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Rufous City Review



Rufous City Review

Where Industry Encounters Raw Earth
Issue 6 2012

Rufous City Review

Masthead

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Rufous City Review

Introduction

This issue embodies the last frost before an earnest spring—the deconstruction of small beginnings and the cold that grows up quickly from the ground only to sink silently back in. These poems are unapologetic and imperfect, stretched tight and filled with fields of uprising and atmospheric disturbance, horses wearing gold masks and magic as long as train smoke. Each poem, in its own way, implies a strange, brief distance and it is there, between a collection of evenings and just a few minutes of rain, that you will find the truth of it all—despite the emptiness or the cold or the damage, something is budding here. Enjoy your stay.

Anna Rose Welch

Singing Bowl

For Centralia, PA

i.

Like the beginning of all things,
it was tremendous – fire
trickling into the carbon caverns,
coal imbibing heat and light
beneath the streets and houses
in the town.

ii.

On your fingertips is a bowl
made of seven different metals.
Hit the rim with a wooden mallet.
You are the only way
it will keep ringing.

iii.

Smoke rose from cracks in the pavement.
Rust colored clouds blossomed over hills.
The flames were never visible above ground.

iv.

If the ringing fades too quickly,
tighten your fingers in the center
of the bowl's base.
Feel its weight, a heavy balance.
To keep the ringing strong
your fingers must stay firm.
They should be like roots
connected to a bulb.

v.

The ground began opening.

It took houses and yards.

It almost took people.

vi.

The bowl is filled
with humming.

Your hand does not stop
skirting these resonant edges.

You —

wrists, forearms, triceps,
clavicle, manubrium, sternum —

are no longer empty.

vii.

The residents left behind
a highway ending in the middle of itself.
A mine entrance towering uselessly.
House foundations: whorls
of toppled stone and wood.
Abandoned cars dripping oil
in the outskirt woods.
The town cemetery.
The ribs of ancestors
kindling this interior burning.

viii.

The ringing crescendos
with every revolution you make.

It's the only time you'll feel
your bones glowing.

What Happens After the Haul

If my iliacus was a circus tent made of silk,
and my Sartorius was a ribbon tying open the doorways.

If my radius was one animal,
and my ulna another, joined at the teeth,
bending each at their own wills, away.

If my trapezium was a little table
where wanderers would sit and watch.

If, after each viewer has grown bored and left,
my scapula would rise as a hill in the background,
beckoned up by wind.

If my arbor vitae was not a gathering of trees,
but what lets go of the grappling pines:
mist, fog, campfire smoke from a lost caravan
settling for stillness for awhile.

Eszter Takacs

Notice

Fate brings a glance into the mirror,
quiet eyes turning on the crack
and a line down the middle.

A pitch-perfect plateau
in a pale linoleum frame
and the pulse of fertility
is perched in the corner of your eye
ready to jump ship, crashing egg-white
and penny-pine words, so quick you don't notice.

I pretend to take your picture,
pretend not to notice the space
that has arched its back into your veins,
imperfect and vertical, soundless.

Randolph Pfaff

Neurasthenic

It's early. First thing, I'm disassembling. The clock is on the floor, so I'll have to stand over it to tell time. But I'm not quite there yet. Rays of sun knife between vertical blinds, zebra stripe my prostrate body. Somewhere nearby, fruit blossoms are blooming or rotting, eating up most of the air, but this morning doesn't taste like anything. Clothes are scattered just beyond reach, I assume, to mark the trail — the way back. The window isn't the mirror's opposite, the door is.

Daniel Sinderson

A Taste for the Invisible, the Art of Conversation

the crinkle of leaves

precipitate chunks, love notes on scented paper,
silence, a man's hands, a song bird in them, a
footbridge, the sound of rain hitting it, an
alley, parallel enclosures of stone, the sound of piss
hitting them, remembrance's blank (as
before the blood).

the crinkle of paper

Rich Ives

Concerning the Unification of Movements Among the Young:

Tree-huggers met God-huggers and embraced. The children were already tall and dreamy-eyed. They believed only in the homeless flute of experience.

