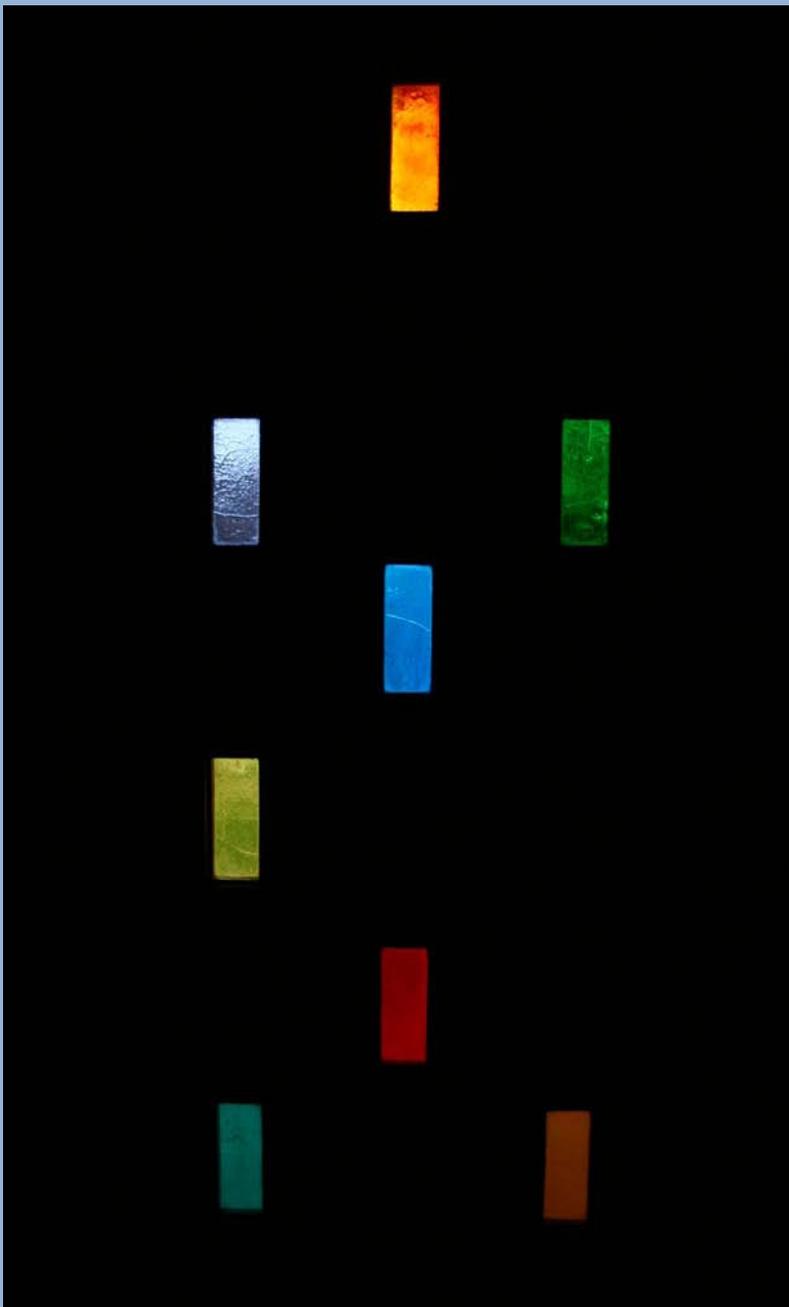


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Back cover photograph: Light through the Stained Glass Door of Chapel of Memories by BZ Huang

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(Translated by Jianqing Zheng and Angela Ball)

Dick Lourie

JAZZ AND BLUES

Blues and Jazz meet at a sidewalk café
for coffee or a beer they're old friends and—as
old friends will—they stay in touch drift apart
reconnect without pattern and when they

manage to get their quite busy schedules
together they'll find a place to hang out
and just pick up where they left off: chatting
and reminiscing—today for a start
Jazz brings up 1920 and laughs “quite
a shock remember? *Crazy Blues* the first
ever blues record they called it—” Blues smiles
and interrupts “of course and I know what

you're going to say a huge blues hit but
Mamie Smith's backup band is called the Jazz
Hounds: folks couldn't even tell us apart:
we were both in shock about that one and
you said they must have needed that label
'jazz' to sell more records and I said just
remember she's a *blues* singer” Jazz laughs
“and I said: Blues my friend the real question
is which came first—the Blues chicken or
the Jazz egg” now they are laughing hard and
Blues gives Jazz a high five (old as they are
they do try to keep up with what the young

folks are doing) “well some of these *scholars*”
Blues emphasizes the word “thought they had
the answer to that one it was just that
you *developed* from me nature itself:

yeah I'm the chicken you dropped out of my
hairy . . .” Blues laughs harder Jazz looks a bit
embarrassed perhaps less tolerant of
down-and-dirty humor than years ago
when both of them would have indulged in this

kind of rough joking—themes of sex (good and
bad) whiskey despair Saturday night fish
fries cops death the rent deceit joy trains jail

lost love fine loving grief : Blues can still get
down to it—if not with the same kind of
defiance and bravado as before
when they were after all younger—but Jazz
has moved on or up depending how you
see things more likely now to be giving
a concert than playing for the rowdy
crowd that still inspires Blues to feel that long
gone youth or something like it if Jazz is
wistful about that it doesn't show as
the talk goes on “dancing” says Jazz “dancing
is what I miss most about the nightclubs

“and ballrooms those lindy hoppers the way
they could step and fly and the drummers learned
some very hip beats just from the tappers’
feet—” Jazz gets thoughtful Blues notices the

silence “what is it my friend?” “well” says Jazz
“it’s a trade-off isn’t it my rhythms
got more complex the dancers don’t come out
like they used to but the music is so rich
I couldn’t give that up” “of course” says Blues
“and look: who does come out? the grandchildren
of those dancers they come to listen you
have a real audience can’t do better

than that” “huh” says Jazz “I think you mean the
great-grandchildren” they both laugh “but” says Jazz
you’ve still got all the dancers they show up
at the joints don’t they love you?” “sure true
enough” it’s Blues who gets thoughtful now “but
you know I often feel like they think I’m
some kind of rock and roll yes they love the
guitars but they don’t really understand—
I don’t have to tell you—how the space
between the notes is what makes it music
some of them anyway seem to want that

‘wall of sound’ and as the philosopher

says ‘I ain’t no Phil Spector’” Jazz nods in agreement “not to criticize those friends of yours” says Blues “who can push right out there and do stuff nobody’s thought of before

I mean I admire the freedom the big tent I sure can’t put up with too much of that myself it’s just not . . .” “just not Blues” Jazz offers “exactly!” says Blues a slight pause “well the scholars do have a point” says Jazz generously “all my musicians keep saying that at the root of it all is you my friend: if my ten-dollar chords start

to get cocky floating off here and there leaving that root behind if they forget your heart rhythm your I IV V if they go jazzing off into the stratosphere why they’re just playing tennis—as Robert Frost says—without a net and at that point to paraphrase you my friend ‘they ain’t no musician!’ yes without you I’d have no soul whereas without me like Hound Dog said: you’d just be on your merry way” touched by this tribute from a friend Blues smiles and says “sure on my merry way from one

juke joint to the next right?” they’re laughing what’s true is that they are just about the same age grew up in the South Jazz more at home in the cities (where you could find some horns

drums pianos) Blues mostly befriended by sharecroppers who needed those Saturday nights with guitars and harmonicas the dancing in the back rooms of shotgun shacks but eventually Blues too made some urban connections Ma Rainey Bessie Smith storming out of the tent shows tearing them up in the big towns Mamie with her

cross-pollinating Jazz Hounds Blues and Jazz
both traveled—in their youth a hundred years
ago—and for that long they’ve been (to quote
an old line) like “two trains running” sometimes—
as in their Mamie Smith joke—seeming to
cruise along parallel tracks so close that
folks thought there was only one of them and
sometimes heading full speed in opposite
directions yet they’ve remained friends (unlike
some of their more close-minded devotees:
the condescendingly dismissive or
those who claim to represent purity

or—maybe the worst—all those faint praisers)
and as old friends will Jazz and Blues share things
they wouldn’t tell anyone else—“you know”
says Jazz “that quote how one stretch of years can

be the best of times and the worst of times”?
“sure” says Blues “Dickens *Tale of Two Cities*
you must be thinking of that Renaissance
in Harlem in the ’20s right?” “of course”
says Jazz “of course” “yeah” says Blues “and I know
what you mean: you and me both riding high
getting called by each other’s name even
jamming together the black musicians

tearing it up rent parties nightclubs a
whole scene literature painting it was
something” “yes” says Jazz “and celebrating
Africa especially the music—
the rhythms and that’s us—as a huge gift
to America so: best of times in
a way—but also the worst” “you bet”
says Blues “like the Cotton Club the whites would
rush uptown to hear the Duke and look at
the dancers doing their . . . their” now Blues is
indignant “jungle plantation stuff those
old nasty images then they’d taxi

back downtown and tell their friends all about

‘this wonderful primitive African
dance and such savage music and they all
had that absolutely natural—’” “oh

