

*contents*

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Brandon Downing / Daniel Hales / Chris McCreary interviews Michael Magee /  
Jessica Smith / Mark Wallace / Carol Mirakove

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editors:

Chris McCreary

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Elizabeth Robinson

**Regard**

1.

Something falls from the heavens, the sky, the cloudburst itself  
and falls  
and crimps, reconfigures

It lands on the hat  
of a passerby, a label:  
a nametag

Arbitrary like all the designations  
that are received from above  
or elsewhere

The name of this person come unbidden  
to hobble free passage

as in the case of the nutcracker  
who walked backward in good faith

and stumbled on vermin,

progress and fine form disfigured

No one recalled his given, the name a lover  
once whispered in his ear

He was purchased as an object:  
all progress is sacrifice

What stranger tries gamely to greet him as familiar

2.

Though little do the sleepers of the world — this city — know it,  
those skeptical parents of life,

forsakers of recognition

This person stands on solid ground, but walks as if  
on a tightrope

Why is balance like a nametag, teetering thready,

intent on sticking to its apparition

Hunchback or prince  
juggles appellations

while a child nearby earnestly explains

that in dreams the fall is exciting  
and does not end in injury

3.

Child in the deserted arcade

Away the benighted pedestrian

To drop the juggled balls  
is to make a decision from on high

and the impact of the discarded balls  
on the ground laminates identity

further

A smart child,

insists, "But that person disappeared"

And who walks on, shrugging,  
good-bye to the invisible,  
its spell broken

inside the transformations of mobility  
handsome and still hunchbacked

Smart,  
wise with gravity,  
sincerely absent, extended like a old friend's hand

4.

So perturbs what should have ended already

Things sent down seep  
from one conclusion to the next

A purgatory or so lower  
another child

looks up, goggling at the supposed sky

A bird swoops down, maternal,  
and plants a worm in her mouth

Above, he offends his hosts by spitting in disgust

Why he recedes to the membranous floor  
that she pokes through

because salvation is simply an exchange of names

Sherry Brennan

**Three**

Fog among  
branches, placid and silently lifted among fog,  
the grey fog, though not perhaps light  
and it is not light, dawn later now and winter  
approaching. Which salmon to generate would recede.  
Gravelled bed of stream to compose through air  
as freedom to compose through air.  
Light probable. I am aware of it,  
quietly. I am aware of it falling  
into the room with patience, with difficulty  
in the hearing. Slow unremarkable working of patience  
dropping like rain into the lake to be water  
indistinguishable. Memory of wind and water.  
So did they follow truth—  
in land, in quarries, train lines, among trees  
among hills and cows standing in their stalls  
breath frozen blowing in front of them hanging  
and stamping a hoof impatiently—  
To have just arrived.  
To have been hammered down the moon.  
To say that one would stay  
here, stone and water placed on water—  
home. People sounds and sea sounds,  
remarkable, and through the window, sea,  
again— sea and people on the stairs voices,  
sea voices and sound voices of these  
and gulls, wheeling— dishes being washed  
in the sound of water and waters' voices,  
lapping, whispered. And on this island, peace.  
Standing there, or rather leaning  
having just met, in the glad eyes a question,  
“Why do you use the adjective avant-garde  
for your poetry?” This is the question. He before

whom I am not worthy to tie his shoe-latches. Rain  
evident on the dark road, the ridge a silhouette  
behind turning cars, their headlights emerging  
out of the not yet light greyness of early morning.  
Towards in the quiet light before dawn,  
trembling and then still. A lady asks me  
have I seen the moon? I have not and wonder  
at her blue nylon padded jacket and babushka.  
A bell. A horn on the street. The muffled sound  
of traffic breaking over the courtyard  
wall, in waves. She turns me  
to see the moon slowly  
floating free, a mechanism and spirit. And this  
machine of desire between us, where is it  
fed, from what strange fire? Venus  
following down the sun, descent in that light of dusk fall.  
Venus yet gathering dark. Jupiter and Saturn  
rising on the eastern horizon above Aldebaran,  
that procession of planets high overhead  
among wheeled stars circling, that path  
of planets along the ecliptic  
mid star paving moss-grown foot-trod  
black path of planets arc'd, fiery.  
Fury. With hope and with fear. To a new place.  
Standing over quarry, hawk quarry, the pleasure  
of wind and sun on rock, machines and men  
in its depths, grinding and crushing rock  
from ground. Green wood forced into rock  
to split it with great sledgehammers driven  
into rock-drilled rock, blow by blow, down  
into rock heart the green wood, then water  
into wood water-soaked. That green wood place  
splits, stranger driven, water driven wood  
driven rock. Limestone quarried block by block,  
limestone and beautiful island in the sea  
among sea waters. And they with block

and tackle hauled it up from among rock,  
carried down in wagons to the ships,  
to the ship-side land, for market. Selling  
land from among land, gradually, hesitantly  
carved deeper into the face of the island  
rock to where water tables, blue as those eyes  
with which you looked into me, stranger,  
and more blue yet, among sun and limestone,  
fierce with sun in the landscape and so you do  
arrive and go, arrive and go. Someone passes  
by in a tan jacket, young, carrying milk.  
With a one-way monument in the square  
and that passing traffic circling and  
returning. Here and there are small birds  
and many men and women passing forms. One  
with a gentle face passes. He is not  
one of the powerful. I have seen the eyes  
of the powerful, hawk eyes. One who is young  
passes, carrying a jug of milk. He does not  
yet know. But this remote body, rocking  
in the rocking chair, with its feet on  
the radiator, here late fall cold seeping  
in around the windows, this body cannot  
tell by what air or presentiment  
you arrive here tonight, to comfort me  
in mind. So I sit yet awhile rocking,  
looking at the quiet town, wondering  
by what means you find me here. Your voice  
like the sound of water under water  
ceaseless as the tide and with  
small sea beings silently floating in amongst  
the carefully arranged patterns in sand,  
surges in and quietly disarranges,  
arranges, rearranges— so it does move  
as I do not. So passing cars push wraiths  
of snow across the dull road. Ply over ply

