

Scribbler

JULY 2015

ISSUE 84

Editor's Note

Any journal addressing the human body must begin by acknowledging Whitman's "I Sing the Body Electric," which ends with a litany of body parts that states they "are not the parts and poems of the body only, but of the soul." So "this skin this sac of dung & joy..." as Yusef Komunyakaa calls it, is this issue's theme.

Issue No. 85 will be guest-edited. I'll return to edit issue No. 86, which will have as its theme—Parents. The deadline for sending material for the Parents issue is **October 15, 2015**. Please send work to Karnit@LMI.net or by snail mail to: Kayla Sussell, 420-45th Street, Oakland, CA 94609-2125.

—Kayla Sussell

My Skeleton

My skeleton,
who once ached
with your own growing larger,

are now,
each year
imperceptibly smaller,
lighter,
absorbed by your own
concentration.

When I danced,
you danced.
When you broke,
I.

And so it was lying down,
walking,
climbing the tiring stairs.
Your jaws. My bread.

Someday you,
what is left of you,
will be flensed of this marriage.

Angular wristbone's arthritis,
cracked harp of rib cage,
blunt of heel,
opened bowl of the skull,
twin platters of pelvis—
each of you will leave me behind,
at last serene.

What did I know of your days,
your nights,
I who held you all of my life
inside my hands
and thought they were empty?

You who held me all of your life
in your hands
as a new mother holds
her own unblanketed child,
not thinking at all.

From *The Beauty* by Jane Hirshfield (Knopf NY) 2015.
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Feast of the Circumcision of Jesus

We lie together unclothed and a little drunk,
and trace exile in the scars across our bodies:
my leg, your shoulder, my face, your hands,
the bottom of my womb—and the scar that marks
the first time your blood was shed.

We feast in each other. We feast in our humanity.
Your scar, covenant—my scar, a broken vessel.
We sigh like a million tiny messiahs deep inside everyone.
They bubble and rise toward the endless divine.

My true love, you bring your scars toward mine,
and they orbit like the rings of Saturn.

—Sharon Coleman

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Eileen Malone Thomas Lovell Beddoes
Richard Loranger Will Cloughley Jason Mark

PREVIOUS-ISSUE FINANCIAL REPORT

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Participants in Clive Matson's creative writing workshops receive copies of the Scribbler for two years, and for as long thereafter as the recipient shows interest. If you are interested in receiving copies of the Scribbler, send an email with your name and mailing address to: clive@matsonpoet.com

Submissions and Editorial Policies:

Basic Acceptance Policy: If the current editor likes a piece, it gets published; if not, it is passed on to the next editor who will either use it, or return it to the author. All rights are reserved. Send submissions to: scribbler@matsonpoet.com (BUT any emailing instructions at top of page 1 rule!).

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SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

POETRY SALOON (drunk on poetry!)

Meets at 472 44th Street, Oakland, the second Friday of the month. Potluck at 6pm, reading at 7:30pm. Bring poems or prose by you and others to share, or come just to enjoy. Hosted by Kayla Sussell.

July 10, August 14, September 11, October 9

CRAZY CHILD WRITING WORKSHOPS (fee: \$80)

Saturdays, 10am - 5pm, once a month.

July 11 in Middletown

August 1 in San Anselmo

September 19 in Carmel Valley

October 3 in Oakland

10-WEEK WORKSHOPS poetry, prose, plays, nonfiction (fee: \$400), Mondays, 7pm - 10pm, Temescal District, Oakland. Current sessions end July 13, next sessions start July 20.

NOVEL AND CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOPS (fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

One ongoing, intensive workshop meets for three hours every other Monday in Marin. Writers bring ten pages to each session. Limited to five writers.

STRUCTURE OF LARGE WORK

(fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

For writers with a draft of a full-length play, script, or novel, or who want to start a large work. Our topics are standard repertory, starting with "Whose story is it?" Current sessions end July 17, next sessions start July 24.

THE NOVEL'S ARC (fee: \$500 for five sessions)

In this workshop four novelists commit to reading each other's novels and examining how each works as a whole. We'll devote a two-hour session to each novel. Current sessions end in July, next sessions start in September, dates to be arranged.

WRITING EXCURSIONS: SEE PAGE 8

For more information about any workshop, visit matsonpoet.com or phone 510-654-6495. To register, phone 510-654-6495 or email clive@matsonpoet.com (unless otherwise noted).



