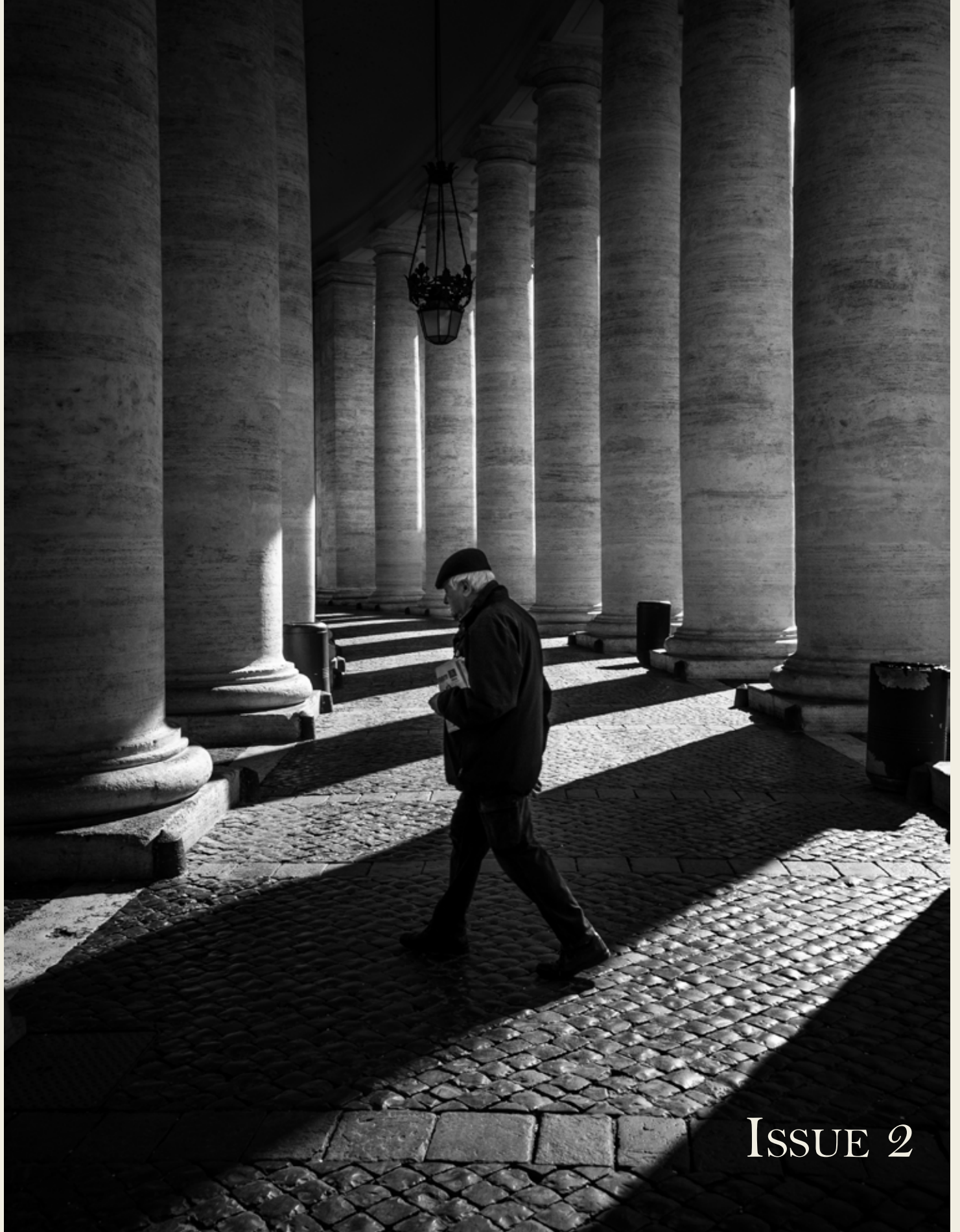


# LOTUS-EATER



ISSUE 2



Lotus-eater is based in Rome, Italy and publishes works  
in English and translations from the Italian

Editor: Diana Mastrodomenico

Assistant editors: Marco Costantini, Chiara Patrizi

Italian poems translated by Diana Mastrodomenico

This compilation copyright belongs to the Editor


© Lotus-eater Literary Magazine 2015


© Copyright of all works remains with the contributors

Do not copy or redistribute without permission

Cover image © copyright Francesco De Franco, 2015

 [lotus-eatermagazine.com](http://lotus-eatermagazine.com)

 [facebook.com/lotuseatermagazine](https://facebook.com/lotuseatermagazine)

 [twitter.com/LotusEaterMag](https://twitter.com/LotusEaterMag)

# ISSUE 2

---

## PROSE

DANIEL LEV SHKOLNIK	4
<i>Amyerika</i>	
RENA ROBINETT	7
<i>Swat Valley</i>	
JACKSON CONNOR	10
<i>I'm on a Mountain</i>	
ELIZABETH GEOGHEGAN	12
<i>Dahlia</i>	

---

## POETRY

CHARLIE BAYLIS	14
<i>Elizabeth</i>	
GLEN ARMSTRONG	24
<i>A Brief History of Liberty</i>	
GAIL ACUFF	25
<i>Gnash</i>	
<i>Touch</i>	
<i>Praise</i>	
MIRIAM SAGAN	29
<i>Self-Taught</i>	
FRANCA MANCINELLI	30
HOWIE GOOD	33
<i>Untreatable Strangeness</i>	
<i>Buddha &amp; Co.</i>	
<i>Modern Love</i>	
THOMAS O'CONNELL	35
<i>Predestination Wins Again</i>	
MAŁGORZATA SKAŁBANIA	36
SAM SELINGER	37
<i>At the Noguchi Museum</i>	
<i>A Japanese Woodblock Print</i>	
CONTRIBUTORS	42

# Prose



Photo by Francesco De Franco  
© F. De Franco, 2014



## Amyerika

I sit by my grandmother's hospital bed. Her Russian is tiny and trembling. So small, I have to shrink to hear her.

*"Danya, stay away from the sink. The nurses have left something horrible there."*

A row of black spines rises from of the water, rattles, and sinks back down.

*"We must leave this hospital, Danya. They've already found out we are trying to escape."*

Miles away, the secret police break down our door and throw our pots into the sky. They search under the beds with carbine-eyes and sniff the floorboards with their nozzles. They find no one and emerge furious, whipping the air with steel arms.

*"We must leave, Danya. They will ask us for our papers. Our names are already on their lists."*

\*\*\*

The nurses are all failed ballerinas. Envious and vain, they come in on tip-toes at night and take the rings off her fingers and the gold right out of her mouth. Her bag goes missing three or four times a day.

*"If I die here, Danya, they will steal the jewelry off my corpse. Take me home."*

She tries to get up but finds her belly full of bowling balls and her legs weak as dry rubber bands.

*"You've had a stroke, baba."*

*"And if I get better next week?"*

*"Then I'll take you home next week."*

*"And you'll water all my plants till then?"*

She promises to do exercises with the nurse and take their pills, even the ones that taste like arsenic. I promise to water all the plants—the begonias twice a day.

