Fall 2006

RATTLE

Poetry for the 21st Century

Featuring:

Excerpts from Erik Campbell's *Arguments for Stillness*

Photography by Hal Bergman

Issue #26 Preview:

Excerpts from a Conversation with Jane Hirshfield

Poems by Patrick Ryan Frank, Robert Funge, Ed Galing, Michael Hettich, & Leonard Nathan

e.1

Fall 2006, e.1

 Print issues of *Rattle* are 4-color, perfect-bound, and include about 200 pages of poetry, essays, interviews, and reviews. Each issue also features a tribute section dedicated to an ethnic, vocational, or stylistic group. For more information, including submission guidelines, please visit www.rattle.com.

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Why E-Issue?

While we all love the feel of a thick book in our hands—the smell of the glue, the heft of each 40 pound box from the printer—putting out two cohesive print issues each year is also limiting. We want artwork and essays to relate to each tribute's theme, reviews to fit neatly on a page, introductions to be tidy, professional, timeless. Moreover, six months is a long time to wait between issues. It's a wonder you don't forget about us.

Occasionally we think—why not go quarterly? We could print only one conversation per issue, cut the poems in half... But then it comes time to ship, and we remember that twice as many issues would mean twice as much postage, twice as many papercuts, another twelve hours in a dark room stuffing envelopes, peeling labels and watching *Porky's III* for the fourth time.

Electronic issues allow us to broaden our scope, and our reach—after all, our goal isn't to make a profit, it's to make sure great poems get read. Posting PDFs online and emailing them to subscribers is all but free; it just takes a little labor and some bandwidth. We can reach people who choose not to buy our print issues, and we can include material that we're unable to print.

E-Issues will appear every March and September, and will hopefully reach at least 5,000 people. Their format will be malleable, but each should include the following:

Book Features

A series of poems from a recently published collection. Though this issue's feature is a book Rattle had a hand in publishing—Erik Campbell's *Arguments for Stillness*—that will probably never again be the case. We want to showcase representative samples of books that work well as a whole, including 4-7 poems, publisher summaries, and information about the author.

If you're an author or publisher who'd like to be featured in a forthcoming E-Issue, email me (timgreen@rattle.com), or send a copy of the book highlighting which 4-7 poems you'd like considered to:

Rattle / 12411 Ventura Blvd / Studio City, CA 91604

While we prefer a sequence of poems that has not appeared in any other journals, they may have—just be sure to note where they appeared, and affirm that the rights are yours. Be sure to include contact information. Should we chose to feature your book, we will need additional materials (images, bio, etc.). Books submitted will not be returned—instead, they will be added to the E-Review request pool. Payment is the exposure. Hopefully some of the several thousand readers will like what they read, and buy the book.

We begin with *Arguments for Stillness*, not because we helped publish it—and indeed, we receive no compensation for its sale—but only because it's one of our favorite books of poetry, and it deserves the attention. As a collection,

Arguments serves an affirmation for why we love what we love, a statement that poetry matters, despite the little space its stillness is given in our society of mass media and perpetual motion. With the calm and contemplative pushed aside, poetry lovers are left as walking anachronisms from a slower time. Campbell refuses to let us forget the essence of what we do, that "silence can mean anything / in the right man's hands." I think you'll agree that Erik Campbell is one of those men.

E-Reviews

Anything-goes poetry reviews. E-Reviews are a chance for anyone to say anything about any book or anthology that relates to poetry. Guidelines and a full list of E-Reviews are available at www.rattle.com/eissues.php. Every E-Issue will feature selected E-Reviews from the last six months.

Artwork

A full-color series of paintings or photographs. To submit, email me low-resolution jpegs, and we'll ask for high-res before publishing.

Print Issue Previews

Selected material from the upcoming issue of Rattle. Obviously, we're hoping to whet your appetite enough to order a copy (click here for the order form), but at the same time we're just proud of what we do, and want to share.

Poems by Patrick Ryan Frank, Robert Funge, and Michael Hettich are from the regular poetry section. Ed Galing and Leonard Nathan appear in our tribute to the Greatest Generation—poets born between 1911 and 1924.

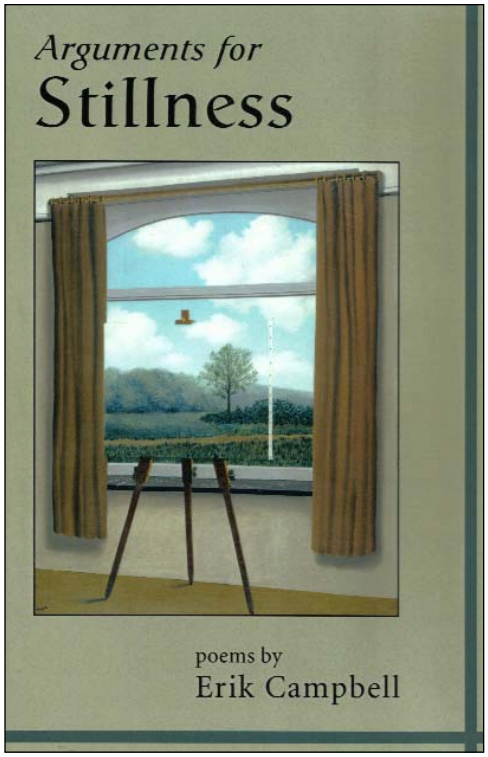
The conversations in the forthcoming issue are amazing—both Jane's and Jack's. Not only are they wonderful, entertaining people, but they offer insights that reach well beyond poetry. The excerpts included here are pages 5-8 of Jane's 20 page interview.

