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Moderator: Catherine Hammond

April 2 – John Olivares Espinoza (pages 1-5)

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April 9 – Charles Jensen (pages 6-10)

April 16 – Hershman R. John (pages 11-15)

April 23 – Patricia Colleen Murphy (pages 16-20)

April 30 – James Sallis (pages 20-25)

Moderator: Catherine Hammond (page 26)

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John Olivares Espinoza

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ECONOMICS AT GEMCO

My mother pushes a grocery cart,
I tug at her blue, pleated skirt.

She puts her change into my hands,
For the old soul slumped against the wall,
His gray mouth covered by a beard of wind and dirt.

I place the coins into his cupped hands
And he stacks two neat columns of cents
Next to his seat on the curb.
He nods his chin, half-solemnly.

I turn back to mother,
Suddenly a cop—he came out of nowhere—
Tells me, *Take the money back.*
I brush the coins
Back into my palms like table crumbs.
As the old man,
Silent as those pennies,
Gets cuffed and hauled off to jail.
I ask Mom why—
We only tried to help.

The cop says bums make thirty bucks a week
Begging for change
And are not too unhappy
When arrested
Since they get food, shelter,
And a hot shower for at least a week.

My mother pushes the grocery cart without a word,
Knowing that as newlyweds she begged outside markets for
change
While Dad stole bread and sliced honey-ham inside.

John Olivares Espinoza 2

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN HUNGER

Mom having quit her job at school
To give her neck a rest, tense from hovering,
Like a desk lamp, over the Special-Ed kids,
Had made us the newly broke Mexicans
To settle in the Indio of 1986.
Albert and I, barely hip-high
To our mother, unaware of our budget,
Salivated as we thought about the dry buns,
The Grade B patties of Argentine beef
At McDonald's—for what our TV eyes
Believed was the best lunch in this town.

To pay for two cheeseburgers, Mom pulled
Out her blue purse, laid out a buck thirty-eight—
Two dull quarters, six dimes, five nickels,
And three Denny's parking lot pennies
Found the day before.
The cashier's forefinger counted the change
As Mom held up the line, waiting red-faced
For these burgers to slide toward her
On a bright plastic tray.

Bun by bread bun, Mom with a plastic knife
Bulldozed the ketchup-mustard-chopped onion
Spread before slicing the burger to give each
Of her sons a half. Satisfied, we went ahead
and ventured
Through a rainbow of tubes and hollow balls
With the blond heads whose stomachs were filled
Of Big Macs and Happy Meals. But we were
happy too—
Better than staying at home on a Saturday eating
Rows of potato tacos after our yard chores.
Did Mom sit there and watch us play?

John Olivares Espinoza 3

I only remember her fingers neatly wrapping
The remaining half in the greasy red and yellow paper,
Then tucking the lump away in her purse, sustenance for
later.

John Olivares Espinoza 4

ONE HEADLIGHT AND A WINDSHIELD MOSAIC

Where's your eyeball?
She asks, pointing to my car's
Darkened headlight.
I must've been winking
At other motorists
For who knows how long?
The one working Light
Seems to be staring
At my knees, reminding me
Of a song titled *One Headlight*,
A hit when I was dating
My first college girl.

I remember her nodding
To that tune as we parked
Behind the Phys-Ed building,
Our palms wetter
Than our tongues.
It was the second night
Of spring. A mute rain dropped
Before us like fruit.
Her neck craned toward
The windshield as if looking
For that one point
Where the cloud became
The water, and she said,
*My father crashed
Into the ocean...*
I'm remembering now her dark
Varsity sweater, her name printed
Just above her heart.
This reminds me of a similar
Sweater worn by an older
Kid in junior high
As I huddled alone
With my hands under my pits,

John Olivares Espinoza 5

Laughing along unnoticed
With his friends.
All our laughter joining the same
Cloud above the bus stop
And going nowhere.
Soon, in high school,
His face would make a mosaic
Of broken windshield,
Blood, and teeth,
As he made a simple right turn
And slammed into what he
Believed was a motorcycle
He was passing, because it had
Only one headlight.

