ICON

magazine for literature and art

is published annually in the spring semester at Kent State University Trumbull campus since 1965.

Poetry, fiction, and nonfiction: We accept all forms, themes, styles, and genres of 700 words or less; we limit the number of submissions to six (poetry) and three (fiction and nonfiction) per author per issue. Submissions must be typed. Fiction and nonfiction should be submitted in standard, double-spaced format. Send submissions to: Dr. Michael Lynch/ICON/Department of English/Kent State University/4314 Mahoning Ave. NW/Warren, OH 44483 (mflynch@kent.edu). Enclose SASE (self-addressed, stamped envelope) if you want submissions returned; disposable submissions are preferred. Include e-mail address. Pays one copy. Deadline for the annual Spring issue is February 1.

Artwork and photography: Submit copies, not originals, in black and white or color; 5 x 7 inches. Limit of six submissions. High quality photocopies accepted. Pays one copy.

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest: Annual award of $100 for best poem. Include a letter stating submissions are for this contest, and a maximum of two poems to Dr. Noelle Bowles, Hart Crane Poetry Contest (address above) by January 15. The winning poem is published in ICON.

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The views expressed herein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the editors or Kent State University Trumbull campus.


**ICON**

*magazine for literature and art*

**spring 2012**

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Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
2012 Selection

John Davis

How to Find a Lover

Rub your hands with lavender.
When the sun glints off your fingernails follow the reflection the way you follow a compass when trail markers have been removed.
You sleep in the shadow of a mountain ash tree and curl your body into the shape of a serrated leaf.
By dawn you have become the leaf.
You turn an orange copper color and fall from a limb.
A child picks you up, takes you home, presses you between the pages of an atlas. You travel to Ireland to Afghanistan to China and Antartica, settle on Sicily. You never knew you could speak Italian, but you can.
You find her at a café. She is the one serving gelato. You order lavender. You hold hands, hope you are not placed on another page.
Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
2012 Selection

John Davis

How to Find a Lover

Rub your hands with lavender.
When the sun glints off your fingernails,
follow the reflection
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you could speak Italian, but you can.
You find her at a café. She is the one
serving gelato. You order lavender.
You hold hands,
hope you are not placed
on another page.
**Homage**

Today I am writing in Polish and all my poems are the same poem. I wake in Lvov, I weep in Warsaw, I dine in Moscow and get drunk in Paris. (Excuse me while I light this cigarette.) All my poems are the same poem. Even the sun is old. It has seen all this before. The pollarded trees. The plodding widows. The small boys in ringlets and short pants who grow up to be killers. The cows huddling in the rain. The fields go green, then brown, then green again and all my poems are the same poem. I sip my brandy while Beethoven groans. Cracks vein the portraits. No one has dusted the sconces since the housekeeper died. The war ended just last summer. At last the sugar bowl is full. Along the lanes, men are limping home. Tonight I write in darkest Polish and all the poems are the same poem. At sunset I walk by the river where I used to go with Papa and Mama. I cross the stone bridge though the damp is bad for my arthritis. Ah beautiful Natasha, or was it Marinka, I remember when your white throat sent me into a frenzy of longing and all my poems were your poem. I draw a bath; the water spits out brown. My face in the speckled mirror is furrowed like a field.

**The Fall**

With the gates about to close, the Cherub impatient and imperious, Eve went to tell that she was leaving. Went to tell the on the trees they swept bore fruit unlike all so rich her eyes were opened to the sweet the bitterness of time. Uncertain now unwilling to loose this new-made woman around her, ready to dance the way out, creatures, and Adam, all the animals—winding a path behind them into the Au leaving Eden empty of everything save J
Judith Sanders

Perhaps tomorrow
I will write a new poem
in a new language.
But every morning is the same morning,
all languages are Polish,
and all poems are the same poem.

Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest
2012 Honorable Mention

Julianna McCarthy

The Fall

With the gates about to close, the Cherubim waiting impatient and imperious, Eve went to tell the bees that she was leaving. Went to tell the orchard hives the trees they swept bore fruit unlike all others, fruit so rich her eyes were opened to the sweetness of fear, the bitterness of time.