oak moon blue of sun and snow on sky  
mountain the color of snow on snow  
washed place of snow and machines paper  
tongue so that my hands touch now snow  
among roofs a machine to break it or your  
hands, still? Neither hope, neither fear but fog  
along the mountain in the morning, coming in  
with rain and damp cold, dropping leaves.  
The rain yellow puddled in leaves drift  
and bound, drift and bound. The mists  
of cormorants, crooked, yellow-beaked. Blue heron  
sky still heron grey and lowering, blowing  
from the north, from Middle Island, and the light of gulls  
in water. Flame. Water. Salt. To the remote. Sounds  
again. Your eyes, hungrily. To remember  
the day, today, and that day and them standing  
with fog, rain and in rain, wet. Of last light  
falling across and under trees, and against  
clouds and failing. Of cormorants stretched out,  
beating a path against the wind or crosswise  
to it, along wave tops, under wind and above  
waves, south and to the sea.

Terrence Chiusano

**backfill: rondo**

*...because from this distance figure a.) spread us nearby objects for the more remote...appendix d.) snapshot document-work disputes official nap and dimension...esplanade e.) that really extends itself to underwrite principle outskirts...traffic circuits...universal grammar of*

1. interstice...which might've blushed us colors, variations in the absolute dye-lot—
2. we're told not to live with, blushing us colors—orange perhaps, or blue is a bitter
3. “this and that's” blushing us colors—orange perhaps, or blue is a bitter ribbon • “alas,

1. orange perhaps, or blue is a bitter wash • “alas, I rose like a petal” • in light of every
2. wish • “alas, I rose like a lilac” • in between everything *comes to* already swung, as if
3. I blue like a bell” • as if to STOP is to imagine and project objects *in situ, in perspective,*

1. indoor and set-piece, very important we achieve \$30,000 clear skies: to say there's no
2. the Virgin at Fatima, Lourdes, Gaudalupe, San Miguel were guy-wired from boom- or
3. *round-off* in lieu of *place*, in place of joining *with* them, to be shared, entering as

1. corruption into story from basis or tier, that the practice of interpreting views in
2. yard-arm...everyone's *not* there, watching, which is...uh...*in-ter-es-ting*...diasporic
3. a collection of edgeless flats *that* question of framing (against), movement (around),

1. a series of fading views pretends to compile a final holographic picture / topographic
2. phase-shift, but different: flat open square dramatic desolate austere, straight-lipped
3. always reorganizes against a relativistically “stable” ground, permits whereabouts,

1. survey—taken together maybe spread me yours or I'll spread you mine or *what*, another
2. and monastic VS. somnolent, despondent backwards kid's stares and bratty glares
3. time, presence, posture, showcase; entering with them rigidities of floreation / floreations

1. what other, *what* may be the fault's ours or the thing's unavoidable—(habitation is
2. and *un*wellwishing; opposed to simply *vacant*, the atmosphere's a monied and corrupt
3. of rigidity, *that* problem of scaling and identity, that exhaustion, expulsion (that

1. vacation hung around 'till the end, affixed/appended)—engineered momentum writes
2. collection-plate of effects, erupt to stem from what's next under scrutiny, like standing
3. *contaminatio* reaches a point where you can't possibly send the letter—the *why* bit

1. all that fountains over mere illustration, in each a measure: how twilight unwraps
2. on a hillside surrounded by miniature collectibles on consignment—mistaking *nearby*
3. of “story” to basis or tier) • as if to STOP is to die where it's heated, dry, understandable

1. a room in crushed tones, in coves of rhythm; how parables of anchor and cable time my
2. for *more distant*, of a different *sort*: rag on a bush thirty yards out for a dog on a hill
3. • when all elses equal “thems” need a way to *proceed*—I allow maybe not *belief* or

1. dream of the surf; that time still has time at its other end, is a dog asleep in the grass;
2. three-hundred; Rotary for Moose Lodge; filling-station for weedy baseball-lot; used-
3. *certainty* but *admission*, what other advantage is there: screened doorway out

1. that summer: slick whitish mooncast, highway erotica; that “stairwell” leads past:
2. car garage for town saloons; crumpled waxpaper bills of lading homeless under
3. the screened back and sides of, rough granite banister caps backyard verandah—

1. four directions only on first or last of three in each series of GRAND ENTRANCES, or six
2. the loading dock use to keep tobacco dry in the rainy season for styrofoam coffee-cup,
3. notches hammered-in for hidden sprinklers • “you curse foolishness for coming?”—

1. to a final one—foyer after foyer after foyer, apparatus of apertures *that* who/what *at*
2. cake wrapper, bottle-cap, short deck of discarded playing-cards collecting in the
3. no, for assenting / expecting, as if *process* didn’t confirm the methodology at work

1. who/what *through* who/what kicks the gong around (in sing-song) • so, standing at
2. culvert • some not agreeing at key joints everywhere after first letter—*spell some-*
3. within it; for allowing “*back in*” and “*total*” and “*darkness*” and “*echo-outline; alas,*

1. first landing: small octagonal window—vintage man-of-war’s window junked from
2. *thing* isn’t something you do something *with*, like a hose, you do something *to*: stop
3. ‘*the sea*’ is not a sea” and “*unrepeatable and characteristic*” and “*where copy and*

1. purser’s or post-master’s billet, re-glazed with cheap blue bottle-glass, air-bubbles
2. it, chop it numbered 1 through...equal or not, 26A ships backward up to piece 1Z,
3. *atlas be*” and “*rumor and hint and whisper and his*” and “*kiss any bliss but this...*