These electronic issues are only as successful as they are fun to read. If you have any comments or suggestions, feel free to email me (timgreen@rattle.com). Full-color, high-resolution printouts—ink-jet on heavy paper—are available for $5 at www.rattle.com/eissues.php (to pay for shipping, handling, and ink) but we encourage you to print them out yourself. The pdf is designed to print well on standard paper, in color or black and white, and you can easily print only those pages you're interested in.

Please spread the word, and in the meantime, we hope you enjoy.

Timothy Green, Editor
October 17, 2006

BOOK FEATURE



ARGUMENTS FOR STILLNESS BY ERIK CAMPBELL

A Curbstone / Rattle Edition

Arguments for Stillness is a vivid examination of daily life. Campbell's concerns are wide ranging—from political injustice to the solace of nature and the comfort of love. These are clear, readily accessible poems, although they resonate with psychological and philosophical depth.

Arguments for Stillness, in short, is just that: a case for stillness and a lyrical exploration of contemplation in our world of frenetic motion, an examination and series of "arguments" for the quality and possibilities of stillness and reflection in spite and because of what Neil Postman referred to as our current "peek-a-boo world." The theme of the collection is perhaps best expressed in the last two lines from Campbell's poem, "Considering Metal Man (as a Template for World Peace)": "Look how he sits and stares, they say. Observe how / Nobody dies because of this."

Arguments for Stillness by Erik Campbell · Original Paperback · Curbstone / *Rattle* Edition
Curbstone Press. 321 Jackson St., Willimatic, CT 06226
Publication Date: April 2006 · ISBN: 1-931896-26-7 · 86 pages · $13.95

To order online visit www.curbstone.org

For more information contact: Alexander Taylor (860) 423-2998
or email: sandy@curbstone.org

Erik Campbell lives in Papua, Indonesia, where he works as a technical writer for an American mining company. His poems and essays have appeared in *The Iowa Review*, *Tin House*, *The Massachusetts Review*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Gulf Coast*, *Nimrod*, *New Delta Review*, *Rattle*, and other journals. Born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1972, he grew up in Bellevue, Nebraska, and received his BA from Nebraska Wesleyan University. After a year in Thailand, he taught high school English in Maryland for two and a half years before moving to Papua in July 2002.

Praise for *Arguments for Stillness*

"A truly excellent book of poems. Erik Campbell sings them with measured precision. His voice is one I look forward to hearing again—then again and again."

—William Kloefkorn, Nebraska State Poet

"Erik Campbell has given us a fast-paced, free-wheeling romp through world culture–from the Great Pyramids to the corner Kwik Shop, from Rilke to the Rolling Stones. Part brainiac, part class clown, Campbell is the consummate quick thinker, sifting meaning from the white noise of mass media, while wrestling with Aristotle and Neil Postman. In lesser hands, the result could be a dazzling mess, but these poems weave into an unexpectedly intricate *bildungsroman*, whose hero likes us and wants us to share his journey. With these poems as our guide, how can we resist? We like him, too; we're along for the ride."

—Ted Genoways, editor, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*

"I found it fascinating to follow the record of Erik Campbell's witty, heartfelt journey in search of, and in praise of, that still center: the source of all poetry."

—William Jay Smith, author of *The Cherokee Lottery*

"An enthusiastically written collection, brimming with energy and the vivacious need for expression."

—*The Midwest Book Review*

Erik Campbell

WINCHESTER MANSION

If anyone on the outside asked, they would only smile
And shake their heads, silently affirming that ghosts, like sins,
Are a private business. And if there was no logic in the house,

There was smooth certainty in the wages. "We have years of better
Than even pay," they would say if pressed. "Call it lunatic work
If you please." They had all been privy to Mrs. Winchester's genius,

Those mornings she would appear with plans scribbled on paper
Napkins or the back of dust jackets, last minute revisions
And decisions from a besieged architect's hand. "Can you build

This?" she would ask the foreman, "Because it seems impossible
Enough to me." But more than her money they respected her sense
Of dread; the only wealthy woman they'd ever met who thought

Herself capable of death, the sole patron who commissioned sublime
Illusions of functionality and encouraged the carpenters to stop making
Sense. Some days she would lose herself in her house, and it was then

That she was happiest, finding herself suddenly, say, on a spiral
Staircase leading to a ceiling. The carpenters would hear her laughter
At lunchtime (the only time the building stopped) adumbrating up

Blind chimneys and off of trap doors, hinting at certain sundry truths
That they would need to leave their lunches again to find. Perhaps
No end is the end when building a metaphor, or there is no need

For locks when all the doors lead nowhere. The foolish try to escape
Their sins, and then there's the wise, who give them rooms of their own.

Campbell

WE READ THE NEWSPAPER

For George W. Bush

It's true we envied of Jeff Chase
His Swiss Army knife
Full of gleaming diminutives:

Lilliputian saw and scissors;
Mysterious, sundry blades;
A plastic toothpick he actually used,
Removed and cool, as if waiting
To disdain through high noon.

And with the knife's miniature
Magnifying lens Jeff would harness
The sun, an anti-Prometheus for us
To wonder on as we huddled about him

Watching insects shrivel and smoke
Like things unbecoming. *The smoke*
Looks like ribbons or souls, he'd say.
The smoke that was their bodies.

The murdered that were never dissected.
That afternoon we watched him
Beat up Micah, threatening to cut him
Because his kind killed Christ.

Now, decades later, we read the newspaper;

And still we suffer nothing
In suffering all.