Uncertain now of Paradise, unwilling to loose this new-made woman, the bees rose up around her, ready to dance the way out, as she led all flying creatures, and Adam, all the animals—even the serpent winding a path behind them into the Autumn of the world, leaving Eden empty of everything save Judgment.
Maureen Alsop

Further

Her face is a flame in the windshield
exaggerating the streetlight's electrified husk
as honey-colored sparrows disappear under your skin. You place
your heart inside the sun.
   Last you are by blood. Dust through the white
door she exits.

In the cemetery the orioles hid in the leaves, your cotton dress
tore at the hem. A silvery pallor
autumn among elms. Like a tune in your head, she went on
speaking. I aim, she said, a'imsim
   When one listens, one
hears sea. Later
you visited a seashore the old house.
The house said nothing is light which was season she said you
said you walked
toward your edges nothing said
the edges. Loudness applied the sea. Each in your shadows
exposed by current.

It is a question of how the dead evolve. Their blanched hair, a
wavering blizzard
looms the air as pink snowfall. Who knows enough knows the
dank under wing of the
gull—

What comes into the room Why do you not ask my name
So, what then

Deities walked toward you through the grass. You were
outsiders. You believe / you
recognized her. She was a small figure holding a lily in her left
hand—the deacon's blue dress
brushed her ankles. Ealaim, I escape, she said. Geallaim, I
promise.

David Sapp

Two Hawks

From the tall pine leaning
over the field's edge,
a palpable fervor appears; two
red-tailed hawks plunge
from their lanky rendezvous, one
an instant after the other,
wings spread seductively wide, slicing
a vast, pale blue ocean;
feathers, reaching like slender,
elegant fingers, lure the currents,
updrafts of atmosphere, into
downy palms until they become
in their liaison two
blades cutting water, rising
in rapid interlacing circles, soaring
in a tryst of bliss,
high above the seabed:
dense tracts of wheat, corn, alfalfa
and the timid, scurrying things
relentlessly bound to the soil.
The two lovers' sharp cries
pierce the sky; their romance
carries them upward, cleaving
a thin remnant of moon
and incise a path to the surface,
the soft, moist lips, the shore
where stars and galaxies abide.
David Sapp

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over the field’s edge,
a palpable fervor appears; two
red-tailed hawks plunge
from their lanky rendezvous, one
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and incise a path to the surface,
the soft, moist lips, the shore
where stars and galaxies abide.
David Sapp

The Stone

This stone, a stout, girthy boulder, was nudged along, scurried across the continent by the wide hand of a glacier, from the high brow of the arctic to the lower lip of the Great Lakes, and after the waters warmed, receding north, tossed like a pebble springing from icy fingers.

The stone sat in the earth on the lip of a cold spring for a thousand years as a Zen monk in wu wei—unwavering. When water scurried in quick fingers around the great pebble, nudging the stone to move again, nirvana came easily.

Natives leaned their backs against the stone's pebbly chest while cooling their lips at the spring's waters; settlers nudged at the forest's edges and plowed around the stone, like fingers drawn across the dark soil; eventually, air conditioned machines scurried, snatching up harvests.

Last spring, a nice couple from town, with pens in eager fingers, a price on their lips, and details of a house pebbling in their heads, scurried to buy the stone, the water, and a bit of land.

David Sapp

A Saffron Moon

A saffron moon, elusive, exotic orange hue, the dye of monks' robes lingers, suspended this morning on the horizon's wrist of emerald green and blue-gray eyes of distant hills. I know this full, ripe fruit will slip from the sky's lip, but for a moment I am duped; I presume this moon, this color, this instant was ceded only to me; it will fit nicely in my pocket. Though the speculators scheme and the surveyors ogle through lenses, no one may own the Sea of Tranquility. Now, the saffron moon hovers in the east above the Great Buddha's brow and its reflection illuminates, making radiant, golden domed stupas. Now, the eyes of any caste may merely gaze upward to possess a saffron moon.
David Sapp

With a tractor's calloused, steel hand,
the stone was nudged from its loam;
The stone now ornaments a shiny, green lawn.
This stone is no longer a stone.