spare me” says Jazz “I hate that natural
rhythm congo-bongo bull *shit* it did
more damage—” “yes yes” says Blues “talk about
African pride: at the Cotton Club and
other places they tried hard to kill it
with those shows that looked like live-action
Tarzan movies” “not to mention” says Jazz
“that the crowd being entertained by these

colorful and—just by coincidence—
barely dressed chorus girls (maximum age
twenty-one) was always a white-people-
only crowd” “you mean to tell me” says Blues
feigning surprise “that all this was endorsed
by our old friend the elegantly attired
Mister James Crow Esquire?” “Ex-Act-Ly” says
Jazz “and I remember how you and I talked
at the time trying to figure a way
out feeling trapped— our rhythms the heart of
our music ‘the most glorious thing we
got’ you said finally recognized and

praised and at the same time under attack:
not musically—which would have been fair
even if narrow-minded—but vicious
racist attacks on black musicians and

all black people: twisting things around to
fit that old happy singing darky image
and you said something what was it” Blues thinks
“oh yes I said it was like the same riff
played in two different keys—the best and
the worst” “well” says Jazz “that was then but now
in these enlightened times we can be glad
to have done away with solved transcended

overcome ended put paid to and whipped the ass
off all those problems with which history

was once long ago replete” “Come on now”
says Blues “you know I can’t do irony
this early in the day” they’re smiling but
this last shared recollection seems to have
cast a shadow there’s a silence until
Blues says “OK let’s see how sharp you are
I brought the cards” Jazz laughs “I’ll take you on
any time” it’s one of those private games
mystifying to a stranger two friends
trying to outsmart each other the deck

perhaps a hundred cards one side blank on
the other: a single large-print letter
Blues shuffles lays the cards face down on the
table “after you” Jazz turns over one

card it’s an “L” each of them seems to be
pondering “OK” says Jazz Blues turns the
next one over “J” a pause: just a beat
Jazz says “John Lewis”—a second before
Blues shouts “Louis Jordan” people at nearby
tables look up Jazz grins “let’s keep it down”
Blues laughs “oh I thought if I was louder
I’d be faster” (another of their old

shared jokes) “never mind smartass” says Jazz “that’s
a point for me next card please” Blues turns up
a big “M” says “come on now” Jazz: “don’t
rush me I’m thinking” slowly lifts the next
card: “W” Blues jumps up hands clasped in
prayer position whispers “Muddy Waters”
Jazz (eyes closed in thought) “OK now . . . Mary
Lou Williams” Blues hesitates “well all right
we’ll call that a middle initial but
you were slow on it anyway my point”
“M” and “T” and now Jazz leaps up as if
to pray “Thelonius Monk!” exactly

as Blues pointing a finger says with a
satisfied smile “Mama Thornton! If ‘Lou’
is a middle name then ‘Big’ must be a
nickname” “hmm” says Jazz “half point each” “done” and

the game goes on awhile “Katie Webster”
“Wynton Kelly” “Cab Calloway” “Chick Corea”
Jazz hesitates “OK now here’s Chick this
reminds me of something I overheard—
panel discussion at a music store
one guy with a big mouth is holding forth
about how white people just can’t play jazz
yah yah on and on you know that bullshit”

Blues nods “so what did you do?” “Well I was
standing in the back next to a woman
and she’s holding that 1953
Gerry Mulligan Chet Baker quartet
album “yes!” says Blues “great stuff just those two
with bass and drums” “right” says Jazz “it’s great stuff
“so I whisper in her ear ‘why don’t you
take your record and go give that asshole
a dope smack on his head” Blues laughs “so
did she?” “don’t know figured I just better
get out of there” Blues laughs again “well not
to make this a cutting contest” “no no

not you” says Jazz “I know you’d never do
that” “all right all right “ says Blues “well I was
in Mississippi of all places and
at a blues museum also one of those

“expert” panels and here’s a guy who says—
get this he’s not even talking about
the ability to play he says white
people *should* not play the blues as if we
need some appropriate legislation
to be sure they don’t try” Jazz is speechless
a moment then “you’re right friend
that’s beyond all what did you do?” well” says

Blues “I’m not going to claim that this was
influenced by me in any way” “no
of course not” “but what happened was just then
a guy walks in and says in a loud voice
“do you have any Charlie Musselwhite

albums in your gift shop?” “a nice touch” says
Jazz “and are there any cards left? I’m
scheduled for a concert tonight” “just these
last six cards and I’m due down at Red’s Lounge
in Clarksdale” says Blues “so let’s play them and call
it a day but just before we do I’ve
been thinking wouldn’t it be inspiring

to find a band that could dig our friendship—
so hip so caring so understanding
that they would have the best of you and the
best of me in the same outfit grooving

together . . . ” “ah come *on*” says Jazz “have
you been doing your riverboat gambler
impression again with that deck of cards?”
“spare me your suspicions” says Blues your turn
let’s do the thing” Jazz turns over an “L”
Blues a “Y” “OK you old fox” says Jazz
standing up in unison both laughing
“Lester Young” they say “hats off to Prez” says

Blues now Jazz reaches out: “R” and Blues “J”
“ah” says Blues and Jazz moans “Jimmy Rushing”
two cards left Jazz smiles “you think I don’t know
your tricks by now? Let’s do it together”
each has a hand on the next card “B” and
the next “C” they are still standing they bow
“Count” says Blues “Basie” says Jazz at this instant
down from blue sky a spotlight seems to shine
on their faces from high up somewhere a
voice: hip firm yet mellow joyous loud
enough to be heard at every table
in the place a voice that says “one more time”

“one more once” and the crowd goes wild

Dick Lourie

LIFE ON THE TRAIN

it's a long long way from Boston to New
York not to mention Philadelphia
but that's where my wife is—the love of my
life or is that redundant (but then not
everyone gets lucky) and I will help
out this weekend: we're preparing to put
her old family house on the market
(they lived in it for more than fifty years)

so I'm on this train—three hours to New York
where we are arriving as I write: so
sweeping and gorgeous out these windows a
view I wish I could share with Walt Whitman
who would have added this trip to his vast
celebrations the ones where he got so
excited he apostrophized himself
“O take my hand Walt Whitman! Such gliding

wonders! such sights and sounds!” and a vision:
“I see the tracks of the railroads of the
earth” Father Walt would have loved this ride—I
can't recall if there was a train back then
coming down from Boston but if there was
of course the view would have been different
not to mention the amenities my
laptop battery will never run down

on this train—just plug the machine into
the convenient wall socket next to each
seat and I won't go hungry here is the
café car—OK just sandwiches and
a few packaged snacks but the coffee is
good and don't get me started on planes (or
as the industry insists: the “aircraft”
a subtle hint at the sense of care and

personal attention that they hope to
convey by the term “craft”) no I will take
any time this six-hour session: sitting
back relaxing I sip coffee and think
about the whole history of train rides
—mine and others— in this country it’s a
glorious tale (as long as you were white)
of club cars dining cars sleeping cars who

would not want to be Jack Lemmon having
a party with Marilyn Monroe in
that upper bunk ah too bad—you didn’t
get to see the outtakes? and now I think
of the long long train ride with my mother
when I was six New Jersey to Reno:
1944 divorce was tough to
get in most states—much easier just to

establish residence in Nevada
(which took less than two months) where Reno was
the divorce capital of the nation
we rode that train we slept in it we dined
on white tablecloths she entertained me
with books and puzzles I watched the mountains
roll by and I believe she sang to me
so it was I had her all to myself

no grandparents cousins uncles or aunts
she didn’t go to work every morning:
no distractions as there would be even
in Reno where the soon-to-be divorced
dallied for weeks amusing themselves and
dating while they gradually became
legal residents then the train ride back
across the country not long after that

she remarried I must have wished we were
still on that train anyway I’m here now:
dark tunnel Penn Station then New Jersey
brown grass of the marshes New York across
the river Philadelphia ahead
my mother is gone so on this train ride

I have only myself all to myself
which frequently leads to memory and

reflection I won't see her again or
Abby's father and soon the house itself
will be gone it seemed like a long long way
up that narrow slate walk to the front door
first date I was hopeful—though not enough
to expect this marriage: thirty-five years
of “good good lovin'” (as James Brown used to
say) now the big romantic finish—where

it wraps up with my wife her father my
mother symbol metaphor the old house
the train but here's the problem: I started
writing this on the ride home to Boston
after my Philadelphia weekend
just one day before that derailment same
track same route home just a day too early
or were they a day too late the dead and
injured because I got the relaxed ride
again sandwich coffee pastry—and all
they got was that wreck—so now I surely can't
use this poem as I intended: quiet
reflection on me and my mother my
marriage my wife's father Abe who lived and
died in that house and took me in like a son
all of it framed by the long long train ride—

instead it's got to be Wordsworth turned on
his head: “tranquility recollected
in emotion” and thus it becomes at last
about mortality but whose? (since my
mother is dead Abby's father is dead)
oh: it's mine me who was spared the train wreck
just by luck I get to have more time—for
no apparent reason—to be alive

it's the proverbial “blind chance” seen one
train ride you seen them all till one kills you
or you escape from them all into old
age as my mother and Abe Freedman did—

both of them living into their nineties:
after my stepfather's death I had my
mother back undistracted for twenty
years the poem I read at her grave was

from a dream where I was in a race with
a six-year-old—myself—to see who could
get to her house first at Abe's funeral
Abby's brother Peter and I guitar
and sax played "September Song" one of Abe's
favorites—in the Broadway show where it
first appeared it's an old man's attempt at
wooing a young woman but you know how

words are: no matter what the intention
once they are set out on the page they'll get
sung in ways you can't control life of their
own unpredictable as trains I think
what appealed to Abe was the sense that your
fate is like a year you know has to end—
though you can't tell when ("it's a long long while
from May to December") and you sense strict

invisible limits ("the days grow short
when you reach September") but within them
you make your choices and there we are so
"these few precious days I'll spend with you these
precious days I'll spend with you"