To Praise

I want to praise bodies
nerves and synapses
the impulse that travels the spine
like fish darting

I want to praise the mouth
that warm wet lair where the tongue reclines
and the tongue, roused
slithering a cool path

I want to praise hands
those architects that create us anew
fingers, cartographers, revealing
who we can become
and palms, cupped priestesses
worshipping the long slow curve

I want to praise muscle
and the heart, that flamboyant champion
with its insistent pelting like
tropical rain

Hair, the sweep of it
a breeze

and feet, arch taut
stretching like cats

I want to praise the face, engraved
like a river bed; it breaks like morning
like a piñata, festival of hope

Breasts, cornucopia
nipples that jump up, gleeful
like a child greeting the day

and clitoris, shimmering
a huge tender pearl
in that succulent oyster

War and Peace

In his old neighborhood down by the docks sat the Dew Drop Inn where the War's stunned veterans consumed cheap scotch and rank nuts, but it's long gone, replaced by Good Vibrations, an upscale sex shop where the freshly young fed by the heroics of old men can taste, in pretty shapes, the other side of animal attraction – not aggression, but knights at the altar with rings around their glowing scepters. He hunkers at the corner to imagine their smooth skin taken by the sea. He thinks of sailors, soldiers, bold airmen in tight cockpits over Germany going down, ejecting in pearly white chutes to float nervously over enemy territory. He thinks of the ones who failed to get out, their fiery graves...of ghosts shadowing the way pain can, what we are birthed in, and who preach now that in physical abandon we can keep this wild drink called danger leaking from our hides.

– Eliot Schain

I want to praise the love cries
sharp, brilliant as ice
and the roar that swells in the lungs
like an avalanche

I want to praise the gush, the hot
spring thaw of it, the rivers
wild with it

Bodies, our extravagant bodies

And I want to praise you, how you have
lavished yours
upon mine
until I want to praise

– Ellen Bass

From *Early Ripening: American Women's Poetry Now*. 1987.
Edited by Marge Piercy. (Boston: Pandora). Reprinted
with the poet's permission.

the reason for maya

it's the body, after all
that apprehends a peach

(the orange flanks, the fuzzy skin,
the sweetness oozing from within)

it's the arm that reaches into tree
or onto shelf – apart from the body
why bother with a self?

every body eats other bodies
and gets eaten in return

so bite the peach, enjoy the flesh
now you – later the worms

– Jo Podvin

What Happened

I don't know what happened
they woke me up for a big party
called Millennium Times 5
strangers with shiny faces asking
if anything hurts
I say no it just feels weird
a word they have to look up
when the box on the wall translates it
nonsensically.

My body isn't what it used to be
they junked the old one and
now I've got this servo thing
with perfect skin and teeth although
there's no hair due to the fashion.

I can't even bite my fingernails because the
teeth are just for show because
(I learn) the race no longer
eats anything.

Desperate I ask if anyone holds hands and
they say no, there's a problem with static charge
but why would we want to do that anyway?

I go into shock and they don't get it

I say I want my old body back

Everything gets real quiet

I'm think I'm about to be unplugg –

– Jean Hohl

Rear End

"Be kind to your behind," says a commercial
I think for toilet paper.
"Don't look behind you," the horror movie's young couple
are told by an old woman. "Monsters. Demons."
But when demons come drooling, claws out,
your ass deals with them.
Your ass sits on shadows till fear drains out
leaving only a black outline,
second cousin to the white outlines of Hiroshima.
Close your eyes and walk backwards,
your bottom reads Braille in the original language.
Your ass leaves your mind behind.
Your rear hears more than your ears.

The Body

One problem with the body
is that it acts as a divide
between the world outside
and the one within.

So the desire I feel for you
but am too proud to show
stays hidden in me
instead of offered to you.

Another bad thing about the body
is the way it looks.
Inwardly I am the Venus de Milo,
forever young, my bosom swells
above my slender waist.
My limbs are long,
my skin like cream,
as flawless as the soul
that I was given
but also cannot show.

Now that I've finally learned
how to look at a rose,
how to stir a pot,
how to give my full attention
as an act of love,
look at my body – it doesn't show these things.

– Adele Mendelsohn



Dancing butts twinkle like stars, spank the night,
shake your booty.
Sometimes you have to be an ass.
You have to need god or love the way you need the bathroom
when you need the bathroom.
When you take a dump, your ass is in charge,
dragging the rest of you along like a sock puppet.
And not only then.
Ride your ass into Jerusalem,
it knows the way.