A Saffron Moon

A saffron moon,
elusive, exotic orange hue,
the dye of monks' robes lingers,
suspended this morning on the
horizon's wrist of emerald green and
blue-gray eyes of distant hills.
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its reflection illuminates, making
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Now, the eyes of any caste may
merely gaze upward to possess
a saffron moon.
Christine Popadak

Panic

Saws of breath ragged jagged trying to wheeze up into constricted throat but trapped in concrete lungs.

Pulse pounding pounding pounding so loud it’s vibrating eyeballs in their sockets and little hammers of inner ears are crushing anvils with 500-pound sledges.

Whole head throbs and a scorching slickness glides down over lump lodged in throat and spreads under clavicles to thrash thundering heart around chest cavity... feels like it’s drilling all the way through this time.

Icy barbed fingers scrape over visceral organs and down arms and legs to tips of fingers and toes raising up goose bumps and downy hairs of nape alike... STOP!

Ok ok ok remember how to breathe... from pit of belly, pulling oxygen from toe-and-fingernails into and through frozen lungs. Slowly in.
One two three four five six seven and out.
Throat relaxes, vision focuses.

Clarity lies in remembering the breath.
If not for crows,
I'd thank whatever god made this April day
with its phlox, forsythia and spirea,
azaleas and camellias, red tips,
tulips, dogwoods, and clematis.

But three crows high in the pin oak disdain all flowering things below.
Any moment now they will fall upon some living thing
in whose veins runs not sap but blood,
and spring will have a death.

Aristotle said beauty is what pleases the
but crows do not please me.
Fat and black, they weigh heavily
upon the pin oak branch,
and upon my gratitude.

I wonder, though—
because I cannot reconcile myself to crows,
is it they or I who mars this fine April day?
Dennis Vannatta

If Not for Crows

If not for crows,
I'd thank whatever god
made this April day
with its phlox, forsythia and spirea,
azaleas and camellias, red tips,
tulips, dogwoods, and clematis.

But three crows high in the pin oak
disdain all flowering things below.
Any moment now they will fall
upon some living thing
in whose veins runs not sap but blood,
and spring will have a death.

Aristotle said beauty is what pleases the eye,
but crows do not please me.
Fat and black, they weigh heavily
upon the pin oak branch,
and upon my gratitude.

I wonder, though--
because I cannot reconcile
myself to crows,
is it they or I who mars
this fine April day?
Richard Dinges, Jr.

Thin Air

Some day I will plant myself in this sticky clay beneath the thin layer of sod that covers my backyard, return air I borrowed over a lifetime, inhaled fresh and pure, turned sour long since, when I kept inhaling on long stale flights, in smoke-filled bars and hot billows from high platforms where I dozed and dreamed and grew large, a balloon, a dirigible, a long slow float in storming skies, now landed, flat and empty, another thin layer in my backyard where I lie still and contemplate how thin air lies between me and infinity.

Richard Dinges, Jr.

Prayers

I still remember several prayers, words buried beneath years of decorum and philosophical rants, a neglect born of new routines that replaced those magic chants beneath clean white sheets just before closing my eyes or upon ironed table cloths before filling my mouth, or looking up in Sunday clothes into a soaring space to see who was watching and seeing only a ceiling, those dusty words just beneath a cynical surface, waiting to form my lips again into a formula that places me back among the believers who never lost faith in me long after I lost my belief in them.
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Many Voices

Nestled around a table reserved for the old, I face away from bride and groom, vows already over, now time to eat cake and try to hear what a face mimes across this white linen tablecloth buried in a din of many voices none of whom speaks to me while the new couple sits patiently, as I recall from long ago, several more rituals, wilted blooms thrown away, dancing with strangers, waiting to escape and begin their new life, all these voices speaking too many tongues, too loud for them to hear what is bound to come next.
Colleen Hernandez

I Live My Life in My Head

I live my life in my head.
That is where I am my only true self.
I am the most honest
when I can hold myself account
question every emotion

The connection,
the bridge that should be there between
has cracks that go to the found
depth, cracks
deep, bitter, black.

