

## Letter from the Editor

Welcome to the first Erato of the new year. As of this writing, Brooklyn has enjoyed an unusually mild winter. But February and March await us, and some of you are thinking of snow. We received two poems about snow for this issue, from Beatrice Diamond and Todd Friedman, which are here on the front page. In another mini-theme, there are two poems of war on this page, by Friedman and Tim Brennan. On the back we've run four selections from Bob Heman's Eden-inspired "Serpent Variations," as well as a variety of poems from others. Thanks to all who contributed poems this month. And if you're new to the Erato, turn the page and read what we're all about. Enjoy!

— The editor

## Beatrice Diamond Snow's Cascade

Snow cascades  
in frozen silence  
blankets in pristine white  
bids pause in time  
reflection on beauty  
on primal innocence

Begs rejection  
of worldly corruption  
covers tides of bigotry  
seas of ravage  
oceans of genocide

Speaks its mute message  
soon melted  
desecrated by  
dark gargoyles  
of reality

Ethereal snow  
implores we emulate  
its purity  
evidence of godliness...

## Sad Hide And Seek

Like the tides that come and go  
refuse to recede and culminate,  
she is exiled into oblivion,  
she pays visits to reality,  
returns to her isolated prison.

What internal battle conquered her,  
so loquacious, now mute  
so sparkling, now dull?  
How can I infuse life into this shell?  
I look into her eyes,  
now vacant and unknowing.

Can I ignite the spark of life  
perhaps with sibling memories?  
She has left us with no connecting  
doorway  
I find myself banging on the  
non-existent  
doorway, demanding entrance!

## Todd Friedman Snowfall

She always felt like she was living in a  
blizzard  
He'd come home from traipsing around  
the neighborhood with those cursed  
plastic bags  
All filled up with the local papers  
Oh why did they have to give them away?  
If they weren't free he wouldn't come  
home with half the junk he did  
It was amazing the way he'd take those  
bags and empty them out on the table  
Like he was looking for some kind of  
treasure  
Then he'd just leave them there or dump  
them on the floor  
And if she wasn't careful  
The piles would mount  
The way snow does when you're not  
looking

It was the same with books



Daryl Lang

Anytime anyone in the neighborhood  
threw books away  
There he was dragging them home  
Sometimes he'd get really lucky  
And the people putting them out  
Would bundle them up in stacks  
He said it was like saving souls or  
something like that

What was the point of all this?  
He was never going to read any of this  
stuff  
He knew it and she knew it  
At least she liked to think he'd know it  
If he ever bothered to think about it

Then one day she was going through the  
latest heap of garbage he'd brought home  
Like she always did  
Trying to make order of it and at  
The same time get rid of things  
So he wouldn't know the difference  
And then suddenly  
Just as she was about to toss one of his  
books  
She saw the first flurries of the season  
coming down  
And she stood at the window to watch

It was funny  
For so many times she had pictured  
herself hiring a dumpster  
And filling it when he wasn't around  
She'd even had fantasies of lighting a  
match to it all  
But she found a place on the shelf  
And slid the book in there

She could deal with his anger  
That was one thing  
But who would he be?  
That was the thing that scared her

## O'Malley

You'd steer clear of O'Malley  
Unless you wanted to hear once again  
How he had enough shrapnel in him  
To set off the metal detectors at Kennedy  
Airport  
And God help you if you made the mistake  
Of wearing a plaid tie to school  
He'd tell you exactly which clan in  
Scotland the pattern came from

And then proceed to give you a thorough  
accounting of the topography of the  
region  
But mostly O'Malley talked war stories  
The chief one being the one he lost to his  
wife  
That was how he wound up on Staten  
Island  
At night he'd stand with his feet planted  
in the driveway smoking a cigar  
Trying to drown out the dump  
Then in the morning if he'd gotten stuck  
on the Verrazano  
He'd come in talking about slitting his  
throat  
And you never knew if this time he  
actually meant it

At the English Department meetings  
The chairman would talk  
And the teachers would sit with their  
hands folded on the desks  
And even the chairman would roll his eyes  
As he talked about the educational  
panacea of the month  
But on this particular occasion  
Someone was going to make a  
presentation  
And she asked for a volunteer to read  
Wilfred Owen's "Dulce Et Decorum Est"