I look at my hand
Bright from the one
Good light, turn to her
And say, *I gotta get that fixed.*
It's late and the stars
Will burn out by morning,
No matter how sure I am
That they're still there
On the other side,
Glowing inside the mouth of God.

All poems from *Living Things* by Charles Jensen. Thorngate Road, 2006 and used with permission. ©2006 by Charles Jensen. Winner of the 2006 Frank O'Hara Award Chapbook Competition.

EVIDENCE

Each dark uniform paces in and out the house,
ducking under yellow crime scene tape.

Stone-faced police look grave
for your benefit. Their five o'clock shadows stain
otherwise dull faces.

The thinnest cop
with his long, bony fingers
drops empty pill bottles in a bag.

His eyes
glaze over.

I sit outside the bathroom door.
My head explodes.
My hands and feet explode.

The cop does his job. The night goes mad
as a starved dog, but he'll get things done.
Someone zips you up inside a bag.

The cops file out
like stiff, brittle quarter notes. You go last,
a black bag. A long, quiet rest.

SHOPPING

At the store, I tell the salesperson
I need something black,

something plain.

This clerk
hates his job, hates me, hates my money—
hates that you died and brought me here,

hates my blank expression onto which
any person's misery could be hung.

"Somebody died," I say. My voice,
raw, makes a sharp croak. I can't finish with words.

He touches my hand. He has
eyes that go all the way in.

"I know," he says,
and counts back my change.

Charles Jensen 8

FLOWERS

Every room fills with buds
sprung open like snake heads.

The big, dumb eyes of the chrysanthemums
look jaundiced and sick.

The lilies
have nothing more to give and drop their petals
like small gloves.

Their sweet smell grows more fetid.
My head stays dizzy and numb.

Each day the house
takes on more death, more dying; more doomed flowers
go to pieces.

I want to know whose idea this was,
filling up death
with hundreds of smaller deaths.

Charles Jensen 9

THE CAT

It appeared first by voice—

all day long I had thought of you.
At last I erased your phone number sure
you would not call.

I heard the mewling
as a question in the wall.

It brought me outdoors. A dog barked its one refrain
again and again like the night might spark and catch fire.

I had not driven in days. I lifted the car's black hood
and there the kitten sat on the engine block, not scared.

I know I couldn't stop
your suicide. I only have two hands. The world is not as pretty
as it used to be.

I reached out my hand—
the kitten slid down into the organs of the car.

I let it drop.
I let it go. Really
what choice did I have.

Charles Jensen 10

REMAINS

What's left are just
questions, which I see
must stay unanswerable. The world needs its secrets

just as two lovers can never fully disclose themselves
to each other: this constant asking to be discovered,

to be found out. The world needs
less death. I see that now. And the body

has too many fears. When you died,
I was even more broken by our history, which then ended.

It's true I can still see you
with the expert eye of having held you.

The body demands
change.

The only cruelty
in living is living.

Hershman R. John

All poems from *I Swallow Turquoise for Courage* by Hershman R. John. The University of Arizona Press, 2007 and used with permission. ©2007 by Hershman R. John.

