

On the Rusk



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Chad Lutz
Metamorphic Inoculation

There is an art like intercourse in melding the souls using nothing but heat and passion.
Peel back desire and temptation, remove every article of sexual clothing,
And embrace a world sans gender, sans genitalia, sans initial response, societal
expectations.
Destroy obligation, learn to love as one, and unite under the common good of all.
Think not of wanton lust, but of majority good.
Think not of selfish desire, but of mutual admiration.
Think not of means to ends, but means to mean something more.
Metamorphous inoculation, Perceptual penetration;
I wish to rid myself of sex, but first I must fuck myself.
And then fuck my hopes for normal, without a single, bent regret.

Howie Good
HYPOTHETICAL

The man peering through the security fence seemed to be debating with himself whether to go in or not. I crossed the street to avoid being splashed by fire in case he did. It was what machines dream about – and the kind of slapstick that children adore, their laughter sounding on the playground strangely like sobs.



Christopher Woods
Girl in the Street

Glen Armstrong
Simulacrum, Fran and Ollie

1.

All geothermal mysteries
will be revealed at midnight.

2.

There is no ancient world
to defer to.

3.

I am the next puppeteer and the next puppet
and the next puppeteer

in such an endless pattern
that I don't know who I am.

I'm half a man
and the hand inside me

unwraps my heart
as it would a double cheeseburger.

Mark Rossi
Cog

I am a new age slave mind-whipped daily on an electronic plantation owned and operated by morons and moral midgets.

I am a cog caught in a digital machine digging deeper for a number.
It's all about a number.
Their number.
Your employee number.
Your bank account number.
Your social security number.
It's all about a number.
Their number.

You work ungodly hours for ungodly people whom deem your existence disposable. They often quote "there's three hundred like you on the street ready to work for that number." Their number. It's all about a number. You are just a cog.

Last night I set the master's place on fire. Watched the servers and keyboards melt into black ash. I dreamed the owners and managers were trapped inside crying, frying, trying to reach their precious number. I'm just a cog who locked the doors and turned their screams into soothing songs sung to my children who are happy to have me home.



Christopher Woods
Lyric, Clouds

Elvis Alves
Amongst my African Brothers in New York City

Oh brothers, did the blue of the Caribbean Sea and
white winters of New York serve to wash me clean
of you?

We dance separate rhythms. We eat different foods.

I am ashamed to say but it is a fact that spaghetti and meat
balls, cold cuts sandwiches, and perogies , yes, even perogies

agree with my stomach more than your native peppa soup with
goat meat, suya chicken, and roasted banana eaten with peanuts.

Oh brothers, must my stomach, like my mind, too be decolonized?
If yes, where is the chef Fanon?

Oh brothers, is my love for you not enough?



Kate Ladew
Waiting

Changming Yuan
September

In the open fields
Nothing, not even a wish is left
Except bare stems
Deep holes, bald twigs
But behind each closed door
Is a cozy room
private or public, full of
Colored fruits, plump seeds
And overflowing minds
As if all ready for the new school
of thought

Y, Y

Yollowish-skinned, yellowish-hearted
You are really haunted by this word's first letter
Yes, simply because it contains all the secrets of
Your selfhood: your name begins with it
You carry y-chromosome; you wear
Y-pants; both your skin and heart are
Yellowish; your best poem is titled
Y; you seldom seek the balance between
Yin and yang; you never want to be a
Yankee, but you yearn to remain as
Young as your poet son; in particular
You love the way it is pronounced, so
Youthfully, as a word rather than a letter to
Yell out the human reasons; above all
Your soul is a seed blown from afar, always
Y-shaped when breaking the earth to greet spring

Tyler Heath
Untitled I

enter tonight

the white balloon
blown with mania

now twisted into an animal

god will pop
in his splintered hands

Untitled II

in the sand
down mary's
throat
in the fist
of sand
mary shoved
down
mary's throat
in the fist—
she'll spit up
the desert
like mary