Campbell

TWELVE STANZA PROGRAM

…man is the measure of all things…
—Protagorus

First, just under the title, I will place the correct
Quotation, book-ended with ellipsis, so my readers
Are certain I've read the Greeks before they begin

To watch me parade my first person as it conspicuously
Eats, takes walks, reads some haiku, contemplates
Bridges, has the occasional nightcap with Charles Mingus.

I will read the biography of a poet or a painter and later
Place Shelley in a discothèque, Vermeer watching
Reality Television, then sit back and watch the poems

Dance about the room, drunk on anachronism. I will
Gaze out any number of windows and chronicle
The movements of even those animals I don't see,

After which I'll peruse a book on orchids for hours
(Any ethos worth its salt is fluent in the language
Of flowers). A lost love will appear periodically

With a possibility in her proverbial pocket and a head
Full of obligatory hair that massages memory.
Even the moon isn't off limits to a first person like me.

I, for one, have seen it for the first time again and again
And, in order to round out this troublesome stanza,
I'll presume your passion for snow, the topography

Of clouds, rivulets, antique bridges, and field mice.
Mind, your knowledge of jazz must be as prodigious
As mine, and you must let me decide what it means

To quit smoking, to *truly* appreciate Pound, turn 50,
And above all you need to accept my mornings' lyrical
Minutiae, riddled with birdsong, coffee cups, and allusion.

You will slowly become convinced, when my artifice
Permits, that everything you've ever done, said, forgotten,
Or read had a poem in it you simply didn't notice. Your

Life, albeit full, has been too full of formless, almost
Moments that should have ended with action, with
Someone weeping or waving their way to becoming.

Your felt experience, like your participles, precariously
Dangling, perhaps preceded by the perfect adverb. *Listen.*
It's your lyrical, newly vertical life, passably singing.

Campbell

NICK ASKS *DO YOU MEDITATE,* LEAVING THE QUESTION MARK OFF

This is not the sort of filtered factuality
My former student, Nick, needs:
My first Buddhist monk chatting on
A laptop in the Colombo airport,

Or the quiet confessions that accompany
Bad backs and tinnitus (it can take years
To become your own worst anachronism).
And my back is reminding me that Nick

Is still young enough not to have his Kyoto
Assaulted by cameraed tourists and smoking
Roshis; he's still reading Kerouac,
On the precipice of Hesse and more

Conspicuous austerities. How to answer him
Now suspecting that, despite years in Thailand
And meeting Ginsberg twice, we are not
All beautiful in song? And if I saw the Buddha

On the side of the road I still wouldn't kill
Him, but I wouldn't give him a lift either,
Too worried that the abstraction riding
Shotgun had more than a koan or a flower

Sermon hidden in the folds of his robes—
A pistol, a tax return, perhaps a worn copy
Of *The Portable Nietzsche* that, when opened,
Makes him a grow a moustache before

Disappearing. Or better still, a small bell
Without a clapper that he shakes serenely,
Seeing as silence can mean anything
In the right man's hands. My reply,

Nick, is this (all metaphors exposed, things
Almost what they are): one hand shaking
A small bell, not clapping.

Campbell

CONSIDERING SOMETHING ARISTOTLE SAID

Papua, Indonesia

Moments ago I was, perhaps, feeling
Too insouciant, like I belonged
Among the privileged few

Who have too much time to sit
On a balcony overlooking
A jungle full of trees
That they can't name,
And so can truly see.

It was soon after this that I became lazy

With my thoughts and began proving
What we truly are: walking habits
In creature form, our daily designs
Fitting so faithfully we forget
To pause at mirrors and make
Comparisons.

For a moment I understood the nameless

Argonauts whose only glory was to row,
Who never minded coming home
Again and again after each re-telling
With arms fleeceless and empty
Because that's how Apollonius of Rhoades
Rendered them: mute rowers, ill equipped
To argue with mythology, accustomed
To their lives' unheralded, lateral moves.

Lazily I put down my book wondering if I knew

How to make the Sheppard's Pie I promised
My wife for dinner; I reached for my lighter
And, with the flame an inch from my nose,
Realized I hadn't a cigarette in my mouth,
And I remembered that this is because

Of another Greek I read, something
Aristotle said concerning character

Being a question of cumulative habit.
And if this is so, I supposed, touching,
Like Thomas, the tip of my nose,

There must be scores of us sad characters out there.

Enough of us to play the most predictable game
Of checkers ever played, certainly enough of us
To compose a small army of redundant souls
Only capable of seizing castles that anticipate
Their falls. And instead of flexing my most

Purposeful pose or quitting something
I'm ashamed I enjoy or walking straight
Into the jungle, barefoot, to test its legends
Or finally moving my desk to the sunlit side
Of my study, I went inside to find my Marlboros
And smoked two in a row, using, because of Aristotle,

My left hand instead of my right. My left
Hand, I reckoned, would never see it coming;
It would think something strangely new, something

Out of character was happening. My fingers
Twitchy, ready to welcome this minute mutiny.

Photography
by Hal Bergman

Hal Bergman lives and works in Los Angeles, California. For more information on upcoming shows, portfolios, and a daily photoblog, visit his website.

www.halbergman.com

"Wildern"

"Bay Gulls"

"Sunset Rower"

"Pier 4"

"Surf Perch"

Marjorie Maddox

NO SHADOW OF TURNING
BY TREY PALMISANO

Main Street Rag, 4416 Shea Lane, Charlotte, NC 28227; ISBN# 1-59948-036-0, 37 pp.

