



CHEAT
RIVER
REVIEW

Nicole Matis
Andrew Miller
Nicholas Snow

horatio
Cathy Ulrich
David Allan Cates

Table of Contents

Cover Art: *Crows* by Jim Ross

Poetry

Horatio		
	<i>The Head's Will is the Wind's Will</i>	3
Nicole Matis		
	<i>I'm Drawn to Things with a Complicated Past</i>	4
Andrew Miller		
	<i>Prophet</i>	6
Nicholas Snow		
	<i>On Route Seven, Before Harrowing</i>	7

Fiction

David Allen Cates		
	<i>The Far Edge of the World</i>	8
Cathy Ulrich		
	<i>The Sky Goes Quiet</i>	11

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The Head's Will is the Wind's Will *Horatio*

What brings you in today?

slices of lemon and onion the wet of them trapped in
bones this sweating a mist-suspicious and the dread
of dialing one for emergency.

On a scale of 1-10, what is your current level of pain?

there is moth-claustrophobia stop shinning your light stop
betting the under this hillocked marrow a monte carlo
fallacy yes i'm aware jason passed at a five yes this haunting
both of may and the arena introductions for the world
famous chicago bulls.

Do you have any known triggers?

reckless azaleas, burgundy voices, my ziplocked change,
imagining this rubber neck as home, the want of wild and wind,
a sycamore peeling its skin.

What medications are you currently on?

a deciduous desire: that a lifeline, that my widening gyre, my
lucubrating nights, my english ivy, that which says relief as in
carved, bodies as in polyphones, hunger as in spooled light,
that as in you.

horatio is a queer poet, writer, and massage therapist based in Brooklyn and Montreal. He is currently completing an English Ph.D. at Princeton University where he researches heterotopic spaces and the phenomenology of gender fluidity in modern poetry, fiction, and performance art. His writing has recently been published in the Lambda Literary Review and is currently a finalist for the 2019 Linda Hodge Bromberg Award in poetry.

I'm Drawn to Things with a Complicated Past *Nicole Matis*

a poster of nervous anatomy

hangs in my living room

teaching fruit flies

the importance of myelin

in grade school, I hold up a cauliflower

this is a brain

then smother the cortex in ranch

would you like a piece of cerebellum?

Egyptians

weighed the heart against a feather

for salvation

this

the prize

of hieroglyphic tombs

while iron scrapes away a crooked head

insanity

best treated

by holes in the skull

drill meets dura

dura meets air

a control system exposed

while pieces remain to ward off ghosts

at the core of the earth sits a brain

dopamine snow and glutamate rain

I cling to this gray

matter in the middle the only organ I trust

to balance the scale

Nicole Matis is a pre-med student at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, studying biochemistry, psychology, and English. She interns at a nonprofit organization called Random Acts of Flowers, and is an ambassador for the international clinical shadowing program, Atlantis

Prophet Andrew Miller

With six tattooed tears down his left cheek,
Hector Rodriguez would read the grey pamphlet
Of my face to the bone, then whisper pussy
For the pleasure of seeing that word secrete
Flat smiles across the face of every other boy.

“Put up your dukes”—I can’t believe I said *that*,
Like *that*, or that I tried to stand like a boxer
In a movie, my paired fists telescoping
Beyond my racketing elbows. All I remember really
Is how I woke up—down. I never knew for how long,
Only that Hector’s punches had knocked
A handful of minutes out of my fourteenth year,
And that a voice out of heaven kept on asking me:
How many fingers? Even now, there seem to be too many.
Even now, a wheel of fire descends from heaven
Over the suburbs, and I stare into the face
Of an angry god, and though I am really
Only talking about of the afternoon sky
Spreading out behind my old man’s shoulders
As he inspects the black-blue apple of my face,

I can hear, as though everything were yesterday,
His one commandment: “to go get that son-of-a-bitch
Tomorrow,” until Hector punches out
Another handful of minutes again, and the sky
Asks me to count its fingers again,

And my father sends me out again, the prophet
Of his one message. Day after day, until, finally,
Even the questions of the sky are lost into the sound
Of a car engine, turning over and over as my father gets out
To use the word of ‘love’ in vain, and walks.

Andrew Miller was born in Fresno, California. His poetry has appeared in such literary magazines as *Laurel Review*, *Spoon River Review*, and *Iron Horse Literary Review*. In addition, Mr. Miller is the author of *Poetry, Photograph, Ekphrasis: Lyrical Representations of Photography from the 19th Century to the Present* and the co-editor of *The Gazer Within, the Selected Prose of Larry Levis*. He lives in Copenhagen, Denmark, with his family.

On Route Sevcn, Before Harrowing *Nicholas Snow*

I drive east, because why the hell not.
The season's turned, but snow still carpets
the shaded shoulder. Fallow field after
fallow field spills across the horizon,
like scenery on which plows sketch

possibility, defining before
and after. I am sick for security.
Are bread and peace a matter of chance?
Can I admit I fear the future,
that I've a head of carrion birds

ready for flight? In the radio's static sound,
a voice breaks through near recollection
and I'm reminded of the friends I used
to call to hear say my name, lend me light,
to plant in me even a single seed.