But there is no bridge to my inner space
the me I want to be,
the one I am working to create
Perfect.

There may not be a bridge to cross
when I am alone, my time in solitude,
yet I feel that too is not honest.
Colleen Hernandez

I Live My Life in My Head

I live my life in my head.
That is where I am my only true self.
    I am the most honest
    when I can hold myself accountable,
    question every emotion.

The connection,
the bridge that should be there between people
    has cracks that go to the foundation--

    foundation cracks
    deep, bitter, black.

But there is no bridge to my inner space,
the me I want to be,
    the one I am working to create
    Perfect.

There may not be a bridge to cross
when I am alone, my time in solitude,
yet I feel that too is not honest.
In Your Eyes

You
are the
color of my
life, dull but
yet so wonderful.

You
are the
color of the
earth beneath my
own balanced two feet.

You
are the
colors of my
favorite month mixed
into one sweet, sweet dream.

You
are the
color of my
thoughts in my own
completely upside-down mind.

You
are the
color so very deep,
and so very dark, that I
don’t understand you in the slightest.

And You
are the very
collaboration of all
the many colors of what I want
myself to represent; color so very solid and real.

my dark hair cascades
down over my narrow shoulders;
my eyes are shadowed;
only tell lies and stories;
my lips—chapped yet lightly scented
are worn as a mask.

I watch and move like a puppet;
I am plain, I have no voice.

there is nothing to tell
no masks, phony smiles;
my body (language)
tells all. And I
walk slowly, with a smoothness
not my own
constantly

I look at my feet because
I don’t want to look

I am ashamed
of the person that I
(will) never exist and
I’m back to
being myself
and you can never
“me” again
I watch and move like smoke
I am plain, I have no beauty
there is nothing to see
no masks, phony smiles
my body (language) tells all And I
walk slowly,
with a smoothness not my own constructed
I look at my feet because
I don’t want to look at you
I am ashamed
the person that I was (will) never exist anymore
I’m back to being myself
and you can never see “me” again
Dennis Saleh

Umber

The weather
has left
its shoes
outside
the door
Do not
wake it
Winter is
its slumber
Dark its
pillow

Insomnia

Absent-minded the moon
cannot find its hat So
it never leaves Stays
too long at the party
Weary of brightness
it would sleep a year
If it had a blanket
and could remember
how to
Janice Fine

The Strength to Give

(written after reading The Seer)

Sorting out Dad's belongings

Rough grey work clothes
neat piles
gave no warning

of raw reality.

The white business card,
identical to mine,
my father-in-law's work
address, telephone number
dropped from a pocket,

causing burning tears.

Dad's offer, his voice, his look:
"Whenever you need me
call."

I need you!

Dad, you barely walked, talked, breathed.
But you joked--lived.

I wish I could have answered your call.
Janice Fine

The Strength to Give

(written after reading The Seersucker Suit)

Sorting out Dad’s belongings

Rough grey work clothes
neat piles
gave no warning

of raw reality.

The white business card,
identical to mine,
my father-in-law’s work
address, telephone number
dropped from a pocket,

causing burning tears.

Dad’s offer, his voice, his look:
“Whenever you need me
call.”

I need you!

Dad, you barely walked, talked, breathed.
But you joked--lived.

I wish I could have answered your call.
I spend most of my week in a semi-conscious trance watching million-dollar machines work. They are more active than I am. Monday at 3 p.m. I click off my brain, switch on automatic, and begin the countdown: T-minus 40 hours. Each minute that ticks by in the dull monotony slowly steals my sanity, bit by bit. The vampire conglomerate that signs my check robs me of my youth, intelligence, and vitality until I am just another mindless automaton.

These walls are masters of time. Each minute closer to Friday gets slower and slower, until on Friday they seem to tick backwards. Then on Monday, the entirety of the previous week repeats. Each day blurs into the other, making them indistinguishable.

The dictator they put in charge of the asylum barks out commands on cue, just to remind everyone that they own you. All the while he never realizes that he’s just another puppet dancing for them, only his strings are shorter. When they inevitably cut them he has further to fall.