COYOTE'S AD INFINITUM *E Pluribus Unum*

On the beach, under a big red umbrella, Coyote finishes reading
About King Midas and his touch. But greed became Midas's curse:
He could never bathe in cold river water, never eat cherries,
Never love. Coyote wouldn't make that same mistake
As he claps his hands.
One Coyote standing by the sea, a multitude of seagulls circling
Overhead, and then there are two smiling Coyotes.
A great story and a great idea, Brother.
Two Coyotes standing by the sea as a sailboat lazily drifts by.
Four Coyotes standing by the sea clap their hands.
Sadly, with his power, Midas turned his daughter into a golden statue.
16 smiling Coyotes appear by the sea: imagine stepping
Into a carnival's house of mirrors:
A perfect reflection all around... *ad infinitum*....
Dolphins gather at the surf to watch.
A thunder-clap pierces the salt air,
144 Coyotes clapping an ovation by the sea.... All Midas
Wanted was to hug his daughter. Coyote upon Coyote
Multiply stories upon stories, multiply idea upon idea:
One takes the gift of fire back and hands everyone magic wands.
One blows out all the stars like candles.
One turns all men into women and all women into men.
Now there are more men in the world than women.
One wipes out poverty, pestilence, war and orchids—
Coyote loses himself over and over again.
Which one of his selves is the original?
She was so happy to see him. She ran and hugged her father, Midas.
One gives all animals speech; the dolphins and seagulls
Begin arguing. One makes everyone into brown-skinned people.

Hershman R. John 12

Everyone becomes "Indian." Coyote tries to find himself,
Just as Midas tried to bite into an apple, a lost wish.
Just remember Coyote is there, *to infinity*,
Changing everything from oak leaves to tide lines
To butterfly cocoons. Sometimes, when a sock, a \$5 dollar bill,
Or a small engine plane goes missing,
It's just Coyote trying to remember. One expands the earth
To the size of Jupiter, so man, animals,
Gods, plants can live together. In Paris,
A Monet beachscape shows 16 coyotes frolicking
In the sands of *La Saille*. Coyote under his beach umbrella
Picks up his next book, *Cinderella*, and reads, *Once upon a
time...*

Hershman R. John 13

WATERING THE SHEEP

after Basho

*An old frog
Jumps into the sky
Splash!*

Dark Navajo boy
Sitting under evergreens
Eating hard frybread.

A roadrunner, big
As a chicken strikes the pond—
Swallowing wet jade.

Sheep and goats nibble
Sweet grass at the water's edge.
The sheep dog laps blue.

The horned toad's eyes
Oblivious to the light
Wait for a buzzing.

The lightning bird skips
Over the toad, over the boy's
Foot, into the pines.

Heat waves hang above—
Even the tree's shade is hot.
His lips are sand dunes.

Another frog jumps.
The sheep move onto ripe reeds
Chewing and splashing.

* * *

Grandma kneads a cloud.
She lets it rise, heats a pan—
Bread waits for her sheep.

Hershman R. John 14

A POSTCARD FROM VAN GOGH

Small brushing strokes—
The feel of oil on the back,
Rubbing hands.

A good cooked meal—
Heavy cream sauce with pasta.
Garlic bread, warm.

We're out by the pool
Imagining a tranquil river.

The sound of water falls
With pineapples growing all around me.

Stars heavy as snowflakes
Reflect off the surface
As I begin my Coyote story
(I always tell this story, it seems romantic).

*Coyote puts his hand in the pouch,
Pulling out a singing ember of burning
Turquoise. He tries to place it in the sky
Expertly like a surgeon or a card house
Builder. But, like all of us, frustration*

And quick schemes....

Two weeks later—

I pick out the postcard from my mailbox:

The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles
(It reads in small print on back)

Vincent Van Gogh's "Irises"
(Oil on canvas, 71 x 93 cm)

Hershman R. John 15

Purple splashes of paint; thick full petals
Ready to fall. Green leaves, rich enough
For cows to eat. Irises are almost as pretty
As orchids. One iris I notice stands out deep

And cold as ivory or snow....

*Coyote picks up the bag of stars—
All singing and whispering and blinking—
Bright as marigolds and shakes the bag
Like shaking out a blanket—hard and quick—*

In perfect script the postcard ends:

I miss you
Love,

Above us the stars are singing.

Patricia Colleen Murphy

WHAT GOOD DOES A DROP DO

Burn line runs the length of the mountain spine.
I could comb your hair with the tree teeth of the ridge.