Untitled III

with a prayer dissolving in my mouth

i color my teeth crayon

and bite my sister

i'm the wolf in this story

lost in the woods

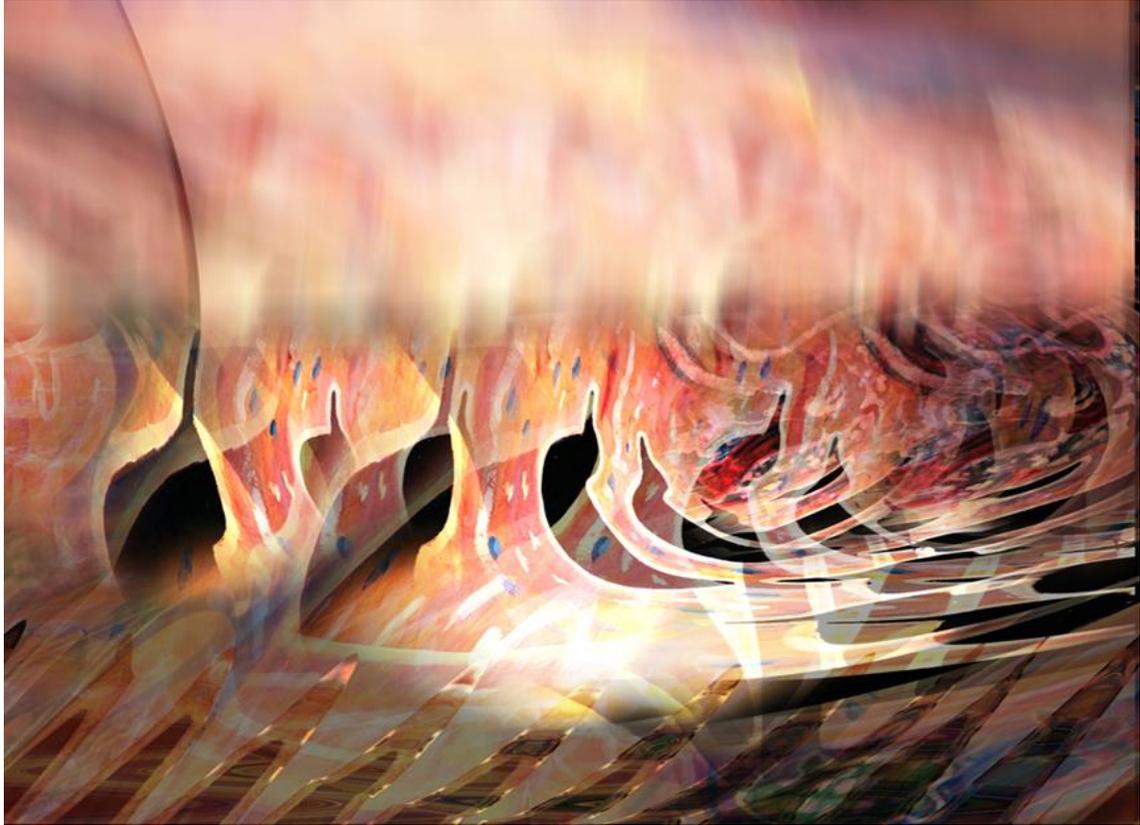
i'll go hungry until i'm in a hospital

Gerry Sarnat
Elemental

While my wife laughs with Kyoto shopkeepers, not a word in common,

I sit on a stone bench, stare at winter camellias across the stream.

Wash blown on the line, odors of street fires are preserved in amber.



Glenn Halak
Ducktable

Douglas Penick
Separation

For those of us whose lives depend on what land and sky provide, our dreams are all the same. We dream of not being hungry. Like all peasants, we dream of not being poor. As the subjects of far off rulers, of landlords, their overseers, magistrates, we dream of being not being sold, beaten, imprisoned. We dream that parents be content, sons find a better place in life, daughters marry advantageously. We dream that when we die, our kin will bury us and make offerings so that we can be free of the torments of this world. These are what we dream.

I was 11 years old when I was brought to Beijing where high walls hide the horizon. Like a chessboard, the grid of avenues and streets shape the lives of all who live here: vendors, merchants, entertainers, servants, cooks, street entertainers, criminals, high officials race from place to place past shops filled with vegetables, fruit, silk, metal ware, animal carcasses, cotton cloth, paper lanterns, heaps of wheat, rice, and barley. But what most amazed me was, for the first time, to see people smiling in public.

