

the MEADOW

the MEADOW 2013



the MEADOW
2013

TRUCKEE MEADOWS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Reno, Nevada

The Meadow is the annual literary arts journal published every spring by Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada. Students interested in the literary arts, graphic design, and creative writing are encouraged to participate on the Editorial Board. Visit www.tmcc.edu/meadow for information and submission guidelines. Look for notices around campus, in the *Echo* student newspaper, or contact the Editor-in-Chief at meadow@tmcc.edu or through the English department at (775) 673-7092.

See our website for information on our annual Literary and Art Contests sponsored by ASTM. Only TMCC students are eligible for cash prizes.

At this time, *the Meadow* is not interested in acquiring rights to contributors' works. All rights revert to the author or artist upon publication, and we expect *the Meadow* to be acknowledged as original publisher in any future chapbooks or books.

The Meadow is indexed in *The International Directory of Little Magazines and Small Presses*.

Our address is Editor-in-Chief, *the Meadow*, Truckee Meadows Community College, English Department, Vista B300, 7000 Dandini Blvd., Reno, Nevada 89512.

The views expressed in *the Meadow* are solely reflective of the authors' perspectives. TMCC takes no responsibility for the creative expression contained herein.

Meadow Art Award: 1st place Nicole Lee, 2nd place Andrea Buchanan

Meadow Fiction Award: Shelby Cook

Meadow Non-Fiction Award: Melissa Laws

Meadow Poetry Award: 1st place Maria Musa, 2nd place Brandon PeQueen, 3rd place Diane Hinkley.

www.tmcc.edu/meadow

ISSN: 0886-8654

Editor-in-Chief

Lindsay Wilson

Poetry Editors

Erika Bein

Joe Hunt

Fiction Editor

Mark Maynard

Non-Fiction Editor

Molly Lingenfelter

Editorial Board

Andrea Buchanan

Andrew Crimmins

Scott Goodin

Jeff Griffin

Annie Landrito

Nicole Lee

Ron Marston

Andrew Newbold

Tyler Nigro

Summer Ogilvie

Drew Pearson

Griffin Peralta

Roxanne Piskel

Georgia Russell

Logan Seidl

Hank Sosnowski

Alyson Stronach

Atha Trefethen

Neil Whitehurst

Anne Witzleben

Cover Art

Christopher Anthony Leibow

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mark Maynard	An Interview with Christopher Coake	68
Fiction		
Shelby Cook	Falling Slowly	57
Charles Rafferty	Modest Blouses and Flowing Skirts	85
Lauren Eyler	A Visitation	97
Justin Crawford	Death & Progeny	122
Non-Fiction		
Gerry LaFemina	Keep Your Stories to Yourself: The Failure of the Anecdote as Poem	10
Debra Fox	Paper Fragments	23
Melissa Laws	Seedlings	39
Robert Lively	Nonfiction, Apotropaics, and the Remembrances of Ourselves	54
Poetry		
Joseph Fasano	Moon in the Dark Pines	7
Simon Perchik	*	8
Simon Perchik	*	9
Steve Shilling	It's OK To Admit It	17
J. Patrick Lewis	Thirteen Ways of Squinting at a Poet	18
Mitch Grabois	Fortune	20
Daniel Aristi	<i>las manos</i> (the hands)	21
Stephen Christopher Schlatter	Ghazal Abandoned	38
Diane Hinkley	The Problem With Our Table	43
Brandon PeQueen	The Signal at the Intersection of Cypress and Star	44
Logan Seidl	How was Work Today	45
Emily Jewel	A Cup of Vanilla Ice Cream with Two Spoons	46
Andrea Buchanan	Down and Dirty Guide to Surviving a Holiday with My Family	47
Andrea Buchanan	Something like a Mom	48
Emily Jewel	Wild Flower	49
Adam Tavel	AD	50
Alyse K. Bensel	The Other Kids at Recess	51
Evan Adkins	A Walk In The Park	52
Colin Dodds	(Spill-O's Plan for America)	53
Anthony Frame	Everything I Know I Learned from Chaz Bono	62
Jane Rosenberg LaForge	Mickey Rooney Lives Within Us	64
Jane Rosenberg LaForge	The Last Days of Louis Armstrong	65
Tim Applegate	John Cassavetes	66
Joe Benevento	What Cannot Be Feigned	67
Angelo Perez	Bear	78