1. like creeper-grown trellis caught with flash-bulb—recalling, *out there*, alone, a stroll:
2. then spell something • that’s not aping anything—photographically it’s a *tough burn*,
3. *any bliss but this...*” • we know the tryst: “little cricket francis: is soft and lives in

1. imagined endless untold machine-rows, like capstans stowed below summer-mown lawn
2. anomalies of excess, default, duplicity, architecture without a “sparrow-in-the-house
3. a warm hole with blue flowers—hear the tick-tick cricket—how big is cricket—cricket

1. or hitched to reverse of house, horizon or dawn (always drawn to tow it *back*, *behind*,
2. -kind-of-music-to-paint” buildings, that lamppost front of building, inside-corners
3. is eating his good supper—s-s-s-shh!—cricket is sleeping...” • we know: stretch |

1. *go* and *go back*, imagining everything flat as a scrim, well-balanced, lit from within)—
2. and windowsills...lights off or something whose ranges depend more on density than
3. shoulders serve—stretch | lines | shoulders serve—block and touch • we know: bone-

1. and stopped to stand, just so, on the lawn, under the window • slow unrolls, we know
2. isolable tiers for a working systemcore • about states of forestating • we know
3. fish know every saltgreen ocean, remember the broken dog bleeding in the stream—

1. the tone: rusted threshers for sale by ditchside, long straight slide into Disappointment
2. the score: WAX 134 • we know: PRIORITY-MAIL—1/6<sup>TH</sup> PLAIN • we know: selling
3. after this, perhaps you kill • we know: the name says it all • we know: that for any

1. Valley and well...hell, we know: that there's mainly *historical*, you get to fighting over
2. is a theatre of "progress" and "exit only" • we know: indifference • we know: washes,
3. appearance *thus and so product*, like thing which moved senses produced concentrated

1. what happened or didn't • we know: it's a brief disrupted conversation, that woman...
2. tablelands, mesas, bluffs, buttes, gulches, narrow defiles and passes, frightening
3. succession...or, after: it all comes down to one 3 writing to 1, a well-defined line,

1. double stainless doorsill...you said...I...he walks away because of wind, cicadas, busy
2. and religious regularities of striation and coloration of rock formations • we know:
3. a place for everything...

1. highway • we know: how stars might've been oppressively present • we know: at
2. polyphonous • we know: repetitious • we know: "francis: went to market 'round
- 3.

1. or on • we know: Reno • we know: (stoneblue desert sky) and (pebble beach bleach
2. the bend (vodka, roast-beef, toilet-paper)—come join—later we make bread, fuck
- 3.

1. and sandpaper) • we know: house • we know: next-in-thread | next response | previous
2. like dogs” • we know: discussion, disputation, the use of sophistical, hypothetical
- 3.

1. upward | next thread • we know: next-in-thread | next upward | previous response |
2. and the like arguments • we know: inconsistency • we know: how we discover
- 3.

1. next thread • we know: “francis: I send it to you now in the midst, to also hear
2. the duty of life from names • we know: signposting • we know: *summary*: go up to
- 3.


1. [what]—believe it itching there at the back of my neck” • we know: at or on • we
2. table of contents | go up to table of contents | go up to table of contents • we know:
- 3.


1. know: Reno • we know: there’s been a discrepancy
2. *summary*: go up to table of contents | go up to table of contents | go up to table of
- 3.


- 1.
2. contents • we know: everything as everything’s everything—careful, sympathy *for*
- 3.


- 1.
2. or overidentification *with* is known as “error of halo,” even so, in the end, seems there’s
- 3.


- 1.
2. always something to be said for a thing with no painterly relief sense of *fore- back-* or
- 3.


- 1.
2. *middle-bend*, opposite of contracts in which key terms are GROUND issued *in extract*,
- 3.


- 1.
2. an easily predictable lawfulness proposed in certain predictable “this and that” posed
- 3.


- 1.
2. as un-sleeved unfoldings we’re told not to explain—
- 3.

*...extends from pulled o.) official document...table p.) posed as snapshots of remote objects for ones nearby...distance that from a reel of stills chafed in somewhere, closer—at foot of grand-staircase, no less interval...*

Mark Salerno

**Compulsive**

*for Kevin Opstedal*

The journeys were long the farther I got  
as I had thought but not as I had wanted.  
Always the afternoon light just sat there  
beguilingly so finally I stopped worrying.  
The lost worlds we cannot forget the  
broken bits we simply will not let alone.  
Everywhere I went with my brief case  
I was reminded of you. Bolsa Chica. Seal  
Beach. Temecula. A like-minded “egyptologie”  
of our undoing. Never figuring anything out  
just making room for more. K. got that  
right. Lucky him. The rest of us will  
always only be his contrail or vapor cloud.  
Water in a kind of agitated state.