I often welcome sleepwalking through most of the week. In the few instances the machines malfunction, I curse being awakened. At least as a zombie I don’t feel my mind rotting.

I live on the weekends. I shed the identity the uniform has forced on me, and my true self emerges. On the weekends I love life, I achieve the goals I value, not the hazy path set before me by the corporation that owns my soul. For two days the dungeon master gives me reprieve from my incarceration. Upon clocking out each Friday I suddenly feel rejuvenated, while Sunday night I begin dreading the impending coma.

The Blue Collar Lament

(written 1/28/08 while on the “job”; edited and organized into sensibility on a weekend)

And Then There Was None

First they came for my things.
And I did not speak out.
Because I had so very little anyway.

Then they came for my mind.
And I did not speak out.
Because I had no thoughts to give.

Then they came for my heart.
And I did not speak out.
Because it was already broken.

Then they came for my body.
And I did not speak out.
Because it was already worn beyond use.

Then they came for my soul.
And I did not speak out.
Because I was empty inside.

Then they came for me.
And there was nothing left for them to take.
Ryan Kinney

The desperation for dollars creates the shackles that keep me here. I am only truly living two days a week and dying the other five. I’ve made a pact with the devil: 5/7 of my life for a weekly pittance. Until the decay of my body matches that of my brain I return weekly to mind-numbing tedium, the memory of my weekend existence fading into the background.

And Then There Was None

First they came for my things.
And I did not speak out.
Because I had so very little anyway.

Then they came for my mind.
And I did not speak out.
Because I had no thoughts to give.

Then they came for my heart.
And I did not speak out.
Because it was already broken.

Then they came for my body.
And I did not speak out.
Because it was already worn beyond use.

Then they came for my soul.
And I did not speak out.
Because I was empty inside.

Then they came for me.
    And there
        was nothing left
            for them to take.
Megan Smith

**magic**

Something wholly illuminated
connected through the nerve endings
burrowing to the marrow
felt where no scope can explain
where has it gone?

Here?

Shaking in anticipation
holding every breath

Waiting...

Everything stills,
and the universe glows with sheer joy.

The pieces fit.
Meant to find this space

Together.
As a bird perched alone on a pole
I prefer to be a carnivore,
not a sparrow.
But for you I would change
into something smaller,
a warbler perhaps or a finch.

When young we could work fields together,
stealing or setting seed.
I imagine you behind a sod-breaking plow
with me the following harrow.
And, after, I'd wish for us
a safe old age encaged
in a comfortable aviary
that met our every need;
a room not too wide or narrow
with plenty of grain-based food for you
and a sun-high arch to its roof.
Love needs no other proof
than wishes such as this.

True, the gods by their nature are
contrary to hawk and canary,
and time alone dictates
the trifle of life we own.
But even though love can fail
and time is a metaphor,
right now I am your sparrow,
your finch, or if you allow it
your loyal carnivore.
John Van Peenen

Hawk Courts a Canary

As a bird perched alone on a pole
I prefer to be a carnivore,
not a sparrow.
But for you I would change
into something smaller,
a warbler perhaps or a finch.

When young we could work fields together
stealing or setting seed.
I imagine you behind a sod-breaking plow
with me the following harrow.
And, after, I'd wish for us
a safe old age encaged
in a comfortable aviary
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But even though love can fail
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right now I am your sparrow,
your finch, or if you allow it
your loyal carnivore.
John Van Peenen

Warblers

The urban ones used to gather under eaves, spring leaves, or a roof’s arch, and over-spilled our city air with what could not be seen, chirp, chant, peep, trill. It was their way to tease and hide while insisting we knew that they existed and were making love.

Defying our cameras and eyes they utilized the shadowed eaves or spring’s trees to garner cover. Their yellow flittings, barely glimpsed, were lost in a soughing of the wind as we sighed our own last hopes as lovers.

Heard song, invisible makers, they hid what we also had to hide—loss sometimes, ambition always. Even into the clean and barren hallways where the last great lady of the Shakers guarded an inheritance their wordless music came.