The Far Edge of the World *David Allen Cates*

I came home from the party last night with a wine-coffee headache and sat in the bedroom while Denise undressed. I felt as if I'd listened to myself too much and was appalled by how boring I'd become.

"Did I talk too much?"

Denise touched my head as she passed. She smiled but didn't look at me. "You always talk a little too much. But so do I."

"I dominated the conversation."

"You're always kind to people."

She left the room and I sat with my head in my hands, elbows on my knees. I could imagine the other guests talking to their spouses right now in their bedrooms. They'd be laughing, expansive in their privacy. "*Poor Denise! How does she put up with him?*"

Good question. I work with a woman who tells me that withholding information from your spouse is just as dishonest as telling a lie. She's talking about herself, of course, and her marriage, and her husband's infidelities.

I told her that for most men, keeping our mouths shut is the best way to stay sane. I was talking about me, of course, and how too often I fail.

Because secrets are crucial to any relationship. Certain things you just don't say. Like how down deep I'm afraid the plastic-helmeted patriots will knock at my door and arrest me. Do I tell Denise that in this daytime nightmare the patriots can see right through me to my essential coward core, so they'll forego a trial, stand me up against a wall and shoot me?

No! Of course not. Because she'd ask questions I can't answer, questions like, *Who are the patriots?* Questions like, *Are you nuts?*

And how can I tell Denise that just this morning I sat in church wanting to bite the neck of the old woman sitting in the pew ahead of me? I leaned forward over my knees to tie, re-tie my shoes so I could smell her smells, powder-lotion-shampoo-conditioner. And skin. I longed for that neck!

Some things I'll keep to myself, thank you.

I met a man the other night at the bar. Call him Rich. Things have gone well for Rich. Let's say he's in love. Let's say he's got a good job, too, and when the sun shines on him in the morning it shines on a rare, happy man. But tonight he stopped in to have a drink with his wife's brother,

String, visiting from Hawaii, the Big Island. It's a celebration. Rich buys String a drink and then excuses himself to go into the bathroom. He stands against the urinal, pees and reads the wall. He smiles at the things men think. He's got a picture in his mind and he wants to get his pen out and draw it. *Hell*, he thinks, *get crazy!* So while he's standing there peeing he draws an image of a man mounting a kneeling woman. Crude but unmistakable. Wow! Wild! He quickly puts the pen away, thinks about throwing it away in case String recognizes the drawing as having been done with this pen. Ridiculous! Nevertheless, Rich feels suddenly ashamed of himself for drawing the picture. He zips up his fly and leaves the bathroom, pen in his pocket—and his shame causes him to grin broadly, to drink heavily, and then, like a little boy, to confess the whole story to me, a stranger.

Is there any such animal as a grown-up?

I ought to tell you more about myself, my day-to-day life, my job, that sort of thing. But then I think, why bother? Let's just say I have a job. It gives me a variety of feelings ranging from pride, to envy, to boredom, to disappointment, and it pays me money, but not enough. Okay. That's done. Now to the important things, like how even though I have absolutely no reason to suspect her, I am sometimes convinced that Denise is getting it on with somebody who is not me.

It's hot, and although the muggy night has passed this morning I'm still sweating as I write. Fingers to pen, forearm to desk. I like to sweat. The best moments of my life have happened while I was sweating. I like knowing what's for breakfast. I like drapes moving slightly in the breeze. I like the *sssss* sound of the wind in the leaves. I like sitting outside on the lawn reading a magazine. I like throwing myself on my knees and holding Denise around her hips. Sometimes I like the thought of slapping her.

The first wet dream I ever had I was falling simultaneously through a vagina and a woman's face, absorbed through both of them toward an infinite sky of stars. Is that odd? Only, perhaps, that I remember it. And despite my own mental health warning, I share it. Perhaps by now, I've little left to lose. I have never slapped Denise, nor bitten the neck of the woman ahead of me at church. I have never done most of the things I think. Denise and I make star-spangled love once every fortnight, meat and potatoes love a couple of times in between. Except for the fact that in fifteen years of this kind of activity, we've never been able to make a child, we are, according to experts and pollsters, normal.

Which is to say we are in pain; we've broken our hearts trying.

But who hasn't? When you feel the creep of self-pity, always remember the world is full of suffering children who will never get a chance to try hard at anything. Which perhaps is the purpose of suffering children. To force adults to be adults.

Now what? Mow the lawn, of course. Fix the fences, oil the door hinges. Keep the cows in their pasture, out of the corn, out of the house. Bury bodies when they begin to smell. Wash your hands. Eat huevos rancheros for breakfast. Examine your wife's underwear, if you need to, but always remember you might be wrong.