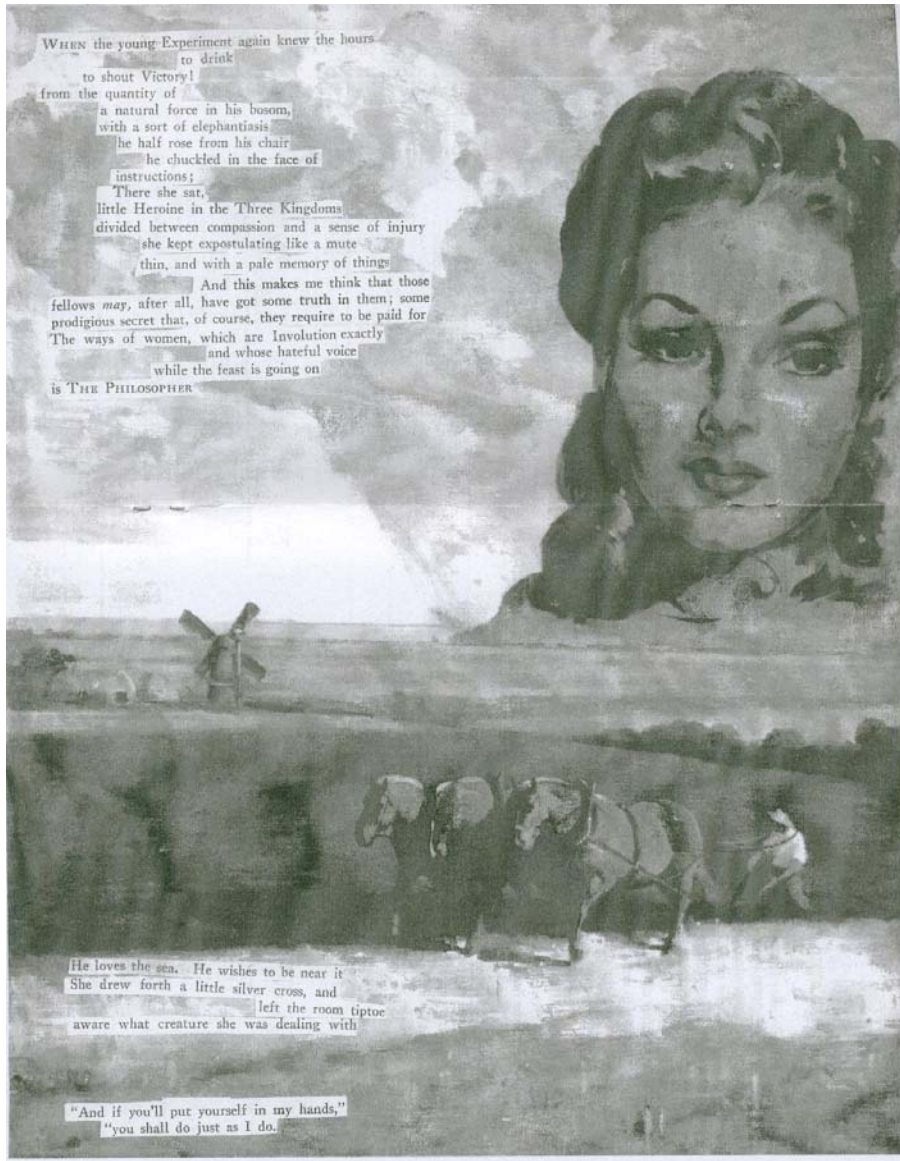
## Asked

The green before silence the light fallen  
lightly and some blue mixed with daylight  
this all happened twenty years ago in the  
real history of consciousness we had some  
fun with our shriek values and mad vodka  
stripped now of it all except the picture  
to give silky and come away driven that's  
your broken left knee doing the talking in  
lieu of going to church beside the freeway  
O bunky Picasso's favorite song was  
Twenty Flight Rock so shoot me already  
it's bobolink day here it's the power of  
wanting as when a connoisseur of default is  
born into significance or some sort of a jam.

## Twenty-Five or -Six to Four

Esemplastic was one ungulate was one incogitant  
only because I wanted to know the names and she  
was the day-to-day mob rule of her vocabulary  
twenty years ago the sunlight scouring the white  
everything comes back except the flint in her  
the all impatient etc beating inside her voice  
ultimately to be thought of as a blocking principle  
a repetition compulsion an extremely bad hair day  
O mirror in the sky what is this the flimflam of  
memory again another cheap suit shoulders padded  
and everywhere I went the raveled sleeve of care  
until the high volume distortion bandied about  
with my brief case and my kinsman and this nattering  
sense like the fallen wonder of small town parades.

Brandon Downing  
*from* Dog & Horsey Pictures



Daniel Hales

## **Sideways Evolutionaries**

As stated before, Stan never went anywhere without lucky cilantro leaf. Hear him now perpetuate rural mythology about The Curator God and how we rebelled, the while wishing he'd exhibit us. Divergenists, until the ancillary Diversionists did a cut and paste revision of our manifesto. For a tiny era we served Corsair Sanglot, but we smashed the glass of every last reliquary when we left.

Forward to the summer of invincible earwigs. Opening band for a corpse unhappy about being exhumed. In unison, spilled beers before our amps and a decent job making it look intentional through all manner of insecure horseplay. Then: the totally unforeseen and long awaited.

The jaded say she sought a scapegoat to anoint. The vain claim a remote precipice, intending to carry on century's long affair with herself. Siddhartha Vicious' bassist said he knew her before the Clone Wars, but I won't repeat what that asshole said.

Her voice of bard owl or cotton hammock in unobstructed sun. Our glass harmonicist returned from retreat at the bottom of the Quabbin. Slowly the surface changes. Slowly as to be untiring eyes. And many later, the wings.

## **Torch of the Mystics**

Part of the funeral home's package deal. The center stalk stole what light a basement window allows. Drank the shower's mist, grew to tall, red-edged sheath, while perimeter stalks shrank to brittle brown. Pick them away, sit it in stronger light.

After Thanksgiving I left the wishbone beside his name. The way home I followed, at a respectful distance, sparks from a dragging tailpipe.

## **Some Heavy Lifting Required**

After drowning humidity all day, at last, some air you can breathe in. Some days lifting your head's a chore. But just as de-escalation is the art of behavioral interventionists and elevator repair the preferred temp job of Sisyphus and insomnia's in the kitchen stirring up the ingredients of tonight's tempest

I left the Underwood in front of the window to see what the wind typed. Went outside to write under a smut kiosk's short sloping roof, sheltered from rain till the owner came to undo the lock and open it. Now I want along the outer edge of awnings, deliberate rain dripping down on my graying goatee.

A goalie looming between posts. Offense is so good, though, that he passes the game hovering, tensing — then relaxing as the ball swoops back across the field. After a while he realizes each traffic light imprisons a dryad who's refused eviction from her tree and screams: "the rivers of Utopia become the Totalitarian state's sewers!" But the rest screamed for another reason.