\*\*\*

Outside, the second great war is starting again, and great rubber boots march over the landscape. People are armoring doors with boilerplates and windows with stove grills. The Germans are coming and the first paper villages are already burning on the horizon.

At night, the sound of bombers keep my grandmother awake.

*"Has Tanya covered the windows? They will drop bombs soon. We must kick them off before they set the house aflame."*



“Tanya is in Philadelphia.”

*“Ask her if she heard from father. It worries me he hasn’t written.”*

\*\*\*

In Kiev, *Baba’s* father receives a letter, dirty with official stamps and nested in military etiquette, informing him of the regiment in which he is to die. He reports to the barracks where the soldiers are given unloaded guns and ordered to find bullets along the way. They march towards the front and come to a place where the grass feels like hair and the pebbles grind against each other like teeth. They pick fresh bullets off the bushes that grow there while clouds of burnt earth rise in the distance.

At midnight, the sky cracks open like a blackboard and hammers fall on everything. Leb spends the night with his face to the darkness reading the lines of Torah that pass among the clouds. By morning, his hair also blows with the grasses and the falling rain cleans his teeth. His veins become a red bush that grows in a war field. His branches hang with leaves of Hebrew letters that wither as they’re read.

\*\*\*

The nurses try to poison her again.

*“Murderers! Thieves! Where is my grandson? What have you done with him?”*

She goes on for hours. The nurses give her new pills. She spits them out, so they grind them into her applesauce. As the medicine takes hold, the light from the fluorescent tubes begins to smell like sour milk. Herds of words scamper past her like small gazelle, but she can’t catch a single one.

\*\*\*

When the war was over, she left Leningrad in a train that rattled over starving mountains and towns where the people had worked themselves to shadows. She saw fleas gather on the tips of people’s fingers to be closer to the fire. She saw bakeries mix sawdust into their bread and steel girders snap from hunger. Moscow was a city held up with glass pillars and whose onion domes drilled against the skies. Where people walked around with needles in their hearts and thimbles in their pockets, with nothing to sow and no one to sow it for.

She built a house where she remembered the old one stood. A man came into her life and left a daughter. The Uzbek steppe became a father of sorts. Even then the country was already beginning to topple, and she would find large chunks of it sunk into her front yard. Her daughter returned from medical school with a ticket in her pocket and a neon arrow in her mind pointing fiercely to the West.

The night before they left, she ran through the steppe with glass jars and pickled what memories she could. She

left pocket mirrors in the moonlight for fear there really were no stars beyond Ukraine. In Italy, they planted the nutshells they'd brought with them and boiled the staples from their suitcases to make a broth. But the shells never sprouted and the staples went rusty. They lived in basements so dark they could only read by the moonlight of their pocket mirrors. They traveled in boats so rag-rigged and foul the jars of wind were empty long before they saw the Hudson.

There were other things then: a heated house, a grandson, an apartment full of plants, but it felt as though a very long time had passed since she'd seen them all—centuries, maybe more. A fearful thought entered her head: that all these people she once knew had died without her, long ago. She sat at the bottom of a numb universe, tasting vaguely of arsenic, and wondered if there was anyone left to bury her.

\*\*\*

As the medicines wear off, her daughter and grandchildren are sitting around her. Tanya has come up from Philadelphia, Lonya has driven from New York. We astonish her like flowers popping from the snow.

*"Where did you come from?"* She asks.

*"How did you find me?"*

She looks outside the window and sees cities so well-fed she mistakes them for

mountains and people so rich they barely cast a shadow. Here, the night sky has never shattered like a blackboard. Bread has never tasted of wood shavings.

*"What is this country?"* she asks me.

*"It's America, baba. You've lived here for twenty years."*

\*\*\*

As she lies in bed that night she notices the nursing home is mounted on a seashell that gently drills into the earth. The building passes through regions of loose stars and faint fish where there are no secret police, through groves where rare children sleep in fruit trees and jewelry is as common as bird droppings. There she sees a tree with Hebrew letters on its leaves. She reads them and begins to laugh.

*"Amyerika,"* she says and almost understands.

RENA ROBINETT



## *Swat Valley*

The town in Swat Valley, Northern Pakistan is a village of mud huts centered around a bazaar. The hashish shop, Chai stand, and a few hovels sit in a dusty square filled with whatever meager goods made it through the passes north from Peshawar or Lahore. Swat sits in a cool mountain valley between the foothills of the Hindu Kush and Kashmir. The road continues north through the valley all the way to China. Buddha was said to have traveled south through Swat on his journey into India, although that is widely contested in India.

The women of the village gather on wash day and slap slap slap the shirts and pants of their husbands against the old river rocks in a valley. The valley is long, narrow, and verdantly green bisected by the cool blue ribbon of the Swat River. These are proud, independent, strong, fierce tribal women. They do not wear veils. Like gypsies who came from the tribes of India, these women do not look away when you stare at them. Coal black eyes look through centuries from the tribes of Israel to Macedonia to Persia to Genghis, and some are through Alexander with blue eyes like a desert sky. Swarms of white and brown men, adventurers and exploiters, employers and traders, hippies and diplomats, have passed these women standing by the side of dusty

roads their head piled high with colorful woven baskets of household goods.

I sat on the stoop of an adobe in rays of sun stabbing my hash-glazed eyes which followed one woman as she swayed down to the river with her laundry balanced on her head. I held a book in my hand, trying to escape the day. Across the dusty pathway through the center of town a tiny woman stood in a shadowy doorway, hiding. She had no nose, just two watery eyes staring from inside the deep fold of her head shawl. Occasionally, when I had passed her and put a coin or two into her outreached hand, she would let the material fall from her face. The first time I gave her coin I couldn't look at her noseless face, so I kept my eyes down. After a few encounters, my eyes slid up past her chin to the leprosy which marked her. I looked away, ashamed of my horror. The next time I looked past her nose and her eyes looked straight into mine. She did not look ashamed. Now, I always looked her straight in the eye. Her eyes filling her gentle face were all I saw.

The dusty road was a great conductor of sound and I heard feet stomping on the dry ground down the road leading from Lahore. Distantly, in a haze of heat and dust, I could see a moving column of men with guns. Pakistani military garrisoned outside of Swat Valley for reasons I had no desire to grasp came to our village





daily for tea. I had escaped the Kent State of America in the 70's to escape. I was tired of protest. The cacophony of Asian politics in 1973 was of no interest. As I smoked my daily pipes, I no longer cared who ruled the world.

The soldiers marched into the village and spread out, filling up the local Chai shop. Several soldiers gathered in chairs around the rickety tables outside. The tea man sat hunched like a frog on his mud ledge, feet tucked under his ass, stirring the Chai in a huge metal caldera with a wooden paddle. Cups were filled and drunk while the men boasted and preened in their gray and red uniforms. Others lined up in front of the local tobacconeer to buy tiny packets of K2 cigarettes.

The men were a noisy, colorful intrusion on the quiet lull of the village. I stood up to slip inside the tiny hotel and up to my room that had a view of the river. As I turned, I heard the clear, fast thunk of a gun cock. It split through the day and spun me around. The man stood across the way in front of my lady of the eyes. He held his gun toward the ground casually in her direction. He pointed at her with his other arm outstretched and laughed with his friends. She tried to back away into the darkness. The man barked out a word that could only mean, "halt". The air froze. Our lady began a long, slow keening wail. I stood, frozen, as the day folded in on us.