In the small arid farm village in Shantung where I was born, everyone was worn out. The struggle to survive ground them down. Years of drought had left the rocky soil hard, and sudden floods washed away the crops. There never was enough to eat. No one could repay the money they borrowed for seed. Cattle died and could not be replaced. Tools broke and could not be repaired. The houses of mud brick and thatched roofs were all crumbling and falling down. Dust was everywhere. The excrement of animals and humans was horded to fertilize the barren fields. Starvation, money problems, quarrels over land left people in a stupor. Many died. Many ran off. A few rich families found ways to profit from this misery, and they looked at us appraisingly. Magistrates were usually took their side. When honest magistrates appealed to the central government for help, their pleas went as unanswered as our prayers. When they tried to act justly, they were denounced. This was a world of chaos and torment. It was like that for most throughout the land.

And then, when I was eight, there were three years of civil war. Soldiers took everything and killed anyone who resisted them. They beat my father to death and left his body in a dusty ditch. My two brothers had been conscripted, so my mother and I had to bury him ourselves. Soon after, my cousins began insisting she re-marry. That way, her new husband would have to support her, and the cousins could sue to take her land. But there was no husband to be found. One night, she put me to sleep in the dark, wept as she hugged me, and when I was asleep, hung herself in the garden shed. I lay her on the ground beside my father, but I wasn't strong enough to bury her.

Soon after, the clan elders decided to sell me to a man who bought girls to work in the tea houses of the larger towns. The clan needed the money, and there would be one less mouth to feed. My mother had taught me to read a little, to sew and do needlepoint. I was hard working, and more importantly, I was pretty. Pretty enough that the agent decided to bring me to Beijing rather than leaving me in the provinces. I was lucky.

How else would I ever have seen so many people who did not worry about starving? It was a dream. I would never have realized that so many men could afford to spend their time and money on nothing but pleasure. I could never have imagined such men paying women so much that these courtesans could live in great luxury and even enjoy a certain status. But, it was so. And I saw men of great power: officers, officials, merchants, bowing and smiling, bringing lavish gifts as they paid visits to my mistress and the girls she employed. And I too was given fine silk clothes to wear so that I would fit in with this dreamland. I helped the courtesans dress and heard their gossip. I brought trays of food and jugs of wine to guests. I carried messages to and from the houses of the wealthy and the palaces of nobles. And finally, I came to know a domain known but inaccessible to everyone in the Empire. I often was sent to run errands in the Forbidden City. This was like finding that I could walk in and out of a celestial realm. Even on that particular winter night, as I crossed through the menacing shadows of great gleaming courtyard, thinking for a moment of my village, I felt now reborn.

But I heard a soft step behind me. I was frightened and froze. A deafening crack shattered my head, scouring my skull with white fire; pain shot through my bones. Vomiting a searing exhale of breath. And then ...

I was outside myself. I saw my body fall with a gentle thump onto the vast empty courtyard's marble paving. A terrible mistake to have taken this shortcut to the small portal that allowed me to enter the palace on errands when all the gates were sealed. A hand from behind grabbed my collar and pulled my body roughly across the cold stones. I heard panting. Whoever had struck me struggled to push my body through a hole in the facing stones of beneath the balustrade of one of the huge Imperial Pavilions. I smelled a man's rank sweat and I heard the echo of retreating footsteps. My body was motionless, hidden in the dark beneath the marble portico, lying on its side amid construction rubble, broken tiles, scraps of timber, broken pieces of stone from the new repairs.

I could feel the shock waves of pain and panic that still moved in it, but these sensations were no longer mine. All the shock and anguish I would have felt were now outside me. They were no longer attached to me, and I knew I had lost something precious. I looked on as the body that had been me lost its warmth. Dark waves of panic, fear, grief, and indignation were trapped inside.

And I...

It had all happened so fast that I didn't realize I couldn't move. I didn't breathe, and there was no motion within me. I sensed the cold but it didn't pain me. Seeing and smelling did not prompt likes or dislikes. I was floating in the cold lilac air of late evening like a wisp of smoke above the spot where I'd been struck down, and the world around me became like mists and cloud. Nothing was solid. With a glance, I could see into the palaces around me and the city beyond, the country beyond that and deep into the sky above.

Lost in darkness, my body was prey to wordless torrents of emotion I knew but did not

feel. All the memories of hunger, privation, abandonment, fear, struggle, and grief were there. I was aware of everything, but free of all that. An all-encompassing sorrow seized the corpse as it sensed that my spirit with its clear lucidity was now severed from her. I was suspended in an expanse, vast, alive, and completely indifferent to any individual concern. But she was being devoured by earth bound yearnings, falling, falling and spinning downward. Her terror and misery froze in her and began to coalesce.