## Walking & Talking:

**Chris McCreary interviews Michael Magee about his *Morning Constitutional***

Spencer Books/Handwritten Press, 2001, \$10.95

*Chris McCreary:* I was wondering if you could just talk a bit about how the full-length book version of *Morning Constitutional* evolved out of the long chapbook of the same title. I'm always interested in what decisions poets make when sequencing manuscripts, for example.

And of course I want to hear about the title poem. How did you conceive of this trek around the city? Did you plot it out before you wrote it, or did it fall into place from scraps in a notebook?

*Michael Magee:* Well, as far as the chapbook goes, Kristen Gallagher asked me if I wanted to do one for Handwritten Press in 1998 (I think). She had seen most of my poems (we were both part of a group sharing work very informally over a Penn listserv called "hubverse" and in person, which included Louis Cabri, Matt Hart, Jessica Chiu, Mytili Jagannathan, Kerry Sherin (off top o' head). I had just finished this long poem "Morning Constitutional" (more on that in a minute) and it seemed to crystalize the rest of the work, and the chapbook was born. Kristen had this vision of it as an old spiral-bound school book — like what you'd practice penmanship in or something — and I wanted it to be a square, like O'Hara's *Selected* and Harryette Mullen's *Muse & Drudge*.

But maybe this isn't all that interesting — as far as the poems go, they're more stylistically consistent than the book-book. They're almost all in a sort of polyphonic lyric vein — short lines which play with homophones on the level of the phrase. In the book-book I've added a series of poems in a different manner — what I guess might be called in the simplest terms absurdist narratives. I gloss these poems with an epigraph from Carla Harryman: "This is not logic but a language of logic used to other ends. Just as 'I' might be used, as well, to other ends." So, we're talking about poems like "The Short Story of Her Life," "Poem Beginning with a Line of O'Hara's," "Cowboy Poetry," "Death and Circles," etc. ("The Red Coats are Coming" would be a more ecstatic version of same.) They're mythologies or folktales — the speaker of these poems is more stable but the voice is undercut by the unlikelihood of the events being narrated. I think of them as somehow both farcical and dead serious. Both kinds of poems (and keep in mind I'm simplifying a great deal to create these two categories) were written contemporaneously. And knowing I had a little more room, I figured out a way to integrate them into the chapbook poems. I noticed, for instance, thematic connections that might be put in relief.

There was some revision as well — the most obvious example being that I integrated the chapbook poem “Phila. Transit” (which had been written on its own and published in *6ix*) into the poem “Morning Constitutional” as section 9. This was suggested to me by Matt Hart. The poem is based on a walk from my apartment towards Independence Hall and then out and around into the Kensington area of North Philly. The idea was conceived in very general terms ahead of time. My apartment, Independence Hall. That was it. I was reading Franklin assiduously at the time and so I went hunting for things Franklinian, and it soon became obvious to me that the walk should include Kensington, where I was volunteering at the North Philadelphia Needle Exchange (my wife ran the medivan there on Saturday mornings). After that I just walked the walk and talked the talk so to speak. I’d just trek around whenever I had a chance and when I saw something interesting I’d sit down and write it.

(Wait a minute, backtrack: you know how you have an idea for a poem but no words to begin, and then something happens that gives you those few catalyzing words? That happened — I witnessed a car accident outside my window between a luxury car and a Chrysler minivan, a very flumoxed guy started yelling at the mom driving the minivan and, if I’m remembering right, an African-American man came out of the laundromat to chill everybody out. I wrote down a few lines and took a couple photographs. So the poem began with a serious act of rubbernecking!)

Okay, where was I? I’d just sit down in a place (like next to the little grave yard of section 3 or on a bench in Washington Sq. Park) and write. There was revision but a lot of that was done right there too — I mean, I’d spend up to maybe four hours in one of these locations. The exceptions to this method would be the Ortlieb’s section (8) which was drawn from a series of memories, and section 9 which began as the poem “Phila Transit” as I said. Again, Matt Hart, after hearing me read the chapbook version at the Highwire Gallery, told me that the end of the poem seemed to arrive in Kensington too quickly, too willfully. And he was right because the transition — getting on the Blue Line to Kensington/Huntingdon — had become a separate poem.

So I fussed with the linebreaks some for stylistic consistency, made a few changes (notably the last line, changing “view” to “vous”) and dropped it in place. And this was actually fairly consistent with the method because the poem’s sections were not all written in order.

I found the format extremely flexible — once you were sort of grounded in a place, anything could be integrated, anything you happened to think of, and reading you’d been doing. Of course it helped that my reading and these places were pretty wrapped up in Constitutional mornings and mournings — from, say, Emerson to a wide variety of African-American literature (esp. Douglass, Ellison, Baraka, Mackey, Mullen), to the radical democrats among the New American Poetry. I’m sure that various unrelated notebook scraps ended up in the poem — that’s something I do all the time. I think I learned from Louis Cabri how to work

on the level of the phrase but I'm perhaps more inclined to then take that phrase-work and assemble it as stitched narrative? Maybe. Anyway, I can't verify the method of "Morning Constitutional" very well because the notebook in which I wrote it was stolen out of my car a couple years ago.

*CM:* I'm interested in how you separate a couple of the groupings of the shorter poems: polyphonic lyric vs. absurdist narratives. How conscious are you of the poem's form when you're just beginning a piece? Do you not only envision the finish line but how you'll get there as well?