It is easy to be pious when your life is not on fire.

Red-tailed hawks circle the smolder-wind,
insidious in this, their own slow dying.

At our cabin I left a watering can months before the blazes,
not in any way for watering, but as a suggestion,
a hint of leisure, as if we have time to garden
or know how.

Here ours is a life of lanterns,
wood stoves, chairs worn on the arms.

So what if the wind stopped the fire
an acre away from our own rustic wood?

Ashes coat nightstands as far away as Phoenix,
traveling those miles perhaps to warn:
watering can, birch tree, steady insistence of the flame.

Patricia Colleen Murphy 17

WHAT MY BROTHER WANTS

Now he wants wooden gloves
with ornate carvings of egrets,
detailed cuffs accentuating
the coquettishness of wrist skin.

Now he wants a grave.

Now he wakes to darkness
and so he yells, *water, water*.
In comes a shadow
and so he yells, *light*.

Now he is a front window
lipping at strangers.

Now he is tired.
He secures his long hair
at the nape with a pencil,
a chopstick, or a spoon.

Now he waits in the woodpile
while I fetch carrots from the kitchen.

Now he is over 400 lbs and must be
taken to the cattle ranch for weighing.

Now he phones to say *mountain*.
It's as close as we've ever been.
He in my ear
me in his.

Patricia Colleen Murphy 18

THE IMPLICATIONS OF ICE

The buckeyes began leaning over the house long before my mother left. From my corner room I watch their branches in a cold hug, the last leaves specked with frost, the swaying hard breath of another fantastic storm. The morning radio

clicks awake with cancellations. The roads are runways. My father is already out asserting the thick wheels of his sports car. Downstairs cats purr under an afghan, noses like the slotted heat vents in our old Plymouth Fury.

Frozen limbs scrape against the Sears aluminum. I can't not think about yesterday, third period, my oldest crush calling my long nose "Scandinavian," leaning into my ear as he whispered I should meet him tomorrow after the bell.

Now the snow sheds as if a great white dog in the sky shakes awake from his afternoon nap. Salt trucks lumber past. I think of getting some tea from the kitchen, but the bed offers a more thorough kind of warmth,

the windows offer a clear view of this powder that has stopped time. I'm sure that my mother felt this—in a bedroom in Minnesota, in a climate much colder and more prone to complications, about a man less handsome and more timid than my father.

And now she is nowhere. When the phone rings just think of the possibilities.

Patricia Colleen Murphy 19

THE IDEA OF BERRIES

You called to talk about not the dew on your lawn but the glint of the dew, the exact moment it dissipates, how plain the earth looks when it loses its sheen.

I watched the bus to my 9-5 bounce down Taft, the black breath of its engine poised like a cat's tail.

You have been unemployed for months, brushing down the horses on your parents' farm, the barn a waterfall of stomping.

Now at the window, you mention our grandmother's satchel, the one I buried out back to hide the stains you made.

My briefcase weighs on my arm. Outside the stream of traffic builds. I can hear my neighbor's coffee pot, smell muffins baking across the hall.

What stops me from hanging up the phone, bolting downstairs, hailing a cab?

Just like when we were young, you lead and I follow, which is why I can keep a job without becoming bitter.

In a few hours I'll be seventeen floors above your trees' fringe, where the musk of early summer begins, where as children we gathered our buckets and picked.

Patricia Colleen Murphy 20

DAYS AFTER

For me it is a time for more horses.
Mane-hair bleached at the tips,
eyes bowled and glassy,
noses fleshy, mottled, low.

From this comes a bulbous anger,
some noxious desire,
some unspeakable marriage
between what is present or is not.

Some days it is as easy as
cushioning my own dark weight.
Beyond the city limits
ten thousand moons crest, fall.

The last time I saw your father alive
the night had just cut its own teeth.

So now we are left to this:
Some solemn wandering.
Some structured mounting of defenses.

