aids the first time and didn't need me to repeat it and repeat it until my grandfather was more upset that the words East and Coast were being used in his home than he was about me moving there. The East Coast was America's first draft. The only proof he needed for that was the winter. The agreement was that I would call them every night to give them "some sign of life." For four years, I have been diligent. I call at 6 p.m. to sound off my report.

Apu, I call my grandfather, wants nothing more than to hear that I am frolicking in my sexual peak in college. In stories from his youth, he makes himself out to be a Hungarian gigolo—mainly, I think, to get me hungry for the same. "There were many, many times when I was dating two, three, four girls at a time," he would say.

In 1942, he was sent to a labor camp after soldiers arrested him in Budapest. Hungary was one of the first countries to crumble under the Nazis and many of the captured Jews were put to work before they were sent to concentration camps. While he was at the labor camp a devoutly Catholic military officer took a liking to him and went to his barrack just before the regiment was sent north to Poland with an offer to save my grandfather's life. "If you convert to Catholicism," the man said from the doorway, "I'll pull you out and let you work as an office clerk in the camp." It was, to my grandfather, a decision that required little thought, though many Jewish people would call it cowardly.

He worked in the labor camp for two years. Every Sunday he attended mass and every Friday he confessed to the priest, all the while planning an escape with two other prisoners. One was a man named Kapos and the other was Alex Vari. Kapos had a gift for imitating signatures. Using the typewriters in the military office, my grandfather created false papers that claimed the three men were members of the Hungarian army, which Kapos then signed as if he were the Catholic military officer. My grandfather's last name was Goldschmied—a mark of Judaism brighter than any yellow star. He chose Laslo Gonda for his false identity, the name of a Christian family from his village. In October 1944, the three men put on stolen uniforms and walked right out the front gates, their false papers ordering them to report to Budapest immediately.

Budapest is a city cut in two by the Danube River—Pest on one side, Buda on the other. My grandfather spent his first month in Pest, renting an apartment in the same building as the Gestapo and selling cigarettes by day to people on the street. By December, the Russians were waging a severe fight on the Buda side and it seemed certain to be the first liberated part of the city—if for no other reason than it was closer to the motherland. He took a ferry over to Buda as soon as he could.

A group of Arrow Cross guards were huddled at the dock when he came off the gangway. They were the Nazi party's most devout followers in Hungary.

"Could you give me a hand with this?" he shouted to them, pointing to a large military-style trunk that he was lugging.

He told them he had just come from the front lines fighting Russia and was looking for a place to stay. "Brother!" they exclaimed, and carried his bag to a mansion perched on a hill overlooking Buda. A wealthy man lived there with his young, beautiful wife and their two children. During the war they rented out the rest of the rooms to guests. When my grandfather approached, cloaked by a band of admiring Arrow Cross guards, he must have made quite an impression.

"Our brother here is looking for a room," one of the guards said to the woman when she came the door. "He needs something nice. He's just come off the front lines."

I have never heard anything about the man of this house, except that he was old and rarely present. Only of the woman who escorted him that afternoon to his room on the top floor.

Shortly after he arrived, their romance began. "It was nothing special," my grandfather says of the whole affair. "She was a beautiful woman. I was a young man. It was natural." That she was married or had children was apparently of no consequence and had no affect on the nature of things between them.

After a few weeks, he discovered there was another guest in the house. A young Jewish man named Brodi was hiding within its walls. Every day, my grandfather sneaked Brodi food after he came home. But he never revealed his identity to him or told Brodi the story of his escape. That was a secret he kept up until after the war and even today, his last name is Gonda.

At 88 his most apparent love is for my grandmother, whom he won't leave in a room without kissing. They met in Budapest two days after she was liberated from Auschwitz and nearly four months after he left the villa in Buda. Her experience in the war was of a completely darker shade. Almost everyone she knew died in Auschwitz. Tears come down her face when she talks of the plumes

of smoke that carried her father, her mother, her sister, and then her brother, high above the camp while she stood on the ground, neck bent and weeping. At 82, the vivid memories of those four years still find her at night.

The day she was to be executed, American soldiers bombarded the camp and liberated her. She was put on a train to Budapest and knocked on the door of distant friends whom she had remembered from childhood. It was all just a matter of luck. Luck that she wasn't killed a day sooner. Luck that those friends were home when she arrived at their door. And luck that my grandfather was sitting in their living room when she walked in, her head shaved, and all of her teeth missing. How they fell in love and fled to Switzerland to marry; how they boarded a ship to Venezuela, started a family, and moved to Los Angeles, is a separate story altogether.