*MM:* No, in most cases I start out quite blind. I mean, some begin with a vague sense of theme (a walk from my apt. to Independence Hall, the *idea* of Detroit, my Irish-ness); others are programmatic in the sense that they begin consciously with a problem (How to rewrite the Pledge of Allegiance while maintaining its sonic and rhythmic pattern, or how to "repeat" the life-story of an IV drug user named Faye without "telling" it or appropriating it); the majority though begin with a first line ("That guy is my mom," "Rome is Gorgeous . . . like the Catskills," "Our Goldfish is not / Nathan Bedford Forest," etc) which I try to treat as if it were true, following its logic, with each line suggesting the next. In none of these cases (except the Pledge poems) did I have a feel for the ending until I discovered it, or it discovered me. "Cowboy Poetry," for instance, lay unfinished until I heard its last lines in some old western on American Movie Classics.

As far as the two categories go, as I said, it's too grossly general to really hold water, just a useful distinction. In my latest work (part of a manuscript entitled *MS*) I seem to have figured out how to do both kinds of poems at once.

*CM:* I like that you went back and made revisions to work that'd already been "finalized" via chapbook publication. At what point do you feel like a poem is really done, that it can't be revised anymore? Are these poems "done" now that they're sealed up in a perfect-bound book?

*MM:* They sure do *feel* final all bound up like that! Yeats revised his poems maniacally — it's interesting to look at all the changes detailed in the Variorum edition of his poems. But his impulse was to get them *right* — it was about precision (what Pound learned, I suspect while working as Yeats' secretary). I don't have that in me — a belief that I can ever get it right — as Creeley says, "I think to say this wrongly." So, any revision is a new poetic experience done for its own sake. The "poem" has already been added to the storehouse of language and I'm just re-visiting it, or even "just visiting." And I guess there has to be either a pleasure in that or a perceived need to alter the context of the original poem. Can one think of revision in relation to Stein's idea of a "prolonged present"? I don't know there seems to me a time when the poem feels done for better or worse and to revise, say, "Kin I get a

Kinship,” would feel like revising a friend’s poem. But on the other hand a poem can feel unfinished for quite a long time.

*CM:* Obviously the title poem captures locations very specific to Philadelphia. Do you think you could’ve set this poem in any major city, in a way? I guess what I’m asking is, what, if anything, does Philly bring to table that another city couldn’t’ve offered? (And maybe, how does Ben Franklin figure into things?)

*MM:* Put it this way: American cities all have their histories of democratic struggle, all have their relationships to the Constitution. As a radical democrat and, hopefully, radically democratic writer, I think I would have sought out what needed to be found wherever I happened to be and you would have noticed similarities between the poems so produced and the poems in *Morning Constitutional*. But they wouldn’t have been these poems, probably not even close. I stand by my epigraph from Creeley: “Where you are is a law equal to what you are.” Poems, like selfhood rise out of specific material conditions which are at the same time radically heterogeneous in terms of the outcomes they might produce. Real material, real contingency. So, Philadelphia, yes, but it’s a million-faced city. I managed to put a few things together that made sense in terms of (while it was shaping) my philosophy and aesthetic: the socio-political history of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence (material to Philadelphia in several ways, including the literal bones of Revolutionary soldiers in Washington Square Park), local jazz (a long history which included most notably Coltrane but which I was seeing up close with encouragement from jazz drummer, critic and poet Nate Chinen), the Kensington Welfare Rights Union (which was assisting in the Needle Exchange Program and in which, coincidentally, Kristen Gallagher and Mytili Jagannathan had been involved), Plus: very importantly, SPEECH: the things being spoken in these places.

All of this came together and the book is maybe about trying to locate and invent a language of civil rights: which would go well beyond the right to be an individual (a necessary right, obviously) to include the right not to be an individual but rather, to be many. To be many Philadelphians at once, as O’Hara was many New Yorkers. Leaving Philly complicated this of course and so at that point I became many other people. Franklin himself had a remarkably “postmodern” view of his own selfhood — seeing it very much as a construction determined in part by exterior relationships, by the “public.” “Personality as a consequence of reciprocal exteriority” as one theorist has put it. And the tension in Franklin between capitalist and democrat (categories which for me are neither synonymous nor wholly incompatible) was certainly of great interest.

*CM:* What thoughts do you have on the Philly scene at this point, by the way? It's odd to me, because so many folks that I thought of as Philly poets two years ago are now in Baltimore, Brooklyn, Buffalo, or beyond... An amusing, though perhaps unconnected, anecdote: Greg Fuchs relayed a tale awhile back about a NYC poetry party in which a couple of the movers and shakers were discussing how lame Philly is and how the only decent poet in Philly is Louis Cabri. What amuses me, of course, is that he'd been already living back in Canada for quite awhile at the time this conversation took place! So I guess we've got no one!

*MM:* I try not to be nostalgic about it because I think nostalgia is a really unproductive, though sometimes pleasant, emotion. I can say this: from 1995 to 1999 Philly was as lively a poetry scene as I can imagine — anyway the most lively one I've experienced. Hyper-creative, very challenging. I don't get around much anymore, so to speak, but between the ixnay / La Tazza crowd, Jessica Chiu, Matt Hart, Jena Osman, Bob Perelman, Rachel DuPlessis, Ron Silliman, etc — the critical mass exists for great poetic activity. And in any event, whoever said Louis was an island unto himself was just being stupid. Not only were they too inattentive to realize that Louis was largely back in Canada, they should ask Louis himself what he thinks. On the other hand, thinking of Louis as a Philadelphia poet is intriguing. I can't speak for him and know he's had more experience in more venues than me, but for myself, I feel very much the Philadelphia poet. I think Kristen Gallagher would say the same.

I remember Nate Mackey saying to me that you have a few revelatory years that shape your work and view in some fundamental way. For him that was the Art Ensemble of Chicago's heyday, say. For me it was Philadelphia in the mid-nineties. In both cases I'd say (not to pump myself up!) the material found there helped to answer a question something like this: What writing, formally and mise en scene, functions both as an ideal democracy and in the service of a more ideal democracy?

