

PERFUME RIVER  
P O E T R Y R E V I E W



Tourane

Tourane  
Poetry Press

Copyright © 2014 by Vuong Quoc Vu

All rights reserved —

including the right to reproduce this book  
in whole or in part in any form  
without written permission from the author.

Cover photograph by Vuong Quoc Vu

Perfume River Poetry Review

Tourane Poetry Press

Vuong Quoc Vu, Editor in Chief

P.O. Box 2192

Cupertino, CA 95015-2192

[touranepoetrypress.wordpress.com](http://touranepoetrypress.wordpress.com)

## CONTENTS

For the Love-Makers.....	3
A Language Older Than Words .....	4
Sonnet for Leonard .....	5
Teleology.....	6
The Things We Bring to Love.....	7
Post-coital Inventory.....	9
morning after.....	10
If We Ever Made Love .....	11
We .....	13
When He Comes.....	14
The One Beautiful Thing.....	15
In the Super 8 Motel in Tilton, New Hampshire.....	16
The Paddle Dancers .....	17
June Time.....	18
Summer Rain .....	19
Murmur .....	20
Love Poem.....	21
Verlaine Loved Rimbaud.....	22
come back to my dream.....	23
Invisible Sleeping Woman .....	24
Lying on O’Keefe’s Couch.....	25
The Hip Radius .....	27
My Kitchen in California .....	28
Lying On the Floor in My Newly Rented House .....	29
Hush 12.....	30
Trying to Save a Drowning Girl from the Lamona Ditch.....	31
Listen .....	32
Eve Offered.....	33
Loss of Innocence .....	34
in the beginning.....	35
Now Voyeur .....	37
Why Sex With Strangers Might be Better After Death.....	38
The Goodbye Skin.....	39
Where to Put a Body That Will Not Go Away .....	40
On the Quilt of Blue Flowers .....	41
On the Bayou .....	42
Scent of My Lover .....	43
Eight Places a Woman Loves to Be Touched.....	44
In Praise of Older Women.....	45

The first time I touched a vagina .....	46
Lounge Ghazal.....	48
Ghazal of Sex .....	49
CONTRIBUTORS .....	50





“Come up with me, love—  
We’ll disappear in the evening light.”

-- “Plenty Is Never Enough,” Chris Lopez



John Grey

## For the Love-Makers

We made love by the rusty boiler,  
its bumps and splutters melding roughly  
with our moans and sighs.  
And we made love in the garden,  
pierced by rose thorns, stung by bees...  
but what did we care.

We made love on airplanes and buses,  
their smooth movement the perfect counterpoint  
to our wilting thrusts.  
We made love in supermarkets,  
on the upper shelves,  
in the dairy aisle where we  
melted every tub of ice-cream.  
And we made love in the hardware store,  
at city hall, down by the river  
in full view of the joggers.

We made love in our socks,  
on our best China, in the telephone  
directory as we thumbed our way  
to a number.  
We found that number  
and we made love dialing.

We made love anywhere and everywhere.  
No place was too mundane, no object too trivial.  
All that making, all that love.  
We made so much of it,  
it wasn't nearly enough.

Phil Cicchi

## A Language Older Than Words

Body language torching souls with no spoken roles. The way you look without touching. The way you touch without looking. The sun setting through an early winter haze its light reflecting amber rose upon your face. Your deep smile seducing me. If I live forever I will not forget how beautiful you were that day. We were both still young enough. The way you take my heart apart. A touch. A kiss. Tongue to tongue the dance of love. Walk the bashful lane under trees with giant leaves. Autumn tools to fuel the feeling of holding you. A language older than words that needs no words. Your eyes speak volumes without trying. It takes a better day to find a way to bridge the verbal gap. Words are not required when my tongue is in your lap. There is love older than words. Bridge the gap. There are no words older than that. Before I am bold feel my touch older than words.

Karla Linn Merrifield

Sonnet for Leonard

Now somebody knows  
my cold and lonely eyes are on you  
And somebody knows  
the holy dove of my thighs  
And somebody knows  
all about our glitzy waltzes  
danced at my fingertips  
And somebody knows  
this island geography of skin—  
an ear, a lip, clitoris, penis

And somebody knows  
somebody knows who comes closest.

Charles Rammelkamp

## Teleology

She lowers herself onto me,  
and the sight of myself  
down the length of my belly  
disappearing into the billow of hair  
erupting from her mound  
might be more exciting to me  
than the snug wet warmth  
of the tactile sensation.

And then to watch her face,  
eyes closed, a little spittle  
at the corner of her mouth,  
as she lifts and descends:  
this, too, is more thrilling to me  
than those rippling sensations  
up and down the length and root of me.

Indeed, I need to restrain myself,  
prolong the *this*-ness  
of our bodies merging,  
exulting in the sweat and odor,  
holding off the ultimate orgasm.

Oh, and the breasts!  
The sight, the feel of them,  
swaying over me, bouncing  
to the rhythm of her rocking.  
So soft to the hands, the lips, the tongue.

This is all I've lived for.  
This is all.

James Andrew Freeman

## The Things We Bring to Love

When we make  
Love it is  
Not just bodies  
Loins, breasts, lips  
Skin to skin  
Or just the All  
The Now  
The Sweat and cries  
The Moment  
The hours of hours  
It is All  
Of us the way  
Of the world  
Of human  
Love the way  
The race replenishes.  
We bring it All  
To Bed  
Or sofa or  
Floors  
Of passion to  
Ceilings of sex  
With love, Eros to  
Agape to penis  
To vagina  
Dark puckered circles  
To nipples  
Touched by lips to  
Kissed  
Again and  
Again to  
Breath to breath to  
Whispered and yelled  
Names to waves of  
Contracted bands of muscle  
Fiber to nerves to  
Spines to hearts...