Dick Lourie

PETE SEEGER'S AXE

I

Pete Seeger was 89 then 90
I imagined how losing him would feel
maybe I would phone my friend Howie—we
shared a house years ago when we were young

and Pete was only in his mid-fifties—
because besides the long friendship Howie
as a graduate of the Washington
Square School of Music (with a major in

banjo mandolin guitar) is a friend
who I thought would be feeling the same pain:
today I made the call but he was not
there I did manage to leave a message

II

then my old roommate Spencer phoned just “to
commiserate” didn’t need to say why:
did I remember hitchhiking to see
Pete’s concert in Philadelphia we

must have been said Spencer the only two
students at Princeton who had even heard
the name Pete Seeger 1958
Princeton I considered yes I think so

III

after the blacklist Pete on his own the
Weavers driven out of clubs concert halls
ironically it was the Committee
that turned out to be unAmerican

IV

I heard an interview with Pete: he says
the Newport Folk Festival axe story
is apocryphal: what really happened

when Dylan switched to electric guitar

was this: the sound mix is so distorted
that Pete runs over to the tech guy “fix
the sound, so we can understand the words”
and the guy shouts “No! This is the way they

want it!” but for Pete as always the words
had to be clear “I was so mad” Pete says
“I said damn it if I *had* an axe I
would cut the cable” you had to know what

was being sung the words hold the power
that the music releases and Pete says
his “main complaint” about many singers
is that the music is so loud “I can

hardly understand the words” if I had
an axe if I had a hammer a bell
a song not hard to understand these words
of Pete and Lee Hays 1949

V

Pete Seeger’s “axe” in musicians’ parlance
was his banjo not much use in slashing
speaker cables but effective if you’re
chopping away at other kinds of power

VI

Bob’s axe hacked his own path from politics
to rock and roll Bruce’s cleared the way to
drag rock and roll back into politics—
one of them recorded *The Seeger Sessions*

VII

in that interview Pete told this story:
Woody Guthrie performing with Sonny
Terry and Brownie McGee a dinner
somewhere during the war early ’40s

after the show the head guy tells Woody
there’s a table here where he can eat and

that they've got a nice place in the kitchen
where his friends can eat whereupon Woody

shouts "what?! the fight against fascism starts
here" and begins turning over tables
crochery and all they try to hustle
him out Sonny says "Woody Brownie's lame

I'm blind come on we'll all get in trouble"
Woody yells "the fight against fascism
starts here" Pete says Woody taught him how to
hop a freight no place now to hear these tales

VIII

the long list of regrets: I never met
Pete Seeger though it would have been easy
I never even wrote him a letter
I could go on but I think I'll stop there

IX

here's the rest of the scenario that
I imagined before his death: on the
phone with Howie I'm in tears I suggest
that we go to the funeral or some

big memorial wherever it is
just so we can be there to honor him
and as one does to seek some sense of the
absent loved one's presence—or is this it

X

Pete's axe clears the underbrush clears the air
to make the words absolutely clear Pete's
axe hums through the air it sings out the song
about love between his brothers and his

sisters Pete's axe rings out freedom Pete's axe
hammers out danger hammers out a warning
hammers out justice all over this land

Jianqing Zheng

DELTA CONNECTION:
AN INTERVIEW WITH DICK “THE POET” LOURIE

Dick Lourie is a poet as well as a blues saxophone player. In 1997, the chance to perform at a festival with the internationally renowned blues musician Big Jack Johnson led him to Clarksdale, Mississippi, Johnson’s hometown and a historically vital center of the Delta blues. Since then, he has returned to the town almost every year, attracted by the music, culture and history of the Mississippi Delta. In 2005, I met Dick in Jonesboro, Arkansas. Later he came to our campus to perform his poetry through playing saxophone. In 2009, *Arkansas Review* invited me to write a book review of his poetry collection *If the Delta Was the Sea*. I knew he had been enthusiastic about this poetry project for some years, doing research and reading books about the Mississippi Delta, visiting historical sites in the area, and interviewing people in Clarksdale. He has published eight books, *The Dream Telephone*, *Stumbling*, *Lies*, *Letter to Answer*, *4-Telling*, *Anima*, *Ghost Radio* (with companion CD), and *If the Delta Was the Sea* (with companion CD) and edited, with his Hanging Loose colleagues Mark Pawlak and Robert Hershon, four anthologies of high school writing from Hanging Loose Press, and was one of the press’s founders in 1966.

—JZ

Jianqing Zheng: Dick, I remember when we met in 2005 at the Delta Blues Symposium at Arkansas State University, I noticed you wore a sleeveless black leather jacket with the word “poet” in red sewn on the back of it. It seemed like a silent announcement to the public that “I’m a poet.” I also noticed that at other occasions you wore a jean jacket that carries the “poet” too. Is there a story behind this?

Dick Lourie: Your memory is excellent, Jianqing, and accurate. I very frequently wear a black leather “biker” vest, with “POET” on the back in pink letters. Origin: My sister Mary, very handy with such crafts, many years ago embroidered “POET” in black on the back of my faded short pink corduroy jacket (we used to call them Eisenhower jackets, an echo of World War II). I thought, What a great idea! History: When I was in high school (mid-1950s), our

colors of choice were pink and black. Maybe pink shirt and black pants, or black shirt with pink tie. That was fashion! I think I was nostalgic for that old mix of colors. Eventually, like all of us, that pink jacket wore out. I replaced it with a succession of black vests and pink lettering. Analysis: That new idea was partly a result of my post-modern notion of ironic appropriation: I wanted the pink lettering for POET (in some circles already suspect as not really a manly profession) to assert a refusal to be stereotyped as effeminate (“you can’t wear that—pink isn’t for men,”) by appearing defiantly embroidered onto that stereotype of machismo, the black leather biker vest. My only problem has been that my wife won’t let me wear it to bed.

JZ: In November of the same year we met again in Boston. You came over to pick me up at the hotel and showed me around, and I visited your wife and house in Somerville. What’s the reason that Somerville is called the Paris of New England?

DL: Somerville, a city of about 70,000 people neighboring Cambridge and ten minutes from Boston, is a city with a long history (not as long as Paris, to be sure); it started as a retreat from the big city next door where prosperous merchants built houses. Like Paris, Somerville eventually became home to a great diversity of people and cultures. After the first wave of prominent landowners came the nineteenth-century influxes of Italian and Irish immigrants. Today the city (again like Paris) is a mix of cultures and ethnicities—southeast Asia, Haiti, Brazil have all contributed to our rich diversity; there’s always been an African American presence here; and, starting about the time when my wife Abby and I moved to town, younger “urban professionals” began coming to town—but, importantly, and unlike in some other cities—the “old Somerville” didn’t melt away as those residents moved out. Our next-door neighbor’s family, for example, came here from Nova Scotia maybe sixty or seventy years ago. The population has increased mightily since we came here, and today old and new Somerville exist together in a lively and diverse city. Just recently Somerville has been referred to as “the new Brooklyn.” We are all trying to take that in and deal with our new identity as “hipsters.”

JZ: On the back balcony of your house, you talked joyfully about the history of *Hanging Loose*, bringing out an envelope that contained loose sheets of paper, which in fact were the poems of an

early issue of *Hanging Loose*. The printing of the poems on loose sheets was atypical and original. How many issues were hanging loose like that? And what kind of responses did the magazine receive?

DL: Emmett Jarrett and I were students together in a seminar led by Denise Levertov (actually it was the first class she had ever taught) when he told me he and Ron Schreiber were about to kill off, after three issues, their literary magazine—too expensive—and resurrect it in a different format. Their elegant journal was called *Things*, after William Carlos Williams’s dictum, “No ideas but in things.” Emmett and I (after long-distance consultation with Ron, who was in Amsterdam that year) decided on loose pages; Gordon Bishop, a young classmate of ours, coined the name *Hanging Loose* in honor of our informal, more casual format.

The first issues were mimeographed—typed on stencils, printed on the loose pages. Then we recruited some young volunteers—(my sister Mary still has fond [?] memories of this—to join us as we walked around and around one long table, collating sixty or so pages by hand.

Response was positive—here was a magazine you could edit yourself, trashing the poems you hated and maybe tacking others up on the wall to admire. It was an unusual idea, and people liked it.

JZ: When did the magazine switch to the stapled or bound copy?

DL: The bookstore people didn’t like it—after a while it became obvious that if you could buy the magazine, take it home and “self-edit” by deleting the poems you disliked, you could do the same thing in reverse while you were in the store—remove the ones you liked and take them home without even buying the magazine. After 25 issues, we saw that the better part of wisdom would be to maintain the commitment to our particular esthetic (which remained indebted to Williams) while becoming a bit less literally “loose.” Today we have a perfect-bound magazine with full-color cover design and art portfolio in each issue—but still, as we approach issue #106 and head for our fiftieth year in 2016, we remain true to that commitment.