In his own love for women, one of the more comical approaches my grandfather has adopted is deep pity for gay men. It is a carnivore feeling sadness, of all emotions, for an herbivore's diet of leaves. "If they only knew, Michael," he begs.

It did not help my grandfather's sensibilities when my oldest brother, Eli, went over to my grandparent's house wearing crushed velvet shirts with long, flowing hair. The then 80-year-old man was, in a word, confused. It seemed Eli was fishing with all the wrong equipment.

"If you like girls, Eli, you need to let them know," he said.

We were still young and impressionable when my grandfather focused his attention on his three younger grandsons—Nicolas, Jonathan, and me. "Don't keep your eyes closed to the girls," he warned when he dropped me off for my first day of third grade.

To encourage me to write he tells me in Latin, "time is flying, but what is written stays forever." If I've slept in too late, he fattens his neck and deepens to a baritone. "El catorro en la noche, es el bue en la mañana," he says. Then he repeats it in English, convinced that after all these years, it has undoubtedly fallen on deaf ears.

"Do you understand, Michael? A bull at night must be an ox in the morning."

But as for women, his most important lesson of all, he feeds me spoonfuls of stories about the women from his youth. I remember the awe I felt for the man when he told me that, at 13, he was sleeping with a married woman from another village, "fooling around and having fun." It was the stuff of my dreams. Just being with a girl seemed hopelessly out of reach. It wasn't that my eyes were closed, I wanted to tell him. They were as open as I thought necessary. But nobody I liked

was looking back. It became clear that if I were going to convince him I was keeping his legacy alive, my comfort with lying would have to increase.

I started by talking about my best friend, Dylan. I met Dylan the first day of the fifth grade and she is as platonic a friend as I've ever had. But I could spend an entire car ride with my grandfather describing our fabricated days at school, in which Dylan and I would invariably have lunch alone on the yard, blocking out the cacophony of unproductive friendships budding on the blacktop. "We're just friends," I'd say with a bright smile, and he'd shoot me an approving wink, sure I had adopted his coyness along with his skill with women.

In my daily calls from college my grandfather spends time asking about classes but it is stories about girls that get his voice up. Whenever I tell him about a girl I have just seen, he congratulates me and does not wait a breath before urging me to go on and look for the next one. "Don't be steady, Michael, this is for the girls," he says. I wonder what my grandmother thinks sitting next to him as he sermonizes his opinion. He firmly believes it is a girl's duty to be a steady flower, devoted to her bee, while the man goes about pollinating an entire garden. To convince him that I am answering his own call for more philandering, I bring up every single girl I know and let his imagination run wild. My other brother's have decided not to play this game. They tell him they're still looking. "Looking?" he asks. "I don't understand. You are keeping you're eyes closed. Take lessons from Michael. My youngest grandson really gets my theory."

It turns out we both have a gift for projecting identities we want—in his case, the one he needed. Years after the war ended, Alex Vari, one of the men with whom my grandfather escaped the labor camp in Hungary, met a man named Brodi in the United States who had also survived the Holocaust. Brodi told him that he had fled the continent after the war. The two spent hours retelling about their stories of survival. Brodi said that a young couple in Buda hid him in their villa for a fee. Towards the end of the war, a military officer moved into to the home but he never turned him in, Brodi said. Familiar with my grandfather's story, Vari told him he was sure this officer was really Laslo Goldschmied, a Jew from a peasant town in Hungary.

"No," Brodi refused, shaking his head. "I can bet my arm on it. I can smell a Jew with my eyes closed and I promise, this man was no Jew." Then Brodi came a little closer. "Nobody knew it," he said quietly, "but he was always fooling around with the owner's wife. He was a real lucky son of a gun and a hell of a womanizer."

Petting Zoo<sup>1</sup>

by *Laura Brown-Lavoie*

All this time I've been  
yelping the way you would at extinction  
and voices in me said, If you were a man—  
I trespass stupidly. Let be, let be.

The palm and the fingers feeling in the dark are  
one two three four five six seven eight nine ten  
it is such a good shape so vivid  
a rounded sword made of porcelain.