She is made  
To fit me velvety,  
Slippery, tight as  
A hand crushing  
And releasing in  
Spasms of  
Ecstasy and I to  
Complete her selfishly  
Like young marrieds  
Fumbling, rushing to peel  
Off reluctant clothes  
On the night before  
The night of the  
Honeymoon, unselfishly  
    Like Gandhi  
Must too  
Have loved...  
When we All love  
And pray the  
African proverb, we not  
Only move our feet:  
We wiggle the  
Toes of  
History.

Alan Cohen

## Post-coital Inventory

Our parts lie strewn  
across this sea of  
scattered pillows  
& cool wet spots

which are you  
which are me &  
which of us owns  
five cold toes  
still unclaimed

is this leg yours or mine

tottering between  
orgasmic bliss &  
sweet sleep hear me:  
*are you okay*

she giggles: *inventory*  
*all accounted for*

in the dark I feel you  
smile from warm  
nose to cold toes  
because I've visited  
all your special spots  
along that route &  
I'll be back tomorrow

Will you be here?

Allan Kaplan

morning after

Is that trio of books leaning on  
each

other

in the coffee's pungent shade

allied

to him?

A woman's shadow passes through

perfumed

sunlight,

returning from the dark's moans.

Soft

fingers

play on his thighs—Is he only

her

echo?

Colleen Powderly

## If We Ever Made Love

I would sigh with relief as you kissed me  
and I would kiss back, the long way,  
tasting your mouth, exploring your tongue.

I would kiss the lines of your face  
and nuzzle your ear as you bent to my neck,  
my poor lonely neck which has never been kissed properly

which waits for you now to make my head lean back  
and my mouth open in a small sound  
as you move around and around it.

I have worried that my neck might never be kissed  
before I die, but you would do it so well that once would last.  
When you reached the hollow of my throat

started down to the crease where my breasts meet  
I would lean back further, giving them to you,  
and my hands would explore your shoulders your back

your muscular arms. As my breasts opened up before you,  
you would find them with your hands and hold them  
like the prizes they are, breakable and infinitely precious.

Your thumbs crossing the pulse of my nipples  
would yield to the silk of your tongue.  
As you tasted them I would sigh again,

then catch my breath. Your hands would grasp  
the small of my back and lower me  
to a bed or a floor or a grassy bank

and I would stroke you every place I could touch.  
Clothes would open, awkwardly but surely fall away,  
and the strength of your erection would push against my thigh,

not insistent, but present, wanting, waiting its moment.

And I, wet with longing, would gasp  
as your fingers slid down to spread my lips,

to touch the hillock of my clitoris.  
Then, opening wide, I would let you in.

Dennis Maulsby

We

flame inside, *fuego en la sangre*, fire  
in my liters of blood wine. You flash  
miles through me: pulse, touch, moan.

Intimacy whips fever. Blue and green tipped  
flares singe our flesh. Your presence injects  
pure high oxygen, blast furnace violet.

Embers incense flesh. Burn-smoke  
releases the caress of orange-vanilla,  
peach-cinnamon, sweet pinion-sandalwood.

Rushing before your hips the salt-hot scent  
of ocean exploding over black cliff rocks.  
Swollen rose petal lips whisper

the liquid jazz of far-out Coltrane.  
Updrafts spin our burnt souls' lace.  
Gray-black particulates glow, spark.

Our mingled warm ash bound with desire  
smolders, swirls in fitful breaths,  
seeks each other again.

Catherine Arra

## When He Comes

He hovers above my belly.  
His eyes, fingers, feet, the nape of his lower back  
are distant landscapes, the territory  
of wakeful sex-  
Breakfast on the porch  
a walk with the dog  
Dexter Gordon, Chardonnay, and yeah, another day.  
Like the rocks we gathered to edge the garden  
and the corners we tuck to make the bed, the peripheries  
of relationship hold us. What we are infinitely  
is less.  
A vagina, nothing more than  
and a penis trembling before  
lips open to the shape of the mouth of the moon  
spilling silver from God's throat  
dashing stardust across galaxies  
and into my naval.

Erica Goss

## The One Beautiful Thing

“Burning in a certain way, still burning.” – Gerald Stern

You are the one beautiful thing  
I use over & over

the first thing I touch  
in the morning

your breath stirs my  
surfaces

my hands keep busy tending  
the green forests of your body

in the long story of you & me  
I have kissed red into your life

the way coyotes bloody the yard  
from time to time

while does bring their soft babies  
to our door

our favorite mysteries are the ones  
we can't solve – the pillow of your palm

against my thigh, what rises in my throat  
we are still burning

in a certain way, still  
burning

Michael Estabrook

## In the Super 8 Motel in Tilton, New Hampshire

Alone finally in the room with my wife after dinner,  
she's usually good to me in hotel rooms.  
("There'll be hotel sex for you tonight if you're a good boy.")  
And she really seems to like what I'm doing to her,  
holding my head between both  
her hands, pulling me in harder,  
squirming and grimacing just enough  
to make me feel like a man,  
to make me feel as if  
I've accomplished something  
useful and beautiful, tender, sweet, and wonderful  
at the end of this long, dreary, dull, gray day.

