

# **Yankee Broadcast Network**

*poems*

**John F. Buckley  
& Martin Ott**

**Excerpts**

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Yankee Broadcast Network  
© 2014 John F. Buckley & Martin Ott

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<i>Australian Book Review</i>	“Doppeldanger”
<i>The Baltimore Review</i>	“What I Watched on My Summer Vacation”
<i>Barrow Street</i>	“Déjà TV”
<i>Beecher’s Magazine</i>	“Ghazalgate”
<i>Breakwater Review</i>	“Skycast”
<i>The Chaffey Review</i>	“Television Through the Ages: A Smithsonian Walkthrough”
<i>Crab Creek Review</i>	“Repairman”
<i>The Dos Passos Review</i>	“TV Dinner Theater”
<i>Euphemism</i>	“Our Favorite Poems We Can’t Watch”
	“Synopsis of <i>Lusts of Midgard</i> , America’s Favorite Viking Soap Opera, Season 37, Episode 229”
<i>Euphony</i>	“Fireside Chat”
<i>Glint</i>	“Madame Leah Bears the Weight of the Zoonosphere”
<i>Jenny</i>	“Nightmares of a Late-Night Talk Show Host”
<i>Lunch Ticket</i>	“The Re-Invention of Television”
<i>The Madison Review</i>	“ <i>The B-Team</i> ”
<i>Natural Bridge</i>	“Inside the Box”
<i>Owen Wister Review</i>	“David Lister Versus the Remote”
<i>The Packington Review</i>	“Coming Soon to the Disaster Channel!”
<i>The Penmen Review</i>	“Late-December Holiday Special”
<i>Pennsylvania English</i>	“Drift Away to <i>The Archipelago of Dreams</i> ,” “ <i>Real Housewives of Wayne County</i> ”
	“Come Marvel at the Catasquaphonous Carnival of <i>Dick Clark’s Rootin’ Tootin’ New Year’s Eve</i> ”
<i>Perceptions Literary Magazine</i>	“Sunny Raines”
<i>The Pinch</i>	“The Newlywed Game”
<i>Rabbit Ears: TV Poems</i>	“The Newlywed Game”
<i>Raleigh Review</i>	“Moon Shot”
<i>Redivider</i>	“Final Season”
<i>Reunion: The Dallas Review</i>	“Commercials of the Apocalypse”
<i>Rougarou</i>	“Screens”
<i>The Round</i>	“Gauging the Invasion”
<i>The Southampton Review</i>	“Better Living Through Television”
<i>Switchback</i>	“Burn’ded”
<i>Two Thirds North</i>	“The Mermaid Behind the Glass”
	“Come Marvel at the Catasquaphonous Carnival of <i>Dick Clark’s Rootin’ Tootin’ New Year’s Eve</i> ”
	“The Mermaid Behind the Glass”
<i>Wisconsin Review</i>	“The Day Walter Cronkite Died”

# TV DINNER THEATER

Admission is free, for the most part. Families gather haphazardly, hunched over nuked entrees and cheese plates, truth told with eyes facing forward. During an episode of *Baghdad Nurses*, a teenager bruised

by jock hands swears to his parents he will enlist in the Marines or else go Semper Fi with a machine pistol in his gym class, his father transfixed by boobs, his mother by blood, his dog yawning on death's door.

Four towns over, the news that the pastor's daughter has missed her last two periods is drowned out by the soft slicing of Salisbury steaks and the susurrus of the televised crowds at his alma mater's big game.

She excuses herself and goes to the bedroom, eyes a closet rife with bent wire hangers and reaches in, pulls out the portable set and finishes her hot cherry cobbler alone, watching *Dan and Clementine Plus Nine*.

In a basement rumpus room, a cement mixer in a Barry Sanders jersey wrestles his sons for the sausage pizza, and tells his wife he's bet the mortgage on the Lions covering the spread, while she gorges on the handyman

on *Cougar Country*, believing the rust on the underside of her car spewing through slush is not unlike her own chassis, which could use a good pounding from a fresh pair of hands, perhaps one of her sons' meaty friends.

The Ukrainian's Bolivian girlfriend tranquilly mimics wet celebrities in the synchronized-swimming contest, slowly fanning the air with her arms as he mentions he's taking them both to Kiev, away from the reach of Jose and Sergio,

since he can't find the package, the one that they paid him to babysit. All of the yushka and ceviche in the world can't save either one from sleeping with the fishes when her brother-in-law's ravenous friends discover it's missing.