I looked into his eyes  
and stooped and drank a little more  
and washed his face and hands and beheld  
the wet teeth, a problem to be

The mechanism of his jaw  
fresh and crisp with blood.

---

1 Composed of lines from the following poems:  
“The Fish” by Elizabeth Bishop, “Snake” by D.H. Lawrence, “Pheasant” by Sylvia  
Plath, “Coon Song” by A.R. Ammons, “Elephant in the Dark” by Rumi (tr.  
Coleman Barks), “The Heaven of Animals” by James Dickey

Peninsula

*by Emily Sorg*

In the rhythm of yellow lines he is asking if I need to stop to pee  
and even if we've passed the part I still dream of the trails we walked.  
"No," "Thanks," drips down my shirt and pools where I'm bunched,  
passenger seat womb of synthetics and the false syllogism, me to you.  
Because of the weather, Eucharist is sour on empty stomachs, I could've  
told you this when I was three but never trusted my own sense of smell.  
Until the television barked we hung around, dumb and forgotten.  
We still never speak of our forward moving legs.

Buckeye State

*by Eli Schmitt*

The wind through your hair when we stand in the side-yard  
is the same wind as the wind that courses through rickety innards  
of a thousand gutted barns, the same one wind  
that turns the entire Midwest against all things  
good in culture besides buckeye balls.

He had bought the truck for more money than he had  
and as we aimed—for sixteen hours every day—towards California  
we ate the too-sweet orbs  
from a tin given by his aunt Paula,  
who was from Upper Sandusky (where  
he had lived when he was ten, when his parents  
sent him away).

We left Tooele at dusk and hit Reno around four  
thirty. I drove, and spent those hours believing  
that the name of what I was eating referred to a deer's  
eyeball, and discovered months later, from a book,  
I was wrong.

Here the wind is really not anything at all,  
even when it sweeps every tree, touches every fulvous leaf  
and each strand descending from your skull.  
The wind only happens when the leaves move.

I don't have a side-yard anymore, in this apartment, and  
the fear dictates that we don't owe anything to a place,  
just the untimed air that moves through it.

Lessons: What you can, can and can not do

*by Pablo Larios*

0.

**H**elmut this is a reminder for you. You are tired of instruction manuals before you even take a look at them. You never took well to rules, and this is why I am going to spell it all out for you clear and cold as ice.

1. Movement

You can take care of movement in threes, for you can always buffer a form, but you can't knock a triangle's weight out from under it. And if you tried, there would be more triangles, like button mushrooms all flaring up.

And no one will notice you trying anyway. We are not upset at you any longer for that previous infraction. But we do ask that you take a look around, H.

The neighbors have at this point in time — 7:06 PM on August 8, 2009 — all been called to run inside and, in some absurd act of compulsive unison, double-check that the oven isn't on. It is as if everyone on the planet were handed one edge of an enormous parachute, the one that is covering us me and you right now, and then told to walk or, if you can, bicycle to the center, even better. And here we are, swarming around it most casually, though we are actually forced to and each person's progress is being measured and will be put down in numbers and crunched.

More optimistically, there are those non-moments in films in which everyone in the audience, without knowing it, blinks at the same non-time, and still we all expect to be half understood within moments of exiting the theater.

We have been observing you for a long time, Helmut. We are pleased with your progress and are recommending you to the upper division. Take this case in point:

On occasion, you look at your watch when someone spills their glass on the table, and more often than not you do this in unison with a half-stranger, who will at look you and who will mention that something is roasting, roasting, and does it affect *her* gestation; but you don't have any sense of this ever, nor do you care, but you do in fact *notice* this mild-stranger, and in this way all over the world some teams are picked and other non-teams are not picked.

This is a principle of sociology, this oven, the parachute, hell even the spilled glass, though probably not the lady's kid. Or that's at least what they say.

You can come too, you're invited now Helmut.

## 2. Shiva

You can reach into the sentence midway, no one will notice. No one will see you knock quietly, with suspicion, without imagination. You press open the door, come in as if this entire estate were some imaginary pumpkin, with its moist and its hollow and seed, and you can just waft through it.

Most objects take, even more so than humans, to luxury. You know this very well by now. For this is the house. *His* is the one with four doors. His sense of order. Much colder than you remembered. You think of probing the spines of his collection of objects, which hang down like dead fowl, like living calculus from the *voussoir*.