Ruth Hill

## The Paddle Dancers

I don't know how anyone could sleep with me.  
I'm all over the bed like a mangrove tree:  
a king-size bed where my hands and feet  
find all four posts and wear the bruises.  
Seven pillows help me breathe;  
my dentist pulled the teeth  
that once stopped the drool,  
lactose intolerant — now any fool  
hears me tooting like a mariachi band.  
You never know where slaps my hand.  
Then my husband, like a gentleman,  
fresh from his shower with Irish Spring,  
jumps on the bed and waits for the bounces.  
Although I weigh quite a few ounces, he pounces.  
Like a gorilla, he wraps me  
like cellophane on a cigarillo.  
He's all over me; he exercises me  
like the wooden doll the artists use,  
like a paddle dancer, or a muppet puppet.  
When he's done, I'm dry-mouthed, silent,  
naked, dumb, level and plumb.  
Now that's how I sleep instead.

John Krumberger

## June Time

Driving roads between rivers – Chippewa, Rush, Red Cedar –  
dusk smoldered in the hills and sloped barns sailed towards darkness.

Just past Plum City a deer lurched from woods at the edge of highway,  
ground fog blinding us as we groped to the intersection with County A.

Then in the morning when we awoke to the male cardinal  
unabashedly announcing his lust, I remembered

our love cries from the night before, the wind cool  
after midnight and a whippoorwill repeating his name.

How lucky I felt to live in June time, watching you rise naked  
from the bed, the suppleness of the body standing there with the soul

as I lazily browsed the National Geographic  
article on Whitman you brought for me, reading

*I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey work of the stars.*  
When the rain quenched the valley I closed my eyes

taking that drumming hypnotic sound back into pastures of sleep,  
past rivers, sexual and swollen, azaleas flaming in new grass.

Wally Swist

## Summer Rain

Its patter is distinguished, its rhythm  
Pools then pools within itself again.

It is the slow, persistent music of lovers  
Who are at one in making their gazing

At God last long after their lovemaking  
Is over. Just by the look on their faces,

The divine afterglow of their union  
Is deepened by the mesmerizing

And seductive healing of the slow-falling  
Nature of its meditative tympani.

It is the Paris of weather phenomena.  
Who wouldn't imagine themselves

In the arms of their soul mate just by  
The softness and rustle of its sound?

It is the freshness of the newly opened  
Flowers of iris and peony nodding

To the beat in the coolness of its  
Falling, sometimes a petal loosening

And dropping into a puddle in  
The garden that is alive with its wetness.

Amy Schmitz

## Murmur

Thunder warns us awake before  
dawn, storm-steel light seeps in,  
licks our feet and threatens our door.

Then it begins to pour.  
Arrogant mosquitoes pick and feed.  
Thunder warns us awake before

mountaintops tremble—tremors  
knife apart fertile milkweeds,  
lick our feet and threaten our door

locks, loosely screwed into useless wood—more  
tumble and murmur than slick click. Aggrieved  
thunder warns us awake. Before

safe haven can be taken, let's perform  
one last rain dance full of need:  
lick my feet and threaten my door,

thick with new day. This love can transform  
any storm into slippery seed.  
Thunder warns us awake before,  
licks our feet and threatens our door.

Anthony DeGregorio

## Love Poem

The smell is the sun drying saliva on your skin.  
In the dream your body is canvas for tongue,  
never smeared, perfectly textured.  
Your flesh a perfect mural; we're whispering  
    through a garden.  
Eating, resting. Planting;  
gathering provisions for the long journey still ahead.  
The berries' rich juice gathering along your back,  
    your legs.  
Oceans separate the continents of your body.  
Rivers lead always home again  
through dusk's sleeping towns  
    deep inside you.

Michael Berton

## Verlaine Loved Rimbaud

Can I tongue you  
I mean kiss you  
handsome loins  
towards anus  
yours and yours alone  
whipping the verse  
across the torso  
the scarlet muse  
is still on my palate

Steve Troyanovich

come back to my dream

Mantenemos la luz en un dominio extraño,  
abrazada contra ti y complacida,  
junto a la oscuridad  
--- Juan Manuel Muñoz Aguirre

come back to my dream. this night lingers. the arms of the wind are cold...  
come back to my dream. serenade me with your nakedness. winter's deep  
song hangs on frozen moon branches... come back to my dream. tears of  
another time fill the cold solitude of my heart's recollection. our bodies  
sway in the tangled mirror of a snow blue star... come back to my dream.  
cover me with the remembrance of your warmth. touch me beyond this  
coldness with the midnight seeking landscape of your sun... come back to  
my dream... *i listen to the leaves and the darker shadows fall...*

Joseph R. Trombatore

## Invisible Sleeping Woman

Salvador Dali, 1930

She is a torn sky, a field after battle  
everything familiar has become alien  
Night watchmen stare at pale stars

Drugs to quiet the screams of amputees  
run down shadows in the distance  
A stallion's cry stains sheets like a sunset

Cedar pollen, stalking in our nostrils  
like a lion's mane in a forest fire  
Road kill enhances the scene  
like balls on a playground

Her fingers conceal  
the curves of abandoned staircases  
Her mouth is electrical!  
The spark under closed eyelids  
My seed on her tongue

The lopped off ear of Van Gogh in a napkin  
Your children will study her at University  
make strange faces in front of mirrors

In their sleep,  
rearrange her like a pillow, late at night

Todd Eddy

## Lying on O'Keefe's Couch

It happened again—

*the dream*

Yes, the dream—

*flowers*

No. Lips—

*lips? but, last time you said*

I know I did—

*but, now*

But, now, I saw them for what they were—

*lips*

Lips—

*and*

They were aroused—

*aroused*

They were full, inviting—

*go on*

They were open, parted like the soft petals of a flower—

*yes*

They seemed so warm and moist—

*and*

And, they were pouting, sensuously—

*how did this make you feel*

Excited—

*excited*

Yes, I wanted to kiss them—

*did you*

Yes—

*and*

They kissed me back—

*interesting*

Not really—

*no*

Lips kiss. Full, moist, dripping with nectar lips kiss—

*you enjoyed it*

I quivered—

*quivered*

Yes, I felt myself arch and quiver—

*like an orgasm*  
Very much so—  
*are you certain it was a dream*  
No—

Jessica Sleider

## The Hip Radius

The sweep of my ribcage is  
the same as this planet  
The inside point just  
as hot and  
getting colder closer  
at the surface  
Only warmed by  
an outward source  
I am unrequited by a  
complete circle