A vision of flying wings burst off the path from the river straight across the village. The tall woman's black scarf flew alongside her head and mirrors

in the cloth caught sunlight to sparkle her face with light as she ran up to the mean-eyed soldier yelling like a mad angel. She slapped him all about the head. She yelled or sang or prayed or ordered the gods to save us all and the man's gun dropped on the dry earth. A tableau of men with tea cups half-way to their lips, of me standing in the doorway of the inn, of our lady half in shadow, of women standing up by the river stopped the dust motes in the air around us all.

The man raised arms over slick black hair and curled into a crouch as fast hard hands flew around him as if she was blessing him with her fists. The woman pushed him across the path into a chair by the Chai man who sat beating his paddle on his knee in howling laughter. The soldiers slapped their friend on the back, and continued drinking their tea and smoking their K2 cigarettes. The day went on.

I came off my post by the doorway and followed the woman past our lady of no face down to the river where we sat in the sun listening to the slap of cloth on rock. I did not want to be near the men. As light faded behind old mountains, the women gathered up the enormous hide tents they had sewn together with animal thread. They rolled the tents into huge bundles and put them on donkeys or camels while their daughters packed up cooking utensils, wall hangings, rugs, swaddling and babes. The children trailed in lines beside them holding onto their skirts; the mirrors sewn into their



clothes flashed in the fading light. With tiny hands tugging at them and babes tucked in their elbows, they strolled across the river. I remained by the river watching as their strong backs carried loads balanced on their heads like hats the size of Holland. They walked up the green mountain into another century like queens. From the loins of these women came the history of the world.



## *I'm on a Mountain*

You've just finished your second cup of coffee and Iman still hasn't shown up. This girl is fucking *always* late, you think to yourself. The cons are starting to out-weigh the pros. You motion Anna over with a nod of your head. She smiles at you, pours some more burnt sludge in your cup, calls you hun like only a middle-aged waitress at a diner can. And then she's gone, doing the same thing for some other chump at some other booth. You watch her big ass swish back and forth in her grease-stained work dress as she walks away. In another life, you're thinking. In another life maybe you'd go for it.

You blow the steam off the lip of your mug like wind clearing out the fog from a black pond. It's so dark and murky down there you'd think it was planning to swallow you up, rather than the other way around. The first gulp burns your throat and it tastes kind of like bad olives, but you don't care. This is the only place in town where you can slap a dollar on the table and they'll keep bringing you coffee till the caffeine bursts your heart open. And even then they might force another cup under your nose just to try and revive you.

You're sitting facing the door like you always do, one of the few habits you inherited from your ex-cop father. The spoon pinched between your fingers is

making a whirlpool out of the sludge and you're lost in it. You're going over the beginning with Iman – The Good Shit – which is usually how you know The End is coming. It's like walking down a long tunnel toward a white light, your fucked up relationship flashing before your eyes.

It wasn't even anything that exciting, how you two met. There was no slow motion shot, no music playing; the edges around the screen didn't go maudlin and fuzzy with anticipation. But you keep replaying it in your head anyways. You saw her after class, asked what her name was, and she told you.

Iman. Like, I'm on a mountain, she had said. It's Arabic for faith. And after a pause admitted, My parents were hippies.

Now you're sitting at an all-night diner with your proverbial dick in your hand, waiting till it's convenient for her to see you. You take another sip of coffee, longer this time.

At first you think it's in your head, too: the whimpering, the stifled crying. But that happens later, after The Good Shit. It's coming from behind you, jarring you from your nostalgia. You don't even have to look. You saw them when you came in. The guy in jeans and a sweatshirt, the girl way too dressed up for this place. You had assumed all that cleavage was supposed to say, Hey, look at me. I can get any guy I want. I don't

need your broke ass. But now you realize a closer translation would probably be, Please, please don't leave me. I'll do anything. Remember these? You used to like them.

Look, baby, we need to talk, the guy says.

You have to take another gulp of coffee just to keep yourself from groaning. You hate this motherfucker already, and the worst part is the girl isn't even saying anything. She's just breathing in and out, slow and deep, like there's a doctor sitting next to her with a stethoscope to her back. You want to sneak a glance at her, make sure she's not having a panic attack or anything, but also, more truthfully, because you've always believed that women are at their most beautiful when sad. And God knows you've seen your fair share of sad women. From your mom to your aunt to your sister to Iman. The heaviness of their eyes grabbing at your soul like something inexorable. Or maybe you're over thinking it. Who knows.

Come on. Look at me, the guy pleads. You knew this was coming. I've been telling you I need space. I feel like you're suffocating me.

The girl has heard this one before. She's had to. On TV, in the movies, maybe from a few other guys already. She knows that it's cliché code for, Sorry, honey. I've got this other thing on the side and it's really getting too hard to keep you two from finding out about each other. You understand, don't you? Still, all she can manage are a few meager sniffles.

I just don't want you to *hate* me, he continues, drawing out the word like he knows she already does, but I gotta breathe for a while.

You, unfortunately, can relate to this notion of asphyxiation. For the last month you've been having the same reoccurring nightmare. It's so bad you'll wake up in a cold sweat at three o'clock in the morning and have to let the hum of the TV and a tall glass of gin lull you back to sleep again. In the dream you're driving up a mountain in your beat-up Crown Victoria, which makes no sense cause the thing can barely get up your driveway. You're almost at the summit when suddenly the breaks go. There's nothing you can do to stop it. The car careens off the edge of the jagged dirt road, explodes upon impact, and you become pinned under the fiery wreckage of tire and gnarled metal. You scream and scream and try to shake yourself free, but you cannot. Finally, you're able to hit your cell phone with the tips of a couple bloodied, lacerated fingers. A nameless voice asks you your coordinates and all you can say is, I'm on a mountain. I'm on a mountain.





## *Dahlia*

The rabbits are skinned, tongue-pink and glistening, tufts of fur stuck to their lashes. The ducks still have their heads, buttery yellow beaks wired shut, eyes staring. The pig looks perfect, tiny gray hooves curved daintily about its body. The pig is the size of a poodle, no larger, it's the size of the scruffy Florentine dogs that skitter along the sidewalk beside their owners, the same dogs that dance and twirl on hind legs begging for brioche inside the cafes. The raw red meat is bright and pretty, bound in blood-soaked strings, sprigs of rosemary and basil tucked in. The butcher's smock is stained with blood. His knife is large and shiny, but his hands are small. The butcher's son weighs the cheeses on an old stainless steel scale, huge wheels of pecorino, asiago and romano. He lays the cheese on white paper alongside the white chafing dishes mounded with olives, black and green, shriveled and plump. Green olive oil is slathered over everything, red and yellow peppers brimming with oil, eggplants, sliced thin and swimming in seeds, portobello mushrooms the size of an old 45 record. The artichokes are black-purple, the color of a new bruise. But it is not the carcasses of beef, the pig or the rabbits, it is not even the head of a steer, severed from its massive body and dangling from a thick metal spike, brown and white fur riddled with cowlicks and the fur curling in every direction. It is the squid. The squid are strung up over the slanted glass cases of fish, their tentacles falling like girls' sheer dresses in springtime, ribboned with suction-cup flowers, magenta petals blown open. I buy the small one. I name her Dahlia.