You could have even been born here, Helmut, minus an arm. Would you have preferred this?

You would have then been instructed, say:

- a. The first pair of doors is simply a refraction of the other two, stretched out upside down. Or,
- b. Two of the frames collate the sills, one after another in series and in series and in series, etc., etc.

So with four eyes and four testicles no one will notice you walk in: with your palms like filing cabinets, you can keep tabs in triads, stack up the deaths in triads, tally them up all bonus and iterating, with your share of the shiver.

And you, Helmut, you are the destroyer.

You are the endowed one, having one more chance than anyone: a plastic Shiva with an extra plot on the windowsill.

Paradise Restaurant

*by Xue Di (translated by Hil Anderson and Keith Waldrop)*

Years later, words visible by slant light  
in your garden. A sense of accent, we said  
nothing. Rose leaves unfold peacefully as you grieve  
Between gentlest fingers you hold  
photos not of me  
Years ago I dreamt of brilliant beauty  
and a long-legged roe deer. Inside our eyes  
a whole band plays. The heart  
composes melodies. When hands part  
souls become intimate  
Hearts alone in moonlight and water  
lip seeks lip across the gap between bodies

Years later, we read grace  
deep within the cat's eye

Limericks

by Blossom Kirschenbaum

Blue Jays: Are They Republican?

Noisy blue jays will often collude  
to drive other species away from their food.  
Noisy hoarders, they caucus,  
united and raucous.  
Intelligent. Territorial. Rude.

“Plan: Control wild horses”

*ProJo 8 Oct. 2009*

Environmentalist Ken Salazar  
reports too many wild horses by far;  
so more public land’s an expense  
that makes very good sense  
lest they encroach where we already are.

“5-foot boa on the loose in Fall River” or,

If Reptiles Come, Can the Rescue League Be Far Behind?

*ProJo 10 Oct. 2009*

A boa constrictor, erratic,  
has made his home in a Fall River attic  
and, remaining aloof,  
suns himself on the roof.  
The landlord’s response is dramatic.

Sauropod Stomping Ground, or  
“Take nothing but photographs, leave nothing but footprints”

What in the high Jura Mountains we find  
brings long-necked plant-eating giants to mind;  
but for us it’s too late  
to see their forty-ton weight---  
they left only their footprints behind

“Our genes are about 98 percent identical”

*College Hill Indy, 16 April 2009*

Though they’ll dress, help with chores, kiss goodnight,  
chimpanzees are not human. Not quite.  
They make signs and use tools,  
but are not sent to schools,  
for they’re strong—and they know how to fight.

## Considering Lorenzo

*by Alexandra Regenbogen*

**A**nna Kramer is eating a pastry shaped like a duck. The air is very slow; time is humid. Except for when two cats bolt one after the other around the isolated traffic circle, it is all as quiet as a photograph. Anna and I think about predicting the color of cars driving around the rotary. In the course of our wait, there are none.

After some sluggish time, two travelers slog their way across the empty parking lot from the train they have just gotten off. They approach slowly and deliberately, their suitcase wheels leaving faint trails on the dusty pavement. Exhausted, they come to rest next to us at the bus stop.

Now it is four of us, just as hot, and just as quiet. We all wait for the bus to take us up to the town on the hill. There is nothing else to do.

It isn't too quiet, but Anna Kramer never lets a silence go unsweetened. With a flutter of ludicrous yellow eyelashes, head cocked slightly and mouth brimming with powdered-sugar duck cream, Anna Kramer opens her mouth. Oh! she hums to the two travelers, who are drooped wearily over their luggage. Are y'all waitin' for the bus?

### §

It is her magnetic volubility that leads us straight to Lorenzo on the top of the hill. The crooked-roofed town and all its attractions (pigeon smattered alleys and fanciful gelato) are inarguably in the other direction, steeply down. Anna prefers to go steeply up.

For one, she said earlier, you get the sweating over with in the beginning. And also, she had added wisely, I want to hang out with St. Margherita.

Now, within days of our arrival, we are sweating our way up. Anna Kramer is in pink shorts; I am not. We pay quick respects to the saint mustung away inside of her eponymous church, and, still panting, we indecently unfold ourselves into the plastic chairs at the church's seedy café.

Anna spots the only man around. His name is Lorenzo; he owns the café. By means of introduction, she says something in a voice that matches her shorts. Lorenzo bites down a little on his cigarette and raises an eyebrow.