JZ: I visited your band webpage. You founded Juke Joint 5, and you have been called Dick “The Poet” Lourie, which may suggest

either you have leaned toward poetry or you have been known as a poet wearing that poet jacket. How were you being called like that?

DL: The nickname has come right along with the vest. And quite deliberately. Like many musicians, I wanted to have a stage name (in my band we also have “Miss G,” “Mean Johnny B,” and “Silverstone Steve”). I am always very conscious of my double life, so to speak, as poet and blues musician, and I’m proud of each profession, so the vest and the nickname are my I.D. on stage where I want to make audiences aware that I am a poet as well. Offstage, I wear the vest pretty much everywhere. Again, I want to be known as a poet; I’m proud of my profession. And of course lots of conversations get started when people see the vest. The fact is that I wear it more often than not.

JZ: Have you ever been called Dick “The Saxman” (or “The Bluesman”) Lourie? And how many bands have you ever founded?

DL: Let’s see: The Juke Joint 5 and the Blue Suede Boppers (an all-fifties rock and roll band with the same five members now as when it started 28 years ago); and a while ago the band called “Six of One,” which got old before its time and expired peacefully (that’s another story . . .). And as for nicknames, no. “The Poet” is it, the only one. Think about it: there are plenty of “Saxmen” and “Bluesmen” up on stage—so a nickname like that for me might be taken as arrogant, pompous, self-aggrandizing—but there’s probably only one “Poet,” so I want it to be known. That’s another instance where I’m showing my pride in what I do.

JZ: Does your performance with your band also energize your poetry writing?

DL: Playing music energizes me in my whole life, including my poems.

JZ: Where did you meet Big Jack Johnson and sit in his band in the mid-1990s?

DL: My wife and I were on vacation in 1995 at the New Jersey shore. I saw in the local paper that a blues band would be playing

that night at a local club. Had I known at that time of Big Jack's international reputation, I might have been intimidated—another of those cases where ignorance is the best policy. When I saw Big Jack taking a break on the porch outside the club, I just introduced myself and asked if I could sit in. It's a cliché, but Jack really was “the soul of generosity”; he would always say yes to anyone who wanted to play (of course if you weren't up to his standards, you'd be off the stage quickly, but with Jack you always got a chance). I sat in that night, and also the following week when they were in the Boston area, and after that I just caught up with Jack and the band whenever I could. At one point I counted up that I had played with him in thirteen states.

JZ: Are there any interesting memorable episodes about your performance with Big Jack Johnson?

DL: Unlike most other star performers Jack never stood at the center of the stage—he was always over at stage left. After a few years I realized why: From that vantage point, he could simply cast his glance over the whole band all at once. He'd always know exactly what each of us was doing. You'd be sure to get a subtle smile if you were really grooving—or else that “Look” that told you something was wrong, and that it was you.

One night in Providence, Rhode Island, Jack called for us to play “Tequila.” It was a number I hadn't played with Jack, but I did it regularly with another band, climaxing with one of the old historical sax player tricks: walking off the stage, through the crowd, and finally lying down on my back, still playing. I had to decide fast if I would dare to do this with Big Jack. I really didn't know how he would react. I took a deep breath (being a sax player, that was literal) and walked right off the stage into my act. Jack loved it and called the song almost every time we played. Sometimes before I lay down on the floor, I would kneel at his feet.

Then we played it one year in Clarksdale, during the finale for the Sunflower Blues Festival. This time when I walked offstage I was followed by my wife Abby and Jack's wife Angenette and several of their adult daughters and a few grandkids, all wearing big sombreros. That was quite a night.

JZ: Were you considered one of them, I mean a bluesman or a brother belonging to the band?

DL: It's one of my most cherished memories as a musician that Jack thought, and said, that my playing made an important contribution to the band and that he considered me a member of his band, whenever I could get to where they were playing.

JZ: You have been coming back to Clarksdale since 1997. How can the place be so magnetic to you?

DL: For me Clarksdale is a place, a culture—in fact, a number of cultures—on the one hand, very different from my own, and on the other hand, so welcoming to me that I feel when I'm there that I belong there, that I belong to a community (or a culture or sub-culture) of blues musicians. My first stop on arriving is probably Red's Lounge, where I'm greeted by old friend Red Paden. That's where Big Jack, who grew up with Red, always hung out; now Red and I have been friends for almost twenty years. I go by the *Clarksdale Press Register* office, where I've known photographer Troy Catchings almost that long. I will always have a breakfast at the Rest Haven restaurant with Andy Carr, a hero of mine, now in his late eighties: a third generation white cotton planter who sought to improve conditions for his workers and became a civil rights activist and member of the NAACP. I will have several occasions hanging out with Robert Birdsong, the Clarksdale native, blues historian, fire department captain, who knows everyone, and who was my "Virgil" as I sought out people for the interviews that would inform my poems and make my book about the Delta come alive. And at night when the blues music starts, I can go into three or four different venues and be invited to play—"Poet, come on up here and blow that sax!"

Must have lunch with Maie Smith, my old friend who works at the Delta Blues Museum, who will fill me in on local gossip.

Must stop in to see my other old friend, John Ruskey, musician, painter, builder of giant canoes in which he takes people out on the Mississippi River.

Bill Lockett—extraordinary citizen, attorney, club owner, blues supporter, and now mayor—is someone else I've known all these years. I always stop in to see him and chat about what's happening in town.

In other words, I am made to feel at home in what is really a different world from mine. And because I got interested in the place and its people early in my years of visiting, Clarksdale became a rich creative source for my poetry.

And here's a confession—one more reason from which I derive great satisfaction, though I'm not proud of it. I'm a Northeast guy—New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts—with very little experience of anywhere in the South, let alone the Delta, before I met Big Jack. I continue to regard Clarksdale just the way it's advertised, as the “home of the Delta blues.” I can tell anyone who's interested that I'm in Clarksdale for about two weeks every year. And sometimes, when I'm playing around home Boston with some really excellent blues musicians, just sometimes, I find myself thinking, “Well there my friend, you're a pretty good blues player. And your playing is, oh, I'd say, almost authentic, not bad. But tell me, how much time have you spent in Clarksdale?”

Now, Jianqing, I don't really ever say that to anyone; I just *think* that way when I'm feeling arrogant, boastful and superior. So let's just keep that between you and me.

And finally: we all miss Jack, and since his death, Abby and I have remained close to Angenette; we see her a lot when we're in town, and on Sunday we go to church with her and her mother Mildred, where I get to play, I actually go up and stand next to the choir, I get to play my sax in church. Then we go out to dinner with Angenette and Mildred. Nothing beats those Sundays.

JZ: Where do you usually stay in Clarksdale? The Riverside Hotel?

DL: I've stopped in and visited the Riverside of course—I like the atmosphere, where people hang out with each other, casual, comfortable. But when I'm in town, a week at a time, out late at night, expending energy on both music and writing—I need a more solitary place. I stay at one of the local motels where I can incorporate naps and quiet time into the rest of my activities.

JZ: The Riverside Hotel was originally the G. T. Thomas Afro-American Hospital, the scene of the blues singer Bessie Smith's death in 1937, following an automobile accident on Highway 61, which is now called the blues highway. The hospital was converted to the hotel in 1944. It began to house touring blues musicians, including Sonny Boy Williamson. What's your impression of the blues heritage the hotel has maintained?

DL: I can see that they've done a tremendous job of keeping memories alive. That is so very necessary.

JZ: Did you ever hear an interesting story about a bluesman connected to the hotel?

DL: I have to say no—I'm sure there are some great Clarksdale stories I have missed, and I hope others can tell them.

JZ: Now let's talk about your performance and poetry writing. You have two voices: your poetry and your saxophone. With which one you started first? Do they like twins demand your equal attention?

DL: Sometimes I tell people that I started out in poetry, but then realized I would never be able to make a living at it, so I became a blues musician. That is usually followed by a puzzled silence, and I have to say, "a joke! it's a joke!" In fact I've been a poet quite a bit longer than a blues musician. While I was getting started as a poet, I was doing music—as a semi-professional level jazz trumpet player and folk guitar strummer in my twenties and thirties—but it wasn't till my mid-forties (30 years ago) that I became interested in the blues, started on sax, and realized that blues was my true musical passion. And yes, poetry and blues do demand equal attention. It's a dilemma I'll never fully resolve, but I keep working on it. Having the CDs where I'm both reading the poems and playing the sax gets me there sometimes.

And by the way, Jianqing, as you know, I've had my "If the Delta Was the Sea" CD in my hands for a few years now, but it's just recently been officially released by Hanging Loose. Of course that is big excitement for me.

JZ: Your poem, "blues from Clarksdale," in *Ghost Radio* published in 1998 was written for Big Jack Johnson and his band The Oilers. Did you ever share the poem with him and his band? How did they respond to it?

DL: Guys in the band—some responded to poetry, some didn't. They all appreciated that I was giving them attention and respect. But Jack, as a true artist (though in a different area), knew the importance of the fact that I as a poet was shaping my work, my hard-earned creation, to honor him. He was very pleased and very moved.