O'Malley sprang to his feet  
Now mind you  
O'Malley never missed an opportunity to  
let you know that  
We should have made Vietnam into a  
parking lot  
But there he was  
Reading about the guy who couldn't get  
his gas mask on in time  
"The white eyes writhing in his face"  
The blood "gargling" in his "froth  
corrupted lungs"  
But, if you could have been there  
Then you wouldn't be spreading that lie  
about how sweet and glorious it is to  
die for your country

I don't think anyone could have predicted  
Least of all O'Malley  
That when he finished reading  
Everyone would clap  
And it wasn't out of politeness

It was applause

## Tim Brennan Evac Central

A pleasant scene:  
a pond, a cabin  
hounds, Autumn pine scent  
in a twilight sky

Crashing fire  
searing brightness

Hey 'Doc'!  
Get your team on this guy  
He's hurt bad ...  
"through & through chest wound  
with profuse loss of blood  
shock symptoms."

**A blast of light  
& heat**

I tried to tell them there's no hurry  
no worry  
Everyone is so uptight;  
I'm hovering in my landscape  
**Loud flash  
stinging dirt - dust**

Hurry that damn IV!  
We'll need someone to man triage  
1st Sergeant said  
there's more incoming

**The din  
of burning smoke**

Cool it . . . I'm not in this tent  
I'm in my Winter cabin  
at the fireplace the color of the sunset.  
The clouds are comfortable  
as they set . . .

**Noise  
Dims**  
"Keep his dogtags  
get that chaplain"

Bob Heman

from

### The Serpent Variations

THE DISTANCE THEY COULD TRAVEL in a day was the extent of the garden. The only landmark they passed was the river or rivers. They were never sure if there was more than one. They didn't know where it went.



THE CARETAKER A CONSTRUCTION as certainly as the garden. The words that built them passed down to us even now. The serpent no more than an analogy. The woman always the question.



THEIR FIRST ASSUMPTION was that the garden was without limits. Their next assumption was that it had always existed and always would exist. Their final assumption was that they were both the same. The serpent proved each of these assumptions wrong.



ONE DAY THE POND was forbidden. On another day the chipmunk. Each day a different feature or inhabitant of the garden glowed with the caretaker's warning. One day the woman glowed, and the other avoided her all day long. She would not talk about it afterwards.

### Maria Arrillaga Threads

A button in my blazer broke  
The sewing box contained the threads all tangled up  
Underneath, a matching button laid  
In wait for a new place  
To make things right again.

The threads beckoned to the human hand  
The colors looking to assemble winked  
A pink flamingo carried in its beak  
A spool humble enough to set the order straight.

And so the hand coiled the chosen color  
To nip the needed length  
To make the cloth secure once more  
In touch with needle, thread and button fast.

### Ricki Stuart Fragments

I walk into my room  
After laughter, poetry  
Fellowship and hugs  
After music and art,  
After burgers with friends;

Into the silence of my flat  
Into the vacuum  
Of emptiness,  
Into the echoes of past loves  
Pieces of a life fill my rooms  
Slices of connection  
Fragments of the past  
Signed photos of those gone  
Your photo frozen in time  
You deleted by absence.

Love letters lie  
Dusting a table.  
Now visible as the door  
Closes connection  
To the certain and real  
Closes to the living  
And opens to bleakness

A world filled with books,  
My phone, chairs, tables,  
Walls smothered  
With paintings, memos  
Menus, slices of a life.

They cannot replace warm flesh  
They cannot replace murmurs  
From another room  
Inquiring about lunch.

### Allison Griffiths Untitled

this city is back-breaking;  
a woman that cannot  
make up her mind.  
her eyes are yours, the steel  
grey that one day was comfort.  
today you are staring me down,  
lips tight, these doors do not  
open when i walk past  
anymore.

i press my hands against the brick,  
unfamiliar against memories that  
once were. i have left this behind without  
ever moving my feet but i can  
still feel his breath on the back  
of my neck.

i visit old café's and leave  
goodbye notes on ruined napkins,  
determined to walk away this time,  
but every vein  
is a dead end.