Rectangles glow in syncopation in the East Quad dorm, then the bombs started dropping, and the numb students could not pull themselves up from plastic chairs or text about the red lights, smoke plumes, soldiers with gas

masks. On HD sets and cable-connected smartphones, mouths masticate a United Nations of dishes, but no words are left in any known language to explain how the bombs taste in windpipes and bellies, in dayglow.

# THE DAY WALTER CRONKITE DIED

Suicide bombings at two swank hotels in Jakarta hurt at least fifty and killed at least nine. A baby delivered in a Rio de Janeiro *favela* was destined for heartbreak and glory. We worked on “Miami” and “Pantsless,” overwriting old files on the way to improving the poems.

A day of mourning continued with hurricane force winds in Norfolk, while three soldiers were blindsided by rockets outside of Basra. Then we saw model/actor/surfer Braden Bacha released from self-imposed jail on *Big Brother*. Why do you never see the end coming?

Chavez celebrated Bolivia’s birthday and promised Zelaya’s return to Honduras. Obama spoke out at the NAACP, calling for bootstraps, while John botched a telephone interview, wrecking his chance to get benefits during a summer with no work, just creditors’ inquiries.

Martin was wandering through narrow Barcelona, his pidgin Catalan drifting out into the ether, lost in a stadium filled with pill hawkers. Bartenders replaced glasses with cups, the narrative now unspoken, soothsayers shimmying in front of painted backdrops, blinking eye.

Pope Benedict slipped in his bath in his mountain chalet, breaking the wrist on his chief benediction arm. Forty-nine rough Mafiosi in Sicily went to jail. Father McCleary ran a free hand down the rear of Wright’s pants, tucking inside the tail of the junior’s dress shirt.

Truth took a cigarette break, then a drive through the countryside. People could not remember seeing the wreckage, or cameras clicking like birds without worms. Do you remember hearing it? That’s the way it is sometimes. That’s the only tale that matters.

# REPAIRMAN

The television department in the Superstore  
is like a lodge fireplace or preacher's pulpit,  
drawing problems and their people to the lights

I keep. Diagonal inches pull them, pixilated  
and spellbound, to the grunts and grimaces,  
the heroic couplings and impossible quests.

I must tinker covertly, heal without taking  
stock of the double coupons and upsells  
that spell some dollars less or more. I lead

my guests to the La-Z-Boy. I hand out universal  
remotes and listen to their diatribes so that  
they will keep coming to me to mend cracked

monitors and lovers' fatigue, spotty reception  
and familial rejection. Two thousand channels  
of distraction flow like a river from my guiding

touch. Toshiba and I will never speak hurtfully.  
In the break room, Manika talks to her hair  
about the hidden dangers of the jewelry

counter, about the fear of being strangled by  
angry necklaces fashioned by children in China.  
I ply her attention with pudding and mention

opportunities for adopting Guangzhou orphans,  
a shot at karmic recalibration. "Not all Funyuns  
are sour," I state to the manic Sporting Goods

twins, Oscar and Dieter, after their impressive match of invisible badminton failed to attract prospective brides to the yoga accessories aisle.

They nod and ask if Sony Watchmen “are being still *übercool mit die* hotties?” I don’t know the answer; my last date was ages ago, with

a Methodist Sunday-school teacher who used me to set up her Wii Active and lure over some of the younger crowd interested in a sweaty

rapture. I sometimes gather the gang after hours to help me stack the television monitors in a giant pyramid, a sacred shape that radiates

positive ions. We gather in a ring and recite knock-knock jokes, plan the next joint Sunday dinner, bathe in the many voices directed

at us by flickering faces of fictional families, clues on how we as individuals might join together, my people, my flock, my target demographic.

# BETTER LIVING THROUGH TELEVISION

Olga tried to recreate the ascension  
of the fourth Musketeer with lunch tray  
shield and the Terrible Mop from Janitor

Bill, but Mr. Jaymes intercepted her,  
relegating her to cleanup duty, and shushed her  
when she sang “Jailhouse Rock” like

a righteous Blues Sister. So she quit, formed  
a detective squad with Snuffles the rat  
terrier and one-eared feline sleuth Cherry