# Poetry



Photo by Francesco De Franco  
© F. De Franco, 2014

## ELIZABETH

I

Poppies shimmer from the light  
Of the moon. Tasmania, dark  
Avocado blues stir the bush fire

Elizabeth enters the water with a hand  
Of dead flakes. Glass stones  
A worn copy of *Bolaño*. Looks

Like a Californian sunset, Elizabeth  
Removes Elizabeth's jacket, her boots  
She steps across a ripple of rose garden.

\*

Vertigo, red on the lilac fields  
I climb on lamp lit wing beats  
Asperities - skin as soft as sponge

Every night she hurts me, every night  
I am delicate, in fear of the great white  
The terror in the sob and pain, dust

Falling as dust between the sunbeams  
Into the chink of the cat's green eye  
Elizabeth, come to where I can see Carthage

Elizabeth, come to where I can see Alexandria  
Drowning in sea lions, passing into neon night  
Come to the hills dripping with nuclear sound.

II

Moon ink under laudanum  
Death in the 70s - soldiers and vomit  
Empty lesbian realia, glitter kicks

Nail varnish - tipping over a bucket of bleach  
Into the waves of rosé, Brighton beach,  
Lipstick and sapphires, magnesium

UV rays, six feather skirts, six  
Greenhouses in the sea-light gold  
The cloud colour dancing, divine

April starburst, separating comets  
Come let me kiss you: Elizabeth, for Israel  
For the white beads on the Gaza snow.

\*

Elizabeth let me bleed minims  
Into your fractured mouth, my suns  
Are ships sinking in your silver swirls

Come let me bless your head  
In the apple bucket, ladies and lords  
Asleep on the morning linen

Of oil, the melody of gods, cellists  
April snowfall, lava in the blackberries  
Filmstars and saliva, vodka and vomit

Elizabeth: let me lead your hand through the strawberries  
The red ones fat with moon juice, the red ones  
Thin with velvet, let me wet...

\*

The walnut and treacle tint of the hexanes



A sugar spoon full of mg, lead and gold  
Models legs plastic and joyless, trials

Coffee and centrefolds, for where the green air  
Collides with the green waifs, the water  
In the glass is blue, Elizabeth, I need

To make this clear: I do not love you, not now  
Not ever, I am blank in the black marble  
Of the bath tubs black smack, I am white

And am softer than snow powder sighs  
Softer than the flesh of Turkish delight  
As it shivers under a bone marrow rainbow.

### III

Elizabeth - I am yours though, because you  
Are with me as the fireworks explode  
And the world blurs to yellow fog, the smiles

The Catherine wheels, spinning hypotheses  
Catch me if you can. Petal, I will run away  
My loveliness flowers all the lovely heads

My marigolds drool ocean blue into the violins  
Into chopped staccato waves. I am worthless as  
A word is worthless, yet I am yours, here - only

And in this line I am mine. My artichoke heart  
Bruised on cotton wool, on colour wheels  
Anointing my eyes with that colour they are.

\*

Elizabeth let your left foot twist the honey tap  
Let indigo pour out between the lashes of your  
Thighs, I like the water, I stroke butterflies

In deep black lagoons, in drowning moons  
Sing to me of burnt parliaments, my oars are ripped  
With raindrops: Virginia, Medina, St Lucia, Tokyo.

All is a shimmer in the Parnassian school  
The swordplay of little purple dukes, Belgravia  
Under the stars, the lamps lit up like Casper

America, a dream of oboe blows and viola  
Elizabeth puts her jacket back on, ties up  
Her hair in a loose knot, her skin is glittery.

#### IV

I have never seen a woman more beautiful  
Than Elizabeth. She steps over the towel

I want no more blank clouds in my mind  
I want no more of anything, anything but

Elizabeth, the moonlight is closing the curtains  
Feet, patter, nymphs  
Sound and colour collapse, I am  
The nuclear bride to a nuclear husband, I

Sit alone with my wife. I answer to no one  
The words shatter like walls around me  
I am still. I am in love. In silence I paint the dawn.

#### V

Elizabeth's strokes Elizabeth's toe; Tigers,  
Shallows. Dopamine on ice, the soft wind carries sugar  
White girls make out with white girls on the lawn.

Elizabeth strokes her pad. We scissor *Vogues*, feed  
On soft porn, temazepam, UV. It takes estates of blue





To sate Delph't's blue: Elizabeth sleeves a line so strong

It shakes skulls in the sand. Paris tints the cherry-cola sun,  
Elizabeth trills the snow off avocados. Her hair golden and electric.  
Her nipples in my mouth. The boys from the Beaux Arts seduce

Boys from the Beaux Arts: chanel snowflakes slit their throats.  
The jaws of the hotel slam, in merry-weather rhymes  
We swing, we sway. I whisper words, horseback to the 6<sup>th</sup>.

\*

*Lemons sour under the lemon trees  
We can be faithful to each other  
Until the next lemon falls.*

## VI

*'Tirra lirra' by the river  
Sang Sir Lancelot  
LORD TENNYSON*

One rose is red Elizabeth, one rose is blue  
Let the lords sing for the ladies of apothecaries  
Their Galacian hymns for green winds, their thefts

Stolen virgin eggs, six green sounds and  
A queen with a salamander torch, holding up  
A rainbow, the songs of summer wet on lips

The princes of Rome in the shower, light flows  
Over fogs and formulas, meet me by the river  
Let me bend moonbeams into your heart

I will tie you up in freshly sprung jasmine  
And batter your body into butter and shade  
The mercury nights weep for Napoleon

The buttons are here: cute. I only want you to

Remember one thing. That thing that  
I have forgotten. Elizabeth: that thing.

\*

Mountains rise over the opium fields, Elizabeth puts on Elizabeth's  
Jacket. The cherry rests on her chin. I wonder the rings she will wear  
In bed. I wonder through Eugene gardens and pagodas, baked in Kyoto

Smoke rising over arenas, far away from her  
The owls are dreaming of grasses, Elizabeth rings,  
The floor collapses. A lemon falls from the lemon tree

*Gomenasai*: Elizabeth. *Gomenasai*. We are spit on magazines,  
Luck is for idiots: lush lavender lights  
Low lips and card cheats. Hollywood: the rain falls crooked. I hate you Elizabeth.

I hate your fucking guts.

## VII

Elizabeth's onyx shatters, on stolen nights she stirs the moon's silver  
Into softer silver. Elizabeth strips, whips ESP winds for the waves' October  
I sip from her cup. She sings *The Penalty*, peacefully. I taste methane, ships

And forgiveness, palaces of summer, cucumber leaves and butterflies, olives  
Flowering from the mouths of virgins. The faint napkins of the left bank  
Naval thunder busts and diamonds thrown in Elizabeth's oceans. Look

Honey, I've had enough: pull down your pants and get fucked up. I don't  
Want what you want: I don't know *Songs in the Key of Love*; submarines  
Torpedo submarines, Elizabeth's smile blows up the Agave, I sell my telescope...

