

# P O E T R Y

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RONALD MORAN

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JULY 4, 2007

It feels like a Saturday, coming as it does  
on a Wednesday,  
and except for no mail, no banks, and some  
store closings,

it is a nondescript Saturday, my neighbors  
cutting grass,  
painting, or planting, but by 5:00 p.m. supplies  
of hot dogs,

ground beef, and buns will have disappeared  
from supermarkets;  
and by 9:00 p.m. our town in South Carolina,  
the fireworks center

of America, will sound like the earlier nights  
in Baghdad,  
while a CNN or Fox newscaster is trying not  
to cringe

in front of the camera, as America wipes out  
the powers of evil  
in the Mideast, and the rest of us are stunned  
by the bravery

of newscasters in bombings depicted for us  
so closely,  
just as, for a little while, the men and women  
of northern Virginia—

safe from harm, dressed in Sunday finery as if  
for a cotillion—  
watched, instead, the battle of First Manassas,  
June 21, 1861,

first hand through opera glasses, until the fat lady  
never sang,  
and war for us as a spectator sport was changed  
forever.



## READING THE MAIL

As I was drinking my second glass of cheap chardonnay  
before supper,  
I picked up a brochure from the mail, advertising items  
for those

who must have everything, when I saw a modified  
ping pong table  
floating in the middle of a swimming pool with two guys  
trying to play

and, well, I thought, how silly, as I turned the pages  
to hammocks  
then to floats of equal value, and, once the second glass  
settled in,

I started, without cause, to think of Humvees without  
armor plating  
to withstand roadside bombs and soldiers without  
the right body armor

to wear under their combat fatigues; and, after pouring  
another glass,  
I almost opened a thick envelope from the DNC that,  
on the outside,

asked, Are you willing to put up with this White House?  
but the one  
I opened was from American Express, offering me again  
a titanium card

that cost as much for a year as a floating ping pong table  
or hammock  
or float with a blonde dangling a long, tanned, sinewy leg  
off the side.

I took out the official letter, with a fake plastic card,  
embossed,  
and read the pitch, until its print vanished like particles  
of sand.

## THE FOO-FOO GIRL

The foo-foo girl did a bad thing and went  
to jail,  
and Mommy and Daddy couldn't stop  
their little  
foo-foo girl from going to jail but they  
could

have the jail moved into their foo-foo  
girl's house,  
which they did with the aid of Barbie  
and Ken,  
who is now an FBI agent in charge of  
monitoring

the whereabouts of bad foo-foo girls,  
at least  
foo-foo girls who did bad things such as,  
well,  
we all know because the media also loves  
foo-foo girls

with oh so fine long hair with pure roots  
and midriff's  
sculpted into midriff's, even with tattoos  
of spiders,  
and those long, sinuous legs, the thighs  
of which,

according to the Foo-Foo Girls Handbook,  
lengthen  
into inscrutability. Our foo-foo girl had to wear  
a bracelet  
that Ken clasped ever so gently around  
her ankle,

after having gone with Barbie to Tiffany's  
to pick out  
one approved by the Handbook on page 37,  
after which  
the foo-foo girl said, Party! and her house—  
the jail—

was magically filled with other foo-foo girls  
and escorts,  
champagne, tinkling glasses, music, mood lifters  
in bathrooms,  
and then all the loopy, pretty people said,  
Foo-foo!

### MAUREEN MCHUGH

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#### AFTER EDWARD MUNCH'S *MADONNA*

One arm above her head,  
her face turns upwardly.

She's drinking into the light with it.

Her chest is flat, as if it's been rubbed.

The streaks of light pull around  
her body lazy as Angels,  
luminous as a Saint.

There's light inside her,  
but she does not point to her chest,  
which burns,  
just holds what heat she has inside quietly—  
the heat which must  
have pulled her face to features,  
that burns so hot  
it can only be seen as whiteness.

Looking at her waist,  
it is as if the light's two large hands  
have smoothed her to a thinness,  
leaving just one hard line  
in the gut,  
which is empty,

making it appear that her children  
have formed birthlessly,

as if from the ends of her hair

or from something like the oil  
which she floats through brightly:

legless and elysian.

