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Protest as Free Speech
Arthur Graham

Insofar as everything is political, HST has never been the most overtly partisan rag. We've been called left by the Right and right by the Left, so I guess we must be doing something good in between. Freedom of speech has always been the main thing for us, and that's a value largely shared across the spectrum.

Unless of course you're saying things they don't want to hear.

Granted, our ongoing protest against the stale state of poetry is a far cry from the protests currently taking place against police brutality. No one ever came after HST with tear gas and billy clubs, after all. Some nasty comments here and there, sure, but whether you're protesting our little protest or the protests out on the streets, you ultimately have the right to do so. You also have the right to come across as an intolerant asshole, if that is how you choose to come across. Our perspectives can compete within the marketplace of ideas. Despite the profound ignorance and evil of mankind, the best ideas still sometimes win.

Anyway, we're not solving all the world's problems here within these pages, we're sure as fuck not solving them on Twitter, and we're certainly not solving them all overnight. If history is any indication, it's possible we're in for a slog.

In the meantime, as always, enjoy some poetry.

Arthur Graham
Salt Lake City, June 2020

more than enough to explain
Bogdan Dragos

There was nothing
to explain here

The man's wife told
the paramedics
everything they
needed to know

Her husband wrote poetry

Yes, that would be enough
to explain why he'd
cut off his own penis
and tried to use it
as a pen
before collapsing
on his desk,
blood pooling at
his feet down below

Just being a poet was
more than enough to
explain what he did

She didn't have to
justify his unorthodox
approach to inspiration

"He's a poet,"
she said

They understood

Teknirikon
John Gartland

He was holding forth in Bada-Bing,
In this year of the Yellow Death,
erotically deviant, hilariously scandalous.
I'd read those scattered fragments
of the satirist, Petronius,
knew drollery, outrageous acts
of lewdness, were his thing,
and scorn for solemn moralists
until his final breath.

There's a rash of visitations,
from people doubtless dead
...Into my dreams.
It's the plague year, most confirmedly,
and in such times, it seems,
a mind most fears
the onset of infirmity and
sheds forgotten fellowships and phantoms;
acts out those conversations never said;
sins yet untried, and outlawry unransomed.
A lust for pleasure burgeons
in these miasmas of dread.

As fumes of illegality laced air in the locality,
he caressed a fair companion of ambiguous sexuality.
Clearly, fruits of their society were coming to a head...

This keystone fragment I stole from ruins...

So, let's raise a glass or two, he said
and scoff at turgid life;
prefer a brace of strumpets
to some temple-tethered wife,
and chart our decadent decline
with most audacious style and wit,
for scrofulous tyrants weigh our life
and roll dice for the price of it.

Now poetry and art are bonfires,
blazing by the river, where critics of the emperor
sink, disembowelled, together.

Reverberating rapper bars pump
fantasy and gangsta-chic but
Apuleius' Golden Ass is all the fiction that I seek.
Lust and folly, like some Pompei meth-house, under ash,
are my worlds to immortalise, with cynical panache.

A death sentence hangs over us, by majesty decreed.
I took the knife to my own life;
hot ladyboys and harlots come, and watch my genius bleed.

You
A. Lynn Blumer

Somedays are shrouded,
locked in rage.

Displaced anger
better off contained.

Reflect in soundwaves,
jaw fully extended
as if to consume its tremendous—

Somedays, it hits the gullet
floor like a wet back wrestling
the reverberation.

Find its spine—its verbiage.
It's relentless—this echo.
Somedays.

Today, I can hold it still / hold it still
long enough to read its
 vertebrae
protruding up a marked hide
& I etch a fresh line:

"It's just you again."

It's just you again.