At first there was something about the “atmospheric disturbance” of the hurricane interfering with communications, before the lost signal proved it. Then we were too far away to hear any local stations. Then no one seemed to know anymore the area we named for them that we hoped still held our house. Then it was no longer about saving our lives as we knew them or our place to live. It was about what we were doing and not the reason we were doing it. It was about traveling to Alaska, but what is traveling to Alaska really about? We wanted to know, but we didn’t want to ask. We watched what we were doing as if it was something we were telling a story about, a story that had already happened and came out well in the end.

Concerning the Financial Sources of Reforestation Funding:

A sparrow in the shit-filled trenches of Flanders doesn't know the seed fell from the pants-cuff of a dead soldier.

We try to be nice or kind or helpful, but we're not ourselves, and we don't really know yet what that means. It's something we don't seem to know how to do anymore. Maybe we don't remember what it is. Maybe we get to start over, which sounds like a good idea, but it's hard. Trying seems to make it harder. We're not so sure what we ought to be, if the old concepts of positive role models still function or not. It's amazing how quickly what you thought you knew loses its place.

The lights are out a lot in the winter in most parts of Alaska. At first we don't mind coping, and we learn to get along in the dark. It's the long dark of winter in Alaska, and it makes the hurricane seem not so different, just another huge natural phenomenon. There's always been something dangerous waiting outside this time of year. It's really not much different here, and it's got plenty of darkness to hide in. It helps if you make friends with the northern lights, but they can't be seen in a snowstorm. We all tell each other how great they are, but I'm not sure how many times we've really seen them. It makes me feel like a kid wondering what parts of his dream were real, and when he gets used to it, what parts meant something important, even though they weren't real.

Concerning the Subcommittee for the Institution of Welcoming Committees:

Automobiles with their rubber shoes off in the back yard just seem as self-satisfied as cabbage.

Charlotte starts calling me "My Husband" when she is talking to me. It seems natural enough, even though it isn't literally true, when she does it in front of the neighbors or the grocery clerk, but it just feels weird when she does it at home when we're there alone. She says things like, "Would my husband pass me the peas?" Or, "Oh, it's you, my husband, I thought one of the shutters was banging."

Last night she said, "My husband is amazing in bed," as if she were telling me about someone else, and she was telling about something that had already happened, not something that was still going on. It was flattering and unnerving at the same time. I was even a little jealous of myself.

Corollary to the Adequate Resolution of the Proposal:

What did the bear say to the holy man?

Don't worry, you're just as important to me as the sinner I had for breakfast.

I'm outside watching the thick yellow light playing on the horizon. We're not quite sure we live here yet. We hope we will think so long before the natives do. We still sleep too much in all the darkness, but right now we're outside, watching the light struggle. People are waving and kicking at the icicles hanging from the porch railings. They argue, but I can't hear what they are saying. They stop to wave and kick at the icicles. As the light starts to fade, they start in again, louder. I can hear some of it clearly now. Maybe it has something to do with the darkness. The husband is angry. He is trying to convince the wife he has seen snakes, black snakes, moving across the frozen tops of the snow-banks. Small ones, he says. Maybe the snakes were picked up somewhere else by a hurricane and dropped here, he is saying. Maybe they were going to adapt and learn how to live under the frozen snow.

The wife doesn't argue that there aren't any snakes. She is just convinced he is a fool for believing the snakes would adapt. I'm pretty certain on that.

Grace Hobbs

A Poem

The moment when we fought
was a poem because it was pristine,
taut in its anger: we were stretched tight;
there was no room for anything else,
and everything was absolutely necessary.

The moment when we made up
was also a poem because it was messy,
because my cheeks were grey with tears
and if I put a finger to my skin I'd see it cake with salt
and wipe it off on my sheets or on my knees.

It was a poem because when I took the bus to your house
it was midnight and the streets were wet with rain
and the streetlamps pooled yellow and slick,
because when I leaned my head against the window
I was tired of fighting and tired of blaming you.

When I saw you it was a poem because you were sorry
and your apologies fell on my ears better than verse,
because poets always lie, but you can't –
you always mean things, even just in the moment.
You are unfailingly honest. I ache with your honesty.

