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JAN D. HODGE

New Word File

His eyes scan quickly down the yellowed page
Hoping to find
A baffounding word, a pleasure at his age
When what he writes is mostly persiflage.
But never mind.

He's mined these volumes like a truffling snout
Under an oak,
And most of them have long since been played out.
Still, one gem might be found to lend its clout
To a masterstroke.

He smiles, recalling the time he first heard
'Velleity,'
And thought how exquisitely apt a word
To be possessed of, deftly sepulchered
In an elegy.

But some, like refricate or fluckadrift,
Just fall away,
Never enliven a poem or give a lift
To a word-weary world, as forgotten a gift
As yesterday.

JEAN FREE

Balloons the Clown

His breath gives life to all the limp balloons,
a muddled rainbow spectrum that's been torn.
The pinks are plucked by little girls and soon
are twisted into petals that adorn

one-leafed green stems. The boys would like a black
jet plane or a bright blue sword, or better, both.
The white toy poodle snarls and bites him back,
deflates into a flapping, dying moth.

He's resurrected by the clown, re-plumped
with a quickly rendered head and knotted tail
and given to a tired mother slumped
over her hard beige party folding chair.

I ask him for the only red he's got
to replicate the heart I gave to you.
But hearts are not as simple as he thought;
they burst in pieces just like real ones do.

At the Pool

When she was young, my mother nearly drowned,
and so she never learned to swim. Her legs
dangled in the neighbor's pool, like mine
do now, submerged to the knees at the five foot line.
I'd try to pull her in. My daughter begs
me, too. *Later*, I say and look around

at all the women on their chairs with books;
That's where I'd rather be than here, the weight
of seven years immobilizing me.
I'm regularly wishing I could be
almost anywhere else, although I'd hate
to go. I wasn't taught to swim. Her hooks

are lodged in me securely when she smiles,
a perfect dimpled flash of mismatched teeth.
It's hot. I pencil dive; she's on my hip
and I have to pry her off. We handstand, flip,
speak secret bubble messages beneath
the water. She traces letters on wet tiles.

The signs of drowning are subtle – calm behavior
like gazing at the clouds. The sky today
looks blank. I mirror it and float, a silent
stretch of lull. She cannonballs; the violent
jeweled explosion illustrates the way
she's constantly my accidental savior.

DAVID COOKE

Sirmione

At the height of the summer, Catullus,
it's always best to arrive here early
– as it probably was in your day too –
before the heat builds up to its climax
each late afternoon; for some things surely
remain unchanged on this cypress-clad
peninsula, where you absorbed its peace –
strapped for the readies and strung out on sex.

Addicted to diminutives, you called it
ocellus, a place as precious to you as sight
and a haven beyond the power play
of unbridled mobs. Dying young,
you never dreamed the worst was still to come,
when minders cleared the way for mad men
and an enviable way with a verse
might see you slumped and slashed in a tub.

And I, no more than you, can comprehend
the violence that went to make such calm –
the clash of a planet's shifting plates
revealing white escarpments across a lake
that's fed by glacial water, crashing
down from the Dolomites until it's tamed
by gods whose milder cult and virtues
you embraced in friendship, wit and grace.

For a modest fee in recent money
I explore the remains of a villa
they have opportunistically named
for you. Not even your dates are certain
or anything else that isn't contained
in the wine-stained codex they found in a cellar;

while I savour now, imagining that you did,
the wild rosemary's oily scent.

DANIEL BROWN

So Many Toys

One of my lower lows although it was,
I couldn't tell you what occasioned it:
A morning people seemed so many toys
I'd tired of playing with. As like as not,
It was just an early evidence of age.
What say we call it that, and set aside
Any consideration of the damage
That comes of having nothing in your bed.

A Breeze

Though summer's ease
And an easy chair
Are making it hard
To really care,
I needn't bear
The disregard
Of a welcome breeze
That threatens to close
The very door
Through which it blows.

No cause to implore.
Rather than beg
I extend a leg
And interpose
A couple of toes.
The lazy tussle
Takes no more muscle
Than tug-of-bone
With a stubborn pup:
I win, one up.

Another time
I'd undertone
This slender rhyme
On lines like these:
"But a real wind
Such as I've known..."
You know the kind.
And I know how.
But it's a breeze
That's blowing now.

The Olden Times

Hardly an especially
Sensitive futurian.
But catch him thinking back again
On the olden times when people had
To die and *knew* they had to die –
You're looking at a shaking head.