### Triada Samaras Dirtbike to God

Last night I sent my pain up to God  
With a bike messenger  
Who charged me 15 bucks  
To peddle furiously upward  
Vertical-like, into the sky  
Straight to God's mailbox  
Pain too big a file  
For e-mail

In point of fact,  
I loaned my pain to God  
With interest  
Warning God:  
Guard this!  
I may need it back some day  
You hear?

God had a good laugh  
Shelved it with millions more  
Garbage bags crammed with pain  
Doubts, and plenty of fears  
Dispatched with colorful twisties,  
Put a little label on it  
With a glue gun  
And gave me a receipt

In the back of His giant warehouse  
God's cloud machine was manufacturing  
Cumulus clouds for North America  
Still munching on a garbage bag  
From the Stone Age, this one  
Woolly mammoth skin,  
No plastic then,  
Of course.

### Children

Have you ever noticed  
How children wiggle and waggle  
Wiggle and waggle  
Spinning down the slide  
Like happy yellow snakes

They jibber and jabber  
Wiggle and waggle  
The sun shines on their happy little faces  
As if all the dark sounds  
In the background  
Are like a laughing day  
No matter how hostile

Children throw themselves down the slide  
Again and again  
Mindless of the ugliness  
and trouble that awaits them  
As if the sun will always shine  
Upon them  
And the moment  
Is all that matters

Poetry is kind of like that  
For adults  
The words together are like the sun  
A giant burst of sunny warm space  
Upon the heart  
Poetry's moment sometimes seems endless  
And its touch oh so boundless.

Kurt Sass

### Today Is a New Day

Yesterday I couldn't get out of bed.  
Yesterday I was wracked with suicidal  
thoughts.  
Yesterday I didn't accomplish anything.

But today is a new day,  
and so is tomorrow.

Bill Pyles

### Delaware Bay

I can't escape from Delaware Bay  
I remain fixed right here as time floats by.  
My poor slowed down brain and "feet of  
clay"  
Hold me in this place where I'm sure I'll  
die!

### Heavens Water

Oil tankers ply gray, heaving water.  
I reflect on days we'd stroll this shore.  
Sea gulls run, take wing and sail aloft.  
I, earth bound, yearn to soar again with  
you!

### Society matron

Society matron asserts power,  
Recites "up a monkey's ass" limerick  
Discrediting daughter's lover!  
Disparaged from infancy, man bolts!

Larissa Shmailo

### Essential Tremor

"This shaking keeps me steady/  
I should know"

—Theodore Roethke

Even my heart trembles  
As my body shakes and hums  
And my hands, holding dollars,  
Flap at the surprise of bums  
Who grab at the moving bills.

To my core, I shake: You shake your head.  
I shake the floor, I shake the bed  
I am a menace on the assembly line,  
A road hazard ahead.

This is a fissure, the movement of plates,  
Between you and me a fault,  
You who hold steady  
As a lighthouse in a vault.

But know this: All things swing  
All things sway, take wing,  
Except for the imprisoned  
Told to stand still, held pinioned  
Like a butterfly on a pin.

"Hold still," the jailers exclaim.

Dionysus gives the shakes  
From Tmolus the tremors come  
Seismic as me, the choryphantes come  
Speeding the service of god.

erato

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We accept submissions of poems  
and photographs via email:  
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Space is limited and we give  
preference to poems that have  
been previewed at the Poetry  
Project's open reading.

## The Park Slope Poetry Project

meets the first Tuesday of every  
month at 7:30 pm in the basement  
of St. John-St. Matthew Emanuel  
Lutheran Church, 283 Prospect  
Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11215.  
All are welcome.

**Directions:** The church is on  
Prospect Avenue between 5th  
and 6th Avenues. By subway,  
take the M or R to Prospect  
Avenue or the F to 7th Avenue.

### Upcoming Readings:

**March 7** - Hal Sirowitz + open  
**April 4** - Jason Reynolds + open  
**May 2** - Douglas Collura + open

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