In *No Shadow of Turning*," harbor lights "thread through open seams / that spread thin buildings wide." So, too, are our crevices—of both doubt and belief—pried open. In this book just out from Main Street Rag Press, Trey Palmisano uncovers what we hide. Here "ground breaks any spade / bold enough to open graves"; faith bubbles up, "ready to burst the seams"; and "desiccation signal[s] a grace / we struggle to make sense of." Scarecrows, Sartre, weeping statues, Icarus-like moths—all are "strange visionaries" forcing us to "shift [our] center of / gravity to weightless contemplation."

There is much in shadows here to contemplate. In "Here in the Bay," a woman—"somebody's Saturday night"—"finds the closest shadow, / and steps into her own." In "Pigtown Christmas," makeshift highway crosses "slope down the gravel / cul-de-sac where a graveyard of / car parts and broken lives / decay along the roadside." In "Drought," "even the birds hid[e] / their colors in briarwood, / sagewood, and tanglewood" while in "Where the World Ends," a dog food factory produces "a murderous stench so foul, / [the poet] no longer struggle[s] to / grasp a God with nostrils."

But there is also a lot of "turning" in Palmisano's *No Shadow of Turning*. Both the poet's and others' "turning away"—from hope, from God, from life, from action—give way to a "turning toward," a modern day Damascus experience, in which "you learn/the world again…a lilting breeze that / meets where two / rivers tangle." In the same poem, the mind is "slow and cumbersome, / like those who carry their/weight by memory." Still, as in the biblical allusion in the book's title, there is the promise of Light, of sight after blindness. There is the hush of praise, as in the poem "Rend": "not just creatures and stars [but]…how my wife ceases snoring / just before midnight...how a purple wave of light / ripples blue from the neighbor's / window, asleep beneath her / TV's sad company."

This is a book where eyes adjust to the dark, then begin to see differently. In the epigraph to his poem "The Real Tragedy of War," Palmisano quotes the poet Stephen Dunn, "oh, when it came to salvation I was only sure I needed to be spared someone else's version of it." This is Trey Palmisano's often gritty version. Do not make the mistake of turning away from these shadows.

G. Tod Slone

THE BEST AMERICAN POETRY 2006 BY DAVID LEHMAN, SERIES EDITOR; BILLY COLLINS, GUEST EDITOR

Scribner Poetry, 1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020;
ISBN# 978-0-7432-5759-6, 2006, 197pp., $16.00

Every public library, or at least every other public library, has probably purchased this book, which in itself makes for a good pot of cash. I found it right next to all the Dummy books in a very small branch library in Louisiana, the Ouachita Parish Public Library. The librarians buy books like this one, no doubt, without even reading it first, because it forms part of the authoritative series on poetry begun in 1988 by David Lehman, tenured professor in the graduate writing program at The New School (NYC). That authority is further enhanced each year, at least in the minds of establishment-order literati, by the guest editors who have included the likes of Robert Bly, Rita Dove, Seamus Heaney, Robert Creeley, Adrienne Rich, Donald Hall, Charles Simic, and Louise Gluck. This, the current volume, is edited by Billy Collins, former poet laureate of the nation and 30-year tenured professor at Lehman College (NYC).

Responsibility, and nothing else, pushed me to write this review, for I doubt I'll be able to find a publisher for it. I write it for the record, for the American record. When I borrowed the book, I did not think I would like much of anything in it, but wanted to see what establishment-order literati thought the best poetry might be. Know thy enemy. As I skimmed through it, I was honestly surprised just how horrendous some of the verse and, especially, themes were. How could some of these poems possibly be considered the best that American poets produced in the year 2006? Cite the following by Richard Newman, editor of River Styx. Visit your public library and read through the whole thing, if you can. I couldn't.

> My briefcase of sorrow slumps by the door.
> The semester's done. I leave it behind,
> all my manila folders of grief (stacked
> and alphabetized, bound with rubber bands
> of stretched hope), pens of overachievement

Cite the following by Charles Harper Webb, director of the MFA program, California State University at Schlong Beach.

> Because we know our lives will end,
> Let the vagina host a huge party, and let the penis come.
> Let it come nude, without a raincoat

Let it come rich, and leave with coffers drained.

Cite Paul Violi, English professor*, The New School (Columbia University).

Roast beef on whole wheat, please,
With lettuce, mayonnaise and a center slice
Of beefsteak tomato.
The lettuce splayed, if you will,
In a Beaux Arts derivative of classical acanthus

Cite Mary Jo Salter, Emily Dickenson Senior Lecturer in Humanities at Mount Holyoke College.

Waiting for dinner. You bake things in the oven.
Or mother does. That's how it always is.
She sets the temperature. It takes an hour.

The verse of the more well-known, name-brand poets is equally questionable and couldn't possibly be the best. It is certainly verse that will hopefully not outlive 2006, let alone be lasting. Cite Pulitzer Prize winner Franz Wright, "A Happy Thought."

Assuming this is the last day of my life
(which might mean it is almost the first),
I'm struck blind but my blindness is bright.

These poems illustrate that poetry for these poets is a fun, intellectual pastime, or play game (though lucrative) like the New York Times crossword puzzle—nothing more, nothing less. They illustrate why poetry in America does not matter, to paraphrase Dana Gioia, director of the NEA, who also serves as a good illustration of that observation. Tenured professor Robert Hass' poem, "The Problem of Describing Color," is the type of problem these poets tend to fixate on. Tenured professor Paul Muldoon's "Blenheim" is but a colorful sketch of a jogging steed, nothing more, nothing less. Tenured professor Charles Simic's "House of Cards" is about his mother playing cards on the dining-room table.