When we lay in bed it was a poem
because I could see myself propped on your pillows with a book,
or rolling over to nudge you with my foot, or waking up
to morning splintering through your window. I could see turning out the light.
I could see placing my feet on your hardwood floors.

When I left it was a poem because it rhymed:
there was a symmetry between telling me how much you hate November rain
and what you like instead. The crispness of first frost,
the way night in winter cuts your vision into diamonds,
the way everything is clear, sharp, pristine.

Hannah Allen

all Men are Sons but not all should be Fathers

Tact twine radioing back and forth between two tin cans, like neurons. Frost accrues over the dew along its length. Snowflakes gather like white flecked paint along her lashes, only to ultimately melt on the peaks of her cheeks. Eyes high and alight, she whispers into her mother's rinsed can of diced tomatoes. *Two pigeons pooped in the turtle yesterday after you left.* She cups one babyfat hand over her ruddy mouth, giggling, referring to a green oval sandbox in Topfler Park. She can still smell the vinegar the 'maters fermented in. *Where did you go?* The boy across the alley eyes the range of twine that divides them, too concealing a florid flush that invades his whole undeveloped face like a well-decorated pinko army. *Went to McCool's. Made out with a bunch a chicks. Insulted a bunch a chicks. Blacked out. I fell down a whole stone staircase.* Applying indemnifying lip gloss – the same color as a Communist ribbon and so opposed to the clarity that had before been its nature – she smacks her lips right in the center of the tin can; so he can hear the wet – the sappy echo through that shelter of botulism and valley lisp. *Sounds like quite a trip. You know I held back the hair of all those girls while they puked up red white and blue after you left? From a broken heart, they said. What happened next?* The boy leans his broken hip on his aluminum cane and seats his withered elbows against the window bed and, rasping now, tells her the truth. *I had to apologize to everyone I know. I am sorry.* When he gathers the stamina to raise his eye from his shame he finds her end of the relationship – only a rusted can half filled with Moscow snow – dangling from the window and the fragmented sounds of fertile children hurtling their mother's snow bank trench over fields of uprising, mutinous. Across continents, the two are twin ends of the same synaptic stream.

Michael Milburn

Drama Queen

Dissatisfied with a life
that just went along,
she revised hers
into something larger

than itself. Being unnoticed
was hard. She loved how
when relationships ruptured —
he's moved out; I've left him —

everyone focused on her.
Lacking events
to rejigger as crises,
she embraced themes,

converted to Buddhism,
began referring to her
college LSD experiments
as a period of grim addiction,

unmentionable, except, well,
here she was mentioning it.
Being noticed was heaven.
She wasn't manic, though

she hinted at this and at ADD;
she was a little girl dancing
and as long as she danced
the curtain would not fall.

Kevin Heaton

Scars & Empty Vases

Van Gogh's mad ear enflamed a field
of purple irises – marring the face of

a sleeping homeless man. The misshapen
gather shopping carts & talk about Jesus,

their smiles look like burn scars. They tape
magazine clippings to bedroom mirrors

& blow cigarette smoke into perfect
images, hoping to see a heartbeat. Liars

parse sermons then kneel before driftwood
crosses – change sangria into green tea.

Would that I were a sickle & whetstone –
a reaper of men,
or palette & canvas –
the turned cheek of Christ.