This evening, the shadows of resident black birds are flying at especially vertiginous angles on the medieval cobblestones. The uneven roofs are communing crookedly. Navigating through waves of German tourists, Anna winks at Luigi, the lazy-eyed wine merchant. Her divining, hopeful eyes target clouds of smoke and the scent of beer at the Lion's Well and within seconds, she is ensconced in the middle of the bar. She lets her Rapunzel-yellow braid brush against Lorenzo's cheek, flirtatiously near his burning cigarette.

She whispers to him; I watch him. His husky, hairy compatriots speak no English. They exhale thickly, overcast.

When Anna's sweet-somethings are muffled by the rim of her glass, Lorenzo speaks.

What is it you do, he says.

I am studying to be a therapist, I answer.

I do not tell my shit to anybody, he says, and the conversation is over.

§

What is it, Anna, I exhale, focusing mildly on where my sandals are falling as I hurl myself up the mountain. Is it the ornamental stye in his left eye? Her braid like nautical rope in front of me is unresponsive. His tidy beer-belly? A rock slips under my feet, a warning. The cigarettes decorating his face, his yellow teeth, his charming distaste for shampoo?

Anna Kramer is eating small chocolate hippos as she climbs.

He said I'm in the family now, she returns. He told me he likes Bisquick and his ex-wife's name is Anne. He said (and now her phosphorescent eyes radiate), that I should look to him as my father. I'm in the family now.

The steps to St. Margherita are nearly vertical. The town in the valley below is especially small. The chocolate hippos are gone. It is going to be a hot day.

§

Consider the photos, all lined up: Anna and Lorenzo buying beers for each other at the Lion's Well. Anna using patchwork Italian and low-cropped shirts to tease smiles from Lorenzo's posse. Lorenzo offering Anna cigarettes. Anna listening to stories about Anne. Lorenzo with morose smirks feigning interest in her semi-sweet drawl. I am in some of these pictures; I am not in others.

Turn so that your face is in the light, she orders, and plays with the exposure on her camera. I turn, with my hands in the pockets of my shorts. I have never been photographed for a portrait before.

I ran into Luigi the wine guy at the Lion's Well last night, she says, squatting on her feet with her lens pointed up. Angle your chin left.

I turn my chin left, and wonder what to do with my hands.

We are in front of St. Margherita, around a corner from Lorenzo's cafe.

Right there, Anna Kramer, photographer, announces. Luigi said that Lorenzo is wanted for murder.

My chin is angled left, and I feel prickled dread.

What do I do with my hands, I ask.

She ignores me, and the shutter clicks before her knees do as she stands.

My hands are sweating in my pockets.

A murderer, I murmur.

Turn your gaze over the precipice, she orders. Good. Good. The shutter clicks quickly, but slower than my pulse.

Now, step out of the light, she says, and with a toss of the braid, sweetly; Look at me like I'm your father.

§

Anna and Lorenzo continue to share beers at the Lion's Well. Passersby still catch Lorenzo's more than occasional and questionably accidental, "Shut up Anne!" echoing from the bar. I am no longer in any of these pictures. I stay away from the top of the mountain. I imagine Anna Kramer's body on the news: student artist missing in Italy. Rocks overturned, rivers dredged, mountains scaled, found only by a Catholic years later near St. Margherita. Another body festering familiarly in the Saint's tiny reliquary.

§

We two are painting a landscape on top of the hill, a pallet between us, a quaint villa in front. I have selected this house out of many – the blue chair out front with herniated innards makes a striking composition. A wedding is nearby, and we can hear the uneven clicking of urban stilettos on hilly terrain. It is uncomfortable; we are sweating while trying to contend with the irreverent ants that continue to lodge themselves in our oil paint.

The front door of the villa opens, and I envision the hobbled-through conversation with yet another strange man that will undoubtedly proceed. But it

is Lorenzo in front of me. For the first time in weeks, I see him: his legendary cigarette, his celebrated sty. He removes the cigarette from his mouth, holds it over his dilapidated blue chair. A fat, lazy dog idles beside his feet. My blood pressure rises.

Anne. What are you doing at my house, he says.

Paintin', she coos.

She is unruffled, and swills her brush in the turpentine. I picture myself chained to a wall in this quaint villa's basement.