"Go upright and vital, and speak the rude truth in all ways," had written Emerson. But clearly those words have nothing at all to do with America's best poets, that is, those who figure in this volume. "Let your life be a counterfriction to stop the machine," had written Thoreau. Sadly, those words too have nothing to do with America's best poets.

On the front cover of the volume is a blurb written by former poet laureate of the U.S. Congress, tenured English professor Robert Pinsky: "Each year, a vivid snapshot of what a distinguished poet finds exciting, fresh and memorable: and over the years, as good a comprehensive overview of contemporary

poetry as there can be." Clearly, however, this is not at all a "comprehensive overview." What it presents is an overview of The Best American Poetry Apt to Please Establishment-Order Literati. And indeed, if that had been the title of the book, I wouldn't have taken the time to write this review.

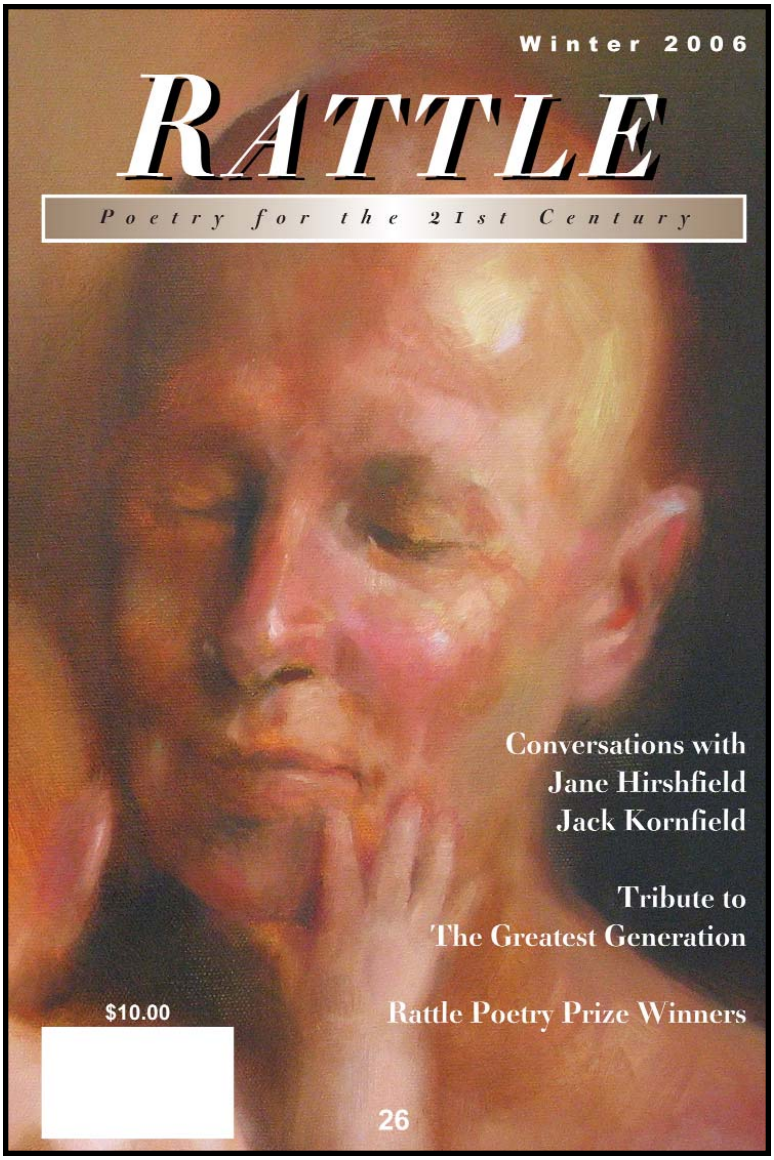
It is time that tenured academic English professors yank their swollen heads out of the sand and put an end to the rampant self-congratulating and back-slapping that have come to characterize their milieu. Lehman's forward to the volume is a perfect example of such shady behavior and not only with regards Collins but also the volume itself, whose poems Lehman characterizes as examples of "wit, charm, humor, eloquence, ingenuity, and comic invention"—unfortunately, everything but depth of substance and pertinence in a world gone awry.

Stephen Fry sums up the poets in this volume: "far too many practicing poets default to a rather inward, placid and bloodless response to the world." And indeed if those "respected" poets had not defaulted, they wouldn't have been in it, nor would they have been published in the various "respected" lit journals from which the poetry was chosen, including *The Paris Review, Briar Cliff Review, Georgia Review, New England Review, Gettysburg Review, Connecticut Review, Virginia Quarterly Review, Kenyon Review, Poetry, Iowa Review, New Yorker, Atlantic Monthly, Harvard Review, Atlanta Review,* and *New Letters*. Moreover, they would likely not have gotten tenure, nor would they have won Pulitzers or Guggenheims.

"A friend of mine announced one night over dinner that 83 percent of contemporary poetry is not worth reading," states Collins in his introduction. Certainly 83 percent, if not more, of the poetry in this volume is not worth reading. What establishment-order literati like Lehman and Collins are succeeding in doing, more than anything else, is keeping American poetry from being the best. I write this review as a protest against their mindset, which seems bent on keeping out of the literary agora any sociopolitical poetry that dares risk their wrath or that of other establishment-order functionaries.

*Editor's Note: In an earlier version of the review Paul Violi had been erroneously listed as a "tenured" English professor. We apologize for the mistake.