I observed the little corpse, broken and cold in her crimson silk jacket with the pale blue embroidered butterflies now ripped and torn, lying in the dirt like a jumble of rags. The jacket was my favorite, and I'd always worn it on errands to the Forbidden City, the Great Within. But the smooth oval face that had once been me was already chalky gray, marked by dark scrapes and bruises. It was no longer pretty. A dense mass of blood seeped through the still shiny black hair at the back of the head. Her gold phoenix hairpin, which I'd so treasured, had disappeared.

I looked dispassionately at what had once been my body. I understood her shock, her sadness, her longing, her sudden rage and her furious determination. And as I watched, like drops of black ink spilled into clear water, her passions turned in the air. They lifted from her body, unfolding like veils and twining together in one indistinct shape. Her ghost took form. She could feel that some essential part of her was missing, and it tormented her. She longed for me. She was consumed by a desire for love, a desire for revenge, a desire for completion. And because she felt such pain, the world around her still seemed real.

Born by a sharp gust that smelled of ice, she emerged like smoke from where she had been hidden. Against the cold marble, she was just a shadow. Then the desire for vengeance turned and moved her towards the corridor where the running footsteps had vanished. As she drifted away, I knew she would not stop until she had found my killer and managed to end his life. Her instincts told her that this was the only way she and I could again become one, again be 18 years old, and so resume life as the favored slave of a wealthy mistress. But I knew this was not so. I watched, but she no longer was me. I understood her anguish, but now she was like a sister, a desperate dark twin.

Aware, unwavering, I watched. My memories left me and pursued a reality of which I was no longer part. Everywhere now, I was alone.

I was shocked at the immense clarity that now was mine. The fates of the living and the dead wove like luminous threads through the expanse of light and dark, amid the moon and sun and stars. Myriad lives followed myriad deaths; numberless deaths followed infinite lives in continuous succession. They expanded like interwoven brocades on the plains, mountains, rivers, lakes and seas. And every being, as she died or he died, saw the vast and unending pattern of existence.

The greatest mystery of all, as she now knew, was that every single one forgot.

Alana I. Capria
A Man Rationalizing the Skin

Forget about the brides. There are no brides. There is barely any Bluebeard. He is just a man with mold colored hair that looks blue from afar. He lives beneath a bridge. The women he calls wives are just dead bodies floating face down in the sewerage system, their bodies pushed down the gutter and left to bloat. [We always wanted to meet a king,] the man says in a falsetto. He turns the females right side up and stares down at the blue faces. [We match,] Bluebeard says. He kisses their faces and his lips sink into the softening foreheads. The water smells like meat. Bluebeard cups his hands together and collects the water. He drinks slowly. [The water tastes like meat,] Bluebeard says. He coughs and spits the water up. The dead women watch, their eyes rolling around in their heads. The whites are half-eaten. What Bluebeard thinks are pupils are actually dark bruises. [We once heard someone say that you are covered in mildew. Is that true? Because we won't love you any less if you do,] the man says, mimicking the women. He gazes at them and pulls them onto the shore. Water runs off their bodies. Slowly, the flesh shrinks. Bluebeard strokes their limbs gently. Their skin stains his hands. [All those stories are terribly wrong. They were spread by jealous people. And who wants to listen or believe that? I am a man who promises to always love you and I think that is more than enough,] Bluebeard says. He moves the women's heads up and down. Their necks crack. A hole forms just behind their heads. He peers through the deep opening and sees the top of the spinal cord. [We want you to be able to see all of us,] Bluebeard says touching the women. He pulls their lips back into a smile. He touches their breasts, then brings his hands to his mouth. [Apologies,] Bluebeard says. [I didn't mean to. I simply thought it might be fun to embrace our sexuality but I was wrong. Please forgive me. I will never touch you without getting permission first.] He smiles at the women. He slips their hands into his. [We aren't upset,] he says. [We like the fact that you love us so deeply. Do what you want with us.] Bluebeard climbs on top of the bodies and penetrates them one at a time, his phallus dribbling into the rotten muck. [Oh dear,] he whispers. [I might have gotten you pregnant. There was a lack of protection that I forgot about. What will we do in the mean time?] [We will pretend that we already have the child and love it,] he says as the women. He touches the fat stomachs. The flesh moves around beneath his hands. Water dribbles out of the sides. Bluebeard's eyes tear. [And what will we do once we bring the child into the world,] Bluebeard asks. [I am afraid that we might not be good parents. I am not the best at nurturing.] He laughs softly. He lifts the women at their waists. Their limbs hang off their bodies. He wraps their drooping arms around his shoulders. [We will just eat the baby. That is enough. We'll know we had it and then we will take it back into our bodies,] Bluebeard says as the women. He cries into the women's shoulders. Leaning past them, he stares into the water, his vision obscured by the mold making up his beard. [Yes, I am the sort of man who can bring countless women into a chamber,] he says, his voice dropping until it is almost a grumble. He rubs his green cheeks. His.