Anna and Lorenzo converse; I do not listen, but rather breathe slowly and pack up our paint brushes to make a speedy exit.

I look down to grab the pallet. The pallet is gone. It is safely secured underneath the belly of the fat, lazy dog. When the dog breathes, the oil paint makes bog sounds.

Shit, Anne, Lorenzo says.

§

I see Anna Kramer less and less. It is not intentional. I find that I prefer painting burgeoning, busy urban landscapes.

§

Seemingly without warning, it is our final night. Anna wants to say goodbye to Lorenzo, but not alone. She is not dead yet; neither am I. Capitulating, I follow her.

The church looks lonely in the seeping dusk without its tour buses of senescent Catholics. We wait for Lorenzo beside his vacant café'. A garrulous German couple snaps photos of the vista, commenting on the view with what seems like mixed joy and aggression. Their son, in a frenzy of boredom, gallops circles around the parking lot.

The exhausted zip of a Vespa rises from the valley below, steadily increasing in gusto. Finally its climb is over and its motor ticks to rest. A body disembarks and plucks a tiny helmeted thing from in front of it.

It is Lorenzo and a small person in an implausibly little helmet, who is making shy figure-eights between his knees.

It is time for you to meet my woman, he snarls.

He cups his fatherly hand around his daughter's whole skull.

The rest of the night, I consider Lorenzo. He fetches the tiny one Coke from his café, and accompanies her to its bathroom at twenty-minute intervals. In between cigarettes, he feeds her little biscotti, and once, lip curling, he sings

with her a gruff duet concerning billy-goats.

Anna Kramer doesn't speak much. We are about to leave; she tells him she will send him Bisquick from the States.

We are five or six steep steps down the hill when we hear the German couple's little boy stop his parking lot laps to practice Italian for Lorenzo's daughter. He shouts Ciao, Bambino! in her direction. Bambino, Lorenzo roars, and his words hurtle across the parking lot, butting against the walls of the church. Then: scampering, stillness, and the sound of a cigarette hissing under foot. Below me, Anna Kramer's blond braid hangs in silent descent.

## How to Pronounce Appalachia

*by Emma Berry*

I did not correct the long vowel,  
the stretched corners of his lips,  
his empire of teeth. He said “lay”  
and I did. The sound rose into  
his mouth and hung there, swinging.  
But I know it is true what they say  
about eaves, that they frame the rain,  
my grandfather laying cedar upon cedar  
to keep the walls dry. Now the earth sucks  
stones into muddy sockets and houses  
burn like forests do, for breathing,  
and claim their own whale-like bones.

He has never been close enough to a mountain  
to find its hollow spaces, where moss dampens  
the echoing cicadas. They never travel farther  
than the next crevasse over, to sweat off  
the amber of their bodies. They mark time  
with their own, slow cycle and around them  
the earth folds and unfolds like velvet, creasing.

And I know what I should have told him:  
It has a latch in it. Say it rusted shut,  
say it red-brown and screeching.  
Say it strung with catgut, strum and  
and scratch and reel. Let your heels  
click syllables on the wood floors  
and do not let your land grow over.  
Dig six inches into clay and say it like that,  
like once you cared to live here,  
like once I did.

Hobbled

*by Lisa Starr*

Years from now, I wonder if I'll be able to recognize the irony of any of it, like how just when you had almost begun to accept my leaving, I ruptured my Achilles playing tennis with you, which was one of the only ways we knew how to manage time, and summer and Saturdays, given this fact of my leaving.

Years from now, when I think of how ready I was to go—to walk, run, fly, even swim, if I had to, away from the weariness of what our love had become, I hope I will remember how, when the time came, the only way to leave was slowly and the only way to walk was to hobble, one wavering, broken, brave new footstep at a time.





## Contributors

† **Xue Di** was born in Beijing in 1957. He is the author of three volumes of collected works and one book of criticism on contemporary Chinese poetry in Chinese. In English translation, he has published four full length books, *Zone*, *Another Kind of Tenderness*, *An Ordinary Day* and *Heart into Soil*, and four chapbooks, *Forgive*, *Cat's Eye in a Splintered Mirror*, *Circumstances* and *Flames*. A new book, *Across Borders*, is forthcoming in 2009 from Green Integer Press. His work has appeared in numerous American journals and anthologies and has been translated into English, French, German, Dutch, Spanish, and Japanese.