#26 PREVIEW



On Sale December, 1st, 2006
to preorder, visit:
www.rattle.com/greatestgeneration.php

R

POETRY

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Doug Holder
Gary Lehmann

CONVERSATIONS

Jane Hirshfield
Jack Kornfield

ARTWORK BY

John Paul Thornton

REVIEWS BY

Morris Collins
Barbara Crooker
Candice Daquin
Gayatri Devi
Diane Lockward
Arthur McMaster
Natasha Kochicheril Moni
Joseph Zaccardi

Patrick Ryan Frank

THALASSOPHOBIA

—The fear of the ocean.

That there are depths you cannot know
and you could sink forever,
the water below

opening only to other water,
unlit undertow,
movement, tighter

circling shapes surrounding you,
all unknown edge and bitter
hunger, tooth

or tentacle or fin, all black
approaching through the blue,
the clinching wrack

of struggle, the final giving up
to the pressure and the dark,
that patient grip,

panic burnt down to a dull
and thoughtless ache, the slip
into the pull

of nowhere, bearing no hate, no wrath,
holding nothing at all,
not even your breath.

Robert Funge

WHY I AM NOT A SCIENTIST

Now that science has discovered that cod
get seasick in a storm, and that halibut
(and probably other fish—they're waiting

on a federal grant of five million
to study the subject) pass gas, perhaps
it's time to move on. We don't really know

how salmon change sex
when the going gets tough, how the swan
finds a mate for life, or the swallow

Capistrano. And there must be more to learn
about the hibernation of bears, and why the Cubs
can't win a pennant. Let's find out why

the whale beaches itself,
the drinking habits of certain birds,
and how the monarch takes four generations

to migrate north, then another four
back south, and how each generation
returns on time to a place they'd never been.

How can they remember what they never knew?
when in one generation I can't remember
where I left my keys. Let's study that.

Let's study why the long forgotten
flashes into a mind that goes blank
on what he had for breakfast, and mixes

the names of his grandchildren. Let's determine
why an otherwise serious poet doodles
gibberish when he could be creating

esoteric balderdash. Or better yet
let's just study that which retards
the advancement of our civilization,

like spending five million on seasick cod
and flatulent halibut, or half a minute
on a bored poet with equally bad habits.

Ed Galing

VISITATION RITES

from the outside it
looks like a college
campus, situated off the
highway, with a long road
that leads to the front
entrance, with large white
columns on either side,
rather than the psychiatric
hospital where my wife has
been for two weeks now,
because they said she was
deeply depressed, at age
sixty, writing strange
messages on back of photos
and speaking about death all
the time, the doctor advised
a few weeks of medication and
treatment, away from stress,
and unable to cope with daily
life, so now i come to see
her on visiting day, and i sit
in the waiting room while they
go to get her, watching the passing
parade of doctors and nurses, in this
antiseptic prison, mostly drug addicts,
and alzheimers here, and my wife
comes towards me, unbelievably pretty,
slim, her hair well done, smiling,
as we embrace...no one close to watch
us, and i feel guilty, having her
put away like this, so we sit for
awhile, and she tells me they are
taking good care of her, and she
is getting better, and then she takes
me to her room, to show me the bed and
well-used dresser, and we hold each other,
and i feel as if this is not us, like this,
but someone else, she tells me they are
having a dance down in the recreation
room, and asks if i want to go, of course,
so we go downstairs, where the others are
already dancing on the floor to a jukebox,

while others stand by to watch us, and we
dance together, hold each other, i feel her
body, just like the old days, and everyone
smiles and says we look good together, you
would think this was just a regular dance
somewhere on the outside, instead of a
mental hospital, and for awhile i imagine
that its really true, and i love her so
much, and hope there is a cure
so she can come home soon, and later
we go to the cafeteria for
dinner, and i get in line
with her, a long line, all
headed for the steam table,
and we sit down at a table
to eat, and my wife begins
to cry a bit, and asks me
when i can take her home...
she tells me she loves me,
and i tell her the same...
we then sit in the lobby,
and my wife seems tired now,
and not so spry as before,
she says she is sleepy, and
wants to go to bed, and soon
a nurse comes to take her gently
by the arm, to escort her to her
room...i hug her, and whisper that
i will be back next week, she nods,
turns away from me, and i watch her
disappear down the hall, my heart
crying, as i head for my car, to
return to my lonely home, where
we have lived for forty years,
some days are better than others.
this is one of the better ones.

Michael Hettich

THE LESSON

In that second grade classroom, Mrs. Circle said
each of us carries an ocean inside
bigger than we are, like happiness, and full of
fish that live nowhere else in the world
and tides that are pulled by our heartbeats, and low tide
sand bars to wade far out in the bright sun.
She taught us we can learn to swim there by jumping
out into the water where the water is still
and shallow, holding our breath and moving
our arms and legs gently, gently—*try*
for yourself she suggested, and we all closed our eyes
sitting there at our desks, while the snow fell outside
and the radiator whispered. I could hear the clock tick
as we held our breath and swam without really
moving our bodies, like jellyfish, across
the beds of coral that were filled with many-colored fish
whose names didn't matter, Mrs. Circle said,
as long as you let them come to you—
they are like angels—and nibble the tiny
air bubbles that cling to the hairs along your legs and arms.
Feel how they tickle, she said, *Take a deep breath,*
dive down underwater as far as you can.
Do you see your shadow down there on the sand,
following your body? That's another form of you,
a kind of memory, swimming down below
your only solid body. Don't forget it. Then she clapped her hands
and we all looked up, happy to be sitting there
with our young teacher in that drafty classroom
in the age of extinctions and nuclear bombs
we hadn't been taught about yet.

