

Part One

A Selection of Philadelphia Poets

SCOTT EDWARD ANDERSON

Intelligent Design

The knee is proof:
there's no such thing
as "intelligent design."
If there were, the knee
would be much improved,
rather than in need
of replacement.
The doctor tells me
they are doing
wonderful things
with technology these days,
have improved the joint
and bond—
Amazing, really, they
can take a sheep's tendon
and attach it there or
remove ligaments
from one part of the body,
secure it by drilling holes
and plugging them up,
stretching until taut
with tension superior
than the original.
The new designs
are so much better
("my better is better
than your better")
it seems obvious
the Creator took
off the afternoon,
went to play a round
of golf with Beelzebub,
perhaps a foursome with
Methuselah and Lucifer,
left the joint between
thigh bone and shin
to an intern.
Isn't it *obvious*?
I mean, 2 million years
of evolution haven't
improved the knee one wit.
Nothing intelligent about it.

SCOTT EDWARD ANDERSON has been a Concordia Fellow and poet-in-residence at the Millay Colony for the Arts, and received the *Nebraska Review Award* and the Aldrich Emerging Poets Award. He writes "The Green Skeptic" blog (www.greenskeptic.blogspot.com) and was one of the founding editors of *Ducky Magazine* (www.duckymag.com).

MARIS BRASON

Now

For a week now, the days have been hot
with no wind. The trees droop just from the stifling
stillness of it, a stillness like the mood in this snapshot
of the tennis court at camp—no one's playing, you're barely
in view, walking off the court—just the mesh
of racket at your side, the net sagging over
the scorched green clay. The only other thing you can see are some trees with
hazy slits of sky breaking through, their slack low leaves
dangling into the spotlights—
the low, almost inaudible buzz of the spotlights, air so thick you could hook

your fingers through it, until the heat folds back,
the lights click on, swell
and glare like huge flashbulbs over the court,
the camp, over what the camera would have caught if someone
had kept on shooting—back there

we were standing in the doorway's shadow outside
your room, the cool crisscross of screen pressing
my bare back, our lips barely touching when I saw her
coming, stepping out from the sunlit cluster
of poplars, her long hands fixed upward, holding
a movie camera that pointed at us as she came nearer; breeze
ruffling her hair. I thought: *her dark red hair that spread
across his pillow nights before. Her amber eyes.* She came
nearer and I felt your lips
stop, you began moving your mouth blankly
playing a game of speaking
without sounds as she walked by us and laughed.

July. August. Those long days passed
like a run of stills that only she watched while you and I moved around
the edges of them not saying what we felt, incapable of touching, like
those milkweed
pods called wishes that sweep past suddenly from the windlessness
of these afternoons—there's one bobbing near
my window now, that wavers then jerks and swoops
up, just as I try to cup it,
just past my reach.

MARIS BRASON's poems have appeared in journals such as *The Antioch Review* and *Quarterly West*, as well as previously in *The American Poetry Review*.

RANDALL COUCH

The Iron Swims

Elisha's men needed a bigger house,
so they went to the Jordan to cut beams.
One lost a borrowed axe-head in the river.
Elisha did not ask about the borrowing.
He asked where it fell in.

I live in language like a stream.

Last year my lung was vented
so mold would not erode an artery.

Elisha cut a young branch
and threw it on that place.

Now I'm joking with the doctor
when he says something new:
*I'm surprised you can talk at all
leaking so much air.*

Elisha made the iron swim.

Beatrice

*Guardaci ben! Ben son, ben son Beatrice.
—Purgatorio XXX, 73*

Look at me well.

Suppose I am not radiant.
Let me lay aside my veils of light—No,
you lift them. One by one, expose
the body: Now we're getting
somewhere.

Picture a Pearlstein nude: Gray flesh,
heavy with yellow gravity.
Are you disillusioned? This suet
will not be changed

in a moment. I am looking
down,
out of the frame. No way
to meet my gaze, no risk
of image aping spirit.
What do you know? Note in
a stripped car:
No radio.

*

Let's read a chest x-ray.

In this likeness, you see
a cavitory lesion in the right upper lobe, diffuse
ectasia, bronchiolitis, pleural
empyema.

At this stage I could still joke, still attend
with interest when you read to me.

Do you remember what came next?

Calculus:

When does bleeding become
drowning in the night?

In cold blood I said *Cut*

out the worse lung.

It came with three brittle ribs
impacted in granulous tissue, left
a respirator, nosocomial pneumonia,
green sponges on plastic sticks
to moisten my lips.

You brought me red sneakers
against bed sores.

There are things more important—
everyone agrees—than making love.

But this is what they remember if they're lucky.

What I wanted: to look across
a roomful of shadows, to see our window
cast its shadow lattice
on the ceiling.

The end was rushed:

missed messages, late arrival.

Pulsox reading

failing for eight hours,
lungs filling with fluid.

Behind the curtain, the sound of nurses
rotating my limp body around
the breathing tube, trying to keep
some piece of lung above water.

The surgeon's hasty entry, useless
readiness; his

Turn off the monitor.

I died face down with my head
wedged on foam blocks.

Does that make me good?

Does drawing it make you
an artist?

* *

While my voice lingers, this
is how you conjure me—

writing with my lipstick
on the bathroom mirror
the trace of every
word I ever spoke to you.
Tell your rosary of letters

love-knots won't reach me here,
and your bright slate will wear
longer than my name
in Revlon Autumn Berry.

You won't hear me forever.
Listen.

Don't test yourself against
other people's hardships.
Black-fingered climbers
and swollen mariners
six weeks in an open boat.
Why should that be the standard?

Doesn't the gaunt face captured
gazing from the gate
of a liberated camp
have a claim to be remembered
for his clarinet,
for his younger daughter,
for saving the world?

My claim on you is simpler.

In the little country churchyard
where you laid my boxed body
under lines from Milton's sonnet
the diesel of highway graders
clouds the pastoral
and traffic will soon sing to me
unceasing,
in its sixteen-valved voice.

* * *

As in the festival tent
where volunteers read Yeats in the rain
behind a poppling microphone
for poets between events to hear
the deathless music on the heavy air
and first think: ah, tribute—
then hope, despair,

you have taken my voice.
What have you learned? To reveal
is to remove a veil from truth.

My veils are gone.
Just what are you closer to?
It may be we were vain
and mystified by fragments,
enchanted by ruin.

I do know what it's like
to want to hold on, to lodge
a few memories where they're
hard to get rid of. Love,
forgiveness is easy here:
there's nothing to it.

But you who want
to see my face clearly
and walk beside me on this hill,
Wasn't it you
who gave these words to me?

I am, I am Beatrice
—so tell me,
who are you?