\*

...somewhere, somehow, over the Western Isles. Elizabeth leads,  
Restoring melodies in waltzes of skin; actors paint an essence  
Over bored hearts. Schubert plays in Zurich, I find a Cathedral for the lions

Dripping with honey and camomile. Elizabeth: I give up. I want you but I don't  
[want you.]

Are these words unoriginal enough? I do, the Sphinx dips into the Styx  
The panthers prowl from the Palisades and waltz to the music of the spheres

The haze of the tropical storm melts calico. Elizabeth. Jamaica is a flooded  
Epidermis of jasmine and indigo. I am not the man your mother loved. No,  
Not even an impish romantic who ties his shoelaces with blood. I was born  
[landlocked.]

I was born with a cigar in mouth, under the lemon trees, holding a hat  
Walking the silk road to China, the colour of water in hands, in gloves  
*Elizabeth: Stop it, shut up, enough: this ocean is way too rough.*

## VIII

*If love be rough with you, be rough with love  
Prick love for pricking, and you beat love down*

SHAKESPEARE

Elizabeth lies helium eyed, oscillating to swan lake, I start her  
Car, every time a nun passes the old brigade, I hear her name  
Washing like the fields in my fingers, the luckiest of lords

In 757s, as if we framed the motion of moons, her big five  
The ball she said *goodnight*, the rippled waves rippled *goodnight*  
Under the balcony I was more alone than I'd ever felt

But Elizabeth, one last question: what if it's immaterial?  
'If' was the first word Romeo said to Juliet. It's IF Elisabeth, if  
I could dethrone your throne, if I could paint your lips palatine

If you appeared above me, as a canary, how could  
I stand here with the sea in view, pounding the trains  
That pass by the river's green, I love you Elizabeth with

All the love of a tear glittering in the sun, my Elizabeth  
My death will hurt the roses, your death will hurt the roses

But what else can we do? Our shadows forgive us.

\*

H, under the matrimony of trees. Drunk in Verona: two  
Murderers bite a bruised sky: shining in shades of shadow  
Balthazar crossing a bridge bathed in Javanese bells

Paris slowed up to eternity, I hold a bolt to the lightening  
Elizabeth: we were born to die, isn't that something you sang  
And other clichés, "death is amorous" - no less, no more

A caricature for being a caricature, you died in Florence  
In an ash-tray, in a Roman grave, there was no net  
There was just a crucifix, there was an empty churchyard

Sixty six crotchets ripping to a calypso beat.

## IX

Elizabeth, I will give you one last chance, I will raise the stakes:  
You can either live beside me or die beside me  
Naked to the last night, an asp at my chest, with all the jewels of India

Eleven intricate diamonds painted over eleven intricate diamonds  
Heaven: I'd like to leave you here  
But patience sends me away, the angels are digging a garden

In moonlight, neon slashes of eyelash, hymnography, Juliet wakes up  
And the two candles burning in the rain blow out, like the wick of  
Diana, I've dreamt of the death bow, the cold shunt of spinning steel

Nox elephatorum. Latin Ultrix – earth signs. I will leave with the leaves: all  
The lovers are dead, just wind dipped children with peppermint rims.

## X

Sweet Regina, the pink synch of your bathroom sink, its candour

Its birth miracle: immaculate, I pause for you in a bed of ghostly flowers  
Ready for our nuptial feathers to flush, a bucket of champagne

Elizabeth – there's no escaping you, here in the black and blue  
Paris St German lose, Ibrahimović misses in extra time and the  
Rain falls hard in the 18<sup>th</sup>, darling: this is a suicide note

Didn't I tell you before? –

Take off my socks and head westward to the club, tell me, dear  
Something in German, some snow from your rococo tongue  
"Ich hasse dich wie die Pest" darling: didn't I tell you before?

\*

The bells are smashing into bells; torn blue skirts in grease and puke  
From Kampala to Williamsburg, to the Brigadoon blues; Kappa  
Phi-Kappa: Abyssinian flowers burn in the Abyssinian sun

Coke in the morning, ash-trays and empty takeaways  
The poppies are on fire. St Peter's painted red by Cézanne  
And blue by Éluard: dancing on a comma, Elizabeth: this is *Animal Nitrate* by Suede

This is *Your Love is King* by Sade. Rosie tips over the roses; rice paper skies  
Pulled apart by paint. Marc Chagall sits on top of the Eiffel Tower with a toothpick  
And a box of images, he slowly slices the pages

Eighty layers of widows eat his raincoat, black lightning in pockets.

XI

*Elizabeth:*

Take the white stars from your blue and red blouse, unburden the angels  
Take the lonely highway line and walk away under the American dream  
Take the asphalt naked from the red lights of Tulsa to the Garden of Eden  
And eat these fruits: snow pear, water apple, blood stained peach.



## XII

Electric coastlines in amber-light, Shelley lying snow dipped on mount blanc  
 Watching Lady Shelley as she writes, pen dipped in bouillabaisse. *Do you recall the waif  
 Lost in Brighton?* Wandering in blue and white. A tartar princess, bathed in FGR,

Bathed in *Madonna*, we stared as she studied Lorca, laced in the verdure blur of Andalusia,  
 The Norwegian bitches on horseback, life reflected in the mirrors of life, I lost Sophia's

Number, speed bumps, what is passed or is passing: Nancy Sinatra, her boots made  
 For walking. Aristocrats with huge eyes dripping fur into helium lips

Elizabeth pick one pill or the other: I've made lists of them before, a drug culture  
 Or the myth of a drug culture, I can only afford cheap wine, dairy milk and whispas,  
 Allen Ginsberg on acid bending the lobes off the Pope, the Imams, the Dalai Lama  
 White coated boys catching the night bus to Massachusetts, the oval offices of hatred

*Eliza: untie my thighs, dance on the lilac snow and shake glass stones,  
 Sing to my ear as your river mouth spills over the river's mouth  
 Once upon a time I loved you Eliza; just as once upon a time you loved me*

I spend days waiting for the apples to fall from the apple trees  
 I sit in silence and wait for Elizabeth to return my call.  
 I sit in silence and wait for Elizabeth to return my call.  
 I sit and stare in silence. I sit and stare in silence. I sit and stare in silence.

[I-IV previously published in  
*Stride* (November 2014)]

✿ *Glen Armstrong*

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF LIBERTY

Only when we speak at a clear, conversational volume are we ever fully clothed. To raise a voice is to be naked from the waist up. Consider Lady Liberty, bare breasted, barking orders as she leads the French revolutionaries to victory. She shouts, and democracy's flames make pink embers of her nipples.

But whisper and the world finds vulnerability, complete exposure below the waist. The voice yearns for intimacy. The frayed t-shirt is afraid to let go.