James Sallis

All poems from *Black Nigh's Gonna Catch Me Here: Selected Poems: 1968-2002* by James Sallis and used with permission. ©1968-2002 by James Sallis.

DEDICATIONS

I fear I am coming apart.

Last night as I made to turn over in my bed, one arm
cracked away. I looked back to where it remained asleep and
calm on the sheet; to the seam, as yet indistinct, forming
along it. And this morning when I seated myself here, that
part of the legs below the knee dropped onto the floor like
pieces of firewood. When I lifted my pen the shoulder burst
open and small bubbles of sound tumbled out to break
themselves open striking against the room's objects. I
attempted to return to that arm in the bedroom –

But no; how can I hope to describe it? this experience
of watching from eyes yard apart (the first secure beneath a
shelf, the other under a foot's next step) one disengaged
hand moving across the paper.

James Sallis 22

SENTENCES

1.

The pain (loss) like a little man
in my chest, neither angry nor complaining,
but there: Charlie.

Charlie resists every effort
at eviction; each notice returns –
Not at this address.

If only he would leave me now
as you have.

2.

Of my return to Earth
I can say little: I was met
by proper officials

and given awards, ribbons,
keys; I conducted myself well,
and few suspect the truth.

3.

He said: And so I swam out of sight
of the islands, the backs of
small fish my only visible land,
as memory of her bright parrots faded
into this sunset I've seen three times now.

I had wanted to bring some message, some
sign of the misery there, and was not
allowed. And so I have brought the misery itself,
in the toolbox at the bottom of this raft.

James Sallis 23

4.

Or perilous thoughts for the confusion
of lies, and this harbor.

5.

All ends move towards grace.
Our shadows are behind us now.
We lay an arm out along the sun.
Forms rise up before us, waves breaking.

6.

And so: exalted speech –
we fought it. Took barrooms
home to bed, the American idiom, real warts
on imaginary frogs.

Lapping here on the shores
of your body, I lie
abandoned as any derelict,

ship and sea in one.

7.

A long time passing: the configurations
of landscape affording no key,
the coral reef stretched out before us –

pale woman, red blood. Till at last
the bow-man called down: Open sea!
and we set our helm hard into it, leaving

dead still water behind; and the island
a lily, and all those dead men's hands.

James Sallis 24

REVISIONS

The hand leaves the clay and is
Red. All day the city sleeps.
I look up again
At your painting and the window,
Write *ils se réveilleront*, listen
For sounds at the door.

**

The hand leaves the clay
And is red.

This is what I am.

Even the air will not admit
My presence.

**

All day the city sleeps
Curled around itself in the dark house of bone.

**

My cheeks turn blue
With the cold –

"Poetry of the purple cheekbone"
And that silver darkness.

**

With my eye in the sun,
The sounds at the door,

In the presence of bone.

James Sallis 25

ELEMENTS OF STYLE

He would be:

The wheel, endlessly
repeating itself, always knowing
exactly what it does.

Fire, that knows this one thing
so intimately: completely.

The level roll of air
in and out of myriad lungs.

Would be morning,
forever surprising itself among the trees,

Or night,
returning to the ground like water.

Catherine Hammond 26

SO WE MEET

We could be somewhere,
a café maybe, or a bar.
The place itself is never empty.

A man sits at a corner table
remaking himself. Each time
we turn toward him, the lines

in his face shift. Winter willows,
narrow and yielding, branch
against his cheek. What

we have come for—I touch
your hand. The man becomes
a saguaro, centuries old.

Nesting holes deep in his core—
a cactus wren sleeps inside.
Drought lines mark the years

with no water. I order
a glass of wine. How to get
from there to here. Your fingers

leave marks on my glass. This
is how to do it. The man
becomes a seahorse, his tail

curling around the leg of the chair
to hold against the current. This desire
to locate ourselves. The man

is a man again, asking
for his check, believing he
is free to pay and leave.