Jessica Smith

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Mark Wallace  
*from* **Party in My Body**

No strength to disappear. Having fun, we notice at last the crowded sky. The poetry in advertisements! Who wants to be free of the ground? Consider the angle just ignored. Buy futures of an illusion. I want to sit outside, have a drink and talk for hours, and I want to lose my job. Seriously floating. Let's change the names of animals or note we never knew them. Always after midnight, always hard to sleep.

\*

People are going into hiding. Inside the mind of a budget analyst, who knows what hells won't fit the figures. Do you feat the depth of your love? Old factories in Buffalo! There no eason to lie to you, not much to tell the truth. My friends are selling real estate. Case the latest aesthetic theory. I can't stand that you're so far away, here in this room with me. Competency tests unite. Show me again that evil eye.

\*

It's not happening any time soon. A moment for hysteria. Poor in cash or poor in spirit? Where does self-obsession come from? I'm never easy to find. Now we're older than we were. Truth or dare? Remembering different ways to love when it feels the world might end. The pain the human body can take! Jimmy Buffett sells escape to middle-aged men in fishing hats. Most responsibility requires learning how to be cheated. Want to go out, or stay in and watch a movie?

\*

People write to say they like my writing — that's better than an income. I dream about being random unfocused undisciplined. Play me all day your sad piano. The stern-looking lawyers of celebrities! No age is a new age. Who paves the roads or rides them? Watch another vice president regress. Poolside in an apartment complex, I'll try that twisted innuendo. Just when I thought I understood. Who needs the shelter we all need?

\*

Could you slander me a moment? At first the large doses seem easy to swallow. The banter in cartoons! Looking at myself in windows while offices glint under hot white sky. He took action but his brain didn't know it. Shall we try the Texas barbecue place? Shall we kick that garbage out of the street? The evening's argument over prices has left us unable to pay the bill. I'm tired of primary colors. These pundits are hard to believe.

\*

Always return to the place it hurts. Who's got time to develop their character? It's good to walk in the neighborhood, bookstores delis bars. Even a swim can be made into duty. To love and no longer chase chimeras? How local life remains. The constant noise and smell of cars! Do you like money or making money? Does sacrificing yourself for others lead to sacrificing others? Once again, a newly razed mountain to climb.

\*

It's good to see your passive faces. Won any bets? A list that lists the lists of lists. I'm dressing like a medieval warrior covered in grass and leaves. Choose precise details to misunderstand. Fake that you're getting outside. The quiet of the dispossessed! Feel shy around those you'd like to strangle? Doing without long weekend naps, I'm starting to feel like these hallways are home. Recruiting now for obsessive love.

\*

You can't love someone you're forced to work for. The heart of the matter: wear disguises. The taste that hallways leave in my throat! I often dream of acting aimless. Tired more on muggy days? Follow twelve steps to successful silence. Religious poems need good grammar? It's shocking to be left behind, stranded in this surveillance machine. I like fake blood in horror movies. I like to do things wrong.

\*

Let me caress incompatible systems. Why not make a new religion? Too afraid to sleep, I still wrote a poem a today. Some places he gets respect, others eats shit. Adventures at sea with unknown crustaceans who claim close family ties. The necessity of small talk! There's plenty of time to cry uncontrollably. Do you feel vaguely or hugely dissatisfied? Teachers, wallpaper, hoses. Don't hesitate to call.

\*

That sneaking sensation again. Shall we cross a dubious border? Once upon a time, I learned that people could hurt me. Get a job and try to relax? Words that later turn out to matter. The isolation of computers! The break in the wood, the bend in the back. What did he mean "unpractical knowledge"? Hard-working people should give most orders? How slowly time goes when you're walking behind it.

\*

Why bother running to work, hoping the body will hold together? Destruction as creation. Apartment lights at night assume odd shapes in windows. The precision of statistical charts! Try to focus on people after reading law all day. What feels beyond your reach? Future methods of neglect. I sat on a bench with you for an hour, wondering why we'd done what we'd done. There are moments when things seem possible, moments when they don't. A hurricane hits land.

\*

Top down thinking isn't thinking. Public life = mean people doing mean things. A long slow cloudy day and I feel lost for no reason. Brands of food at the grocery! This isn't just life, it's the dominant order. I'll sail away and reflect my mistakes. Does your creativity match the brochure? Anyone else want into the fire? Imagine the terror if dreams came true. Do you think that another person can save you?

\*

So much is avoided or never occurs. Are we being tested or just annoyed? When you realize you know what you mean, what happens then? All the options for retirement! I want to put here a striking weird image in which you could find yourself for a moment. Pigeons are adapting powerfully. In the future, we'll be the past. I feel masochistic love for theories. Am I a form or a function? Some days seem over before they began.

\*

Misled by the sky, I thought that all was possible. With beer in paper bags, men gather on corners, stare tough at passing headlights. When should people do what other people tell them? Large city pool halls on Saturday nights. Freeways, signs, traffic! Are you only as good as the circle you're in? You'll never be forgiven for wanting to know. Dreaming of endless technical night, how to find some hand that sustains? Learn easy lessons of what to ignore. The terror of knowing who's never been loved.

\*

In patches of sun and shade on the circle, people perform Sunday. Why not see past the end of the world? A horn in traffic changes nothing. Let's go to pieces in other countries, call in sick forever. To live for years against. The sullenness of intellectuals! Light on the edges of leaves at sunset often throws me out of my body. Temperature readings on banks reduce the air to a number. One could get in a car going by and end up somewhere unexpected. Smile when you disappear.

\*

Standard procedure #1: the more you're helped, the more you claim you did it alone. All this abstract hunting never lets us eat the meat. I've joined a third century cult devoted to ancient methods of torture; we flourish publicly everywhere. Change in the information industry! Succeeding, or doing what you're told? Ten ways to hide in your house in the hills. If thinking was taken seriously... I'm not the man; I'm not even the man standing next to the man. Obsessing on my own tragic flaws, I forgot that anyone else was there. Maybe it's time to take up gambling.