HENRY KING

Dehydration

An adult can go three days without water,
but under what conditions? It was summer,
a hot one: we sweated all day, while at night
the warmth from far-off suns felt like it reached us
barely diminished. But it was also
the animal heat we shared that kept us awake,
kicking back the sheets, in an oasis
that seemed like an ocean.

Then you deserted. But take it,
dear, with at least a tear's worth of salt
if I tell you how I dragged myself away
from that mirage; how, when I woke up later
and drew a glass from the tap, I checked myself,
getting thirstier, knowing the first sip
would wash your parting kiss off my lips.

CLAUDIA GARY

Two Conversations

"Just like your mother!" "No, sir, I am fully aware and rational, and leaving soon. But you? You have no need to be a bully. Where is the kind sage I recall from noon?"

And in that moment, you and Dad discover a rusted iron bond has turned to gold.

What of the specter he invokes? She'll hover throughout your home and mind, scheming to hold you back. Is she in fact a witch, a Fury? Or can you conjure up a magic key to unlock her mind, too – Socratic query she'll dodge by redesigning endlessly your plain clothes, curly hair, unpainted face?

This other dialogue does not take place.

ROBERT BOUCHERON

Safety Matches

My babies all lie sleeping
Inside a cardboard pyx,
Their thirty-four red nightcaps
Set tight on wooden sticks.

Their coverlet is printed
With diamonds white and blue.
It slides back to reveal them,
Immaculate and true.

I take one out to wake it
By striking it on the head.
It smiles for me a moment,
Then shrivels and is dead.

BRIAN STANLEY

All Is Best

In memory of G.H.S.

The day is hot and summer sounds belie
the ritual words that sever ghost from man.
For now this vaulted crowd becomes a clan
(they also mourn who only stand and sigh)
acknowledging in sober dress and tie
the last patrician. Music fills the span
and no departure from the tasteful plan
offends the ear or disconcerts the eye –
all brightness left outside, all grief confined.
In gloom among the solemn and polite
assembled for a parting act of grace
I ask, though more to hope than faith inclined,
that sightless Milton usher him through night
to blind Cecilia's luminous embrace.

Mogul Sunset

The shrink, like all the others, is a quack
who thinks he has me pegged and pigeonholed,
that early childhood deprivation, lack

of love, caused my compulsion to enfold,
decreed in adulthood I'd manifest
an infant need by what I'd seize and hold.

It's true each acquisition spurred my quest
for more, as every gain revealed a void,
but I hoped one day, sated, I would rest

with assets fixed and round about deployed,
take stock, indulge in pleasant reckoning
and revel in fulfilment, unemployed.

A prison has its own concentric rings,
though few of us present a risk of flight:
white-collar felons, po-faced, puttering

or watching amber fade away to night,
when I will shed what's left, return to birth,
in sleep reclaim as my remaining right

the idle plenitude I lost, my worth.

CONTRIBUTORS

Poems by **Jan D. Hodge** have appeared in many print and online journals, including North American Review, New Orleans Review, American Arts Quarterly, Iambs & Trochees, Lavender Review, and New Trad Journal. He enjoys the challenge of such forms as carmina figurata and narratives in double-dactyl stanzas.

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David Cooke won a Gregory Award in 1977 and published his first collection, Brueghel's Dancers in 1984. His retrospective collection, In the Distance, was published in 2011 by Night Publishing and a collection of more recent pieces, Work Horses, has just been published by Ward Wood Publishing. His poems, translations and reviews have appeared widely in journals including Agenda, Ambit, The Bow Wow Shop, The Critical Quarterly, The Irish Press, The London Magazine, Magma, The North, Orbis, Other Poetry, Poetry Ireland Review, Poetry London, Poetry Salzburg Review, The Reader, The SHOp and Stand.

Daniel Brown's most recent book of poems is Taking the Occasion (Ivan R. Dee), which won The New Criterion Poetry Prize. A new collection, What More?, is forthcoming in February from Orchises Press. Dan's work has appeared in Poetry and his Why Bach? is an online appreciation of the composer.

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Claudia Gary writes, edits, sings, and composes (tonally) near Washington DC. A 2013 semifinalist for the Anthony Hecht Poetry Prize and 2014

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Brian Stanley was born in Madrid and educated in French until high school. His poems have been longlisted for the Montreal International Poetry Prize (2011) and published in the *Literary Review of Canada* and *Encore*. He lives in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.