Mr Almost
Dave Cullern

I'll give up the fags
This evening

The booze in a couple
Of days

Start writing that novel
A week Tuesday, gives me time to buy
A new pen
A new desk
A new chair

I'll go running in my new running shoes
Next week
Do press ups and sit ups
And squats

I'll even take the leap
And find a therapist, talk about
Starting fresh, that's what my problem is,
Probably the week after that

I'll cook vegetables for my dinner from
The third of next month,
Watch calories from then on,
I'll probably only have a few a day
After that,
Be skinny by the end of the year

I gave up the class A's
Yesterday
And I've done really well with that

So I think I'm ready to test
The limitations of my ageing body
In multiple ways
Starting first thing next month

I'll get to doing yoga,
magick, meditation
All that eastern stuff
But not until I've got all of
This other shit out of the way

I'm not a fucking
Miracle man.

mrs. samilian taught 8th grade math
Jack Henry

every time
mrs. samilian slapped
a dusty chalkboard
w/ her pointer stick
i smiled.

no more than 5" tall,
mrs. samilian taught 8th grade math.

some days she wore
leather pants.
some days she slapped
the board w/ her pointer stick
while wearing leather pants,
and i would smile.

one day
mrs. samilian
called on me to
answer a problem
at the board.

she wore leather pants,
slapped the board.

i could not stand up.
i did not smile.

'is there a problem,
mr. jack?'
slap
'you cannot come up
to the board?'
slap slap
'why can you not
come up to the board,
mr. jack?'
slap slap slap

i stood
slowly.
girls cringed.
boys laughed.
one shouted,
'jack's got a boner.'
and i did,
proudly.

mrs. samilian took one look,
smirked.
'you may go.'

instead of the principal's office
i went to the boy's restroom.
slap, slap, slap.

when i explained to the principal,
he let it go. *'he's just a boy.'*
when i explained to my father,
he let it go, as well.

when i explained to my mother
she grounded me for two weeks
and made me apologize
to mrs. samilian,
who politely declined,

when i tried to raise
the subject at hand.

Tangled
John D Robinson

Shapes blended,
bodies wrapped
and tangled like
barbed-wire,
time had
temporarily
stopped in the
sparse cheap
rented room,
the invisible
calendar shredded
and strewn
across the floor
like the
abandoned clothes
of lovers:
evening would
envelope them
and morning
would release
them into a
world unaware
and uncaring
of their fading
silhouettes.

The Alphabet Advice
John D Robinson

Now, after 4 decades
I cannot remember
his name but
I remember some
advice he offered:

‘When you go down
on your woman,
write the alphabet
with your tongue and
by the time you
get to ‘M’
she’ll be satisfied
no bullshit’

He was right,
and I’ve kept
to this advice
ever since,
never reaching
beyond the letter J.

Maybe the Illiterate Demigods
Peter Magliocco

Poets are the most pedestrian people of all:
They can’t pretend to be Rock stars,
Wearing trendy garb & looking hip
Sporting Elton John sunglasses – no,
They are the everyday sorts you see
Looking like hell in supermarkets
Shopping for what might be a last supper.
From lips of bourgeois infidels
Streaming across minds of mad men,
The poets blend in with the crowd
& sing their songs in sotto voce
While mice & men wage war constantly
For the might of the illiterate demigods
Lusting for greater corporate oligarchy
To feed the mass media mendacity.
“But I’m not a poet,” you tell me,
“Just another whore jerking you off.
Don’t cry out at my illiterate hands
Caressing your balls while you pretend
To be jaded, in extremis ...”
My words don’t mean shit, I know that:
All the profound rhetoric we flood blogs
& the social media quagmire are negligible, I tell you;
It took you to find me a phony underneath
The spasm-moments of the void
Evacuating the sperm count of humanity
Crying out its language of lusts
In a nanosecond where your clit
Merged with the colossus of time,
Riddling me with your tonguing slit-
Vacuum (where the cum resides
In sweet syllables for the one night stand?).

Give me one more head, Magdalene, then
I might learn the gospels of your lust
Written in the palm
Of your savior’s bleeding hand.

**The Torture King
Dave Cullern**

When I was young,
But not that young,
I wanted to run away
With the circus
Of course
But my skill set
Lent itself only
To banging in the pegs

I could have been a geek
I guess
But I've never liked
The taste of snakes
And I can only get so drunk
Before I vomit up
The reservations of sobriety

I read a book
About eating glass,
Dreamed of getting on
That ferris wheel truck
I saw from my parents car window
On motorway drives
To safe holiday villages

I lay on spiked beds
For my school friends
But my sinuses
Never accepted masonry nails
And juggling anything other than my balls
Was always going to be perilous
And end in bloody sheets

So I stayed home,
Read long books
About freaks
And carnies
And wrestlers and crime,
Dark shit
Of course

But I always wished
I'd learnt to fall,
Practised up a funny walk,
Picked up tips on
Taking a custard pie to the face
Like the clown
I always longed to be.