– Julia Vinograd

My Body, Myself

It takes medication
with great dedication
It tires easily
and eats food queasily
It's bony, it's frail
with skin pasty and pale
It uses a wheelchair
but seldom goes anywhere
Loud noise and bright light
hit it hard, blind its sight
They are blows to the system
I flee to escape them

So I put it to bed, this body of mine
and follow my thoughts down a whole other line
I remember a hostel I biked to, in France
where dinner was eaten by swarms of red ants
In ascending the Alps I swung free in a chair
inhaling beauty, sharp coldness, pure air
And once, long ago, at the Claremont in Berkeley
my lover and I dared to act quirkily
woman to woman we danced all that night
Giving the stuffy old patrons a terrible fright

I lie there and smile as I range through the past
its colors and textures, its heft, and at last
I don't care the world is unsympathetic
since I have a brain that is peripatetic.

—Dusty Bernard

Penduline Tits

Penduline Tits are not what they sound like.
They're small birds that build hanging nests
of willow down, lined with feathers.
They live a moment, but my pendent breasts
signal half a century and forty pounds
gone whoosh. I could string them up
with rigging, de riguer among the smarter set,
but rigorous compression and elevation
just reminds me of Japanese rope-bondage.
I could snip, nip and hoist 'em higher,
but, mutinous, they resist.
They'd rather hang in the West wind,
sway with the roll of the waves,
swing like twin pendula
that tell the time, the time, the time.

—Jan Steckel

The Gesture

He says he has this
funny sort of pain.

Making a gesture
of his entire body

by keeping it
perfectly still

*

Aesthetic distance
isn't meant
to help anyone.

It's just
for itself.

Like pain

*

Un-
holding to it--

a true report. A mental note

released into silence
like a bird.

— Kirk Johnson

Meeting Fate

The wind,
susurrant in the branches,
is flung in bursts and silences
against the body.
The body goes on walking
into the pain,
the beautiful shouting

to be heard.
The body goes on walking
into the blades of the plan,
the proscribed streets;
to the already forgiven
trespasses, the sweet
rushing emptiness.

— Matt McKay

When the Time Comes

Remove this kidney, this liver, these eyes
before you burn what is left of this body
returning it to the star scattered cosmic
dust-storm from whence we all came

with twinkling needles explore the grace
and distinction of my donated brain
do research, restore the dull mind whose
memory is shattered prisms, make that
which cannot be mended, mended

exchange a damaged hard-beating heart
with one that flows as fast as the blood
of a running mustang, share tissue, muscle
grow winking sparks of new cells from seeds
of my old ones, help a crippled child turn
into a frisky foal, green-broke

answer what you can of the harshly-called
worn and awkward pleas for relief of pain
transplant, transpose, receive these gifts
from my steadfast mount that carried me
all my life even when I didn't want, didn't care
— and always, always forgave me.

— Eileen Malone



Spring

Hormone levels rise slowly as the tide turns, drowning all the shapes with which the distracted intellect played. Now tinglings flood the body, signaling the return of bioluminescent creatures from the deep. The tongue is hungry for a special food it remembers from the sushi days, and soft smelly cheese is out for sampling. Mockingbirds invigorate the morning air with wild riffs. And finally a day arrives perfect for bicycling past jogging female shapes in black spandex around the Embarcadero. Spring has returned even though you are seventy and too much given to the great anxiety of a world that seems to have no future. The old men at Café Puccini are talking about the miraculous success of their knee replacement surgeries and getting back to golf. I take out the envelope of old photographs, re-directing the Turner classics of my own movie star youth. (Weren't we all movie stars then?) Is that you? You were so handsome, she says. Play it again Sam. We will always have Paris. We will always have that attic apartment we called the treehouse in San Antonio. The body yearns for those same adventures into the forbidden, the shock of first experience. The body wants to go back to a spring fifty years ago, to the war years now fashioned into nostalgia and pin-up girl collectables. It even wants to go back to the wet dreams of an ancient tide, to the Cambrian explosion of Earth's adolescence, to the ache that prokaryotes felt when they touched one another in the invention of sex. It wants to dream again all the strange creatures that desire produced again and again and again in the hot volcanic pools, and more recently in the hot tubs where a damp joint was passed around and you couldn't get the glimpse of a perfect ass out of your mind.

— Will Cloughley

Resurrection Song

Thread the nerves through the right holes.
Get out of my bones, you wormy souls.
Shut up my stomach, the ribs are full:
Muscles be steady and ready to pull.
Heart and artery merrily shake
And eyelid go up, for we're going to wake. —
His eye must be brighter — one more rub!
And pull up the nostrils! his nose was snub.