## GNASH

One day I'll die and go to Heaven or  
Hell, it depends on how I've behaved when  
I was still alive, like I am now, I  
think. To get to Heaven you've got to be  
good and if you're not, at least not enough  
of the time, then you go to Hell. That's what  
Miss Hooker says, my Sunday School teacher,  
and she should know, she's 25, that's old  
enough to know better, and I'm just 10,  
probably too young to die so I don't  
worry a lot about sinning too much  
and waking up dead in Hell and ready  
for fire and brimstone and torture and I  
don't even know what brimstone is. The stuff  
that makes the head of a match flare up? Fair  
enough. I'm in love with Miss Hooker and  
want to marry her when I'm 16 and  
hairy, or hairy enough, in places  
it's a sin to talk about, which will make  
her—let's see—31, getting up there  
but not so far away she's got no fun  
left in her, like Mother and Grandmother, I mean,  
both of them, both my grandmothers, I mean.  
Then we'll have babies, I'll learn the skinny,  
and then be happy together, I guess,  
until Miss Hooker dies and makes me sad  
until I die, too, fifteen years later,  
maybe, and meet up with her in Heaven  
if I've been good enough. I'll try like Hell  
but wouldn't it be something if I woke  
up dead up there and somebody told me,  
well, some spirit, not some body, that  
there's no Miss Hooker there? That can only

mean she's down in Hell and I'm stuck up there  
all alone. Watch me weep and gnash my teeth.  
What's gnash? I guess I'll learn but the hard way.

## TOUCH

I love Miss Hooker more than life itself,  
whatever that means, whatever life it  
-self may be. I'm only 10, I don't know  
much but I do know I'm alive but then  
so do a lot of other folks, older  
and younger, too—Miss Hooker's my Sunday  
School teacher and 25 and that makes  
two and a half times what I am, my age  
at least, and maybe more, I'll have to think  
about that. And she's got red hair and green  
eyes and millions of freckles, some of them  
never see the light of day unless she's  
naked, when she isn't, being naked  
is a sin, I think, at least when others  
can see, and of course I can't, not that I  
want to but then again one day I'll be  
a man and might persuade Miss Hooker to  
marry me and I guess when you're that close  
it's okay for your clothes to come off, it's  
practically necessary because  
the aim of all love seems to be babies  
and somehow clothes get in the way when folks  
are trying to have them. There's darkness, too,  
mothers and fathers in bed at night and  
they're shaking hands and kissing and hugging  
and a few months later, *presto*, there he  
is, a baby I mean, or there *she* is.  
That will be Miss Hooker and I one day  
but we'll have to be careful, maybe when

I'm 16 to her 31 she'll take  
 me for her *lawfully wedded husband*,  
*to have and to hold*, I hope mostly to  
 hold, it's no good loving when there's no skin,  
 that's why God died but with a holy touch,  
 it's easier to feel alive that way  
 and you get more babies out of it, which  
 is what God wants, I guess, or He ought to,  
 He can't have them and one dead son's plenty.

## PRAISE

When I get home from Sunday School I eat  
 lunch with my folks, they don't come to church, they  
 send me instead, to represent us, I  
 guess, then go to my room to change out of  
 my Sunday clothes and then read comic books,  
 Hawkman when I can find him, he flies like  
 an angel and so does his wife and they  
 talk to the birds, until I fall into  
 a nap, fall asleep I mean, a kind of  
 death but I'm always resurrected, so  
 far anyway, I wake up that is and  
 go outside while there's still a little light,  
 we live in the middle of mountains, not  
 even the sun can shine through them, only  
 rise and fall for them as they command, if  
 they can talk I mean. Sometimes I want to  
 die just to see what it's like over there,  
 on the other side of life I mean, where  
 -ever that truly is and it may not  
 even be a place but a time and yet  
 if life's eternal there how can there be  
*time* at all? At Sunday School Miss Hooker  
 says that Jesus overcame death when He



rose from the dead and not only that but  
did a few more miracles before He  
ascended into Heaven, which means that  
He rose into the sky but that the sky  
wasn't just the sky like birds know it but  
somehow got smeared or smudged into Heaven.  
She's my Sunday School teacher, Miss Hooker  
is, and a damn good one, I told her so  
after class today and she told me not  
to use that word, *damn's* a bad one, so I  
said okay and apologized for my  
sin and she said don't just apologize  
to her but take it to God in prayer  
as soon as possible so that if He  
strikes me down I won't go to Hell right off  
but wake up dead yet forgiven so I  
said, *There's no time like the present, let us pray*  
and we fell to our knees on the plywood  
floor of our portable building—well, *fell's*  
a little dramatic, what we did was  
kneel and Miss Hooker prayed me out of my  
predicament. And then she thanked me for  
having faith in her. *Keep up the good work,*  
I told her, and then came home and I'm not  
ever going back to church again, damned  
if I didn't get saved so now nothing  
can touch me, nothing bad anyway, and  
I've got a week to break it to Mother  
and Father or just run away from home  
and start making miracles. What the Hell.

## SELF-TAUGHT

I slept in red sheets  
that still showed  
a dried drop of blood

I was everywhere at once  
although not on purpose—  
an underground city, or  
a farm on the Vermont border

both afraid and happy  
knowing the stain  
wasn't mine

every artist is autodidactic  
and an old woman painted  
the happiness of dark bright figures  
against snow and maples

in the painting of the wedding  
there is more than one bride  
or the same bride in several poses  
and the bridegroom appears  
also throughout the narrative  
proposing, vowing,  
dancing in a top hat

there is a lack of perspective  
or maybe the painter  
just didn't see it that way

the way I also  
might find myself repeated  
awake, asleep, or both  
at the same time in the starry dark.

You just can't stand fake pockets. Their looking so much like the real ones. There, on the breast, or on the trousers, lookalikes, shaped like. They deceive you up to the last minute, when you realize that they can't, they aren't made to let anything come in. You can't believe it, you try again, thinking they must be really small, too narrow, but you distinctly feel the stitching, the way it wards off: you can't, you really can't. You must keep on wearing this dishonesty, this hidden fault that enmeshes even your gestures, the way you behave. You too, just like them, you too.

Le tasche finte non le sopporti. Il loro assomigliare così tanto a quelle vere. Lì, sul petto, o nei calzonni, all'apparenza, a forma di. Ingannano fino all'ultimo, quando ti accorgi che non possono, non sono fatte per lasciare entrare nulla. Non ci credi, ritenti, pensi siano molto piccole, poco capienti, ma senti bene la cucitura, come respinge: non puoi, proprio non puoi. Devi portarti addosso questa disonestà, questa nascosta mancanza che irretisce anche i tuoi gesti, i tuoi modi di fare. Anche tu come loro, anche tu.

you leave your skin on the bed sheets  
like a grass snake at the turn of the season  
and a bag of seeds  
for the incoming desert  
beyond the nets, the dams  
irremediably full to the brim.  
You will have to bury yourself  
become a hot root again.

lasci la pelle sul lenzuolo  
come una biscia al cambio di stagione  
e un sacchetto di semi  
per il deserto che sta arrivando  
oltre le reti, le dighe  
colme senza rimedio.  
Dovrai seppellirti  
tornare calda radice.