Diameters damn me  
I can never open my  
legs quite as wide  
even when I find  
it so much easier  
than my arms

Jeanine Stevens

## My Kitchen in California

It's December,  
making Marseilles Candlemas Cookies,  
I'm caught by the verbs:

*Cream:* the back of my wooden spoon has a will  
of its own, giving up long, languorous strokes.

*Beat:* until slick and elastic.

*Knead:* the soft dome on my marble board  
seems to stretch, arch under the heel of my palm.

*Roll:* a firm massage. What pleasure,  
the walnut-size lumps finding  
their way into sausage shapes.

*Slit:* the only sharp movement required.

If the aroma of a Madeline dipped  
in fragrant tea re-ignites Marcel's vision  
of parlors, sofas, and linens,  
for me, this command recalls  
the aborigine's ritual surgery with a stone knife.  
I sharpen mine with trepidation,  
cleave the full length,  
careful not to cut too deep.

*Cover:* Hard not to peek as they puff  
and swell, double in size under a warm towel.

*Bake:* Oblongs emerge like pendulous crystals  
hung from chandeliers, deep caverns,  
rough but nice to hold. On top I sprinkle  
clear sugar chips, place on a silver tray,  
wrap in star-glazed cellophane, and tie  
the handle with mauve grosgrain ribbons.

Meri Harary

## Lying On the Floor in My Newly Rented House

The house is empty—  
our bones touch the bones of a home  
that has contained others  
like a box a child holds,  
full of insects that don't know  
they are being held captive.  
I don't yet own a bed or blanket—  
we don't need them, not tonight.  
I invited you to find out  
if the house fit,  
if you wanted me  
when we got inside.

Kneeling over you,  
the floor hurts my knees.  
I rest them on you,  
rock back and forth  
as you grip my waist  
to keep me from touching  
the oak boards.

Staring up at the ceiling,  
your face glows with satisfaction.  
You say it felt so good  
on the floor, tell me  
you like it here,  
the way the wood feels  
against your back—  
the way I feel,  
wrapped around you  
in this house,  
quiet and naked,  
like us.

Lauren Camp

## Hush 12

In an alley, they swerve unhurried into stars, kiss the calcium-rich light  
of the crescent moon. He hands her his madness and she arches, all sinew

and lava, all watermelon sugar. She murmurs marred words

to his threadbare shadow in tiny constellations until each sentence is  
suggestion: the wet shame of want packed into bricks and pots,

the fragrant bloom of desire. She cannot be distracted by the bottle and his  
cup of kisses, the blue sardonic laugh of his flesh and this uncertain  
commerce

of lust, an infinite haste for his hands on her body,

cannot gather such flourishes, the casual spill into paradise with its bulbous  
afternoons of sighing. If he asks to pray at the altar of anticipation

where craving becomes motion, widening again into wine until the waitress  
has come to their table seven times and the glass remains empty gleaming,

the law of distraction must not settle in. A thousand times,

she'll refuse to return, but we are each part animal, each invisible, poured  
into impurity by thirst, an invasion of the margin.

Impatient as she is to get away, if the glass holds her hand, she'll bring her  
voice to the place he draws his need,

and he'll become a lick of fire down her road of secrets, someone she  
obliged.

James Tyner

## Trying to Save a Drowning Girl from the Lamona Ditch

I will learn later that you are the first Hmong  
I've met. I will remember your eyes, the brown  
so heavy it was black, your hand a fist, tight.  
I will remember your mouth, no sound, no  
word, just small drops of water on your lips,  
your chin. But now, there is reaching,  
holding on to your wet hand, the cold  
of it almost burning, slipping, and now  
I have your shirt, come on dammit, lifting  
you up, some part of it ripping,  
the sound soggy, slow, and your skin  
so pale underneath, the current pulling  
at your feet, your calves, as you come up.

Ronna Magy

## Listen

The clapboard shutters on the back of  
the summer cottage listened  
as she told of her  
afternoon escapades with the boys.  
Age eleven she and I were then.  
I, pre-pubescent,  
and she, already there.  
And those boys, not the same age.  
Just a bit beyond.

How she let Ray and George Menzes  
squeeze her boobs.  
She got excited when they did that to her.  
And other things “down there”  
I did not yet understand.  
On a gravel road in the back seat of a car.  
And not to tell her mother,  
or she’d be considered bad.

The first boyfriend I had was Willie.  
He was seven,  
I was five.  
When he came to my house on a summer’s day,  
we sat on front porch steps, outside.  
I, in a gown of diaphanous yellow  
with holes at the top  
you could see through to the skin.

Patti Tana

## Eve Offered

When she touched  
the soft curves of her breasts  
hard curves of her hips  
the cheeks of her buttocks

when she offered  
her thighs as a cushion  
to lead him inside  
the crimson chamber

the naked man  
entered paradise.

Sarah Brown Weitzman

## Loss of Innocence

The Bible tells us  
that Eden was a sexless place  
that Adam knew Eve  
only afterwards.

Our own loss comes  
when we realize apples  
resemble breasts  
and snakes rise in men.

I was twelve when it happened  
to me: I left that theatre  
ill with longing  
for what I had only glimpsed

of the limitlessness of the fall,  
and its heights.