JZ: The last stanza in this poem about Johnson is really strong:

and when he starts to sing you wonder how
many hundreds of years he's been traveling

How did you get these two lines? What did you see or hear in his voice that influenced your writing?

DL: Jack brought with him, as a gift to us all, the history and tradition—still very much alive in his guitar and his voice—of African American life and struggles in the Delta as they had transpired over many years. He grew up on a farm; he labored at various jobs all the while honing his musical—I'll call it genius. In Jack's voice I heard the voice of someone who carried with him all those years of history. It was a short leap from Jack's actual voice to the metaphor of those lines.

JZ: In the inside cover of your CD "If the Delta Was the Sea," you say that your two passions, poetry and the blues, pull you in opposite directions. Was there a time you would think that there is a meeting point of the two or they complement each other or music helps poetry more than poetry does?

DL: This situation is what's sometimes called a "virtuous circle." Writing poetry about the music and its history helps to keep me focused on the blues and its significance, and to be aware of that when I get on stage to play the music. Playing the music, I always know that I'm a practitioner as well as an observer; that understanding informs my poetry and, I think, gives it energy. And as I mentioned earlier, the CDs, fusing both passions, help me get them pulling in the same direction at least some of the time.

JZ: Though you say your two passions pull you in opposite ways, I agree with Theodore Haddin who writes in his review of *Ghost Radio* that you are "one of the rare writers to have experienced enough musical life that [your] poetry is truly affected by [your] saxophone playing, and by all the *camaraderie* with band members and friends who love [your] brand of rock and roll." Can you use a poem of yours to talk specifically about the interrelatedness of your music and poetry and the influence of music?

DL: A little later, talking about syllabics, I'll go into the formal aspect of this question of how the music and the poetry interact.

Looking here at content, I think the best example is the title poem of the book and CD, “If the Delta Was the Sea.” A number of the poems of course illustrate how being on stage with friends in Clarksdale is an experience that has informed my writing—as Haddin wrote, quite accurately, I am privileged to be able to write about the blues as a practitioner. Here’s the poem:

If the Delta Was the Sea

*Yes! Thank God; human feeling is like the mighty
rivers that bless the earth; it does not wait for
beauty—it flows with resistless force, and brings
beauty with it.*

—George Eliot, *Adam Bede*

“if the river was whiskey” Big T sings
one night at Red’s juke joint “and I was a
diving duck” a good old favorite from
both black and white country traditions “I’d
dive to the bottom and never come up”
I’m standing next to T playing the sax
and—blues being my meditative state—
I think to myself: extraordinary

metaphor! to be conditional and
transformative at the same time and as
usual when at Red’s I also feel
immersed in Clarksdale so my mind shifts and
spins the image till it comes to rest on
the mysteries around me: if the river
was Clarksdale what would I be? (stranger from
such a different place poking around

outsider trying to peer inside) would I
be Twain on the Mississippi godlike
pilot sure hand every rock and shoal
clear in his mind? or Rimbaud’s drunken boat
floating unguided toward those phantasmic
ocean visions? and knowing that each choice
bears its own gifts and dangers should I dive
or sink or drift? and if the river was

Clarksdale the Delta would be the sea (as indeed
it once was) vast and in many stories primal
“darkness upon the face of the deep” while the
earth is still “without form” and if the Delta
was the sea then Clarksdale every town roads
houses forests fields even Red’s all would
be mingled with it as waters of the
Mississippi flow to the Gulf and we

looking out over the Delta Sea from
our narrow lives would think it endless
and always changeable: in the era
when cotton is king it’s a gleaming sea
white in the sun or sometimes we look beneath:
layers waves of black and brown topsoil rich
deepest in the world we’re told calm and smooth
or on some days the surface rough with old

Indian mounds or anonymous clumps
of earth where slaves are buried and other
days maybe close to twilight the Delta
Sea is golden trick of the light or a
reflection of great wealth and in the depths
beyond our vision the registry of
bones: the dead those newly wept for and down
ever deeper thousands of years back to

the Bronze Age—famously democratic
this undersea city of bones unhinged
from age race history cause of death and
by now the “sea-change into something rich and
strange” has as promised transfigured them all
to coral and pearl and as my meditations
come to rest back where I started at Red’s
listening to T—if the river was

Clarksdale and the Delta was the sea then
tonight it would all be intense blue deep
blue Delta Sea eternal the purest though
darkest blue of blues I might never come up

Specifically now, with this poem, the occasion itself—onstage at Red’s—provides the entry point into the poem. And the blues lines being sung create the associative process that leads through the poem (“If the river was whiskey and I was a diving duck / I’d dive to the bottom and never come up”). The river metaphor in those lines brings me to Clarksdale seen as the river flowing to the Delta as the sea; and then as myself the outsider onstage with my sax, the river and the sea bring me to places I’m familiar with exploring, so to speak, as a poet: prehistoric ocean/Mark Twain/Rimbaud/buried bones/Bronze Age/Genesis/Shakespeare. Finally the “through line” returns me to being on stage and to reflecting on my relationship to Clarksdale and the blues—still within the “Delta as sea” metaphor, where now it’s me as the person diving. And the sea, though it may be, as metaphor for the music, the “purest blue,” is also, as metaphor for the Delta and its history of slavery and oppression, the “darkest blue.”

Thus the whole composition is an interweaving of blues and poetry, in a vital way—the poem depends on the blues for its very existence as a poem.

JZ: Your blues performance and poetry reading on Aaron Henry at Mississippi Valley State University in 2006 impressed me that your poetry was vernacular. Listening recently to your playing and reading from your two CDs, which keep the titles of your poetry collections, extends that impression. How do you think about your poetry?

DL: Like many poets who write in styles similar to mine, I seek to write poems that sound conversational; that is, I use informal diction—the attempt is to create the illusion that someone is speaking to you, casually yet with clarity and precision. The reason why this is an illusion is evident from reading most transcriptions of conversational speech, which are replete with repetition, redundancy, hesitation, and explanations of what was not clear when it was said a few seconds ago. The poet’s craft lies in creating an illusion of casual speech that is more articulate than the real thing.

Why is this kind of poetry not just prose broken into lines? Robert Frost famously held that writing poetry without rhyme is like playing tennis without a net. Brilliant, and partly true. What he missed is that besides rhyme, or meter, there are other ways of setting up your net. From Whitman through Pound, Williams,

Levertov, and other of my particular poetic forebears, poems have been organized according to breath, or Williams' emphasis on American speech patterns and the "variable foot," or Denise Levertov's sense of "organic verse," and others. My own "net" is my use of syllabics: I write in unrhymed, unmetred lines of ten syllables each. For some reason I'm not aware of, writing in syllabics seems to lead me into a complicated syntax with long sentences, many clauses, almost like Victorian prose—although of course my diction, my language, remains un-Victorianly conversational, informal. So my style is characterized by the tension between simple diction and complex syntax. And since all my lines are of roughly equivalent length (though never rhythmically the same), I realized at some point that with a blues band behind me I could read my poems so that each line would correspond to a measure. Backed by a 12-bar blues I might, for example, during one 12-bar verse, read twelve lines—or I could read four or eight or ten lines with pauses for the music to comment. In other words, the syllabic nature of the poem allows me to actually score the reading against the blues band backup.

JZ: In *If the Delta Was the Sea*, you seemed to have intentionally created spaces between words or phrases in lines to make the meaning clear since you avoided punctuations. Does the space function also as a medial caesura of the vernacular poem or a rhythmic pause of the sound in reading?

DL: The space functions both as caesura and as rhythmic pause. When one reads the poem aloud, a space serves the same purpose as the rest in a bar of music; and on the page it substitutes for a comma, semicolon, or period. My reasons—one, visual: idiosyncratically, I don't like the look of the comma, semicolon or period; they interrupt the line. And two: other punctuation marks are very important to me, extremely useful in indicating distinctions of emphasis and modification within my "neo-Victorian" periodic style: these are the dash and the colon (not to mention parentheses [joke]) and those are the ones I want to focus on, without the distraction of the others.

JZ: In the coda of "So Italian" in *If the Delta Was the Sea*, you express:

Kendall Dunkelberg

OCEAN SPRINGS

A wall is not a wall if it contains a tree
if it is covered in trees, their branches
arching over every image, an intricate
interconnected border with their roots
always reaching lower to groundwater.

A wall is not a wall when the blue black
panther of night prowls beside the window,
when the sun and the rose glow in its corners,
and the alligator day crawls on slow steady legs.
A wall is not a wall when it comes to life.

On these walls, the artist performs his social role,
brings the community his gift, recounts
the tale of the tribe, their history their labors,
the hunt through the forest for the chesty deer,
their slaughter, their sacrifice and thanksgiving.

These walls celebrate the harvest of the sea
by both the native and the modern peoples
with the same rhythms, the same arc of net
the same washing and cooking round the hearth,
the same intertwining of nature and culture.

These walls are not walls once they open
onto the world to merge the artist's vision
with the landscape outside, blending past,
present, and the promise of a future, where walls
will be windows into the soul and onto the world.