Jim Davis

Patter

The echo of an echo of an echo, uncertain it occurred at all.
Still I stirred, turned to the wall and said, "Come in. Come in already.
I'm awake, quit knocking." Sheets pulled to my chin, nothing. Who is
there, I query. It might have been my father hanging pictures in the den
with a ballpeen hammer, or a man laying rail the next town over.
My attention hung awaiting the return of the sound. I pulled back
the curtains, light announced itself with a higher pitch than before.
I remembered one winter near the Alamo when riverboats rocked
and tapped their docks with rhythm of the current. A man from Colombia
Missourri leaned over and said, "The drive from Alabama to Santa Fe is terrible –
nothin' but desert, forgotten earth – but I tell ya, brother, it may seem unbearable,
but the drive from Santa Fe to 'Bama is worse!" The floorboards creaked
as I roamed from room to empty room. I opened slated closet doors, lifted skirts
to see under the bed. Nothing, still – only an ember of the tapping, the gentle
knocking, the patter trapped in my mind – all but a ghost, a fleck of dust
caught in the light-as-air current of daybreak. The unremitting drum of water
from the tap. Icicles leaking from the gutter – which is alarming after a night
of utter superfluity. The great shoulders of the blizzard were slumping,
trickling quickly where a goose set down on the gray lawn, and although
there was a blurred pane between us, I felt the bass of each braking wingstroke
upon approach: the echo of an echo of an action. It's later now, shadows
projected against the buildings are much larger than the substance of which
they are projected – the object near the light is shivering and small
and by the time I arrive at the place where it was born, I am curious
if it ever was there at all. A jazz-man on the corner moans about the devil.
I am sleeping, I say, I can't be bothered. The river, back then, was tinted green.
"Texas," said the guy from outside St. Louis, "ain't so big after all –
all they got is big pigs and tall tales." I said to him, you don't need to see the sun
dipping into the horizon, it's enough to be outside at dusk to understand.
He said, "Yes, but you weren't there when the banana grove caught fire."
True, I said, but I was lost. I went on hiding for a while, that is, I went on
chasing ghosts and echoes. I grew tired, leaned against cold steel
under the shielding umbrella of a lamppost and I began tapping, tapping.
The song of my tapping echoed to the building tops, through the nightfog.
The sun went and came and went again. My hair grew thin and gray.
It rained but I stayed to listen, so pleasantly surprised I could teach it to speak.

Ray Hadley

Siberian Burial

Even the horses wore golden masks
in the burial trenches of the Khyagasy.

The old graves faced the sun. The new graves face the river.
Some were buried with a rag doll 4'6" tall, a concubine.
An arrowhead was found in the pelvis of a bride.

The pottery had the same rectilinear and diagonal designs
that you see in Arizona. Many swatikas were found.

Deer were depicted on most jewelry, a necklass resting
on a rib cage, a bracelet hanging loosely
around the bones of a wrist.

The deer's legs were always pulled up under its belly,
the torso coiled, the head thrown back so the antlers
rested along the top of its back.

There was a cache of black pottery, an influence from the Han
Dynasty by way of the Huns.

Sometimes an half-empty carafe of mulled wine was placed
in the tomb to make it look like they had been drinking
from it over the many years.

Habits of the New Geography

In Corsica when a man dies they remove
his wrist watch.

In Switzerland when a woman leaves for work
she opens the blinds so her canary
can see the cobblestone streets of the world.

In Newfoundland when a baby is finally quiet
the young couple takes turns getting up
and checking in on the cat. In Norway the accordions
are put away for winter. Why?

Every year the birds up from the south must endure
an unexpected and heavy snow storm.
A child looking through a children's book says,
"The world is no more." and then grows up to be a sailor.

In old age a man begins to learn a language he will never
be able to speak, though he writes down some simple
words in Sandscript to help him make it through the night.

A man on a freighter from Trenton, New Jersey
is learning to love Arabic music and buys some cassette
tapes from a bazaar in Cairo. This year thousands
people will descend up a small village in Macedonia
to see the eclipse of the sun

In high school a young girl remembering her childhood
completes a jigsaw puzzle of America, but still can't find
the state of Idaho which has been missing for years.

In the first year that all her children are out of the house a mother
starts a collection of sardine cans, one from every country
in Scandinavia which she never opens. A Danish prince
on a paper wrapper has passed away. It was in the news.

She eats Halloween candy from years past wrapped in silver foil
she found in her junk drawer where the keys are
that don't open anything, even the doors are missing,
the padlocks thrown in the trash.

Outside there's tinsel in a pine tree left over from Christmas

the birds can use for their nests.

She wonders how many women in Ulan Ude, not far from the shores of Lake Baikal, have anything from America way back in the bottom of their kitchen drawers.