\*\*\*

a rifle shot  
and you start breathing again. Face down,  
no blood shed.  
Things seen out of the corner  
of one crumbling eye  
while the other one is already sunk, and  
[everything  
slips away. Trees  
lean on one side  
lose their voice in each leaf  
that learns from birds  
and for an instant flies.

un colpo di fucile  
e torni a respirare. Muso a terra,  
senza sangue sparso.  
Cose guardate con la coda  
di un occhio che frana  
mentre l'altro è già sommerso, e tutto  
si allontana. Gli alberi  
si piegano su un fianco  
perdono la voce in ogni foglia  
che impara dagli uccelli  
e per pochi istanti vola.

I see inside the gangrene opened with  
gestures, and I stop sprouting  
this useless resin.

Then with my lips I pick myself up  
and take me to bed  
as a cat would with her kitten.

nella cancrena aperta con i gesti  
vedo, e smetto di germogliare  
questa resina inutile.

Poi con le labbra mi prendo  
e porto a dormire come farebbe  
una gatta col figlio.

\* \* \*

spoon in the sleep, the body  
scoops up the night. Swarms buried  
in the chest rise, spreading  
their wings. So many animals migrate  
[into us  
passing through our heart, pausing  
in the crease of the hip, among the branches  
of our ribs, so many  
would wish not to be us,  
not to get entangled in our  
human contours.

cucchiaio nel sonno, il corpo  
raccoglie la notte. Si alzano sciame  
sepolti nel petto, stendono  
ali. Quanti animali migrano in noi  
passandoci il cuore, sostando  
nella piega dell'anca, tra i rami  
delle costole, quanti  
vorrebbero non essere noi,  
non restare impigliati tra i nostri  
contorni di umani.

[ Poems on pp. 31-32 first published  
in *Pasta Madre* (Aragno, 2013) ]

## UNTREATABLE STRANGENESS

1

A sleeping woman has drowned in bed. On the wall is a clock without numbers or hands. The pendulum moves slower and slower, while the mayor rides on a float with Santa Claus. Yeah, every day.

2

It sounds horrifying, the last tiny creature vanishing into a chemical entropy. Close the airports and schools! Evacuate the downtown! The police rush around, looking for someone to whap on the head with their clubs. Ask yourself, “Who is the bad man?” Ask yourself, “What does he look like?” A surprisingly elderly stockboy I recognize from previous trips to the store is arranging hostages in a pyramid, the natural consequence of long habit.

3

Twelve failed apostles, vaguely human shapes, like the friends of friends on Facebook, stumble up. Despite broken or missing bulbs, the sign overhead still spells out Exotic Dancers. There is some kind of holiday, too, that starts with shotguns and databases and ends with a feast of dynamite. Not just anyone can go. You need a reason – the flat light, the still wind, the white sky like an empty canvas.



## BUDDHA & Co.

Exposure has eroded the face of the garden Buddha. Perhaps I shouldn't compare, but Kanye West broke down and cried during a BBC interview. It sounded like treachery, the Dreyfus court martial, Van Gogh getting most of his teeth pulled. And that hadn't happened before. His message was simply, "Your egg, my semen, we change the world". Someone else once said that to feel like an underwater jellyfish is to experience a higher mode of being. Let's cover the walls with soft, plush things, then make people sit on the floor.

\* \* \*

## MODERN LOVE

You can catch him. You can expel him. You can paint over him. He will still be here. The young women seated at the bar seem to be waiting for something without knowing what it is. "Are you busy tonight at 2 a.m.?" he asks the one with a heart-shaped face. "I don't want to pressure you, but my Viagra is starting to wear off." Management approves.

## PREDESTINATION WINS AGAIN

If you do not believe that  
It is a bird, hold it                      in your hands

When you doubt that storm  
Is near, look at the boy's              hair on end

As the trees join, above  
And below, sing                      a new song

Upon finding a snake in  
The river, twisting,                      bring it home

When the magician  
Averts his eyes,                      pick a card

When the timer goes  
Off, decisions                      have been made

## ✿ *Małgorzata Skatbania*

“A poem should not mean  
But be.”

ARCHIBALD MACLEISH

**académie des beaux-arts** the ownership of the mark  
the excerpt from the book by heart and then off the top of my head  
I correct history how much I wanted to be that girl with her back turned to me  
her sister Contempt was carrying a canvas frame signed with a polish name  
she went to the French school of painting  
there was probably someone who transmitted her a knowledge  
about colors  
the right movements of the brush  
the role of light and shadow  
the way of looking at the subject

## AT THE NOGUCHI MUSEUM

The sculpture is what the stone dreams,  
half-asleep; and half-awake, it looks at you,  
formed and unformed, abstract as the air  
that holds thinking, and not thinking,  
in which you are formed, and not.  
One with a bowl-like dip holds water.

You take in the sculpture, as a container  
    holds water,  
less organized even than dreams.  
The stone is both shaped and not,  
and the water that you see holds you  
on its still surface, not exactly thinking,  
not exactly not—it was not made by air,

but a person thinking, in a world where air  
holds everything, sometimes gently, like water  
in a stone bowl. It holds more than thinking,  
and less. Half untouched, the stone is a dream,  
half coming out of its form, not unlike you,  
a rock-like sleeping self, and not,

a physical fact, a nerve opera, but not  
only, or almost not only. Into the air,  
made from somewhere barely “you” inside you—  
from before language, this thing, as into water  
a pebble is dropped, and reverberates near  
    the dream  
at the bottom of your thinking,

which is actually not thinking,  
as at the bottom of water is something not  
water. A human dream

in stone, not in some mystical air—  
a passing thought that barely holds water  
here shaped a carved stone before you.

Rising up all around you,  
these stones from before thinking,  
and after. Out of one, water  
pours out constantly, still and not,  
all as formless as the air.  
The stone is what the sculpture dreams

about you, and the you you are not,  
and the you not thinking: stones like air,  
stones like water, stones like dreams.

## A JAPANESE WOODBLOCK PRINT

A simple landscape, huge moon  
 over the sea, white lines signal  
 waves, two knotted trees hunch  
 in the sand, one coming out  
 of the corner, the trunk and roots  
 not depicted in the print.  
 There is an intangible sense  
 of mischief, the night  
 and the whole structure  
 of its routines, ripples of waves,  
 light from the moon on a slant.  
 It is a space that opens  
 endlessly into itself,  
 one the artist no doubt  
 hoped to paint himself out of,  
 and yet found himself further  
 and further involved in, the way  
 someone talks too long at a party,  
 hoping to recover after saying  
 something embarrassing.  
 And also to the viewer  
 the whole scene desperately  
 complicates in the light  
 of being watched, as you  
 like a second moon become  
 somehow implicated, the night  
 and the ocean a place for you  
 to see an obscure reflection,  
 a self you are oblivious to,  
 or a person you no longer are,  
 a small separate part  
 of the blackness, a still shadow,  
 looking back at you across  
 a distance as though afraid  
 to make some kind of leap.  
 And as you stare back



it is more and more apparent  
that the empty spectacle  
was only ever a racquetball court  
where a repetitive game  
is played—the eyes go  
out with the undertow,  
come back with the waves,  
both directions inescapably  
inwards. I saw this print  
at the Art Institute of Chicago,  
remembered all of this,  
and went back a year later,  
and it was entirely different.