Ed Robson

in the beginning

as time begins the spirit moves creating  
calls us all to join the sacred dance  
by which all things will ever be made new

(each encounter is our very first  
like swimmers long submerged we rise  
into each other's arms  
and from each other's lips  
draw life in great sweet gulps)

in this most perfect moment  
we are drawn beyond ourselves  
our voices moved by something  
far too primitive for speech  
utter sounds of ecstasy  
that none would dare call meaningless

(laughing sighing murmuring  
timeless afternoons of conversation  
punctuated now and then by words)

ego starts to fade within the longing for the other  
for the intimacy that transcends all individualities  
at last no longer needed is forgotten  
as we two perceive the oneness of creation

(yin and yang are met and joined  
breath a gasping counterpoint  
legs seek purchase torsos strain  
eyes lock mounting joy reflect till  
fusion's flare consumes all thought  
and paradise is gained)

name it passion name it prayer  
holy is the gift we share  
all-creative sacrament  
where spirits groan insentient

sighs too deep for words to bear  
our father who art with us here  
the name we breathe in unison  
most hallowed be  
amen  
amen

Ruth Sabath Rosenthal

## Now Voyeur

This old heart of mine no longer beats  
down the doldrums, nor turns humdrum  
bright as gold, as was done in my prime;

and nightly, in dreams high in my vessel  
of wanting delight, it's strangers acting  
out *my* desires! Imagine that! Intruders

beating me to the punch in the quest for  
hot sex: Moist bodies embrace, legs, twixt  
& twain, heighten each twist & turn

of a lusty mind. And this morning, awake,  
far from alright, I vow to lotion my loins  
daily, perfume my skin and, if my old man

again says, *Not tonight*, I'll write this  
craft of mine, shove it in his face, and ride  
out the current into the sunset

with as much grace as I can muster.

Michael Collenese

## Why Sex With Strangers Might be Better After Death

Nobody would ever again worry about pregnancy or disease or where to find an open pharmacy after midnight to buy condoms.

And the bodies are supposedly perfect so there'd no longer be the slightest anxiousness about smelly feet or cellulite or chipped teeth,

and what a relief not to suck your gut until somebody cuts the lights. All such difficulties as are exhaustively annotated in the 1972 edition

of *Paradise*, in which I nearly die behind the wheel of a Chrysler Imperial while traveling across Iowa with a girl called Monique.

Not so much disembodied as graceful; after death you'll never get one foot stuck in the elastic while climbing out of your underwear.

In fact, you'll probably never bother to wear underwear at all, except perhaps as decoration, and those wispy clouds certainly look softer

than an army blanket in the woods. Of course, the afterlife might be a different experience for a frightened young virgin in the radical

Islamic version. Imagine some bony-assed suicide bomber with wild eyes and beard who wanted to slobber all over you without so much

as an introduction. It would be hell to find yourself in a situation like that if you hadn't already been preparing for nothingness or worse.

Joanne M. Clarkson

## The Goodbye Skin

She asks to lie beside him for an  
hour, just an hour, before earth claims him  
and the smoky wind. I see her  
climb onto the bed that for weeks  
had housed nerve endings so brittle  
the air seemed to bleed. *No*  
he had screamed when she reached out

to touch him. Today his stillness is accepting  
as she curls against stiff limbs. I leave  
the room, closing the door softly, taping up  
a makeshift sign so that no worker  
on a pleasure-less schedule interrupts a passion  
beyond intimacy or tear. Is it possible

to reach the dead? Minutes or years later? To  
beg the breeze for a fingertip or sun for the burn  
of cheek against cheek? Is this what heaven  
becomes: loving once again a skin  
not our own? I do not see

her leave, but by the end of the shift  
the room is empty, ragged cocoon. On the naked  
mattress only indentations remain: head,  
shoulders, buttocks, heels and next to this:  
the curve of a hip bone.

Dane Cervine

## Where to Put a Body That Will Not Go Away

Saint Augustine, skin luminescent with perfumed oil,  
wondered. He stood in the Milan baptistery  
naked with his fellow initiates who wished  
for proud new bodies, incorruptible  
as citizens of heaven—unlike other Romans  
savoring their tough muscled torsos  
in the public baths nearby. The future of western civilization  
hung on this question of the flesh—  
to be seduced by it, to master it—  
though he knew only  
his own failure living content in a body  
gorged on roast pig, wine, entwined  
in the wings of Eros.

Ambrose, his bishop, hoped to abandon the body,  
baptism a moment of rapture  
as the soul escaped the dark pagan husk  
of thigh muscle, dirty foot, arrogant shoulder.  
But Augustine worried no single rite,  
not even exorcism, was sufficient to solve  
the body's dark enigma. He feared living  
too angelic, a spectral soul of light.  
Still,

his shameless, unapologetic body was tired now  
as he offered it to water. If only

his perfumed skin didn't shine so  
from the candle light. If only

he knew how to be faithful  
to both light and bone, heaven  
and stone.