Kendall Dunkelberg directs the Low-Residency MFA in Creative Writing at Mississippi University for Women, where he also directs the Eudora Welty Writers' Symposium. The poems in this issue are inspired by the life and art of Walter Inglis Anderson and will appear in his third collection, *Barrier Island Suite*, forthcoming in 2016 from Texas Review Press. His previous books include *Time Capsules* and *Landscapes and Architectures*.

Kendall Dunkelberg

UNDULANT FEVER

Weeks after the trek through the bayou hunting wild iris,
the fever comes on the slow legs of the sea turtle
with the dank odor of sludge from a submerged sandbar,
cold sweats, winter nights when spring should turn to summer.

The seasons are all a jumble, ice gives way to the fires
of the summer, bronzed skin or a fever blush with chills.
Lethargy vacillates into a manic dance, Mississippi
kites flashing their tails in a warm, stiff breeze.

Diving into the bay, Walter becomes a crab,
waving a claw to the bulrushes on shore, scuttling
along with bottom feeders, swimming for miles
to be retrieved, nearly catatonic from the cold.

The fire in the sun or wild iris in bloom, scattered
by a storm, washed away to be discovered years later,
iris bulbs and turtle eggs buried in the same clumps
of dune grass that shelter the nests of shore birds.

No such rest for Walter, caught in the throes of this fire,
one moment burning with life and passion, then next
cold, impotent, longing to drown in the waves
or leap from a bridge, to swim, to fly, to die.

Kendall Dunkelberg

ASYLUM ROADS

The road to the asylum is cold and hard,
paved with rigid stones and broken glass,
smothered in deep vegetable silences,
punctuated with inarticulate snarls,
bared fangs, and sharpened claws.

In Baltimore, Phipps Clinic's four walls
cage in freedom. Doctors pry open silences
with ice baths and chemical shock, hydro-
therapy and Metrasol, but the four edges
of his sketch pad open onto another world.

The road home is long and silent.
Once there he becomes a wanderer
in the wilderness of night, the paint
in his brushes no longer flows, and
his pad remains deaf and dumb.

The road to the bedroom rolls past thistles,
through swamps and over beds of coals
to the room of someone's child, but whose?
Cold hands at the throat, cold steel glare.

The road to Shepard Pratt is swift as the axe
flashing threats in the rearview mirror.
The road ahead offers unfamiliar doctors,
medications, and a library of voyages that
are never enough, so he upends a bookcase,
traps his orderly and disappears

down the winter road into a snowstorm,
walking for months on bleeding feet,
in a heavy coat he got from a general's
black maid, sustained by food begged
at the doors of the poorest of the poor.

Unbathed, wild and hairy, he returns in spring,
hiding in the barn, pilfering from the pantry,
until his sister digs him up from under blankets
like a dried and bitter root. The only record
of his travels, scribbled on paper sacks,
stuffed in pockets like a torn up treasure map.

The night roads of home wind through a labyrinth
of dream and desire, through swamp sludge
and ash of forest fires, past fields of jealousy,
back to the bedroom where he throws
the baby out with the butcher knife.

The road to Whitfield is short and swift
on willing wheels with the sedated patient
slumped in back, as wife and doctor drive
to four grim walls that still hem him in.
Walls he decorates with birds of flight,
climbing sheets out the window to escape.

Yet the return road is slower, calmer, more
tired, taken in numb months, living first
with his mother in a Jackson apartment,
facing checkups, recuperation, and a gradual
revival of painting, as he prepares for home.

Only on the sea road is he free. The four edges
of his sail blow to the four corners of his dream.
The island looms ahead, an asylum without walls,
without doctors or diagnoses, a living sanctuary
where the artist reunites with his world.

Renee Emerson

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

Skin pocked and dimpled, wading in.
The water another flawed surface.

The pelicans dive and catch, holding
one life to another.
In the orchard, we didn't have to think.
Sunlight touched what was just out of reach.
We held up apples pink as baby tongues.
Marred with white, quarter-sized, bites.

Noting the difference, I teach my daughter
that it is easy when we want it to be.

Renee Emerson is the author of *Keeping Me Still* (Winter Goose Publishing 2014). She earned her MFA in poetry from Boston University, where she was awarded the Academy of American Poets Prize in 2009. Her poetry has been published in *Indiana Review*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *storySouth*, *32 Poems*, and elsewhere.

Theodore Haddin

SEEKING MUSIC
for Karim Shamsi-Basha

Out of the desert sands, born of the distant sun,
comes a man, calling in the old way through the lands
a song of sight and sound, pictures of his past
in passing, streets and steeples of a new country
come to, and people, people looking back through
his lens, from India, Iran, Syria, Spain and France
to his new America miles and miles from the desert sands.
Here, too, he comes seeking music in himself, with
hardly a lesson to go by, but determined to understand
his world, the world without violence, the change
that must come over us as searching fingers find their notes
upon the keys. In a new music all sins are forgiven.
The imam sings his Qur'an in all of us, the psalmist
enjoins the mystery of God's melody in a man. The
new music joins us together who are needing
to learn how to sing. So this man, seeking his music,
modifies the world and its senses, from so far back
his calling comes to tell us where he has been,
and who we are.

Theodore Haddin, a professor emeritus from The University of Alabama in Birmingham, is the author of two poetry books, *The River and the Road* and *By a Doorway, In the Garden*. He has published articles and reviews on American literature.

Theodore Haddin

GRANDPA WEARS NECKTIES

He stood his usual grinning self
before the mirror with his new bowtie.
'I can do this easy,' he says, and begins
to wrap two ends tight about his collar.
Then whatever slipped stuck in knot.
He looked at it and went right on
as if to finish the job. But it twisted,
it didn't turn, it caught his finger.
He was struggling with a snake.
He gritted his teeth.
At last he had to admit he couldn't
do it. He hated what to do next.
He sought the scissors in the kitchen
and held one end of the rascal till he
could cut it all off, blue Blenheim
it was, Churchill's favorite, shredded
to the floor, as if old buildings had
fallen in London. But he was so far
from the London streets now he'd
never go back. Then off for a necktie,
black, and carefully wrapped it,
pulled it back. He couldn't be seen
doing this. With his foot he kicked
at the scraps.

Patricia L. Hamilton

AFTERMATH

The silence after the storm ravages,
numbing the senses. No birds sing.
Instinct unites them in reverence
for the wreckage of limbs
where they might have been nesting,
now strewn about as carelessly
as a child's pick-up sticks.
No dogs bark. They cower under beds,
noses buried in their paws, still
cringing at the thunder's treachery,
disavowing the testimony
of a clock's soft ticking.
Only a black-and-white cat
picking its way through leafy debris
as it crosses the wet pavement
remains undeaftened by the tumult's end.

Patricia L. Hamilton's debut volume of poetry, *The Distance to Nightfall*, was published by Main Street Rag in 2014. Her work has recently appeared in *Deep South Magazine*, *Third Wednesday*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Cider Press Review*, and *Red River Review*.

Richard Jones

SEVEN CANTOS FROM *ITALY*

Resting my head against the train window,
I remembered sitting at the table
with tea, home in America,
a book of paintings open between us,
the house cloistered by a night of snow.
Laura had leaned close and I could feel
her warmth when she told me
we *would* see the frescoes.
She turned the pages and
touched her finger to the book's
illustration of an angel hovering
over the Lord's wounded head
and removing the crown of thorns
and putting on the crown of paradise.
Beyond the window, I saw
cypresses on hills pointing to heaven
and farmhouses waking.
I closed my eyes and tried to sleep,
but the train kept stopping
to let people off, to let people on.
At one of the stops,
when I was half dreaming,
I sensed someone sit beside me.
I allowed one lid to open—
awake with one eye, asleep with the other—
and glimpsed the face of a man
who worked in the sun,
a man my age, bearded, heavy.
I closed my eye and moved back into the dream.
A few minutes later,
I heard the conductor ask for his ticket.

I tried to lull myself to sleep
by thinking of my father—
a walk we had taken
when I was a boy of seven or eight.
We were walking in a park

toward the swings,
the Southern sun silvering the glossy leaves
of sweet-smelling magnolias,
and I could feel my hand in his—
the strength of his grip.
And I remembered the last time I held his hand,
when he was old and dying,
how frail his hand in mine,
his face shining
as he lay on the sofa in the sunlight.
“*Fumi?*” a voice said.
Smoke? My father didn’t speak Italian.
I wondered who was talking.
The man in the purple seat next to me
nudged me awake
and said again, “*Fumi?*”
I opened my eyes and looked
and the man was holding out
a pack of cigarettes,
an offering.
“*Grazie,*” I said, taking a cigarette,
not having smoked a cigarette in years.
This made him happy,
even though we couldn’t smoke together
until we got off the train,
if we got off the train together.