Angelo Perez	The Cat's Falsetto	79
Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán	Grown-up	80
Derek Annis	Hunger	82
Buck Feero	Redwoods	83
Elizabeth Atherton	He Went Ahead With It Anyway	86
Joshua Haskins	On the Slow Train to Narita	87
Stephen Christopher Schlatter	Lovers' Almanac	88
Jordan Sanderson	Outside of a Church, Thinking of You	89
Nancy Carol Moody	Rubbings	90
Sean Prentiss	Electric Juarez	91
Sean Prentiss	Our Scars: Five Poems	92
Shelby Cook	And Every Evening	93
Paul David Atkins	A Prayer for Healing My Wife's Mental Illness	94
Liza Porter	[Is it your giving in]	95
Caitlin Thomas	Sunday Best	96
Alyse K. Bensel	August This Year	102
Carlos Gomez	November	103
Noel Sloboda	Self-Portrait as a Stoat	104
A.J. Huffman	Portrait of a Woman Worrying Herself Farther From Sleep	105
David-Glen Smith	Fragmented Still Life with Cardoon and Parsnips	106
David-Glen Smith	The City Remains Inside You	108
David-Glen Smith	Twelve conversations with a Winter Moon	110
Jeff Hardin	Small Town Bliss	112
Jeff Hardin	To a Farmer Whose Fields are Ruined	113
Billy Reynolds	The Bluebird Boxes at the Delhi Water Treatment Plant	114
Daniel James Sundahl	Ransford Dodo at the Depot	115
T R Poulson	Lost Near Wingfield Springs	116
Davide Trame	Coming This Far	117
Jordan Sanderson	Downstream	118
Richard King Perkins II	Light Over the Kitchen Sink	119
Darren C. Demaree	With No Salt in Our Water #39	120
Michael Minassian	Postcard from Russia	121
Ruth Holzer	About Your Mama	126
Jane Rosenberg LaForge	Blood Less Language	127
Sean Sutherland	Vigil	128
Sean Sutherland	Chimney Swifts	129
Christopher Linforth	Another Bird Poem	130
Derek Annis	Communion	131
Angelo Perez	Various Ways to Observe Preciitation	132
Maria Musa	Giving Full Consent	133
Joanne Lowery	Riptide Stories	134
Joseph Fasano	Middletown, New York	135
Joseph Fasano	Still	137
Joseph Fasano	Ceremony	141

Art

Andrea Buchanan	The Prophet	25
Nicole Lee	A Walk in the Slum	26
Abraham Abebe	I See What You See	27
Abraham Abebe	Untitled III	28
Christopher Anthony Leibow	Deer Blue	29
Rachel Carbonell	Woman Reclining Pattern	30
Otha Vakseen Davis III	AudvantGardener	31
Otha Vakseen Davis III	Heartache Sit Down	32
Jeff Griffin	Found Art	33-37
Contributor Notes		143
Submission Guidelines		151

MOON IN THE DARK PINES

by Joseph Fasano

Tonight, however you tell it, my mother
is leaning down in her sleep to sniff of the linens
of her marriage bed

one last time, the birds of October
around her. What is winter
if not her firstborn, lying on the plowland

in his dark wool, wolf fur in his whalebone
buttons, his jackal heart curled
down again, in clove.

Nights like this
she would sing with him, leaning back
with a blossom on her forehead, keeping him

from the cadence of diminishment.
She would hold him from the wings of sip and scatter.
But the giants of Western music say *surrender*.

Always I discover her
in her night-things, the gold coins of nostalgia
in her fingers. She knows, as well as song

does, there is no cure. *O winter-*
ing, we lie
awhile, singing,

may beginning find no comfort in this house.