\*

We always reward awards. Run wild and free in your mistakes. Tired of mistreatment, I returned to my small apartment. Surrender, mutants. I'd say that people let me down, but how do I know I won't beat them to it? Speaking honestly, he couldn't be understood. The pain that often hides in jokes! What happens when your love goes numb? It's hard to fight the urge to fight, or hide the urge to hide. Thank you for your input.

\*

Lying awake at night, seeing clearly then not seeing clearly. People blister when they're lied to. Cable antennas push the sky. Go where it's not all right and curl there, body pressed against oblivion. Why would one call a place a disease? Why would I forget to listen? Standing on a cardboard corner, let's play games and laugh for nothing. Where was I when darkness bought us? The insincerity of getting away! You know it's time when no one's ready.

\*

It's important to drift when focusing. The boxes were moved from place to place. What part of a person can be laid bare? Yellow wall, boarded up window, people moving from place to place. Who wishes they could be far away? Left to myself at the end of the century, I look at gates and trucks, imagine phoning my past. The pleasures of working overtime! There are spots where no one can go. Stories of dreamers who die despondent stop me from speaking openly to people. You don't want this job, but what else is there?

\*

End up in the oddest places, shopping plaza library doorways. There are no limits on how to go wrong. Avenues, roads, streets. So many computer systems together in this room. Treat the day like a worn-out map. To whom might a poem seem an insult? The thrill of never seeing my friends! Back in the nineteenth century, they wrote better boy's adventure books. Do I look good beside this statue? Watch all these people move through the stacks.

\*

I'm worried that I can't sit still. By teaching you to suppress your emotions, this machine will help you make a living. Stuck in the language of right and wrong, stretched taut on the surface of a screen, the division of labor in small sleepy towns leads to a good old-fashioned cry. Do you wish you could go home again? That people you hate would disappear? There's no noise in a vacuum. Someone claims to be missing. Innovative standardized tests focus administrative investment. Moments of loss in family dramas! This fall the battle for earth begins.

\*

Like a purpose pleased to know itself, people lie in the grass and let sun soak them up. Language may not buffer much, but it helps me realize what can't be said. The half-felt day, not at fever pitch. How did I get to the monument? Why are these things happening now? Let's go somewhere to eat and drink. The feelings one has when a love affair ends! My body grows warm while I think about nothing. I like the sound of your voice on the phone. Teach me, someone, how to dream.

Carol Mirakove

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**Sherry Brennan** is the author of the chapbook *Taken* and e-chapbook *Daily Poems on ReadMe*. Her chapbook *The Moving Walkway* is forthcoming from Propjet, and her recent work has appeared in *Mirage* and *Kenning*. She lives and works in central Pennsylvania.

**Terrence Chiusano** was born, and mostly grew up, on Long Island, but has lived in Pittsburgh PA, Portland OR and now Buffalo NY where he works at SUNY Buffalo's Poetry / Rare Books Collection. The poem "backfill: rondo" is from an unpublished ms. titled "On Generation and Corruption" — poems about placing.

**Brandon Downing** does other things besides cutting out lines from forgotten victorian-era picaresque novels and splicing them into forgotten children's manuals. His collection *The Shirt Weapon* will be out this December from The Germ/Poetic Research Bureau, and he's currently finishing up a collage manuscript, *Lake Antiquity*. You can still get his booklet *Lazio @ spd.com*, and perhaps soon even *Dog & Horsey Pictures* may be reprinted. Oh, and he lives in New York City.

**Daniel Hales** is against people using patriotic rhetoric to justify dropping bombs on other people but is for people writing poems which contain explosive/incendiary images or metaphors and reading them to other people.

**Michael Magee's** new book, *Morning Constitutional*, is out from Handwritten Press and available through [www.spdbooks.org](http://www.spdbooks.org). New poems out or forthcoming in *New American Writing*, *Callaloo*, *CrossConnect*, and new articles on American literature in *Raritan*, *Review*, and *Contemporary Literature*. He lives in Rhode Island with his wife and daughter and teaches at Rhode Island School of Design.

**Chris McCreary** is co-editor of ixnay press. His reviews and interviews have been published in *Kenning*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, the *Poetry Project Newsletter*, *Rain Taxi*, *Rhizome*, and *The Washington Review*.

**Carol Mirakove** lives in Brooklyn. Her chapbook *WALL* is available from the same fine press that brings you these pages. The poems included here are from *LEISURE SUITS*, a series that's in line with Frank Sherlock's statement in *13* that goes, "it's not where / you're from / it's where ya / at." Utopia of place: the present. Love to the Philly kids. Other poems from the series appear in *PO-EP!*, the new e-journal from Rattapallax Press, in *The Gig*, and in Outlet's *Paradise* issue. A collaboration with photographer Doug Fogelson appears in *PomPom*. New prose poems are on [www.theeastvillage.com](http://www.theeastvillage.com). She deeply digs Jenn & Chris and thanks them for all things ixnay & kindness.

**Elizabeth Robinson's** two latest books are *Harrow* (Omnidawn Press) and *House Made of Silver* (Kelsey St. Press). Fanny Howe selected her manuscript this summer as a winner of the National Poetry Series. With Colleen Lookingbill, she edits EtherDome Press.

**Mark Salerno** is the author of *Hate* and *For Revery*. His new book, entitled *Grievous Angel*, will be published by The Figures later this year.

**Jessica Smith** is a Poetics Program student at SUNY Buffalo.

**Mark Wallace** is the author of a number of books of poetry, including *Nothing Happened And Besides I Wasn't There* and *The Sonnets Of A Penny-A-Liner*. With Steven Marks he edited *Telling It Slant: Avant Garde Poetics Of The 1990s*. His collection *Temporary Worker Rides A Subway* is forthcoming from Sun and Moon.