Here's a story I've never told anyone: I moved to this state from a steamy Gulf city, hitting an April blizzard at the border and finishing the last six hours in my unheated Volkswagen with my pet turtle under my shirt to keep him alive in the cold. My turtle, believe it or not, has two heads and four front feet, two back, and the scratching of all those feet on my belly kept me awake after I'd spun off the Interstate in the storm. Kept me awake when sleep promised the sweet hereafter. The car smashed shut, no escape, I thought, *How odd is this?* I thought, *Twenty-eight years alone in the tropics and I finally fall in love, drive two thousand miles across the plains and into the mountains to be with her, only to freeze to death with my freak turtle in a blizzard.*

But I didn't die, and my turtle didn't die, and so far, neither have you. We're still living, way up high, and nobody else can tell us what is *balance*, or what means *courage, hope, faith, or love*. Nobody can tell us when we are going to fall—even though we know we will. Can you stand it?

Imagine coming home from a party with your beloved. The one you came to see through the blizzard of your youth. Your head aches and you sit on the edge of the bed and watch her undress and slip under the covers behind you. You lie down. You put your arms around her and feel her breathe, one breath, then another, until miracle of miracles, you are breathing with her. It's your fortune, your grace, and imagine for a few unlikely moments you are keen enough to know it.

Hey, it's happened. I was there

David Allan Cates is the author of five novels, and a chapbook of poetry. His novels are *Hunger In America*, a New York Times Notable Book, *X Out Of Wonderland* and *Freeman Walker*, both Montana Book Award Honor Books, and Ben Armstrong's *Strange Trip Home* and Tom Connor's *Gift*, both of which won a Gold Medals for Best Fiction in the independent Book Publishers Book awards.

Cates is the winner of the 2010 Montana Arts Council's Innovative Artist Award and his short story, "Rubber Boy," (*Glimmer Train 70*) is a distinguished story in the 2010 Best American Short Stories. His stories and poems have appeared in numerous literary magazines, and his travel articles in *Outside Magazine* and the *New York Times Sophisticated Traveler*.

The Sky Does Quiet *Cathy Ulrich*

After the astronaut leaves again, for space, the astronaut's wife trims off all her hair, shaves herself bald, takes to covering her head with crocheted scarves — all she can make is scarves when she crochets, longer and longer and longer.

Oh, your pretty hair, says her mother when she comes to visit.

The astronaut's wife touches the top of her scalp. Already she can feel the stubble of growing hair.

I made you a scarf, she says to her mother.

Her mother says: *It's the wrong season. It's too hot, now, for scarves.*

The astronaut is a thousand miles away, a million miles away. Her wife thinks of the distance between them as a series of steps, up and up and up.

She says to her mother: *I wonder how many steps a hippopotamus has to take in its life.*

The astronaut's wife goes to the hospital with her mother. The hospital is a rectangle with space in the middle for an atrium, with hallways and corners and elevators and nicely waxed floors. The hospital is filled with a kind of heavy quiet that isn't really a quiet at all, but a pause before clamor. The astronaut's wife looks out the window at the atrium, sees purple-leaf plants, orange-face marigolds, shimmering pines. She thinks of the daisies in their yard, gone stick-bare now their growing season is done; she thinks of the carnation bouquet from the neighbors sitting on the kitchen counter beside a salad fork she forgot to put in the sink.

Your father is waiting, her mother says. *You shouldn't dawdle.*

She says again: *Oh, your pretty hair,* and the astronaut's wife tugs her scarf around her head.

The astronaut is in space with three other astronauts. One is from China. The shuttle hangs like an apostrophe in the sky.

The astronaut is telling the others her most sacrilegious joke about Jesus.

It ends with *I can see your house from here*, and they all look out the window at the blue, blue earth.

In the hospital, the astronaut's wife stands beside her father in a bed that makes her think of caterpillars, the way it is hunched in the middle. Her father seems very small in the bed, snail shell-curved there. His eyes come open, then go closed.

There are white whiskers on his chin and tubes in his arms and his legs. The astronaut's wife is afraid he will get tangled in them; the astronaut's wife remembers he would smoke a pipe at the neighborhood barbecues when she was a child, he would stand in the far corners of green-lawned yards, smoke, watch the birds.

Her father's eyes come open again.

You're a good girl, he tells her.

When the astronaut and her wife were girls together, they shared bowls of ice cream at the neighborhood barbecues, one bowl, two spoons. The astronaut liked to spoon the ice cream upside down into her mouth, smoothed the hem of her future wife's checkered skirt.

It wasn't crooked, though, said the other girl, empty spoon in her mouth.

I know, said the astronaut. *I just wanted to touch*.

In the hospital, the astronaut's wife's mother has brought an album of old photos, shows them to her husband, says *do you remember, do you remember*.

The astronaut's wife sits in the stiff-backed chair, thinks of the paper touch of her father's hand in hers, thinks of hippopotamus steps, one, two, three, four, thinks of the hush of the sky at night.

She says *it's always dark out there, isn't it*.

Her mother says, *shush*, says, *shush*, shows her father another photograph.

Do you remember?

The astronaut presses her hand against the shuttle window, says to no one in particular, *I can see your house from here.*

The astronaut's wife flips through the photo album while her mother cuts up pieces of gravy-covered turkey, feeds them to her father. The astronaut's wife rubs at her bare scalp with one hand tugs at one end of her scarf, finds a picture from when she was young, she and the astronaut knee brushing knee at a neighborhood barbecue, says, *oh*, says, *oh*, *I remember.*