*

by Simon Perchik

To grip the Earth you climb
as if this paint
is still not sure it's safe

and though they're white
waves don't last in the dark
—each rung by now

in that slow rollover
they were trained for, one
to stay white, the others

bleeding as rain and step by step
—this ladder is losing curvature
leans against the house

half ramp, half shoreline
and all these stars
still clinging to sunlight

are used to your hand over hand
and yes, spilling a few drops
the way every sea is filled

overflows, lets you drink
from a sky that will light up

*

by Simon Perchik

The door knows why it opens
and still you're not used to it
could be a sound from the 40s

gutting this radio
the way all skies darken
fill with distances

—you listen for the slow turn
the Earth never forgot
though a hidden crack

keeps the room from exploding
and costs you nothing
has already started its climb

spreads out —with both arms
you begin to crawl
and not yet an old love song.

KEEP YOUR STORIES TO YOURSELF: THE FAILURE OF THE ANECDOTE AS POEM

by Gerry LaFemina

In “Lost Poem” Carol Lynne Knight begins: “I lost the poem for today/ and I apologize– losing poetry is like losing civilization./ But, of course, the poem wasn’t a poem yet/just a story with poetic possibilities.” Although the number of poems about poetry and writing poems has grown exponentially in recent years (critics of MFA programs will say this is due to a large number of poets knowing little of life outside of the academy), this poem’s wisdom is not found in what has to say about the poet’s search for the lost poem but in lines three and four, in which she says the poem wasn’t a poem yet, just a story with poetic possibilities. Knight is establishing that there is a difference between story and poem–something, we must assume, that isn’t just found in the use of line

One of the criticisms of the MFA program culture in the late 90s (this went hand in hand with the trends of New Formalism) was that much free verse poetry sounded like chopped up prose—a legitimate criticism of individual poets and poems, surely, although a generalization, and therefore, like all generalities, ultimately problematic—such statements tend to be driven by an aesthetic or cultural agenda. Since Knight’s poem is obviously written as free verse, we have to assume that traditional thoughts of prosody are not what she’s considering here. Thus, we’re left to wonder: what differentiates a story from a poem. Critic Jonathan Culler suggests that “a poem is both a structure made of words (a text) and an event (an act of the poet, an experience of the reader, an event in literary history)” (73-74). The *story* of any poem, it might be said, must transcend itself to become an event, not just for the writer but for the reader. In other words, the poet must keep in mind what Pound says: “one reads prose for the subject matter” (61), and therefore any poem that is just its story—just its subject matter—is ultimately not doing its job.

As a teacher and as a reader, I often encounter what I call the poem of pure anecdote. It’s a poem that tells a story and what’s driving the story is just the story—I don’t know why the story is being told, don’t know why poetry is the choice for such a story, and, even if the poem is well crafted, I turn the page and read the next poem without any reflection. The poem was a story, in other words, but it was not an experience. It lacked what Robert Bly likes to call *heat*.

Which is to say one should never be able to paraphrase a poem. We can ask what any story is about and have it distilled to the essentials of plot. Poems, on the other hand, are not so easy to reduce—perhaps because in a poem language has already been distilled to its most potent (“best words, best order”) or perhaps, as Longinus suggested about Sappho, that poems function as a kind of *sunodos*—a nexus in which “narrative” is only one of the many elements that are held together by the

poem's voice. He notes: "that one cause of sublimity is the choice of the most striking circumstances involved in whatever we are describing, and, further, the power of afterwards combining them into one animate whole. The reader is attracted partly by the selection of the incidents, partly by the skill which has welded them together" (X,1 para 22). Whereas in fiction, it might be argued, the storyline holds everything together (narrator/point of view is an *aspect* of fiction), in poetry—particularly since the Romantic era—it's the psychological construct of voice that the reader mimics by reading in lines. As poet Carol Muske puts it this way, "what takes place in a poem is a kind of conversion process—the reader's attention approximates the attention enacted within the poem, the reader participates as witness, the reader finally 'becomes' the voice speaking the poem" (47).

Story, then, is not enough: we have to have some access to the emotional/ psychological/ spiritual underpinnings of the story because as Billy Collins puts it, "if a poem succeeds for us, we reach a point at which our consciousness sinks into the speaker's. We might even feel that we have replaced the poet and that we, not he, are uttering the words" (14).