About the Authors

Glen Armstrong is co-editor of *Cruel Garters*. He writes fiction and poetry.

Elvis Alves is the author of the poetry collection *Bitter Melon*. His poetry has appeared in *Sojourners*, *Caribbean Writer Journal*, *Tongues of the Ocean*, and other journals. He lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Alana I. Capria is the author of *Hooks and Slaughterhouse*. She has an MFA in Creative Writing from Fairleigh Dickinson University. Capria resides in Northern New Jersey with her husband and rabbit. Her website is <http://alanaicapria.com>

Howie Good, a journalism professor at SUNY New Paltz, is the author of the forthcoming poetry collection *The Middle of Nowhere* (Olivia Eden Publishing) and the forthcoming poetry chapbooks *The Complete Absence of Twilight* (Mad Hat Press), *Echo's Bones* and *Danger Falling Debris* (Red Bird Chapbooks), and *An Armed Man Lurks in Ambush* (unbound CONTENT). He co-edits White Knuckle Press with Dale Wisely.

Glenn Halak is the author of *Transcendence*, a book of poetry. He has produced many paintings, three children's books, some plays and lately two one-acts published as well as some short fiction and essays.

Tyler Heath graduated with a BFA in creative writing from Stephen F. Austin State University in the small town of Nacogdoches, TX. His work has appeared in *Thin Air*, *Poigod*, *Binnacle*, and *Real: Regarding Arts and Letters*. He currently lives in Fort Worth, Texas.

Kate LaDew is a graduate from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro with a BA in Studio Art.

Chad W. Lutz was born in Akron, Ohio, in 1986 and lives in the neighboring suburb of Stow. An avid athlete, activist, writer and musician, Chad holds a BA in English with a Minor in Writing from Kent State University. His work has been featured in *Diverse Voices Quarterly Journal*, *The Dying Goose*, *Napalm and Novocain*, *Haunted Waters Press* and *AltOhio.com*. He currently works as content manager for a website in North Canton, Ohio, and aspires to run the marathon in the 2016 Olympic Games.

Douglas Penick was a research associate at the Museum of Modern Art, NY, and studied and practiced under Tibetan Buddhist teachers for more than 30 years. He wrote the Canadian NFB's series on the Tibetan Book of the Dead and libretti for two operas: King Gesar and Ashoka's Dream with Peter Lieberon. His novel about the 3rd Ming Emperor, *A Journey of the North Star* was brought out by Publerati last year and *Dreamers and Their Shadows* appeared in early summer 2013.

Mark Antony Rossi is a poet, playwright and author of the nonfiction bioethics volume *The Intruder Bulletins: The Dark Side of Technology* and the short fiction collection *No Town of Mine* and published for the Kindle Reader at Amazon. His plays "Cross" and "Thief in the Night" have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry and fiction have been published by The Antigonish Review, Cerebrus, Deep South Journal, Flash Fiction, Japanophile, Slugfish, The Journal of Poetry Therapy, The Magill Review, and Death Throes.

Christopher Woods is a writer, teacher and photographer who lives in Texas. His work can be seen in his online gallery at <http://christopherwoods.zenfolio.com>

Changming Yuan, 5-time Pushcart nominee and author of *Chansons of a Chinaman* (2009) and *Landscaping* (2013), holds a PhD in English, tutors privately, and co-publishes *Poetry Pacific* with Allen Qing Yuan in Vancouver (Poetry submissions welcome at editors.pp@gmail.com). Recently interviewed by *PANK*, Yuan has poetry appear in *Best Canadian Poetry*, *BestNewPoemsOnline*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *London Magazine*, *Threepenny Review* and more than 700 others across 27 countries.

