

Kenneth Pobo / Two Poems

Insomnia

I call sleep and finally
poets come--Du Fu

and Li Bei slip into my bed,
two old cats curling up
against my hips. Li Bei,

sot, a watery moon. Du Fu,
that mountain flower you saw,
did it wink? Hold me close,

sweethearts. Lick my dreams
before you go--

I've cracked the window.
Others need you tonight.

Everything Seems Lovely

*“Everything seems lovely
when you start to roam...”*

“My Mammy” by Donaldson, Lewis, and Young

Hardly. The day I left Villa Park
I cried the 75 miles to the Wisconsin border,
pictured my parents waving before the garage

smelling of gasoline, garbage
and grass clippings. I was a young 23,
pretending to be straight,

attended church, “Kyrie Eleison” with
a disco thud. I’m 51 now. My parents
sold the house, moved to be near me

and Stan in Pennsylvania. They enter
the old folk’s home, er, I mean,
retirement community. So fast,

it goes so fast. Welcome signs slide by
in a blur. How soon grass welcomes us.
Trees border our bones.

*Kenneth Pobo has two chapbooks forthcoming: *Tiny Torn Maps from Deadly Chaps* and *Contralto Crows* from Green Fuse Press, both due out later this year.*

A.C. Diamanti / Two Poems

In the Days of the Empire

In the days of the Empire,
when the Romans at last defeated
a particularly stubborn barbarian tribe,
Caligula, out of deference to the
rebel chieftain, had him stuffed
and propped outside his bedroom chamber.

In the middle ages,
Knights departed for crusade
with pieces of holy bone from
Saints in their satchels
for protection and fortune in battle.

Obsolete practices of an ancient arcane world,
when people needed to possess something tangible
of what they feared, respected or venerated?

Today,
Einstein's brain is
pickled in formaldehyde and
Hitler's brain sits in a cardboard box
on a shelf in a dusty Moscow archive.
I have my late mother's prosthetic leg
in the trunk of my car.
And Dr. Latimer
keeps Napoleon's penis in a jar.

The Subway

The subway train made a high-pitched sound
like a knife being filed on a grindstone
as it took a long sharp curve.

Then, as it lurched into the station,
Mary smiled goodbye to a stout, raven-haired
woman who politely smiled aback and with a
downward glance scuttled out of the car.

Now Mary, embarrassed, wondered why she had
just told this woman – a complete stranger –
that her marriage was failing
and why her husband was a jerk,
and other intimacies, including the
exact length and location of her ghastly
appendectomy scar, she would never dream of
telling a soul that knew her- even remotely?
But the words, though she consciously tried
to restrain them, galloped into the strange
woman's eyes who had listened attentively,
occasionally nodding.

Puzzled, she slumped in the seat.
And, as she caught a glimpse of the back of
the departing stranger's head, the car heaved
forward, the wheels of the steel ground again on
steel and what she had told the stranger
raced from her brain to just behind her lips.
And then she listened attentively to that
familiar quiet voice as she began talking,
repeating everything to herself.

A.C. Diamanti was raised in Toronto. He writes poetry, fiction and children's literature. His poems and stories have appeared in a number of journals and magazines including: The Antigonish Review, Whetstone, Storyteller, The White Wall Review, Underpass, Kairos and BSPS Journal.

Ronojoy Sircar / One Poem

Blue Shadows in the Street and Flickering Bulbs in the Heart

He had no chance;
smelling of camphor, he
went out like a light bulb
hovering over the porch,
in the sunlight.
No one knew till it was, once again,
Safe to come out at night,
light up that cigarette, put on some Brubeck
and faintly hum along.

She feels indecisive as
She places the cheese grater on the plastic tray;
“Front to back, front to back, front to back.”
Placing her hands firmly on the smooth white skin
of the body, the slab, thinking of poor-ol Bessie with
a big-ol bell around her neck,
She pushes and pulls, trying
to create an expiry date,
to desire.