**The Sweet Life
Alan Catlin**

Twenty-four seven slow motion
strip tease soirees and the neon
palaces they take place in.
Brooks Brothers bandits with ring
finger tan lines, nose candy nostrils,
late model Beamers in valet parking
lots staffed by parking lot hot jocks,
one conviction shy of a life without
hope of parole. On the take flat feet,
lap dancers with social diseases,
extended families to feed.
Broke down bouncers one steroid
shot from brittle bone mass reduction,
small ball syndrome. Been-there-done-
that-fuck-the t-shirts waitresses and
the bartenders that serve them.
Jukebox junkies, spinning platters
for brains, collapsed veins and blood
blisters the road map for the immediate
past, the near future, up against a hasn't-
been-cleaned-in-years bathroom wall.
The happy-days-are-here-again, all major
credit cards accepted, hookers and their
maxed out johns one orgasm away from
a not-so-happy overdose death. The bad
debt bail skip collectors and their heavily
armed, concealed weapon permitted
henchmen. The lower depths beneath
the main rooms no one admits exist though
everyone knows, would go there if they
could. The tits-up-in-hell staff that works
there and the music that they play, always
one dirge short of a requiem mass.
Here, where home is, where they hang
the hats, the privileged few, the ones who
come, and the ones who can never go.

Smoldering and Drained
Anthony Dirk Ray

as I smoke the cigar
my life dwindles and
burns toward the end
correspondingly
as I drain the whiskey glass
my time on earth swirls
and disappears in like manner
I ask for nothing more
than a distinctive feeling
I apologize unto all existence
if that is entirely too much
you promise everything
but give nothing
to me that is something

bank roll my existence
forego the inevitable
have sex with my mind
masturbate with intention
colder than an igloo
claustrophobic as such
indescribable sensations
masquerading as emotions
desensitized and mesmerized
hypnotized by the facade
painted faces and bloody cunts
long live the weekend
the towel is on the bed

an indecent desire
beckons my sensibilities
dragging my mindset to the
depths of earth's core
hypnotized by the innate
led astray from moral concept
only to delve deep
within cranial blackness
dwelling on negativity
no escape foreseeable
tedium lingers
darkness spreads
and the song plays on

Death Collective
Donna Dallas

Line my coffin with
the butter-yellow Austrians
from our beach cottage
bedroom with
that cathedral ceiling we loved
to stare up into
forever
Pull some Venetian prisms
off the hundred year old
chandelier that flickered sun-holes
onto us from the window and make
earrings out of them for me please
You can lay me into a mahogany casket
with my black Chanel
the one we bought
on Place Vendome
in the midst of a rain so heavy
it was God upon us
Slip my Louboutins on feet
hard as stone
bend the toes so my arch is angled to the shape
of that divine heel
don't put a ton of makeup on me
I don't want to look garish
at the wake and scare away
the handful of viewers goggling
over my long and broken body
Burn me after
light me up
howl at the fire
I smolder and catapult up the shaft
in a whirlwind of smoke and ash
Finger through the soot
to find a nail
or a piece of a tooth
perhaps a bit of hair

save it
love it
it was me you bastard

Sex, Our Badger and God
Corey Mesler

The badger's in the kitchen
making chai.
He says he learned how from
his sensei.
My wife and I are settling in
to watch that
new Hollywood blockbuster:
Jackpot Vernacular,
starring the ingénue, Sunday
Lipinsky.
I tell the wife, boy would I like
to and she says her, too.
The movie takes our mind off
the wrecking ball
poised outside our plateglass.
It looks like another
planet, that's what the badger
says. Only to a
badger, I think, but I smile my
reassurance.
The chai is hot and spicy and
as smooth as a blowjob
so that we forget the holes in the
movie's plot, the
holes they try to patch with Sunday's
ample backside.
It's almost enough.
"Snuffle," says my wife and the
badger is pleased.
"We have to get rid of him," she
says when he leaves.
He seduced my secretary.
I contemplate this and decide that
her secretary
looks a lot like Sunday Lipinsky.
I wouldn't mind, etc.