Photo by Francesco De Franco  
© F. De Franco, 2014

## ❁ Contributors

**GALE ACUFF** has had poetry published in many literary journals. He has authored three books of poetry: *Buffalo Nickel* (BrickHouse Press, 2004), *The Weight of the World* (BrickHouse, 2006), and *The Story of My Lives* (BrickHouse, 2008). Gale has taught university English in the US, China, and Palestine. He currently teaches literature at Sichuan University for Nationalities, in China.

**GLEN ARMSTRONG** holds an MFA in English from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and teaches writing at Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan. He also edits a poetry journal called *Cruel Garters*. His work has appeared in *Poetry Northwest*, *Conduit* and *Cloudbank*.

**CHARLIE BAYLIS** was born in Nottingham, England. He reviews poetry for *Stride* and *Neon*. His own creative writing has featured in a number of magazines and e-journals, including *Stride*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, *Cadaverine*, *the delinquent*, and *Agave*. Charlie has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, the Forward Prize and for Queen's Ferry Press Best Small Fictions. He has made the shortlist for the Bridport Prize and was (very briefly) a flash fiction editor for *Litro*. *Elizabeth*, his debut pamphlet, will soon be published on Agave Press. He spends his spare time completely adrift of reality.

**JACKSON CONNOR** is a journalist and fiction writer living in Brooklyn, New York. His work has appeared on the cover of *The Village Voice*, as well as in *VICE*, *The Huffington Post* and a number of other local, national and international publications. He is a graduate of Northeastern University, a former producer at MSNBC, and has only been rejected by three master's programs so far. In his spare time, Jackson enjoys watching the New York Knicks, eating Japanese food, and reading Roberto Bolaño by candlelight.

**FRANCESCO DE FRANCO** was born in Rome in 1991. During his childhood he developed a passion for drawing, especially portraits. After a few years, he became interested in electronic music and set up a home studio, producing and publishing two EP's. Yet, his greatest passion has always been photography, in all its aspects, from

street photography to portraits, from landscapes to architecture. Check out his website [500px.com/Fra\\_91](http://500px.com/Fra_91) and follow his Facebook page Francesco De Franco Photo.

**ELIZABETH GEOGHEGAN** ([www.elizgeo.com](http://www.elizgeo.com)) writes in English, dreams in Italian, and wishes she could remember how to speak French. She is the author of *Natural Disasters: Stories* and *The Marco Chronicles: To Rome Without Love*—a Shebooks best-seller, an Amazon best-selling Kindle Single, a selection for *The Best Travel Writing, Volume 10*, and the Travelers' Tales Solas Gold Prize winner for Memoir. Geoghegan earned her MFA in Fiction Writing from The School of The Art Institute of Chicago and both her MA in Creative Writing and BA in English from The University of Colorado at Boulder. Her writing explores the intersection between geography and intimacy and she is currently at work on an untitled novel set in Southeast Asia. She lives in Rome, Italy on a dead-end street between a convent and a jail. Follow her on Twitter @ElizGeo.

**HOWIE GOOD**, a journalism professor at SUNY at New Paltz, is the author of several poetry collections, including most recently *Beautiful Decay* and *The Cruel Radiance of What Is* from Another New Calligraphy and *Fugitive Pieces* from Right Hand Pointing Press.

**FRANCA MANCINELLI** (Fano, 1981) has published two books of poetry, *Mala kruna* (Manni, 2007) and *Pasta Madre* (Nino Aragno editore, 2013). A preview of her second book of poetry has appeared in *Nuovi poeti italiani 6*, edited by Giovanna Rosadini (Einaudi, 2012). Her works are featured in several anthologies, including *Il miele del silenzio. Antologia della giovane poesia italiana*, edited by Giancarlo Pontiggia (Interlinea, 2009). She contributes as a critic to *Poesia* and other literary journals and reviews.

**THOMAS O'CONNELL** A librarian, as well as three time Pushcart Prize nominee, Thomas O'Connell's poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Elm Leaves Journal*, *Caketrain*, *NANO Fiction*, *The Broken Plate*, and *The Los Angeles Review*, as well as other print and online journals. He also happens to be the 2015-2016 poet laureate of Beacon, New York.

**RENA ROBINETT** has had an adventurous life. She traveled across Canada, lived in Europe, and traveled overland through the Middle East, India, and Southeast Asia in her 20's. She then moved to Maui, where she lived for twenty-six years. In 2011, she traveled around the world for over a year, going through Europe,

India, Southeast Asia and Australia/New Zealand. She has a degree in English Composition and has attended, by invitation, the Iowa Writer's Workshop summer session and the Napa Valley Writers Workshop. Rena is currently working on a novel or two, and a collection of short stories. You may read about Rena's travels and publication news at [renarobinett.weebly.com](http://renarobinett.weebly.com).

**MIRIAM SAGAN** is the author of 25 books, including the recent collection from Sherman Asher, *Seven Places in America: A Poetic Sojourn*. She recently won New Mexico Literary Arts Gratitude Award in Poetry, and has received the Santa Fe Mayor's Award for Excellence in the Arts. She also does text and grassroots installations—most recently at Salem Art Works and on South Beach at The Betsy Hotel, in Miami. She founded and runs the creative writing program at Santa Fe Community College and advises the student-run *Santa Fe Literary Review*.

**SAM SELINGER** was born in Chicago, but lives in Brooklyn. He received his MFA from New York University, and is currently in graduate school at The New School to become a clinical psychologist. His work has appeared in *Bat City Review*, *Grey Magazine*, *The Wallace Stevens Journal*, *La Fovea* and elsewhere.

**DANIEL LEV SHKOLNIK** is from Boston, Massachusetts, and currently pursues a degree in sociology at Yale University. Besides writing he enjoys breakdancing, mural-painting, drinking vermouth. His work has appeared in *Cease*, *Cows*, *Apparent Magnitude*, *Escarpe*, *The Blue Pencil*, the fiction anthology *Art, Lux, et Veritas*, and in 2011 was awarded the William H. Lincoln Medal for writing. Feel free to contact him by email at [daniel.lev.shkolnik@gmail.com](mailto:daniel.lev.shkolnik@gmail.com).

**MALGORZATA SKALBANIA** was born in 1965 in Tychy, Silesia in Poland. A graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in Krakow and intern in the Academy of Fine Arts Kampen, the Netherlands, she has taken a lot of commercial simple work to be able to enjoy art as an independent artist. She paints, draws, and designs posters. After the death of the father of her children she tried to create order by writing poems. She has published two books of poetry, *Accretions* and *Szmuctytuł*. Her poems are published in various almanacs in Poland and the United States and are featured in many literary magazines such as *Creativity*, *Karpowicz Foundation*, *The Lighthouse*, *Indiana Voice*, *Deltona High School Book Reviews*, *RALPH: The Review of Arts, Literature, Philosophy, and the Humanites*. Her work will appear in *Accent*, *Ink Dot*, and *Nomads' Choir*. She lives in Lublin, Poland where she works in the Osterwa Theater as an upholsterer. She has two children, Emma and Anthony.