It was only later when we had outgrown the best of the lives we were to own, and found ourselves truly wise, that we heard of the passing on of the Shaker lady and the sudden absence of warbling birds.

Gone now. We swear we didn’t do it. The blame, if any, remains elusive. It was all of us or none, but when we were young, and loving was in the trill of avian lovers, we loved, too.

John Van Peenen

Reflections

Even the stillest of pond-skins moves, so reflections in it of trees and hills move, too, upside down in the water.

The reflections are fixed in place, they cannot go miles away on a whim but they can make themselves longer or shorter if the light is right, and they can shimmy in place like water sprites or dance like a honeybee scout when it returns excited with good news for the hive.

They can be one with the dancing aspen shaking off snow from its leaves on a winter morning.

So, what else can I do when reflected in this pond that seems so still yet shim but join the trees and hills and dance with them upside down?
John Van Peenen

Reflections

Even the stillest of pond-skins moves,
so reflections in it of trees and hills
move, too, upside down in the water.

The reflections are fixed in place,
they cannot go miles away on a whim as I do,
but they can make themselves longer

or shorter if the light is right,
and they can shimmy in place
like water sprites

or dance like a honeybee scout
when it returns excited
with good news for the hive.

They can be one with the dancing aspen
shaking off snow from its leaves
on a winter morning.

So, what else can I do when reflected
in this pond that seems so still yet shimmers,
but join the trees and hills

and dance with them upside down?
John Van Peenen

A Pair of Boots

are parked here neat and empty on the curb.
They're good boots, well broken-in by work
but never patched. Their sturdy soles remain intact.
Their uppers are in good repair
for one or two more years of heavy wear.
Traffic ignores them, but the walking me
cannot be so indifferent. My feet
are blistering in a brand-new pair of shoes.

These seem a comfort too good to refuse.
They were not here last night,
when I walked by and now it's full daylight.
No owner is in sight. May I try
them on for fit? And substitute my new footwear
for these which though half-old
spell better value to my mind and eye?

I can and do.
Alas, they are too small by half a size.
He who tamed them walks in socks somewhere.
I'd rather not know why. What I imagine
(rather, what I fear) is bad enough. Murder maybe?
And so I leave them here,
hoping tonight they'll disappear
and find the right way to their home
without two feet to guide them.

Arthur Gottlieb

Case Closed

We talked like attorneys,
cross-examined every word
written into our disagreements.

In conference rooms
filled with airtight clauses
we spoke legalese,
threatened one another
like lawyer's letters.

One hand on the bible,
fingers crossed behind our backs,
we witnessed the dissolution
of our marriage contract
and null and voided our vows.

The scales of justice
peeled from our eyes weighed
heavier than the preponderance
of evidence against us.

But the lips that signed and sealed
our fates delivered no kisses,
and a signature of smiles was missing.

Judging every gesture
like a juror, we dotted our eyes
with suspicion and swore
under oath, as the Lord is
our witness, others were to blame.

But, to tell the truth, we lied.
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**Night Sounds**

The cat's claws click across linoleum before she stops and crunches dry food as she snags atop the carpet and meows for exit to do cat things outside while cricket in the door jamb rosins up his legs for chirp fest, and dogs bay at only dog hearings before the 4:30 train whistles with the breeze tapping open blinds in rhythm to snoring in the next room in rhythm to seconds ticking, ticking not fast enough to rise with the robin chirping in the ash tree right outside.

**October Snatches**

The evergreen shrub snatches as many October leaves as wind allows to tuck beneath its limbs like the homeless man lining his clothing with yesterday's newspaper salvaged from the recycling bin until wind blows spring, and leaves dust-devil free like yellowed newsprint skittering through highway traffic.

**Traveling Gravity**

Creek water tumbles over rocks on its downward trek from the mountain; sounds like wind blustering its way through a gauntlet of aspen trees changing colors, dropping leaves even in the water all traveling gravity's track farther and farther.