The movie rattles forward
a little longer
but our concentration is shot,
like Kennedy,
like the moon.
We decide to cover each other with
chai and see what happens
to our sex lives.
It's not a bad way to spend
the afternoon, even
if you know you have to let
your badger go.
And, when I mount my loving wife
like a cowboy,
I think her ass is as good as
Sunday Lipinsky's.
It gets me through. It gets me
to the other side.
It gets me and it gets her and we
all muddle along,
as the rain begins to Gene Krupa
the roof,
and the wrecking ball glows
as if it has conjured Dr. Dee's spirits.
The arc of its intention
is something to see.
So I cover my wife's nakedness with
a quick cairn
as the world shatters,
shaking its myrmidon coat, a wet god,
now appearing for the first time,
almost too late.

She and I / Light Breaks Through
Casey Renee Kiser

Don't bother me
when I've shovel in hand
Hot emotions are hard to control

She has got to go
+ the mirror said so +
Find a new place to rest her head

She lets people have their way
and drags me down
Today, I am taking charge

I let in a strange visitor
Fearless and free–
the merge was successful

She and those pills
are buried together
and I must show my new friend around

~ my mind

Lines Intersecting as Seen from a Bus Stop
Jacob Ian DeCoursey

It's 9 am
I'm waiting

A gray February overcast
tints the bus stop
and all surrounding things

Buildings lurch
through frozen sun
between statuesque
pedestrians while
the wind turns
a girl's hair sideways

That same fucking sedan
beeps three times
while speeding past as
the pavements burst again
with cold pigeons like steam

A man and woman press through
and the woman is screaming

She hurls a whiskey bottle
at his head and
the bottle shatters
against the street

A truck blares its horn
and rolls over the glass

*always is such a short time
when we live so long,
sings a distant ambulance*

I cover my ears as
the 35 arrives

The doors slide open
and nobody is driving and
the windows are crowded
with demons

how can you be such a monster?

Bogdan Dragos

he spent four weeks
away from his family
in a rented apartment
somewhere on
the outskirts
of town

he told them that
he needed this
he was a writer
needed to focus on his work
conducting his research
undistracted

his little girl would call
from time to time
asking daddy to hold his
phone against his forehead
while she made a kissing sound
on the other line

very wholesome
except he lied about
holding the phone
against his forehead

“How can you be
such a monster?”
asked the naked prostitute
seated on the edge of his bed

“Shut up,” he said
tossed his phone on the desk
and unbuckled

Ozone

Mark J. Mitchell

The wind tickles leaves without moving them and
Your clothes cling cool and damp to your skin and
You're still too warm for comfort and
All the trees on this block seem unfamiliar and
Your shoes scrape rough against smooth concrete and
You're sure you're not on the right block and
You scan the clouds to see if the moon bleeds through and
You try to glimpse lightning rods on deserted roofs and
That song you don't know just won't leave your ear alone and
Someone disappears around that corner just ahead and
You're sure you know her but she never wore that dress and
A week old newspaper clutches at your ankles and
The air smells like a lake you remember but have never seen and
A bus hisses by red and orange in the darkness and
You only want to reach your home safely and
Fall to your knees to pray for rain to pray for an end

Colonoscopy of God
Craig Podmore

Oh, my lover,
Vertical cosmos of salacious flesh!
Foetal Adam writhing in
The curves of your thighs,
Chants of distaste;
Fragments of apple
Dressed in maggot vein.
The heart of your desire unchaste!
The seeds that you've planted
In our mother I despise,
Vermin gnawing at the thesis of faith
But despite the deafening cries
And the butchery of Cain
We can all pray in this
Wound of fallacy.
We're the colonoscopy of God –
The anatomy of a bad idea.