## HANNAH CRAIG

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### LETTER TO MYSELF AFTER A FENDER-BENDER

Look, there are a few things  
we might as well clear up. No, your lies  
will never haunt the house, will not even appear,  
in fact, at judgment day against a list  
of graver human crimes. These small omissions  
will not grow into sin—and if you have  
unreasonable expectations of love, that's fine.  
Eventually you'll either repent or come  
to enjoy your loneliness.

But let's be fair about those dealings with the past.  
How long do you really think you could have held  
the erstwhile-you at bay? If you don't speak  
into the bullhorn of desire, how can they hear,  
the ones with peanuts and season tickets?  
Usufruct means you have the right to enjoy  
his property, not the right to beat his dog.  
Sorry, I know how it is, you get sick of her barking  
day and night and frankly so do I. But just try  
getting down on your knees and saying it  
directly to her face. You are property, that's it.  
How does that make you feel?

And please, admit you once made the neighbor boy  
eat mud; you told him it was chocolate ice cream  
and he was poor or hungry enough to believe you.  
Anyway. You're sorry about that one, right?  
Sorry that you have a thing for older men

and that you wash your hair way too often.  
Like two or three times a day. Is that really necessary?  
Think of the children of the deserts, rolling in dust.  
Think of the dry skin of the gazelle. Last, but not least,  
let's get this straight. You didn't crash  
into the windmill, the windmill ran into you.  
And the bumper of your car, now half the worse for wear,  
isn't tilting, but your perspective is.

## TERRY ANN THAXTON

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### HAIRCUT

Last time my husband left town I adopted  
a dog. She followed me around the house,  
her tail eager to be noticed. Quiet. We had not  
discussed adopting a dog, and even though  
it wasn't a child I'd picked out from all the others,  
taken to the store to buy new toys, food, and a  
bed, even though it wasn't a child who rode  
in the back seat of my car, we returned her  
to the pound. Signed papers. Agreed we'd never  
call to ask whether the dog was adopted again  
or euthanized. When I left town for a business trip,  
alone, I returned with a new haircut  
short as the dog's had been. The Indian Temple's  
chants steamed through the satisfied trees,  
the saw palmettos, the dirt roads to our  
barren house. Even after my husband assured me  
over and over that my hair was wickedly smart,  
I dreamed I brought home two more dogs, hid them  
from him, and an elephant—easier to hide,  
only its gray trunk a problem. When I was a girl,  
my cousin and I cut each other's hair. We wanted  
"Shag" cuts, layers across the back. It was the  
mid-'70s, seemed easy enough. Two girls  
with scissors—lines stacked in our hair  
like pieces of notebook paper, lines so straight  
you could write on them. The teacher  
at the elementary school where I volunteer says  
with my new haircut I look like Tina Turner,  
cropped with highlights, and I dance for her:  
"What's love got to do with it?" I don't tell her

what Tina and I share—how my first husband held a gun to my head, how he demanded we have children then beat one of them out of me, put it inside a baggie, took a picture of the dead fetus to prove I had nothing to show for being a woman. Instead we laugh, and the children tumble into the room from lunch behind my back—their sweet dark heads covered with cornrows, Zulu knots, braids, locks, Bantus, extensions, finger waves, twists, and weaves. They run their fingers through my stringy never-stays-where-I-put-it hair. These are the children I never had, all hugs and pouts and pictures they draw of me—sometimes, in their drawings, my hair is yellow, sometimes red, sometimes curly, sometimes long. I'm there to write with them. We are strangers. Soon their stories turn into letters on the page, and nothing else in me needs to be filled.

### KAREN HILDEBRAND

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1968

It was the summer I saw  
my mother scoop the dog into her arms  
and I thought he might be dead.

Heat seared red-brick suburbs  
melting tar, fresh cul-de-sac—  
me, drenched in grassy teenage lust

backseat, Eddie Guetlein's '56 Chevy,  
swimming pool parking lot after dark.  
The good girls at the slumber party

in flannel, juice cans rolled in their hair,  
laid out in a row of sleeping bags  
like matchsticks, a tinder box of purity.