Leonard Nathan

WHEN I FIRST SAW

When I first saw my new-born son, I saw
life would be somewhat different now for me,
as Schopenhauer warned us that it would
if we gave in to mere biology.
Of course, there was pity—pity, seed of love,
but there was more: a grown-up feel, quite new,
of separation. I saw it when my son
looked at his own first son; when he was first
shown me, I guess my father felt it too.
And so the hunter, after his freelance chase,
comes home to find another mouth to feed,
and, watching the woman lift it to her breast,
feels useless, yes, but more responsible,
and growls and frowns, and kneels to skin the kill.

CONVERSATION BETWEEN JANE HIRSHFIELD and ALAN FOX IN MILL VALLEY, CALIFORNIA, APRIL 20th, 2006

Jane Hirshfield is the author of six collections of poetry, including *After*, *Given Sugar, Given Salt* (finalist for the 2001 National Book Critics Circle Award, and winner of the Bay Area Book Reviewers Award), *The Lives of the Heart*, and *The October Palace*, as well as a book of essays, *Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry*. She also edited and co-translated *The Ink Dark Moon: Love Poems by Komachi & Shikibu, Women of the Ancient Court of Japan*, *Women in Praise of the Sacred: 43 Centuries of Spiritual Poetry by Women*, and *Mirabai: Ecstatic Poems*. Hirshfield's other honors include The Poetry Center Book Award; fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Academy of American Poets; Columbia University's Translation Center Award; and the Commonwealth Club of California's Poetry Medal. Her work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *The Nation*, *The American Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, four of the past six volumes of *The Best American Poetry*, and many other publications, and has been featured numerous times on Garrison Keillor's *Writers Almanac* program, as well as in two Bill Moyers PBS television specials. In fall 2004, Jane Hirshfield was awarded the 70th Academy Fellowship for distinguished poetic achievement by *The Academy of American Poets*, an honor formerly held by such poets as Robert Frost, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, and Elizabeth Bishop.

[Excerpt]

FOX: It seems to me that you're very sensitive to your environment. Would that be accurate?

HIRSHFIELD: Yes.

FOX: Can you say more about that?

HIRSHFIELD: [silent for a while] I'm going to be a tough interview for you. [both laugh] Could you try asking that in some different way?

FOX: Oh sure. What do you like to avoid, in the environment?

HIRSHFIELD: Oh, what do I like to avoid? That I can answer. Noise, distraction, superficiality—in other words, the entire contemporary world. [both laugh] And yet, and yet... I'm creeping up on present-day life, or it on me. A little more of the contemporary world enters my work all the time. My early poems drew almost entirely on the imagery of the natural, but in the past two books especially, there's much more reference to the shared cultural landscape. In *Given Sugar, Given Salt*, for instance, there's a line that says "a shopping mall swirls around the corpse of a beetle." [both laugh] So there you have it. The natural world is still at the center, but a shopping mall has wrapped itself around it. [laughs]

FOX: Would you say this has enhanced your work, or corrupted it?

HIRSHFIELD: Oh, I think expansion is always good. We begin life with a certain set of powers, tools, loves, and one of the tasks of a life is to enlarge that field, until, along with the Roman writer Terence, you can say, "Nothing human is alien to me."

FOX: Well, even the Dalai Lama is involved in scientific research, I saw him speak in Boston, he works with people at MIT...

HIRSHFIELD: Oh yes, I know some of the people involved in those meetings, and my beloved is a molecular physicist, so... Yes. [laughs]

FOX: Mhmm.

HIRSHFIELD: Knowing scientists has unquestionably changed my poems, has given me new images and landscapes and also allowed me to think about things I might not necessarily have been thinking about otherwise.

FOX: And in what ways has that, I'm not going to say transformed your work, but directed it ...

HIRSHFIELD: Well again, it's an expansion of possibility. A new bit of knowledge or vocabulary is an expansion of world. So, for example, in the new book there's a series of seventeen very short poems, the ones I've called pebbles, several of which have some biological context. They're all very brief, and somewhat recalcitrant, reserved, as a pebble is. As I also like to say of them, they aren't jokes and they aren't riddles, but they function a little bit like a joke or riddle in that they aren't complete until the person receiving them takes them in and has a response. When you throw a pebble into the pond, the ripples are part of the phenomenon.

FOX: Mhmm.

HIRSHFIELD: So, to get back to science, among these pebbles, there's one about global warming, there's one about tool use in animals, there's one about evolution and glass. Another poem, "Jasper, Feldspar, Quartzite," I fact-checked with a friend who's a geomorphologist, and I suspect that talking with him over the years was what allowed these stones of different nature to come into my work as images.

A poet really needs to know everything. Yet no poet does. So what we find is that Stephen Dunn can write certain poems because he knows gambling and basketball. Pattiann Rogers's poetry is an encyclopedia of the natural world and its phenomena. Philip Levine's work is founded on his growing up in Detroit, doing factory work, and coming into adulthood in a community and time where the Spanish Civil War mattered in a deeply personal way. We are given our charges to some degree by our lives, to some degree by our choices. But however it happens, what poets know, or learn, will become the material by which they think and feel. The deep issues of human life are not that many. But the images and stories through which we can approach them are infinite. And every such exploration throws a subtly different light on what it means to be human on this earth.

FOX: So then, I think you're saying that you can find these truths anywhere, or everywhere, and where you go with it depends upon your own personality?

HIRSHFIELD: That, and to a great extent depends also on the circumstances of life you were born to, and on what the world gives you in the course of that life. We were talking before the recorder was turned on about something closely related to this, what for me has been a life-haunting question about how much choice people actually have in what happens to them in their lives.

FOX: Yes.