I closed my eyes to go back to sleep,
to get back to the dream and my father.
I felt an elbow again in my side.
I opened my eyes and looked up again.
“*Sposa,*” the bearded man beside me said,
holding out his wallet
in which there was a picture of his wife.
In his old billfold he carried pictures of his family,
which he proceeded to show me, one by one.
“*Mio figlio,*” a picture of a twelve year old
sitting on a donkey. “*Mio padre,*”
a picture of an old man holding a shovel.
“*Mia madre,*” a woman in a black dress and shawl
(I couldn’t tell whether it was a wedding or a funeral).
His brother was a clerk, “*un impiegato.*”

His eldest son, Angelo—*il professore!*
His daughter-in-law was Antonella, a lovely girl
in her wedding dress on the steps of a church
with the entire family—“*Attilio, Marco,*
Gabriella, Antonio, Binto, Silagro, Capricia,
Tiziana, Maria, Bonfilio, Isabella, Ronaldo, Fiorella,
Miquel, Rafael, Anunciata, Pico, Alessandro, Violetta,
Ravenna, Ugo, Valentino, Immacolata, Nerezza, Francesca,
mio figlio, Angelo, il sposo,
e finalmente la sposa, mia figlia-in-law—”
and here he waved his hand in the air for joy—
“*Bella Antonella.*”

When the man had finished,
he closed his wallet and put his family away,
patting his pocket as he did,
an almost indiscernible puff of dust rising from his coat.

The man sat looking at me, waiting.
After a moment, to communicate to him
that I found his family beautiful
and to let him know that I appreciated
his generosity for introducing them to me,
I nodded my head, *bella, grazie,*
but still he kept looking at me,
though I did not know what he was waiting for.
I shifted in my purple seat.
I turned and looked out the window, squinting.
When I turned back
he was still looking at me, still waiting.
“*Tua famiglia?*” he said.
“Ahhhh,” I said.
He wanted to see my family.
I thought of my paltry billfold.
I pulled out a picture of Laura and our children,
Sarah, William, and Andrew,
the four of them on the beach,
wading in the waves, the sea and sky one,
the sun on their ecstatic faces.
The man said something in Italian,
something about photographs
and the sadness of time.
He waited to see more,

but I had no picture of my father,
no picture of my mother,
no photo of my sister and her husband,
not even a photo of her son, her Andrew,
the first person I dared to love,
the child who drowned when he was five.

In the years before I met Laura, I remember
riding night trains from Paris to Rome,
Rome to Palermo, the train passing by towns so small
they seemed no more real than wishes
a man might make to be healed.

As my heavy-set friend dreamed and snored next to me,
I looked out the window, a little sleepy and dreamy myself,
and thought how the wish Laura made back in our kitchen
will be fulfilled today. We'll stand together
in the chapel and gaze at Pinturicchio's paintings
and by that vision be renewed.

Now I realize this was always her plan.

And when the day ends, arm in arm
like Italians we'll enjoy the *passaggiata*,
that slow stroll through town at twilight,
stopping at one *stuzzichini* bar after another,
sitting at the tables, drinking wine
and sharing little snacks. And later
in the hotel room bed, how, I wondered,
shall we sleep, being so happy?

We'll turn out the lamp and undress in the dark,
a little shy with each other,
though we'll leave the balcony doors open
to the sound of laughter rising
and the revving of the ubiquitous scooters
with the young boy and girl holding tight
as they race in the street below.

Such were my thoughts as the train sped north
and the day brightened and the train slowed
and stopped at a station at the foot of the mountains,
at Spello.

The purple seat beside me was empty.
I must have fallen asleep and the bearded man
with the billfold must have gotten off

at some little town full of wishes.
I strapped on my bag and disembarked,
nodding to Spello's blue-capped porters,
disappointed to see me with only a rucksack.
Standing in the morning light
in the tiny, unhurried station, perhaps
the porters could see before them a man
who carried only the lightness of victory,
a man who rubbed his chest, his heart,
as the station windows filled with sun,
the air with the music of human voices.
I remembered Aloysius one day in the garden
hanging the brothers' washed clothes to dry.
I was telling him I felt lost and wasted,
that I was like parched ground.
Art had always been my guide through life,
leading me through inward mazes,
but the monk told me simply to go into my cell,
and that my cell would tell me everything—
that too much striving, too much introspection,
takes you away from God and the world,
and leaves a man waterless and wandering.
So like a wise and prudent monk, I stopped
at a newsstand and bought a bottle of water
and a city map to find my way through Spello.
The fleeting world before me now like the sweetest gift,
I stepped from the station into the street outside,
and said to myself, "To the fountain."

Spello. Picture the tiny walled town
straddling the foot of Monte Subasio
and the hills St. Francis called home.
Roman buildings and medieval churches
crowd the narrow cobblestone streets.
The houses, red-tiled roofs, towers, and spires—
all burnished to a pink hue by the Italian sun—
shine golden and mellow at sunset.
Except for terracotta pots of rosemary and sage
that line patios and walkways and stairways,
and the geraniums and impatiens
that hang from walls and arches,
and the vines and ferns

that cascade from windowsills,
all is stone. In spring,
during the *Infiolata* festival of flowers,
artists cover the pavement with paintings
made of petals, the wild flowers of Umbria
gathered from the surrounding hills.
Past the Duomo of Santa Maria Maggiore,
accordion music spills from restaurants
and boisterous singing and shouts
remind one that life is *lived* here,
lived well and cherished,
families and friends eating and drinking together.
It's been that way forever.
Above the first-century *Porta Consolare*,
statues of a man, woman, and child
guard and protect the city,
and I've read that the woman's strong and wise face
resembles Petrarch's Laura.

Richard Jones is a poet. His books include *Apropos of Nothing* (Copper Canyon Press, 2006) and *The Correct Spelling & Exact Meaning* (Copper Canyon, 2010). His poems are published in such popular anthologies as Billy Collins's *Poetry 180* and Garrison Keillor's *Good Poems*, and he has been heard on National Public Radio. His collected poems, *The Blessing* (Copper Canyon, 2000), won the Society of Midland Authors Award for poetry. For thirty-three years he has been editor of the literary journal *Poetry East*, which celebrates poetry, translation, and art from around the world. Currently he is Professor of English at DePaul University in Chicago.

Mark Parsons

WHY CAN'T WE ALL GIVE BIRTH
TO OUR PARENTS?

I half-yell and half-sob
at little people carved from stone
and bound with rope and cloth and fur,
diminutive archetypes
holding empty boxes
like someone's life depends on it,
bee sting lips and button eyes on too-large heads.
Docented down the emergency stairs,
we scuff through the lobby,
where I glance at a woman who's built like the Venus of
Willendorf
sitting behind the receptionist's counter,
and out the automatic sliding doors to stand beneath a canopy
a blinding crescent shrouds like mist, consigning us to the parking
lot and then home
for another screening of Friday's pick,
everything about the film
a complete surprise
until the end, when we stare dumbly and in disbelief
at actors and actresses acting the part of
the good citizens of Los Angeles
rubbernecking a traffic accident
of monstrous proportions,
dressed like the actors and actresses acting as extras
on the sets of different sitcoms, dramas, movies, and soaps,
or the campy cast of Can't Stop The Music, the
Village People and Jenner vehicle,
gays and lesbians dressed in parodied straight attires:

a shuttle bus driver, a phone
line repairman,
a construction worker
with a horseshoe moustache,
a bartender straight out
of the old west,

a nurse getting off work
in the middle of the day.

Mark Parsons' poems have recently been published or are forthcoming in *Curbside Splendor*, *Smalldoggies*, *Heavy Feather Review*, *Regarding Arts and Letters*, *Sierra Nevada Review*, *The Dr. T.J. Eckleburg Review*, *Soundings Review*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *subTerrain*, *Emerge*, and elsewhere.

Susan Terris

THE KISS

Pintails on the lagoon flinch and dive
when she angles the canoe but not the ravens,
soot-colored gossips. Parts of herself
are fogged, but too much is visible;
and the ravens will cry out.
She paddles native-style
recovering her blade below water
a purl of diminishing pools—
real and imagined. On a piling, a heron
watches. He sees. He saw. He knows the kiss
at the end of the pier was a lapse,
false clew in a maze.
There are ragged explanations, not unlike
a girl's daisy test of loves-me,
love-me-not, petals pulled and
sucked one by one into clockwise spirals
of pain and pleasure.
Their mouths, their bodies. Yes, the kiss
at the end of the pier was
an involuntary twitch of lips.
She must stroke away.
Memory is only a maze with a whim of fog
tracing its dark mirrors.

Susan Terris' most recent book is *Ghost of Yesterday: New & Selected Poems* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2013). She is the author of six books of poetry, fifteen chapbooks, and three artist's books. Journal publications include *The Southern Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *The Journal*, *North American Review*, and *Ploughshares*. A poem of hers from *Field* appeared in *Pushcart Prize XXXI*. She's editor of *Spillway Magazine*. Her chapbook *Memos* has just been published by Omnidawn. A poem from this book, which first appeared in the *Denver Quarterly*—"Memo to the Former Child Prodigy"—was selected by Sherman Alexie to be published in *Best American Poetry 2015*. <http://www.susanterris.com>

Susan Terris

WING OF THE FUTURE

Today's unforgiving light scores the pond. In that glare, I stand alone. The Hunter's moon will soon set, gone like the veined dragonfly wings I tried to save—ephemera. Vein or vain. Hole or whole. Don't answer. Words can't cure this. The edges are dull. A fire won't change the chill. Don't think of summer at the lake or New Year's at the beach. $X+Y$ equals nothing I've ever understood. Show me how first light opens the sky, and I will not know what to do. It's so late now, the wing will never lift us up.