Again and again we're brought to mind this notion of poem as experience, as an event. The problem with the anecdote, in the end, is that we *know* how the story ends, but when we are experiencing something new—when we are in the midst of a story—we don't know how it ends. In other words, the anecdote already knows its truth, therefore when writing such a poem Richard Hugo suggests the poet's "impulse [is] to push language around to make it accommodate what he has already conceived to be the truth" (4).

Rather than tackle some poems of my peers and cause a brouhaha (tempting as it is), and rather than take some poems from my students who have already heard me talk about the shortcomings of their "anecdotal poems," what I thought I would do was take what Richard Hugo calls a trigger and write three poems: two of which are in the style of the anecdote, and one in which I try to transcend the story and its trigger. The trigger in this case is remembering a photograph of an ex-girlfriend, some friends and me, one summer on St. Mark's Place when we are 16. I won't say much more about the photograph because other details become clear in the poems.

The first anecdote-poem I wrote as a draft that led me to think about why it was failing and thereby led, indirectly, to the writing of this essay.

Snapshot

In the photograph I'm pushing
a shopping cart with Laura in it
along St. Mark's Place. She's laughing. I am too.
Because Dave & Adam are wearing t-shirts
I know it's late spring or summer.
The happiest days of our lives
are in our futures & involve neither of us.

But in that moment we're carefree,
the cart rattling on its hard wheels,
her body shaking with pleasure, my hands, also
trembling as if we knew what were to come.

As a lyric poem, it attempts to 'stop time' by focusing on this event. The poem's "truths" are pretty commonplace, particularly having written as many poems as I have about my youth: as adolescents we think we are in the best times of our lives, but it's not true; those things we think will last forever at 16 usually don't. Yawn.

That said, the poem tries to butt its head, unsuccessfully, against being just anecdote. The first line break on "pushing" emphasizes the desire to push against its own beliefs, there's also the notion of trying to "sell" something (to push drugs) emphasized by the shopping cart in line two. The way the lines are ordered attempt to call into question the anecdotes preordained truths: "The happiest days of our lives" as the center line of the poem functions as a hinge: at first the poem seems to say such summer days were "the happiest days of our lives," but the sentence continues beyond the line break to note that "the happiest days of our lives/ are in our futures...." This sense of the future—of what's next— is hinted in the two line breaks (one near the beginning of the poem, one near the end): "too" and "also" emphasizing more is on the way.

Ultimately, though, the poem sticks to its triggering event: the photograph of pushing Laura in a shopping cart and the quick 'story' associated with it. It uses poetic techniques to function as "a kind of Prose Avoidance System" (Collins 9), but there's not much poetry in this, not much engagement of the experience.

Here's a much more narrative engagement of the anecdote poem focusing less on the photograph and more on the day itself. Because it was pretty much stillborn in its inception, it doesn't even have a working title.

That spring Saturday on St. Mark's Place
wasting time window shopping in record stores

& head shops, waiting for whatever punk show
was going to shake us sweaty & dumb later,

Laura & I with some friends swapping
stories about whatever others missed

the night or week before. Typical, but that day
we found an empty shopping cart

at the curbside & excited, I helped Laura
get inside that little cage, then pushed

her East toward Tompkins Square where
junkies nodded off into their hypodermic dreams

&schizophrenic homeless monks muttered
their ecstatic visions to Saint Nobody.

How they'd envy our buggy & how I thought
everyone would envy me—Adam & Dave Smagalla

& Jimmy Farrell as I pushed Laura, whom I said I loved,
pushed her into our laughter while tourists snapped

photographs of a moment I thought
would be held in a frame forever.

I didn't think the original treatment of the material could be worse, but perhaps I managed in this version. In this one, I've fleshed out the story as best as I can remember: we found a shopping cart (where? how? I don't remember...), Laura got in, and I pushed her down St. Mark's Place to Tompkin's Square Park because we were young and still unbuttoned enough to do something so fun. Big deal. The poem's truth, ultimately, is the same truth as the first one: when these events happen we think they're going to be eternally important, but they aren't: "I thought/ would be held in a frame forever." The line break on "thought" emphasizes the inherent inaccuracy of this belief. Insofar as that most of us over a certain age have experienced this sensation, the truth is nothing more than nostalgia for a good old days that never were.