**Sunken in Heatwaves**

Pavement bakes, softens under summer heat waves shimmering sleight-of-hand mirages of now-you-see-it-now-you-don't as day after day tires squish the lost bolt into sticky blacktop reverting into a tar pit sucking a dinosaur down, down, down-millennium later excavated as a curious metallic artifact of the indigenous people who needed paved roads to travel distances where they evolved to today.
Diane Webster

Traveling Gravity

Creek water tumbles
over rocks on its downward
trek from the mountain;
sounds like wind
blustering its way through
a gauntlet of aspen trees
changing colors, dropping leaves
even in the water
all traveling gravity’s track
farther and farther.

Sunken in Heatwaves

Pavement bakes, softens
under summer heat waves
shimmering sleight-of-hand
mirages of now-you-see-it-now-you-don’t
as day after day tires squish
the lost bolt into sticky blacktop
reverting into a tar pit
sucking a dinosaur down, down, down--
millennium later excavated
as a curious metallic artifact
of the indigenous people
who needed paved roads to travel
distances where they evolved to today.
Saul Zachary

Resenting the Young/Loathing the Old

Caught myself askance
in the mirror today,
saw a crabby fallen-in
face, a caricaturist’s
dream, nose and chin
on their way to a
rendezvous, a rheumy
eye straight out of
a tale by Poe.

Is this what resenting
the young comes to--
their boorishness, their
casual cruelty, the way
they spew their futures
all over you?

Or is the ancient meanness
I saw in the glass,
the same that I’ve
loathed in others,
overdue for retribution
by the gods who must
have guffawed hysterically
to finally teach me:

Beware you don’t
become what you
despise.

Saul Zachary

At the Bereavement Group

It seems to always rain
on Tuesday nights
when we come together,
the seen and unseen,
to share memories of loss
in a cool white room.

Who is to say the spirits
of our loved ones, husbands
and wives, are not here, resting
their heads on our shoulders,
holding our hands, as reluctant
to part from us as we from them?
We cherish their photos, the same
happiness in their eyes
as in ours. How much they
loved us, how desperately
they are missed. And isn’t that
Death sitting quietly in a corner,
trolling for new prospects each
week while we mourn ourselves
and the unforgettable we will never
again set eyes on in this world?

Eight ordinary men and women,
shattered souls trying to fit
the shards back together,
inimate strangers united
by calamity into a roughhewn
family, learning from each
other how to live with grief
and not die of it,
for we each have a purpose
if not yet a plan,
to climb out of the wreckage
of what we dreamed
would last forever
and once more warm
our faces in the sun.
Saul Zachary

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our faces in the sun.
Saul Zachary

Widower

She was still warm
when I kissed her
but it was too late.

The hurricane laughing
at me doesn’t wash
my love’s ashes away.

Her face in the wind
sees what I am, dagger
in the heart,

still pumping, still
need an explanation
for what’s only supposed
to happen to strangers.
People ask if there’s
anything they can do,

then turn away
without waiting
for an answer.

Lyn Lifshin

Lake Champlain, Smell of Candles

in the rain.
We slept in flannel,
marshmallow on our
fingers. Louis Arm-
strong from a hall
across the lake where
my mother danced on
Friday night while the
girl who stayed with
us turned Inner Sanctum
down low and my
sister and I put a glass
against the thin wall,
scared ourselves close
to throwing up. Birch
trees filled with
blood in our dreams
of a murdered six year-old
under the ferns near
the water
Lake Champlain, Smell of Oil Cloth

candles in the rain.
We slept in flannel,
marshmallow on our fingers. Louis Armstrong from a hall
across the lake where
my mother danced on
Friday night while the
girl who stayed with
us turned Inner Sanctum
down low and my
sister and I put a glass
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scared ourselves close
to throwing up. Birch
trees filled with
blood in our dreams
of a murdered six year-old
under the ferns near
the water
Lyn Lifshin

Downstairs the Cats

were giving birth in
the coal bin. My sister's
birthmark grows under
her yellow hair. In a
month, the water in the
cellar would be rising,
my mother keep sending
brownies to Fort Devon
while one cat carried four
kittens between her teeth
up the wet stairs to the
kitchen as my mother's
hands gnawed each other
at the radio bulletin of
FDR dying. Wind. The
old big brown Zenith,
my mother in heels,
just standing in a
ring of spilled flour