“Loud organs play in my head when I think”

The priest raises himself from the bed,
wipes away the sweat, with a
soft-scented and "terribly satin" handkerchief.

Crack

Sniff

Crack

The other man ties liberty to
the book in his hand, and
the self-fashioned crown made
out of cardboard, hanging from his waist,
asking,
for forgiveness, "never beg".

Soft whispers, like hard candy
made him grind his teeth,
till he had "not one left";
all rolling, perhaps, with good-ol Bessie.

Like a funnel reversed and looked through
from the crow's nest of a ship,
with specks of white chalk
floating away with every ripple,
only to gather, of whatever remained
of "Sir Tommy's INVINCIBLE ship!"
on the ground,
The trigger made room
for air to pass through (its circumference),
gently grazing the shaking finger.

"Damn . . .
Is that the time?"

Creak

The man, turning the volume down
to a faint murmur, flicks on
the switch on the wall
clutching his heart,

only to realize the importance,
of spare bulbs.

Ronojoy is from New Delhi. He likes to blink once when asked a question, and twice when faced with a giant elephant.

Amy Jackson / Prose

A Conversation with the Late Edouard Leve

When I was six I spent two years collecting erasers in a peanut butter jar then ate the entire collection. The large pink dollar eraser was the worst. It never feels like summer until it is really hot and I'm in a basement watching cartoons, which is how I spent the best summer of my childhood. I went to Brownies in year 3, where the girl living in the house behind mine, in the woods, told me to get her help, that her dad wouldn't let her mom leave the house. I don't remember seeing the girl after that. In my early twenties I spent a couple of weeks in hospital for a nervous breakdown. There I met an obese man around thirty years old who kept telling us he knew a major secret and everyone in town would know soon enough, and I believed him. I like the excitement of natural disasters but empathize with the victims. When I was eighteen I scraped the word love into the bottom of a candle and floated it down a stream; a book of magic told me it would bring me my one true love. A year later I met my husband and moved to Australia. He was twenty-six and I was nineteen. He was my fifth boyfriend. In Tasmania, at Port Arthur, I saw a flash of light over the hospital ruins that no one else saw. The guide made me write it down in a book and told me it was a ghost. I love my family but don't like most of them. I remember the gravel embedding in my soles as I ran for help when my father tried to kill my mother. A stitch formed in my side and I had to skip towards the house where I babysat so I could call 911. I thought my lack of fitness was going to get my mother killed. I never saw my father cry except the day he shot our black lab in the head down by the river because it didn't love him. I love my husband but always picture his possible deaths. Thoughts consume me and won't stop until I think of the color blue. I'm an insomniac and have been since I was ten. Singing loudly makes me happy. When I took Effexor I had vivid movie-length dreams; they had better plots than my novel. But when I'd wake I could never remember them. I play the flute, clarinet, and somewhat of the guitar and bass but the only instrument I ever wanted to play is the piano. My mother used to think I was my grandmother reincarnated because I always wore gloves and a hat to church until we stopped going when I was seven. People treat me nicer, especially my mother, if I wear makeup. People like my eyes but in them all I see is my father. I am very sensitive but hate to admit it because I think it's a weakness. Over my lifetime I've only had a handful of close friends; most of them resemble me. I am loneliest when I'm in a group of people and have nothing to say. When I was five I stole a pack of stickers. The neighbor kid ratted me out when I wanted to share them with him. I love traveling but love seeing my photos of my travels more. I need praise from people I admire or I quit and move on to different things. I lived five years in a brand new town that was situated on a migratory bear path in the wilds of British Columbia. The dollhouse my father built me I used as a spaceship and pretended to be an astronaut. Nothing satisfies me more than making ugly things pretty. My idea of pretty is different to most people. I'm more of a cat person. After