What's more interesting to me, in reading it is how the speaker attempts to conflate his sense of self in the poem—"everyone would envy me" because he was pushing the cart, because he had the girl, because the ego is essentially insecure in adolescence: it's the moment in the poem that is the most truthful in its insecure bravado.

However, because it attempts to add more narrative tissue to the triggering event than "Snapshot," this poem becomes more bogged down by storyline, and feels even moreso like chopped up prose, despite the attempt to use couplets to emphasize the relationship, the carts parallel tracks, the relationship between the present and the past. The anecdote ends at Tompkins Square Park. Why? Because I don't remember anything else about that day: the only thing special was the shopping cart. As a writer, I am forced—by writing the anecdote, by staying with the trigger—to find the common conclusion, that expected wisdom, of not being able to hold those times beyond their lifespans.

For such subject matter to compel the reader, to become an event, to have duende, to have the lyric experience become part of our own experience, the poet has to actually find something beyond the anecdote, has to discover the *heat* in the anecdote that has kept it alive in his/her consciousness for so long. Hugo suggests "a poem can be said to have two subjects, the initiating or triggering subject, which starts the poem or 'causes' the poem to be written, and the real or generated subject, which the poem comes to say or mean" (4). In the case of *this* story, this trigger-

ing event, I have so far never found the generated subject.

Fortunately, as the saying goes, the third time is the charm:

A Photograph on St. Mark's Place

I thought in the photograph I was pushing
the shopping cart, Laura's fearful, excited smile
wind-red with spring as she careened
in that little cage, the hard wheels shaking her
at every rut of St. Mark's Place. But it's not me

it's Adam, so maybe I held the camera
wanting to capture this one moment-how free
she seemed, how happy
perhaps because I no longer pushed the cart?
Such is the ubiquity of 16's insecurity...

She is smiling at me after all
& so is Dave Smagalla & Adam & the other guy
whose name has long disappeared like so much else
we believed we'd never forget.
I still know Laura's birthday, still send her a note

because she was smiling at me after all
& even if I didn't know what it mean when I said it
I told her *I love you*. Did I mention
I gave her the tatters of my virginity, that she was
the first young woman I held all night

just to listen to her breathe?
I keep saying I've learned from my mistakes
& maybe I will someday. In the photo my friends smile
—so not punk rock— & Laura laughs
because it's spring & she's 16 & she believes

what I've told her, believes what she told me, too.
That moment is captured in this snapshot
which I still look at sometimes
if only to marvel at the beaming faces
of strangers pointing at us from the background.

Unlike the other attempts at dealing with this subject, in this poem, the speaker moves between the event and the “today” and finding not the hackneyed wisdom of “I didn't know then what I know now” but rather a much more complicated wisdom that accepts a Socratic know-nothingness still: “I keep saying I've learned from my mistakes/ & maybe I will someday.”

The material of the “story” is also spaced out between other thoughts,

more accurately mirroring the connectivity of thoughts. The poem begins with immediacy like others—there's the girl in the shopping cart, but Hugo informs us we have to get away from the triggering subject as soon as we can: in this case moving to speculation as to why the remembered event and the photograph are at odds.

The poem also gives more details about the complexity of the relationship between the speaker and the young woman, and—I admit—enters into the land of fiction in terms of that relationship: “I gave her the tatters of my virginity...she was/ the first young woman I held all night//just to listen to her breathe”; Laura is described as being in a little cage the speaker has controlled; the speaker admits to insecurity in the relationship when he is not “pushing the cart.” By complicating the nature of the relationship, the poem expands the emotional range of the reader's experience.

More to the point, the poem begins in doubt: “I *thought* in the photograph I was pushing/ the shopping cart,” which allows for the reader to join the speaker in an exploration of this event, which is suddenly *not* what the speaker thought and thus not a personal story. The anecdote has changed, even as the core event—pushing an adolescent girl friend in a shopping cart—remains the same. Doubt infuses the poem: the speaker was insecure about his relationship, doubts he has learned anything, doubts his own memory. In other words, this poem engenders ambivalence, where as the other two poems celebrate a kind of accepted truth.