Lyn Lifshin

On the Quilt of Blue Flowers

rain sloshing through  
black walnuts, cherries  
on white stones. Stillness,  
green as the  
palm except for the  
dripping. Lie there  
and spread those  
legs wide. What do  
you think when I'm  
touching now you're  
tied down you can't,  
you want me in  
deeper more honey.  
Your cunt reaching  
up and begging wetter  
than leaves surrender-  
ing opening wider  
do you like wetter  
a wet rose loud  
as water in the  
maples I didn't  
have that many  
women but I  
read a lot

Robin Leslie Jacobson

## On the Bayou

You always begin  
with the uplands,  
that rolling country of  
throat and collarbone,  
shoulders and breasts,  
the dark mounds  
places you head for  
again and again and  
you make your way  
from those well-loved  
hills down a long blue  
tributary of vein  
to the broad piedmont  
of belly and thighs,  
slowly homing in  
on the mouth  
of the river—overgrown  
with swampgrass  
it pulls you back in and  
you brush aside branches  
hung with moss  
and enter that delta,  
twilight even at noon  
and smelling of  
birth and decay, and  
you can't help  
wading upstream,  
though you've been  
here over and over  
you can't remember where  
the pools are, where  
the rapids, the rocks, how  
deep the water, and  
you know that  
just around any bend you  
could find your way  
and lose yourself  
all in a moment.

Dah

## Scent of My Lover

The scent of my lover  
comes from the luscious sweat  
dripping down her breasts  
floating over her belly

like pearls or precious light

as my hands mouth and tongue  
slide over her steamy body  
wet with my craving

Hard nipples between my fingers

and her back arches as she thrusts  
her belly button into my mouth  
only for her hands to drive my head  
lower and lower

to her womanly sea

salty and undulant  
alive and succulent

where

I swim through her orgasms  
one wave after another

only to drown in her bliss

Karen Paul Holmes

## Eight Places a Woman Loves to Be Touched

The small of the back  
(where a wren could settle):  
not so small a thing  
when your hand nests there.

Clavicle bone  
strolled upon by fingertips  
like a tightrope walker—  
graceful, vulnerable, balanced.

The nape of the neck  
discovered under my hair  
sends shivers  
delightfully down...

Two inches below the navel  
my sacral chakra shines orange  
and spins, spins, spins.

The back of the knee  
goes weak  
but I don't have to stand.

The arch of the foot  
doesn't tickle where your thumb  
travels. I'm grounded.

The palm of the hand  
feels your breath:  
a prayer.

In the kitchen  
as I pour oolong tea  
you move my hair aside,  
feather the hollow beneath  
my cheekbone  
with good morning lips.

Guy Thovaldsen

## In Praise of Older Women

It's tempting no doubt, for women to challenge time  
be drawn to seductive claims of pricy creams  
to smooth the landscape of deepening streams  
and cracks at the edge of eyes--those aging crimes.  
Or perhaps a laser peeled brow and freshly pouted lips,  
a simple lift and a tuck will stem the lonely tide.  
Pilate' their bodies in hopes of one last good ride  
from life that passes them by as if they do not exist.  
But wise women know a tummy freed creates a perfect bowl  
just right for two hands to cradle from behind,  
that slowed-down sex is the true blessing of time.  
Oh sorrow and truth may ripple in her facial crows,  
but give me a woman who's swum in the oceans  
than those who dwell in a puddle of younger commotion.

Guy Thovaldsen

## The first time I touched a vagina

I was sixteen,  
lying on a still warm beach  
in the moonless dark  
hip-to-hip with a freckled Irish girl,  
our lanky bodies loosened  
by cheap beer and beat Mexican pot.  
As we kissed (one thing I was good at),  
my eager hand slipped  
down the front  
of her hip-huggers,  
the zipper nicking my knuckles.  
First, a tickle of mown lawn  
brushed my palm,  
and then a soft, almost doughy precipice.

Already far out of my depth,  
I hesitated, considered my woeful lack of strategies  
until she tilted back and my fingers tracked  
like happy otters on a suddenly slick slide.

How wrong was whatever it was  
I had imagined until then.  
Here was a wet-slick swamp,  
no handholds or how-to instructions  
as my fingers dog-paddled  
within this formless sinuosity of flesh.  
I was the clumsy boy  
who'd tumbled into the well  
lost, alone, mute,  
yet warmly enveloped in the closest company  
of another I had ever been,  
the universe existing solely  
in the finely whorled surface of my fingertips.

And so when I came in my shorts  
and pulled my hand out of hers,  
only the low rumble of ocean

and damp blanket of sea air  
seemed capable of understanding  
where I had been  
and who I might become.

Zack Rogrow

## Lounge Ghazal

I miss the excess of youth. So deep I used to drink of it—  
Love till dawn, all night long, the double-cream stink of it.

The blues is just a skin too small for our flesh  
But lately there are days I'm past the brink of it.

Love also has its anthems and its flag;  
The sepia and the scarlet and the pink of it.

More than the kick of liquor, more than the wiry taste,  
I like the toast and the clink of it.

Did you do something so human you can't even tell a friend?  
Well, you can always tell your shrink of it.

Don't get trapped in your past, Zack,  
Not for a second, don't you even think of it.

Zack Rogrow

## Ghazal of Sex

Don't know much about love, but I know something about sex.  
One thing I know is it's better to do with than without sex.

"All ways to come are good," said a friend.  
There's so much more than the old in-and-out sex.

Some days I seriously doubt that two lives can mix  
But there are few days when I ever doubt sex.

Some grown-ups dress up when they undress.  
Some like leather, some like girl scout sex.

Maybe what I need is the tantric variety?  
Lotuses overlap in very devout sex.

Saw two fish in a stream waving like flags,  
And I glimpsed the ecstasy even in trout sex.

When you give yourself, Zack, don't pull back your heart.  
Make sure it's always all-out sex.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**John Grey** is an Australian-born poet. His work is recently published in *Slant*, *Southern California Review* and *Skidrow Penthouse*. Upcoming work will appear in *Bryant Literary Magazine*, *Natural Bridge*, and *Soundings East*.

**Phil Cicchi** is an aged and disabled poet whose poetry nevertheless remains young and vibrant and, like good cognac, continues to improve with age.