Sweet Jesus Sausage
Dennis Villelmi

The Man born of the Child who always sat at the back
Of the classroom;
Never an astute, but I learned to read, write, and sharpen my knife
Well enough to cut my way through both womb and city into
The state of Forever.

Picture me in the Camp of Beasts.
I, and any given Night don't get along.
Is your canine sleep more important than my lion's weeping?
I'm on fire!
It's a Catholic conflagration and I'm down on my knees
To Lucifer to put it out.

The Doll unwrapped on December 25 is alive!
Soon disfigured by the nuclear family dog and left
In the winter-stunted grass it grows now with a
Butchered prostitute's soul calling the chewed plastic home.

The Doll puts the questions to God:
'In what kind of carcass shall I sew myself up anew?
Where in this town is the shop in which you'll sell me cheap
Again since You can't by Grace grant me the Grave?'

-Magdalene 's Meats-
There the Jesus Sausage is made.
Whether its apostles or civil worms, they all rejoice.
Sweet Jesus! By each bite we can walk on water, or wine.
Gravity is in the hands of the Damned.

All the Asses
Damion Hamilton

On my feed
Tits and ass
Bored and hurting
Scrolling through my phone
On Saturday

Wishing time would slow
Against the coming
Of next week
So I think of tits and asses
And they come
Through my phone
All the tits and ass
Of Instagram

Brown tits, white tits,
Yellow tits, green tits
All the tits and asses
Skinny asses, fat asses
Firm asses, soft asses
Ass that make a man
Be like woah

I remember way back when
Asses weren't so popular
Now so many women
Show them off for the camera
At home and out in public
Even at the gym
Lifting weights in pursuit
Of better asses

So many asses
With attached smiling faces
This must be what I want
Cos it's all that's in my feed
My excitement grows
And grows with each new pic

One ass
Two asses
Two hundred asses
Two thousand asses

All the Asses

And all the breasts as well
Big breasts, small breasts
Firm breasts, soft breasts
Heavy breasts on older women
I remember one with breasts
Down to her knees

Two breasts
Four breasts
Four hundred breasts
Four thousand breasts

All those goddamn breasts
And that's on top
Of all the asses

Did I forget the legs
So many varied legs
Thin legs, thick legs
Long legs, short legs
Black legs, white legs
All those sexy legs
Like woah

Holy Candle Blues
Michael D. Amitin

In the red-sweet sunset
angel brother bends his blown glass ear
over the wall of eternity
listening in on my restless rathouse jam

She entered peeling story-caked walls
riding lightning rod brooms
swept me out to half-dippermoon bridge
we swung downtown where
waltzing heirs warmed six-figure derrieres above smorgasbord fires
I faked all the right questions into hell's paradise

panting at the emerald city orgasm
waiting beneath her olive skin gypsy thin cocktail feast
ignoring the runaway beast

and someone beamed
they make a great couple
as we dished sweat
to god's blistering last-chance desperate romance bugle call
my ragged sailor heart pirouetting out the hornpipe door
where muddy cliffs lick their chops and more

On the way down
the devil in white linen gown served dark red obsession wine
before flaming flambé soft brown coconut limbs stole my grin
a fly doing backflips in the honey pot

The lava-baked sea
million miles away
a moaning rusted ship creaked like a red infection
begging to be freed from the last ripples in that skin game port

You knew all along prophet of the beautiful tracks
that my ramble played in a forest of doom
I surrendered dear Monk in the sad samba night

That wind pushed me mountains away
flushed me out of hiding in the prehistoric pubescent
road-burnt grotto
at the piano bar you played me like a thundering chord
till a midnight candle grabbed the shades
fire roaring down in flames
we crawled like god's sweet snails to the clear-as-a-bell day

Glaring up through the dark blue smoke
where red sunset angel rained wild, untamed amazing grace ashes
down on desperate love's last twitch
applauding the singed curtain call
live! live! he cried from his bongo perch on heaven street
hot orange coals fading in the chilled breeze
words we'll never speak again you and I
unless fate has too much time to deal strange train cards

This harp strung midnight reverie
sad violins hijack innocent dreams
and twist the arm of violet-coated wishes

In my hidden dark room
holy candle blues...
whispers a sea wind blowing