TRESPASS: THIS IS JUST TO SAY

I took your husband
on a walk
under wild plums
in full bloom

a man you ignore
and are probably
keeping for
his money clip

Forgive me
but he is delicious
so sweet
and so hot

Erin Newton Wells

DANCE

You again. It's only you
making a sloppy rhythm on the shore
where the sand is immigrant. Who knows

where it comes from? Every color
of the world is here in particles. Waves
scrape into the ribs of cliffs, the flanks of bays.

I want is what they say.
I want. And you always return,
bringing no tune but the tune of the surf,

its crash and roll, the hollow
suck drawn back into its underworld.
Who knows how deep it goes or if it wanders?

Your footprints slur
and will not hold a shape in the sand.
They slide into the dance but lose the steps.

You are made of these minerals.
Each time you come up from the sea,
it wants you back.

Erin Newton Wells lives in Charlottesville, VA, where she is winding down a career of over thirty years of teaching studio art in an art school she established. She has been writing all her life and is now reentering this more actively and publicly. Her poetry, fiction, and non-fiction currently appear in regional anthologies and journals.

Yuan Changming

[the betrayal of a tree]

You long to be a Douglas fir
Tall, straight, almost immortal
But you stand like a Peking willow
Prone to cankers, full of twisted twigs

Worse still, you are not so resistant
As the authentic willow that can bend gracefully
Shake off all its unwanted leaves in autumn
When there is a wind blowing even from nowhere

No matter how much sunshine you receive
During the summer, you have nothing but scars
To show off against winter storms
The scars that you can never shake off

Yuan Changming, an 8-time Pushcart nominee, grew up in rural China, started to learn English at 19 and published several monographs on translation before moving to Canada. Currently co-editing *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan in Vancouver, Yuan has poetry appearing in 1009 literary publications across 32 countries, including *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline* and *Threepenny Review*.

John J. Han

KOREA: AN EARLY MORNING DREAM
(Etheree)

Tears
fall down
Mom's sunburnt
face as I say
goodbye to her. She
looks thin like a dry twig,
she holds a bamboo cane. I
promise her I'll come back next year.
After our photo, I leave her.... Awake,
I return to my Occidental world.

John J. Han is Professor of English and Creative Writing at Missouri Baptist University, where he also serves as editor of *Cantos: A Literary and Arts Journal* and chair of the Humanities Division. He has published his poems in numerous periodicals and anthologies worldwide, including *Frogpond*, *Modern Haiku*, and *World Haiku Review*.

John J. Han

SQUIRRELS

end of snow
a squirrel flying toward
a bird feeder

spring trail
a squirrel jumps to the right
one more to the left

*

endless war—
a squirrel survives traffic,
fights another squirrel

snug in the shade
a squirrel unaware
of the air gun

*

autumn solitude
a squirrel perched
atop a tree

plenty of nuts
two squirrels squabble
regardless

*

rheumatic fever
a squirrel's crawl
slow slow slow

winter wind
a squirrel wraps its tail
around itself

John J. Han

LITTLE GIRL AND THE DRACULA MOVIE

her older brother
watches a vampire film
she peeks from afar

the count's mouth opens
she yells at the victim,
"Wake up!"

seeing the vampire bite
the neck of a pretty girl,
she touches her own neck

the vampire's victim
turns pale
she turns pale too

gusty winds outside
she hears a flapping sound
is it a bloodsucker?

she's shocked to see
her dad's bloody hands...
oh, it's just ketchup

Xi Murong

Sixteen poems translated from the Chinese
by Jianqing Zheng and Angela Ball

THE SEA'S QUESTION

—*My dear, let me look you up and down
so I'll remember forever*

What on earth is forever?
Waves glimmering under moonlight
Or the cozy sea wind?
The wet sandy beach under our feet
Or your face shy smiling
Against wind?
*(My dear, let me look you up and down
so I'll remember forever.)*

What on earth is forever?
The kiss I've expected for a thousand years
Or the tenderness in our hug? The happiness
That chokes and shudders
Is waves roaring by our ears
And surging over
To bury us deep.
*(My dear, let me look you up and down
so I'll remember forever.)*

Can't we just stay?
Can't we
Make time stay too?
Can't we change into wild vines
To hold to the boundless sandbank,
This starless and moonless night,
And all the tenderness we have?
*(My dear, let me look you up and down
so I'll remember forever.)*

But, what on earth is forever?
Fifty years later,
What will be unseparation?
What will be "remember forever"?

Fifty short years later,
What will be vows?
What will be “seas may dry and rocks may crumble”?
In the starless and moonless night
Finally there will be nothing
But the boundless sandbank.

(My dear, let me look you up and down...)

A TRAGEDY: TRUE AND FALSE

I must not really be old—
If I were, there would be no crash
Of happiness when I saw you
At this moment.

When you hesitate to look back,
It means you haven't forgotten.
If you had, how could your eyes shine
With tenderness under the moonlight?

But it seems that you don't
Really care. If you once did
Think of me, how can you
Shake hands with me calm as thin clouds
And light wind, then smile a good-bye?
I gaze after you, walking away
Once again.

Xi Murong, born in Sichuan of Mongol parentage, moved to Hong Kong in 1949 and to Taiwan in 1955. She is a well-known artist in Taiwan. In 1981 she created a sensation especially among the young readers with the love poems in her first poetry collection *Qilixiang* [*Seven-Mile Scent*]. Angela Ball teaches at the Center for Writers, University of Southern Mississippi, and Jianqing Zheng teaches at Mississippi Valley State University. Their translation has appeared in many magazines including *Crab Creek Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Exchanges*, *Mid-American Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Poet Lore*, *Poetry East*, *Renditions* and *The Literary Review*.

PARTING IN LIFE

Please look,
Please look at me one more time.
In wind, in rain,
Look back again to gaze at
My face tonight.

Please keep this moment
Firmly in mind because
After, you and I will turn
Onto strange roads.

It's saddest to part in life.
Some day
In an unforeseeable reunion,
I will never
Ever be
As beautiful as tonight.

PRAYER

I know this world isn't so good,
I know it has parting and aging,
But I only have one chance, so
God, please listen to my prayers.

Please give me a long, long summer,
A flawless memory,
A tender heart,
A pure love.

I can only come to the world once; so
Please also give me a pretty name
He can use to murmur at night
And, in flying years,
Remember our love stories forever.

SPRING SILKWORM

Because I often meditate
When you hatch
You'll have splendid wings

And eternal prospects,
In my life I'm willing
To be a lone spring silkworm
In my golden cocoon
And wait for the next-life's
Promise.

QUESTION

I've spent my whole life
Pondering a question.

When I was young as a bud
I felt too shy to bring it up.

When the boughs were all in bloom
We had already parted.

We meet again tonight,
But our gray hairs embarrass us.

It's funny—I'm so unlucky
To have spent all my life
Pondering this question.

A SUMMER AFTERNOON

Miss you and that
Summer afternoon—
You walked slowly out of the deep woods
Toward me, a smiling lotus just out of water,

Toward my gentlest
And most painful part,
My holy, remote, and
Untouchable youth.

I wish to burn
All our pretty years in an instant
Like the fate of Pompeii
And form an eternal mold in tears
So that time by time in thousands of years
They can be again and again
Inlaid in our hearts.

CHOICE

If I come to this world
Simply to meet you once,
Simply for all the joy and sorrow in an instant,
In an instant in billions of light years,

Then let all that must take place
Appear in a flash,
Let me bow to thank all the planets for their help,
Let me meet you,
Leave you,
Complete a poem proposed by God,
And then slowly age away.

THE RIVER OF TIME

—Who says we must age and separate?

But, my dearest,
Don't you hear
What flows quietly
Past our bed
And startles me?

Black hair on snow-white pillow,
Your young, strong body
Lies peacefully beside me.
Behind the window, you're my life company;
Outside, a moon bright with sparse stars.

Oh, my dearest, at this moment
Is the river of time flowing
Past our bed
Or just my nightmares and dread
In the dark?

MOUNTAIN MOON (2)

I once went there on moonlight
Because you were in mountains.
Tonight, relating our past in tears,
I seem to see your smiling face.

Mountains look dark,
My pretty years are gone.
I imagine when spring comes to the woods,
A strong man, you
Will still hold me by the arm
To walk up the mountain steps.
But now, moonlight is like water,
And grass black and dim.

OYSTER AND PEARL

Unable to remove the scar,
You wrap the past layer upon layer
With warm tears.

Day by day memory shines
In your chest with each turn
Touching your tender spot
And making you age sadly when you recall
In the deep, silent bottom of the sea.

WHY

I can lock my pen,
Why can't I lock my love and grief?

In a long life
Joy blooms so quickly,
The most beautiful time
The first to die away.

URNS IN LIFE

In the scented season,
In fallen flowers, isolation,
And your looking back,
I can only sing a toneless song
In tears.

But in an instant,
In the rising curtain,
Lights, and applause, I find
My song is the opera's
Unexpected brilliance.

JASMINE

Jasmine seems
Seasonless—
Day and night
It blooms exquisite
Fragrant buds.

Missing you seems
No difference—
Day and night
In every lost thought.

UNTITLED

Love should be joining,
Not parting.

If love is not joining,
Not saying,
And not remembering,
It's like sparks
That can't burn
Gazing alone
At the dark sky.

CONCESSION

If my eyes
Once staged your scented summer days
And my heart
Keeps an honest poem,

Then, it's not bad
To die unhappily.