Never mistaken for a lioness in heat, **Karla Linn Merrifield's** newest of ten books are *Lithic Scatter and Other Poems* (Mercury Heartlink) and *Attaining Canopy: Amazon Poems* (FootHills Publishing).

**Charles Rammelkamp's** latest book is called *FUSEN BAKUDAN* (Time Being Books), a sequence of poems about missionaries in a leper colony in Vietnam during the war. In August, Finishing Line Press will publish his chapbook, *MIXED SIGNALS*.

**James A. Freeman**, for thirty years plus, has taught English at Bucks County Community College in Newtown, PA. He is the author of twenty one books, including the new poetry collection *Temporary Roses Dipped in Liquid Gold* (Finishing Line Press, 2013); the book of stories, *Irish Wake: In Loving Memory of Us All* (America Star Books, 2011); and the novels, *Isbi's Journey* (Naturegraph, 2006, 1992), *Never the Same River Twice* (Charles McFadden Co., 1996), and *Liars' Tales of True Love* (Publish America, 2007).

**Alan Cohen** dumped research statistics for truffles in Italy and poetizing in northern California, a veritable hotbed of poet laureates and near laureates. His poems appear in over 30 publications.

**Allan Kaplan:** Life passing, revising alone or watching late night movies with wife. Books: Paper Airplane (Harper & Row) *Like One of Us* (Untitled). Poems appeared in many journals over the years.

**Colleen Powderly's** early poems provided material for *Split*, her 2009 poetic memoir (FootHills Publishing). Her work has appeared in many poetry journals. She is currently working on a book-length poem, *Voices from the Unheard World*.

**Dennis Maulsby** lives in Ames, Iowa. His poetry has appeared in numerous journals and on National Public Radio. His poem *Isle Royale Hunted* received a Pushcart Prize nomination in 2011.

**Catherine Arra** is a native of the Hudson Valley in upstate New York. Her first chapbook, *Slamming & Splitting*, was published in March 2014 by RedOchreLit.

**Erica Goss** is the Poet Laureate of Los Gatos, CA, and the host of Word to Word, a show about poetry. She is the author of *Wild Place* (Finishing Line Press 2012) and *Vibrant Words: Ideas and Inspirations for Poets* (PushPen Press 2014). Her poems, reviews and articles appear widely, both on-line and in print. She won the 2011 Many Mountains Moving Poetry Contest and was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 2010 and 2013. Please visit her at: [www.ericagoss.com](http://www.ericagoss.com).

**Michael Estabrook** is a recently retired baby boomer poet freed finally after working 40 years for “The Man” and sometimes “The Woman.” No more useless meetings under florescent lights in stuffy windowless rooms. Now he’s able to devote all his time to trying to satisfy his wife’s legendary Honey-Do List.

**Ruth Hill** was raised in upstate NY, and traveled North America extensively. Little Red Tree will soon publish her first collection of prize-winning poems. Email is welcome at: [ruthhill@joicedevivregardens.ca](mailto:ruthhill@joicedevivregardens.ca).

**John Krumberger** received an MFA from New England College in 2006. He lives with his wife Cris Higgin in Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he works as a psychologist. A volume of his poetry entitled *THE LANGUAGE OF RAIN AND WIND* was published by Backwaters Press in 2008.

**Wally Swist**’s books include *Huang Po and the Dimensions of Love* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2012) and *The Daodejing of Laozi*, with David Breeden and Steven Schroeder (Lamar University Press, 2014).

**Amy Schmitz** holds an MFA from George Mason University. Her work has been published in *Poetry International*, *Freshwater*, *The Bellevue Review*, *Folio*, *River City*, *Kiosk*, *The Baltimore Review*, *So to Speak*, *The Washington Review* and *Koktjl*.

**Anthony DeGregorio** has published work in a few dozen journals. His most recently my poems appeared in *The Whirlwind Review* and *Muse Literary Magazine*. He has been teaching a tutorial in expository writing at Manhattanville College for sixteen years.

**Michael Berton** enjoys traveling, hiking, sipping tequila and drumming. Poems have recently appeared in *Otoliths*, *Blaze VOX*, *Ambush Review* and *Yellow Medicine Review*. He is currently reading the long poem, "Altazor" by Vicente Huidobro. He lives in Portland, Oregon.

**Steve Troyanovich's** poetry has appeared in diverse publications including *Arabesques Review*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*, *Goose River Anthologies*, *Reckless Writing 2013* and *From the Other World: Poems in Memory of James Wright*.

**Joseph R. Trombatore** is a poet & artist currently residing in San Antonio, Texas. Of Sicilian and German descent, he spends 75% of his time in the dark, 25% in the light.

**Todd Eddy** currently lives and writes in Normal, IL., a place where "poetry is best read while naked."

**Jessica Sleider** now lives in the north. Her wet leaves of birch wave in cold wind. A man put a ring on her finger, and they thought her was writing done. But she knew, after thirty-seven years, to keep him in her bed so she could write on his skin. And she does. Daily.

In her writing, **Jeanine Stevens** looks for inspiration in the everyday: the apricot splayed across the havarti, the melon wrapped snug in the prosciutto, the crescent moon and single star above the Aegean, the fleshy tuber of the white tulip. She divides her time between Lake Tahoe and Sacramento.

**Meri Harary** earned an MFA from Southern Connecticut State University, and was the winner of the 2012 Leo Conellan Poetry Prize from the CT

state universities, as well as the 2014 winner of the Jewish Women's Literary Annual Poetry Prize.

**Lauren Camp** is an artist, teacher, poet and radio DJ. Her third book of poetry won the Dorset Prize, and will be published by Tupelo Press in 2016. She hosts "Audio Saucepan," a global music/poetry program on Santa Fe Public Radio. [www.laurencamp.com](http://www.laurencamp.com).