After the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, he was a fellow in Brown University's Freedom to Write Program, and is now a visiting scholar in Brown's English Department. Xue Di is a two-time recipient of the Hellman/Hammett Award, sponsored by Human Rights Watch, and a recipient of the Lannan Foundation Fellowship.

[The poem "Arc" first appeared in *No: A Journal of the Arts*, Iss. 3.]

† **Lisa Starr**, Rhode Island's Poet Laureate, has twice received the RI Fellowship for Poetry. As Poet Laureate, Starr organizes writing circles among student and elderly communities—as well as in hospitals, homeless shelters, prisons, and agencies for children and adults with severe mental and physical disabilities—around the state.

In April of 2009 Starr assembled more than a dozen US State Poets Laureate in Rhode Island for "Poetry for Hope," a series of readings, workshops, and public forums.

Starr's third collection of poems, *MadWithYellow*, was published in September, 2008. She is the author of two other books: *This Place Here* (2001) and *Days of Dogs and Driftwood* (1993). In 2003 she founded the Block Island Poetry Project, a nationally acclaimed celebration of arts and humanity, which she continues to direct.

An innkeeper by necessity, Starr owns and operates the Hygeia House, a 10-room inn on Block Island. The brightest lights of her life are her two children, Orrin (12) and Millie (11) and her dog, Brother. When time permits, she writes her heart out.

† Native New Yorker **Blossom S. Kirschenbaum** (M.A. 1972, Ph.D. 1976) translated the collection of poems *Fables from Trastevere* (Pourboire, 1976) from

the romanesco of Trilussa (Carlo Alberto Salustri, 1871-1950) and this past year has translated the *Alfabestiaro* (LietoColle, 2009) by contemporary Italian poet Antonello Borra (Brown M.A. 1993, Ph.D. 1998), from which the two perform dual-language readings in anticipation of an American edition.

In her Pembroke Club address on 10 November 2009 she noted other published translations of long and short fiction (including two stories by Stefano Benni) and went on to speak about Camilla Trinchieri and Mary Caponegro (Brown M.A., 1983), subjects of her essays in the anthology *American Woman Italian Style*, forthcoming from Fordham University Press. Seven limericks were posted by *The New York Times* on 5 March 2009; the *Providence Journal* reprinted another one that won a prize from the Rochambeau Library the previous year. Before the limericks, she wrote prize-winning double dactyls.

**Rachel Z. Arndt** '10 studies creative writing and Spanish. She enjoys bacon, series commas, and the Great Lakes.

**Emma Berry** '11 is majoring in Comparative Literature and Hispanic Studies. She loves translating 20th century poets and hates the weather in New England.

**Laura Brown-Lavoie**, in the class of 2010.5, is an undergraduate in the Literary Arts Program. She thinks other poets say it best.

**Kate Doyle** '12 is studying English Literature as a Brown University undergraduate. She lives in Westport, Connecticut.

**Michael Gonda**, a resident of Los Angeles, is graduating in December 2009 with a concentration in English. He has spent the last four years trying to figure out where everybody loves Raymond.

**Sarah Kay** '10 is a NYC-based poet whose work has taken her uptown, downtown, and out of town. Her work is published or forthcoming in *Foundling Review*, *Damselfly Press*, and *Decomp Magazine*, among others. Sarah is the Founder and Director of Project V.O.I.C.E., which promotes creative self-expression among high school and college students through writing and Spoken Word workshops. For more information please see [project-voice.net](http://project-voice.net).

**Pablo Larios** '10.5 is an undergraduate and Comparative Literature concentrator, currently abroad in Berlin.

**Alexandra Regenbogen** graduated from Brown University with a degree in Literary Arts in May 2009. She's currently still in Providence and enrolled at the Warren Alpert Medical School where she intends to pursue Psychiatry and to continue writing.

**Eli Schmitt** was born and raised in central Massachusetts but has spent the past two years living in California, Wisconsin, and Oregon. He is currently a junior at Brown, studying English and economics.

**Emily Sorg** '10 is an English concentrator, with a focus in non-fiction writing, from Port Washington, NY. She is a co-editor of *The Catalyst*, Brown's interdisciplinary literary magazine, and will be attending medical school in the future—but not until she has learned to chop wood.

† - indicates a notable contributor  
\* - indicates a repeat contributor