Frank Rossini

Night's plaint: at the Metropolitan

long sigh spins
down my visitor's spine bent
in weary
adulation she wants
a sad god a melancholy
idol
desiccated
by blind
sun she doesn't seek
redemption only
sorrow's cease-
less hum the absence
of breath filling
her lungs unfolding
her heart raising
her head to chant
an aqueous psalm
to sun's flight
from death to laughter

how long
must I be
her dark star how long
before I can turn
from stone
to water

Hilary Sideris

KEITH'S BLUES

I wondered for years how Jimmy Reed played the 5-chord in the key of E, not even bothering with B, the sloppiest possible way. A great invention. A white guy in his band taught me, and it was like, "That's it?" Blues never go straight. There's something wrong, mixed up, flicked back, suspended like a boy from school: no rules. It's dark down here. You feel your way around. I feel like I'm playing something that should be played by another instrument, another man, a horn-line, a field-hand.

henry 7. reneau, jr.

Sigourney Valentine O'Connell, aka Muse

Sigourney, aka Ziggy, muse of my dreams to me,
conjures a pipe wrench from my tongue

to tighten aerodynamic sounds:
ashes to ashes, dust to dust congealed

to flat rocks skimming water,
airborne as a singular adjective.

her eyes, green to blue flint & spark
to hazel tint, inspire me

to fill my mind with expression,
eat from bowls: mouthfuls of sound,

consonants garnish vowels
with a bright light

vision now revealed as inner eye,
rested on a sheltered, park bench,

wind against my face
& long shadows at my back.

feminine singular, she spins a spell
rising bad tidings from Obeah's mouth,

from endless curve of ass & thigh
handcuffed to the bedpost with elastic words,

from jagged depth of wanton greed,
from as-the-crow-flies;

her moral parallel questions
& challenges the machine.

muse: hot, groaning station

from which train cars issue,

unravels the mind that shaped her,
& keeps on moving – magic long as train smoke.

Hannah Haas

Blaze

The mountains burn for days in the background
 smoke rings rising from the peaks like hallowed crowns
 Heat lightning
Neighbors scream at each other
 On the street a homeless man kindly offers me water
 then his body contorts in anger as he kicks a pigeon
 into the air
I turned the corner of a trail once
 and stood at the edge of a ring of blackened earth
 charred trunks of pines that couldn't survive crown fires
 the dead still standing
We smolder for days in the background
 until the heat burns us through
 our crowns of flames
 catching the light
 of the lightning that strikes us

Corrugated Tin Shed Alleyways

Electrical meters radiating conduit across
the faces of crumbling adobe
hotplate guest houses
like big cyborg eyes watching the purple dusk
settle into the neighborhood
behind the neighborhood
A sleepy-eyed spray paint giant
plume of smoke swerving from his star pipe
smiles out over the garbage can
gate barred window nexus
of our single rental rooms

So much dust in the air tonight
that the sunset stretches color
right down to the ground
and glows around me

Alone in a collection of evenings with
a loneliness like a shining cup
A cat mews behind an ocotillo fence —
barbed branches
waiting for just few minutes of rain
to flush with leaves and scarlet plumes