Jubilee, but Mrs. Balakian did not seem  
impressed with how Olga solved her first case,  
that of the missing husband, with blown-up pics

of a strange lady and him testing tomatoes at Safeway.  
Olga switched genres, ages, acted like a real  
housewife until her faux fiancée ran off

with her lunch money, until nobody cared  
'cause she'd become a tough pill to swallow  
since Health Class. Beautiful Caitlyn Coe,

her arch nemesis, had concocted a love  
potion, mixing the urine of pet mice with tears  
produced on command, leading to an awkwardly

flirtatious principal as Olga complained about pigtail pulls. Olga protected herself with a phalanx of boys armed with sticks tipped with deadly

dog doo. It was just like those soldiers safeguarding Inga, the baroness in that bloody Nazi war movie Olga fell asleep watching with her Grandpa

last Saturday on TV-87's matinee. She vowed to rally her forces, such as they were, for a top-secret mission of mud pies and mayhem.

But Caitlyn ambushed! Brainwashed her mother and infiltrated her headquarters with spies, dastardly brothers bought off with candy. RC Cola waterboarding

ensued in the belly of Ol' Iron Claw, bathtub of horrors, her own mother scrubbing her memories, fantasies, toweling her dry and dreamless, to be planted

beneath sheets, kissed twice to keep the ninjas at bay, humming to the lullaby of the living room TV, those great adventures ahead in an endless tomorrow.

# GHAZALGATE

The latest scandal unfurls in infidelity, infinite infidels on the news.  
Why are we witnessing a plague of human cicadas on the news?

In the long-awaited interview, the celebrity deep-throats a lime Popsicle.  
His limpid face and favorite dessert pass for hard-hitting news on the news.

How many times have we seen the tease of *Comet Hurtling Toward Earth*?  
Next time it may well be *How I Survived the Rapture* on the news.

Some drones were retrofitted to fling pamphlets and Boston cream pies.  
American protestors sometimes swat invisible insects on the news.

The model-athlete should not have gotten behind the wheel that night.  
No chauffeur, no time machine, no way to hide his red river on the news.

What we don't know can't hurt us; we became invulnerable last Monday.  
Our armor-plated eyeballs attack the anchor's stiffer haircut on the news.

Twenty-four-hour rotation, factoids spun like liquor-store hot dogs.  
Some politicos see red, and take a bite, others green, and relish in the news.

We can't get enough of body parts: face slaps, talking heads, no underpants.  
The lovelorn dictator leaks his overly produced sex tape on the news.

A parliament of pundits calls the latest poll figures "center-wing sabotage."  
Hands across the aisle disembodied by venal verbal machetes on the news.

Our hand-held cams shake from superstorms, bikinis, binge drinking, gun bursts.  
We shrink, and learn to cloak our first impulses, living on the news.

# THE MERMAID BEHIND THE GLASS

The fall of Atlantis is all our faults.  
I'm glued to news reports of spontaneous  
gills, my own legs fusing, the earth  
becoming a surface for history scrolls.

No one remembers to feed the fish.  
We let them comingle and fight like scruffy  
tritons, each missing scales, neglecting the pets  
we purchased after reading *Tuna Whisperer*.

Lost surfers are occasionally caught  
in nets made of plastic rings and bags,  
and nothing stops the Sturgeon Surgeon  
from attempting to save a life or two.

We are sluggish on coral couches, fins  
rooted in pudgier flesh. Swimming only  
to the fridge and back for fried krill puffs,  
and blame our bulk on omega-3.

We have a sense of drowning now,  
high-rise apartments brushing the sea  
bottom, kelp in the penthouse, cauldron  
of foresight on a drenched back burner.

# TELEVISION THROUGH THE AGES: A SMITHSONIAN WALKTHROUGH

(Press a Button for a Brief History of Each Exhibit)

Blind, Homer thought it a new radio, one with strange pauses, still enthralling enough to inspire him to fashion fan-fiction epics of Achilles, Odysseus, Paris, and the other figures from his favorite program, *Bronzed Band of Brothers*.

Without her rampant insomnia, Sappho might never have come across *Lusty Ladies* (Volumes 1 through 9) late at night on a forbidden movie channel, lending her the gimmick needed to crack her crushing writer's block.

Confucius was the first to suggest that television messed with our *ren* and *yi*, and his actual quote was: "Before you embark to watch TV with your enemies, first dig two graves for the potatoes you become."

They sing of skinny arms and the poet, Virgil, who, exiled from natural buffness by genetics, scrupulously copied every exercise demonstrated onscreen by the young Iaccus Lalanneus, crying "*Aeneid* a hot *puellam*!"