coming home from the lake, I found my first horse lying on the ground. I held her head in my lap and watched her eyes roll back in her head. It was dusk and I cried for help but none came. I consider Melbourne home and didn't want to leave. Now I lie in bed and shut my eyes and pretend I'm in my Melbourne apartment on Carlisle Street, the one above the coffee shop I love. I pretend I can hear the number 79 tram clunk past and picture the way the room feels and how the furniture is laid out. For three weeks every Saturday I watched a man shit in our neighbors trash can then wipe his ass with garbage. He was cleanly dressed, alone and around thirty. Before I left Australia I had nightmares of waking up in Canada. Now in Canada I have dreams about waking up in Australia. I never seem to have enough money no matter how much I have. I'm more afraid of failure than I am dying. I have written my first novel 19 times and still fear it's not perfect. It makes me happy to see my stories and poetry in print even though I don't think any of it is good enough. Something major is boiling inside me, something important and I am afraid I won't find the key in time. One of my best friends is someone I met at a writing residency. We've only met a few times face to face. My aunt died and no one found her for six days. There isn't going to be a funeral because her family ostracized her for being overweight. My other aunt died of Flesh Eating Disease. I'd like a baby even though I never thought I would and because it's not cool to have kids. My husband has nightmares about me not changing diapers and social services taking the baby away. My therapist said since I was having trouble writing my novel, write it for her, which I didn't like. Now all she talks about is my writing and the problems keeping me from writing are too trivial for her to discuss. The thing I despise most about people is hypocrisy. I've always owned at least one animal. I resent my animals when I can't go away because of them. When I was seven I dreamed of a murder then saw it on the television a week later. People view me as a nail and themselves a hammer. I'm trying to change that. One time I scratched my arms so bad they scarred. I didn't know why. Now I do. I don't attempt to hide the scars. I became a vegetarian at ten years old but can't digest most vegetables. I can only drink gin and tonic without ending up in the hospital. In high school people thought I slept with people when I hadn't. I believe in a god when things are either really good or really bad because I don't feel humanity is capable of producing either effect. African-American slave/racist movies make me nauseated and horrified but I love the idea of the South. If it's after midnight I watch black and white horror movies (pre-1960). I enjoy nineteenth century Russian fiction more than contemporary fiction. No matter how much I weigh, I always feel too heavy. I'd love to live in France but I don't think it'll cure my sadness like I hope it will. Paris is my favorite place to visit. I was almost given a scholarship for photography but wasn't so I gave up altogether. Approaching thirty I feel like an under-achiever and that it's too late to figure out what would make me successful or happy. I think most thirty year olds feel this way. That's why we're all going on vacation for our birthdays this year; to be somewhere where our lives are not. My father once sat at our kitchen table tapping a screw-driver on the table repeating, 'it's coming, it's coming.' I don't like it when good things happen to bad people. I spent fifth grade talking with a bad English accent. I can perform in front of thousands of strangers but not my family or friends. I walk around naked in my house even though people can see me through the windows. And I am glad I

don't know how my life will go, because I'd probably be too disappointed to continue to slog it out. I think being a writer gives me too much time to contemplate. That is when I find life unbearable. For better or worse there is someone to stick it out for. Disappointing them is even more intolerable.

Amy Jackson is an Australian/Canadian writer whose short fiction and poetry have been published in Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Canada and The United States in magazines, anthologies and journals. She's a graduate of the Professional Writing and Editing Program from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. In 2007 she was a finalist for Young Writer of The Year in Australia and is currently finishing her first novel with the help of The Canada Arts Council.

Arjun Rajendran / One Poem

at the abortion clinic

I dreamt I was lying face down on the surf; an enormous crab and a tiny crab
clawed my hair like spaghetti in octopus ink. The calligraphy on their shells
was dimly Arabic—the opening lines of a broken Ghazal. The ears of a stethoscope
poked out from the sand. No one listened to weakening heart beats. The nauseating
whiff of bandages followed sea breeze. I woke up groggy, blinded by the image
of rocking chairs in the sun. The nurse stamped a rose holding her syringe to the light.
My cell phone throbbed in the purse, again and again and again.

*Arjun Rajendran's work has previously appeared in Asian Cha, TPQ online, Pratilipi, The
Reading Hour Magazine and Switched-on Gutenberg.*