— Thomas Lovell Beddoes (1803-1849)

There are many ways to inhabit a body. Despite what the despots of fashion would have us think, we are made beautiful by size, and shape, and shade, and scar, and the shunning of symmetry. The myth of the ideal has made far too many unhappy with that which they should celebrate: their sensate flesh burgeoning in air, in life and steam and sweet silk sweat. Take off your clothes and stand on the roof, let the cool dry breeze caress your legs with their fine bright hairs, your happy genitals, your warming gut and arching nipples, your sweet sure face and stolid scalp. Take a deep breath and smile. Then decide what you want, to be exactly who you are.

— Richard Loranger

Eat of My Flesh

When I saw the placenta splayed out on the cutting board, I immediately thought, *The Tree of Life*. This wasn't metaphor — just plain biology. Laid flat, the vascular system of the organ was obvious. Filament-thin blue lines threaded their way to thicker blue lines, which then connected to the fat trunks of the main veins, the whole system converging in the center, at the umbilical cord, which looked like a twisted white rope. The design reminded me of a tree's roots.

Our plan was to eat it.

In the days after our daughter's arrival, one of the jokes around our place was that you know you've had a homebirth if every towel in the house has been used and there's a placenta in the fridge. Now, our good friend and doula, Hannah, had come over to prepare it for consumption. This, she explained, was going to be something of a production.

Wearing blue medical gloves, Hannah first rinsed and cleaned it. She filled one of our larger, deep-bottomed pans with a small amount of water, and into the water added a mix of Chinese herbs. She brought the water to a vigorous simmer, and then added the entire, whole placenta, and steamed it until it was medium-well.

She removed the cooked placenta and returned it to the cutting board, where she began a rough chop. Soon enough she had a small pile of what looked like a bashed-up country pâté. She spread the chunky paste across flats of wax paper and then laid them in the food dehydrator she had brought with her. It would take at least a night to dry down, she said. Once dried, she would come back to our house to transfer the powder into pills.

There was a bit of placenta broth left in the pan, and Hannah asked if we would like some. *Why not?*, we said, and soon enough Hannah gave us two teacups filled with a couple of tablespoons of a thin, brown liquid.

My baby's mama was on a midwife-ordered bed rest, and I found myself kneeling next to the bed as we drank the broth. I brought the small, porcelain teacup to my lips with both hands and sipped a bit. It tasted like Chinese herbs and venison. Earthy. Gamey. There on my knees, mama and baby right in front of me, it felt sacramental. *Eat of my body*.

I know, I know — the whole thing sounds like a hippy affectation. A little too California woo-woo, a little too witchy. What will happen when my partner takes those pills in two months or in ten? Hard to say. It might just be a placebo. Or maybe it will have the desired effects of boosting milk production and increasing estrogen.

In any case, does it matter? Hannah said something about how most other mammals eat their afterbirth. The hormones inside help staunch uterine contractions and spur lactation. Also, cleaning up the placenta is a smart way to steer clear of predators. For me, this offered a justification of sorts. I appreciated the bio-mimicry of the exercise, the effort to reconnect to the primal.

It wasn't until later that I considered that perhaps the mimicking of nature goes much farther back on the evolutionary branch. Think of the alder, think of the oak. They drop their leaves and the leaves dry out and become soil.

The being feeds off itself.

—Jason Mark

Jason Mark is author of the forthcoming book, *Satellites in the High Country: Searching for the Wild in the Age of Man* (Washington, DC: Island Press), to be published September 2015.

WRITING EXCURSIONS

LAKE COUNTY WORKSHOP

"LET THE CRAZY CHILD WRITE!"

Saturday, October 24, 4 to 6 pm, and

Sunday, October 25, 10 am to 5 pm

Lake County Arts Council Gallery

235 Main Street, Lakeport, CA 95453

Fee \$55. Phone 707-263-6658 to register,

510-654-6495 for details on the workshop.

HARBIN WRITING SEMINAR

Friday, September 25, 6 pm to Sunday, September 27, 4 pm

Harbin Hot Springs, Middletown, CA 95461

Fee \$325 (Harbin residents \$225),

\$50 early registration discount.

Included: dormitory lodging and five catered meals.

To register, contact Elaine Watt at 707-987-2339 x72

or accounting@harbin.org.

LOCAL: DEVELOPING YOUR CREATIVE WRITING

Wednesdays 6:30 to 9:30pm, started June 17, ends August 26

U.C Berkeley Extension, S.F. campus, 160 Spear Street, room 704

10-week class, to register: 510-642-4111, English x442-001, fee: \$525

SCRIBBLER FINANCIAL REPORT

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Thank you, donors.

Please keep the funds coming.

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