Half Mexican American and half Caucasian, **James Tyner** grew up in Los Angeles and in Fresno, CA. His awards include the 2008 Coal Hill Review chapbook contest, the Larry Levis poetry prize, the Ernesto Trejo Poetry Prize, and the Andres Montoya Scholarship. He has appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *The Working Poet*, *New America*, and the Autumn House Anthology of Contemporary American Poetry. His poems "At a Barbeque for R.C." and "After the Artichoke Harvest" were nominated for Pushcart Prizes. Tyner was recently installed as the first Poet Laureate of Fresno.

**Ronna Magy** is a Los Angeles-based writer of poetry and memoir. Her work appears in *Sinister Wisdom*, *Up, Do: Flash Fiction by Women Writers*, *Trivia: Voices of Feminism*, *Where Thy Dark Eye Glances*, *Southern Women's Review*, and *Lady Business*.

**Patti Tana's** "Eve Offered" will be in her ninth collection of poems, *All I Can Gather & Give* (forthcoming from JB Stillwater Publishing). To hear her voice, please visit <http://www.pattitana.com>

**Sarah Brown Weitzman**, a Pushcart nominee, has had work in numerous journals such as *AMERICA*, *ART TIMES*, *THE NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, *RATTLE*, *THE MID-AMERICAN REVIEW*, *THE WINDLESS ORCHARD*, *POET LORE*, and *POTOMAC REVIEW*. She received a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. Her latest book, a departure from poetry, is the children's novel *HERMAN AND THE ICE WITCH*, published by Main Street Rag.

**Ed Robson**, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and Unitarian Universalist. His works in progress include poetry, drama, novels, and a nonfiction book, *Artificial Intuition*. He lives in North Carolina.

**Ruth Sabbath Rosenthal** is a New York poet, published in the U.S. and also internationally. She has authored 4 books of poetry: *Facing Home* (a chapbook), *Facing Home and Beyond*, *little, but by no means small* and *Food: Nature vs Nurture*. Feel free to visit her website [www.newyorkcitypoet.com](http://www.newyorkcitypoet.com)

**Michael Colonnese** has worked as an advertising copywriter, as a chemical salesman, as a vegetable farmer, as a real estate agent, as a lobster fisherman, as a house painter, as a day laborer, as a Pinkerton guard, as a beer-truck driver, and as a soundman and editor for a documentary film company. He currently directs the Creative Writing Program at Methodist University and serves as the Managing Editor of Longleaf Press.

**Joanne M. Clarkson's** fourth poetry collection, "Believing the Body," was published this spring by Gribble Press. Her poems have appeared recently in *Nimrod*, *The Midwest Quarterly* and *Rhino*. She is a Registered Nurse and married to James Clarkson who studies UFOs.

**Dane Cervine** was nominated for a 2013 Pushcart Poetry Prize, won the 2013 Atlanta Review Poetry Prize, and the 2013 Morton Marcus Poetry 2nd Prize. His new book is entitled *How Therapists Dance*, from Plain View Press (2013), which also published his previous book *The Jeweled Net of Indra*. [www.DaneCervine.typepad.com](http://www.DaneCervine.typepad.com)

**Lyn Lifshin** has published over 130 books and chapbooks. Her prizewinning book, *Before It's Light*, was published by Black Sparrow Press. Recent books include *Ballroom*, *All the Poets Who Have Touched Me*, and *Living and Dead*. Forthcoming books include *Luminous Women: Eneaduanna, Schererzade and Nefertiti: Femina Eterna* and *Moving Through Stained Glass: the Maple Poems*. Her website is [www.lynlifshin.com](http://www.lynlifshin.com).

**Robin Leslie Jacobson** has taught or been a guest speaker at San Francisco Art Institute, Poets & Writers, California Poets in the Schools, and many other organizations. She also directs for the stage, coaches performing artists, and edits poetry, fiction, and writing about the arts. Robin has received several American Pen Women awards and a Headlands Center for the Arts residency. Her writing has appeared in *Parabola*, *Bellevue Literary*

*Review, Poetry Flash, Runes*, and many other publications. *Eye Drops*, her first chapbook, was published in *Ruab*; her first full-length book, *Just Past Dream Farm Road*, is forthcoming from Tebot Bach.

**Dah**'s poetry has appeared, most recently, in *The Sandy River Review*, *Stone Voices Magazine*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Orion headless*, *River & South Review*, *The Muse*, and *Miracle Magazine*, and is forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*, *Poetry Pacific*, and *Literature Today*. The author of two collections of poetry from Stillpoint Books, his third collection is due for publication in 2014, also from Stillpoint. Dah lives in Berkeley, California, where he is currently working on the manuscript for his fourth book.

**Karen Paul Holmes** has a hot new love after going through the traumatic end of her 30-year marriage. Read all about it in her poetry collection, *Untying the Knot*.

“Growing up, sex was never spoken of in our house, so as a child it confused me that, despite having a massive bed, my parents were often found scrunched up together in the morning. Last year my father, now 90, finally told me that good sex makes a good marriage. Mystery solved.” **Guy Thorvaldsen** lives in Madison, WI and does have very good marriage indeed!

**Zack Rogow** is the author, editor, or translator of twenty books or plays. His seventh book of poems, *My Mother and the Ceiling Dancers*, was published by Kattywompus Press. He is the editor of an anthology of poetry of the U.S.A., *The Face of Poetry*, published by University of California Press. Currently, he teaches in the low-residency MFA in writing program at the University of Alaska Anchorage and serves as poetry editor of *Catamaran Literary Reader*.