Contributors

Eleanor Leonne Bennett, a 15 year old photographer and artist who has won contests with *National Geographic*, *The Woodland Trust*, *The World Photography Organisation*, *Winstons Wish*, *Papworth Trust*, *Mencap*, *Big Issue*, *Wrexham science*, *Fennel and Fern* and *Nature's Best Photography*. She has had her photographs published in exhibitions and magazines across the world including the *Guardian*, *RSPB Birds*, *RSPB Bird Life*, *Dot Dot Dash*, *Alabama Coast*, *Alabama Seaport*, and *NG Kids Magazine* (the most popular kids magazine in the world). She was also the only person from the UK to have her work displayed in the *National Geographic* and *Airbus Run See the Bigger Picture* global exhibition tour with the United Nations International Year Of Biodiversity 2010. She is also the only visual artist published in the *Taj Mahal Review* June 2011 and the youngest artist to be displayed in *Charnwood Art's Vision 09* Exhibition and *New Mill's Artlounge Dark Colours* Exhibition. **Anna Rose Welch** is an MFA candidate at Bowling Green State University. Her work has also appeared in the *Penguin Review*. **Eszter Takacs** is a poet, painter, and photographer living in Los Angeles. She was born in Hungary. She thinks expensive cars are a waste of money, but she knows a lot about them because she's been selling fancy rims and tires for the past five years to fancy LA people. **Randolph Pfaff** lives in Boston, where he plays with words and pictures. He edits for a magazine called *apt* and a small press called *Aforementioned*. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Metazen*, *Thunderclap*, and *Open Letters Monthly*, among others. **Daniel Sinderson** makes boxes for money and studies people at Portland State University. He lives with his girlfriend in a small room. **Rich Ives** has received grants and awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, Artist Trust, Seattle Arts Commission and the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines for his work in poetry, fiction, editing, publishing, translation and photography. His writing has appeared in *Verse*, *North American Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Iowa Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Fiction Daily* and many more. He is the 2009 winner of the Francis Locke Memorial Poetry Award from *Bitter Oleander*. An interview and 18 hybrid works appear in the Spring 2011 issue of *Bitter Oleander*. In 2011 he has been nominated twice for Best of the Net. **Grace Hobbs** is a writer living in northern New York. On a scale from one to things she loves, words are at the top. Her work has appeared in *PANK*, *Corium*, and is forthcoming in *Revolution House*. **Hannah Allen** approaches the everyday with a keen eye for its subtext. From the moment she felt what a pen can accomplish across a blank sheet of paper, she was affirmed that the role she would fill—socially and professionally—would be that of an author. Attending college in Colorado and studying dutifully, she feels certain that her humble origins have no bearing on what she will achieve other than to serve as a challenge, another reason to upend the expected and the pedestrian. **Michael Milburn** teaches high school English in New Haven, CT. His work has appeared recently in *New England Review* and *Ploughshares*. Pushcart Prize nominee **Kevin Heaton** was born in Kansas, and now lives and writes in

South Carolina. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in 150 publications, including: Raleigh Review, Foundling Review, The Honey Land Review, and *elimae*. His fourth chapbook, *Chronicles*, is forthcoming from Finishing Line Press in early 2012. He is a Best of the Net 2011 nominee. **Jim Davis** is a graduate of Knox College and now lives, writes, and paints in Chicago. Jim edits the North Chicago Review, and his work has appeared in *After Hours*, *Blue Mesa Review*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Whitefish Review*, *Chiron Review*, and *Contemporary American Voices*, among others. In 2012, Jim will see two of his collections go to print: *Work* (unbound content) and *Translations* (Mi-te Press). **Ray Hadley** has published almost a hundred poems. Recently some have appeared in the *Sierra Nevada Review*, *Ledge*, *Edge* and the *Siusun Review*. He owns a book and record store in Lake Tahoe. **Frank Rossini** grew up in New York City then moved to Eugene, Oregon. He has an MFA from the University of Oregon and has published in various magazines. Silverfish Review Press published his chapbook, *sparkling the rain*. **Hilary Sideris** lives in Brooklyn, New York, where she studies Italian and develop programs for nontraditional college students at The City University of New York. She has an MFA from the University of Iowa Writers' Workshop and work online at *Forge*, *Eclectica*, *Grey Sparrow*, and *Zocalo Public Square*. **henry 7. reneau, jr.** has been published in various journals/anthologies, among them, *Subliminal Interiors* *Literary Arts Magazine*; *Entering*; *BlazeVOX*; *Suisun Valley Review*; and *Tidal Basin Review*. His favorite things are Rottweilers, books relevant to a concealed, but actual, reality, his "fixie," and Ben & Jerry's New York Super Fudge Chunk. **Hannah Haas** teaches creative writing and composition at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She received her B.A. from Indiana University and her M.F.A. from the University of Arizona's Creative Writing Program. Her work has appeared in journals such as *ACM* and *Folio*. **ru fous cit y re v i e w** \ 'rū-fəs 'si-tē ri-'vyü\ (*n.*) Where industry encounters raw earth in a heightened passion of expression; see also: the best of what can be read. Origin: [Latin] red; rusted memories; russet sparrows; random whimsy; really great writing. The authors and artists published herein retain all rights to their work. All content is protected by law. © 2012 Rufous City Review