The lost first biography, *Beowulf* in London, was created after the scribe monk who followed the hero on his early carousing years stumbled upon a flat screen projecting *Jerusalem Shore* in the Roman sewer aqueducts.

Alfonso XI of Castile chewed his darkened nails during the Battle of Gibraltar, watching the first hospital drama, *Black's Anatomy*, to howl at the other poor souls suffering bubonic plague and the sexy interns seducing the bloodletters.

Obviously, Geoffrey Chaucer learned words like *fart*, *interrogation*, and *slumber* from watching reruns of *Barnabas the Miller*, beloved sitcom of the mid-1370s, in which the learned Dietrich sowed new words among the sheriffs of Greenwich.

The visions of Joan of Arc came to her from a pirated signal that beamed the time-traveling adventures of fellow teens Ted and Bill, plutocrats of the Atom Age who battled parents, aristocracy, and degenerative brain disease.

In researching their respective renditions of the Faust legend, both Marlowe and Goethe nearly went broke giving their money to the fiery televangelists of *God's Very Cross*, which broke records by running from 1579 to 1826.

Surrounded by cameramen, the sound crew, and brioche-bearing production assistants, Marie Antoinette was in such a tizzy shooting her reality show *La Vie Simple*, that she neglected to keep each episode's budget in line.

Secretly unmoved by child labor and starvation, Charles Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* upon discovering orphans in workhouses only had access to beadle-controlled basic cable, watched on antique B&W sets caulked with oakum.

Bram Stoker was an original *Twilight Zone* fan, watching the frightened sun wither every evening in the reflection of his unplugged TV that haunted his writing table, peering for signs of intelligence in the fading red streaks.

World War One would have utterly crushed the spirit of Ernest Hemingway had he been unable to interrupt the horrors of trench warfare with sunny daily episodes of *Live with Regis and Dawn* streaming in the ambulance.

It took only a few episodes of *Animal Kingdom Come* for a young Ayn Rand to pursue survival of the fittest with an almost religious fervor, spitting on Bolsheviks and riding Nietzsche like a broken saddle mount.

Einstein's hair ranked as his third most important discovery, inspired by the unkempt runner-up on the bootleg reality series *Barbery Coast*, where each loser had a close shave with their victor's sling blade.

Thank you for joining us! Please deposit your special glasses in the bins at the end of the corridor. Please return to your home pixel quadrants. Your accounts have been debited. Please wave goodbye as the lights dim.

# THE RE-INVENTION OF TELEVISION

One-point-seven million years ago.  
A savanna on the outskirts of another  
savanna. Three anonymous hominids  
combine sheets of shale, vines, the juice  
from primordial berries, lightning bugs,  
and the circuit board from their tribal  
GPS, which happened to be the spine  
of their departed medicine woman, one  
with unerring direction. The first rabbit  
ears were a form of hare ancestor without  
the hops. Everything was fueled by fire:  
flame shadows crackling its mnemonic  
static, laugh tracks recorded in the hearts  
of coals, red-lit shadow-puppet commercials  
projected platonic on the smooth cavern wall,  
applause signs inscribed in smoke. Reality  
shows sizzled within the steaks of mammals,  
whose sturdy femurs were featured in home-  
improvement programs. Tar pits syndicated  
the comedic moments of men hauling ass  
from fanged terrors, each vertebrae projecting  
passions like pixels on a bleak screen.  
The Pleistocene Department of Standards  
& Practices cut out two-thirds of all mating  
hoots on the *Homo habilis* telenovelas,  
but that couldn't stop a new breed  
from syndicating their dramas and follies,  
from inventing religion as a novel way  
to sell more stones, from sending new  
actors into battlefields and bedrooms,  
from jumping the last surviving shark.

## ABOUT THE POETS

MARTIN OTT lives in Los Angeles, where he writes often about his misunderstood city. He is the author of three books of poetry: *Underdays* (Notre Dame University Press, 2015), *Captive* (C&R Press), and *Poets' Guide to America*, co-authored with John F. Buckley (Brooklyn Arts Press). In 2013, he published the novel *The Interrogator's Notebook* (Story Merchant Books). He blogs at [writeliving.wordpress.com](http://writeliving.wordpress.com).

A recent graduate of the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan, JOHN F. BUCKLEY has been writing poetry since an attempt at writing a self-help book went somewhat awry. After a twenty-year stint on and near the West Coast, he now lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan with his wife. His website is [johnfrancisbuckley.wordpress.com](http://johnfrancisbuckley.wordpress.com).

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