HIRSHFIELD: Somewhere in each of my books, I've noticed, there's a line or two that considers that question. It haunts me. Anybody reading this, and you and I, sitting in this room—we have some choice. We're lucky, and we have some choice about or fates. There are many people who have next to none. For them, it takes some great force of world and soul to break through the pressures of non-choice they were born into. It can be done, but it's rare, and it's hard.

FOX: Why do you think many or most people have such limited choice, or relatively limited choice?

HIRSHFIELD: Because life is simply too hard. If you're a child born in the Sudan right now, you don't have a lot of choice, besides suffering and starvation. One recent poem about this, the last to go into *After*, too late for any magazine, is "Those Who Cannot Act." That poem came out of thinking about

the tsunami two Christmases ago, which led me to think also about the Iraq war. In the one, no one at all had a choice; in the other, the carnage and vanishment are caused by human decision. Yet many of the people who die in war are as without choice as those villagers and beach-going tourists who vanished inside the waters. There's a much-repeated sentence from Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, "Those who act must suffer, suffer into truth." But that is the protagonist's prerogative. The tragic hero will die but so will the chorus. Many people, most, suffer without the catharsis of meaning. The poem is for them. It ends mid-sentence, broken off, as lives do, every day, in Iraq, in the Sudan, in New Orleans, in Indonesia, in Kashmir.

FOX: Yes, yes.

HIRSHFIELD: And I think that those of us who *do* have some choice have a deep responsibility to those who don't.

FOX: Say more about that.

HIRSHFIELD: We have the responsibility of doing whatever we can to alter those circumstances, whether by writing about it directly or indirectly, or donating, or volunteering, or political activism—again there's a full spectrum of possibility, and all parts of that are necessary. But also, I think, there's a responsibility to make, of these lucky lives we've been given, what we can.

FOX: Yes.

HIRSHFIELD: Not to throw them away, because so much opportunity is given to leave the world better. And to know joy. Simply to know joy. You mentioned the Dalai Lama earlier, and one of his central teachings is that happiness matters. Perhaps you have to be the Dalai Lama, a person who has known exile and the dismantling of country, a person who has spent a lifetime in a practice that originated in the recognition of suffering to say that and not be taken as a simpleton. And, of course, one corollary of a joyous heart is that it allows some chance of behaving better, of acting out of richness and generosity rather than selfishness, grasping, and fear.

FOX: And yet there are many people who are not born in the Sudan, who feel themselves victims, and they have no choice, because things happen to them...

HIRSHFIELD: Something I wrote in one of my essays may speak to that question. It's in my mind because it was quoted recently, first in something called the Little Zen Calendar, and then by the director of an Episcopalian church, whom I was told used it in her Easter Sunday sermon. The sentence was "Habit, fear, and laziness conspire to keep us in the realm of the deeply familiar." There are forces of inertia in the soul, and there are forces of awakening in the soul, and for each of us, that's one of the very few places of choice—

which way we turn—towards inertia and the comfortable habitual or towards the unknown, frightening permeability of awakened heart. To make one choice in that realm rather than another, even in the smallest way, will change a life. There's an eight-line, early poem I love by the Greek poet Cavafy. The title is an Italian quote, from Dante, "*Che Fece...Il Gran Rifiuto*." And the poem begins, "For some people the day comes when they have to declare the great Yes, or the great No." That is a life-changing poem, I think.

FOX: Yes.

HIRSHFIELD: I can give you the rest of it if you'd like.

FOX: Yes, please, absolutely.

HIRSHFIELD: [laughs] This is Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard's first translation. They revised it, but I like the first one better:

For some people the day comes
when they have to declare the great Yes
or the great No. It's clear at once who has the Yes
ready within him; and saying it,

he goes from honor to honor, strong in his conviction.
He who refuses does not repent. Asked again,
he'd still say no. Yet that no—the right no—
drags him down all his life.

FOX: Yes.

HIRSHFIELD: I love the poem both for its reminder of the possibility of declaring a great Yes and a great No, and also for the koan held by the phrase "the right no." What does that mean, "the right no drags him down all his life"? Sometimes I think it means one thing and sometimes I think it means the other. For me it's a question you can weigh a life against.

Contributor Notes

Patrick Ryan Frank: "In my work, I'm interested in issues of control: how people master their fears, or else are mastered by them; how a poem's movement can push against its structure; how meaning can determine shape. Essentially, life is composed of conflict and tension, and poetry is the art of struggling beautifully." (patrickfrank@hotmail.com)

Robert Funge lives alone in a library. He is retired and busier than ever. He writes poems to make sense of the past, and because it's fun. Always both. These poems reflect his life, his imagination and his idiocrasy. He would like to hear from others, but has no email. He frequents P.O. Box 1225 in San Carlos, Ca, 94070, and can also be found in the phone book. He dislikes speaking of himself in the third person.

Ed Galing: "The only thing I was ever any good at when 'growing up' was writing. I wrote poems and stories at fifteen for classmates to read, passing them around the room. When the teacher caught me at it, she began to read my words, and when I thought she was going to scold me for disrupting the class, she instead smiled, and said, 'Keep writing.' Now at 89, I have finally got it 'write!'"

Michael Hettich: "I don't remember how old I was when my father sat me down beside him on the living room couch to read to me from his favorite poets, but I do know that I was young enough to understand very little of what the poems meant, and that their meaning didn't really matter at all. My father seemed another person when he intoned these poems, and yet he seemed exactly himself. And I felt very close to him then and very much myself: happy and pregnant with vivid possibilities."
(mhettich@mdc.edu)

Leonard Nathan: "I am the boy chanting iambics into the mirror early one summer day; I am the same boy still chanting the mirror's same old message: there is no time, no time!"

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