Across the street, the boys idled in Randy's Buick  
smoking Winstons. It was before Dwight shot himself  
in the toe to avoid the draft, before Rick died—



heart failure at 32, before they all turned into their fathers,  
that summer night when Candi's carload squealed  
round the corner, red convertible top down, bursting

I made out with Joey Guetlein's older brother.  
It was the summer Dad walked in on us,  
undone on the living room carpet,

raised holy hell. It was before I knew  
my lovers would always be my father—  
his blade hard eyes—or not.

It was the summer my mother would decide  
to put the dog down,  
blind, incontinent, still wagging.

## GARY EVERY

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### BALD

Her perspiration glistened  
atop the skin of her bald scalp,  
while her hands writhed like snakes  
and her naked bare feet stomped upon the earth.  
Stomping, stomping, stomping,  
keeping the rhythm of the beat,  
feet shuffling up the dust of the earth  
as she swirled around the fire,  
big, bald, and beautiful.  
This night, the stone amphitheater  
seated hundreds of women,  
nothing but women.  
Imagine hundreds and hundreds of female hands  
drumming and clapping,  
keeping the beat  
while singing songs of healing.  
Around the roaring bonfire  
forty women danced,  
all of them bald,  
all of them cancer survivors.  
Forty bald women dancing around a fire,  
perspiration glistening on their hairless scalps

as they twirl and the drums beat.  
Her hands writhe like snakes as she moves,  
swirling and stomping,  
tossing her head back to her shoulders  
wailing in orgasmic prayer.  
The drums beat and beat and beat,  
hundreds of female hands clapping together  
while their voices rise in sisterly song  
chanting dreams of healing  
and don't forget the forty bald women  
dancing and wailing like banshees around the fire  
the perspiration glistening on their bald skin  
reflecting the flames and the stars.  
I have heard the power of their song,  
felt the earth tremble  
beneath the rhythmic stomping of their feet,  
and I warn you, God,  
and I warn you good -  
heal these women only if you dare.

### FLYING SQUIRRELS

In the forests of the bay leaf trees  
the flying squirrels glide from limb to limb  
as the pilgrim's progress underneath,  
many of them barefoot  
climbing the steep rocky mountains  
towards the shrine of the virgin.  
After they attain the peak,  
they return to the valley far below  
carrying bundles of bay leaves  
littering the floor of the church  
with thousands and thousands of bay leaves  
until the pews fill with the smell,  
while the church bell rings and rings atop the tower,  
wafting the aroma of bay leaves  
until it blankets the entire village  
like a scented blessing.  
The pilgrims keep marching  
while the flying squirrels glide and soar  
chattering amongst themselves  
deciding which of the pilgrim's prayers  
are the most worthy.  
A single flying squirrel

climbs to the top of the tallest tree  
and launches himself  
directly into the sun  
burning up in a flurry of squirrel and fur  
carrying these very special prayers  
directly into the heart of god.  
I sit down to eat my dinner,  
the spaghetti sauce simmering  
with the sweet smelling aroma of bay leaves,  
flying squirrels and special prayers,  
the very heart of god  
slowly filling my belly.

### KRISTIN BERKEY-ABBOTT

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#### LYING IN STATE

On the day that Ronald Reagan dies,  
in the shadow of the Interstate, I offer  
a homeless man a loaf of banana bread  
which he grabs, as if afraid  
I'll rescind my offer.

Reagan's body flies across the continent  
to lie in state in the Capitol Rotunda,  
that branch of government which made policies  
he tried to evade.  
I report to work, teach English to the children  
of families who fled Reagan's foreign  
policies, Cold War containment and interference.

On the day of Reagan's funeral, I plant  
a tree and remember his claim  
that creatures of this leafy clan cause pollution.  
I think of ICBMs fertilizing far away fields  
and Adam dead of AIDS these twenty years,  
his bones blending into the earth.