Someone is calling *foul* here because this poem is significantly longer than the others, but its length is in direct response to the ambition of the poem: in this poem I am no longer interested in telling a story that I knew, but rather I'm attempting to find in that story what I didn't know. This is an important distinction. Like the other two poems this is a lyric poem as defined by Muske as “the expression of the ‘inexpressible,’ epitomized by the fleeting moment ... Outside of time and connected to a speaking voice, a living person” (42). In this case, the moment in time held is not the moment of finding the shopping cart with his friends, but the moment of time of realizing everything I thought I remembered about that moment and the photograph was wrong. It's the moment not of the anecdote but of reflection upon the anecdote that is the lyric experience.

In her wonderful study *Poetic Closure: A Study of How Poems End*, Barbara Hernstein Smith talks about this issue in this way, suggesting that the “narrative lyric” poem is closely related to anecdote (whereas the strictly narrative poem is related to “tale”) but ultimately is more than anecdote. Her discussion of Matthew Arnold's “East London” is helpful but needs some annotation:

’Twas August, and the fierce sun overhead
Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green,
And the pale weaver, through his windows seen
In Spitalfields, looked thrice dispirited.

I met a preacher there I knew, and said:

"Ill and o'erworked, how fare you in this scene?" -
"Bravely!" said he; "for I of late have been
Much cheered with thoughts of Christ, the living bread."

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,

To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam -
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!
Thou mak'st the heaven thou hop'st indeed thy home. (Qtd in
Smith 124)

Although the opening eight lines are anecdotal, the sonnet form's requirement of a shift allows for the turn—some commentary—on the story: "O human soul!" stops the narrative, and suggest now the speaker rhapsodizes on the experience. The lyric poem is an utterance of held time, and Herrnstein Smith suggests that "time is stopped before the conclusion and ... the speaker concludes by ... 'framing' the anecdote with some indication of why he told it in the first place (124).

Anecdote—story—can be a crucial element in any lyric poem. Story gives context for experience and can expand the emotional waters of the poem for the reader, and it allows for some temporal structure to carry the reader through the poem. To help the reader engage with/participate in the experience of the speaker, a story—or story fragments—may help contextualize the lyric moment. But anecdote alone doesn't make a poem any more than rhyme and meter make a poem, any more than line breaks alone make a poem, any more than attention to music and sound make a poem. The poem is an event, an experience, and we are asking the reader to go for a ride with us. It best be worth his/her while.

Works Cited

- Collins, Billy. "Poetry, Pleasure and the Hedonist Reader." *The Eye of the Poet*. David Citino, ed. New York: Oxford U P, 2002. 1-33.
- Culler, Jonathan. *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. New York: Oxford U P, 1997.
- Herrnstein Smith, Barbara. *Poetic Closure: A Study in How Poems End*. Chicago: U Chicago P, 1968.
- Hugo, Richard. *The Triggering Town*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1979.
- Knight, Lynn. "The Lost Poem." *Quantum Entanglements*. Talahassee: Apalachee P, 2011. 8.
- Longinus. "On the Sublime." *Project Gutenberg* 10 March 2006.
<<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/17957/17957-h/17957-h.htm>>.
- Muske, Carol. "What is a Poem?" *The Eye of the Poet*. David Citino, ed. New York: Oxford U P, 2002. 34-60.
- Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. New York: New Directions, 1960.

IT'S OK TO ADMIT IT

by Steve Shilling

Let's get this out of the way
first. You don't like this poem.
I'm not sure I do either and
will offer no apologies that
it does not have the injury
riddled attention deficit that
so many do on these blogs
and zines. So many kids
who sat in English 455
were told they were good.
They read some Kafka
and Kerouac and believed
they had found themselves.

This isn't about the loves
I've lost. We've all moved on.
This is about a tin can, sitting
on a fence rusting with three
dents and four BB holes in it.
I've read Dickenson. The hell
with it. She wanted to get laid
too. I don't have an MFA or
a fellowship. I've got a riding
mower with a snowblade and
a satellite dish with 157 channels.

I'm not attaching this to a lamppost
on the corner of Haight-Ashbury
in the name of art. Not going to
use my lead singer of a rock band
status to get my book published.
You think it's too angry? It's not
angry. You're angry. Shut up.
So someone took too long in the
coffee shop line this morning
or cut you off while talking on
a cell phone, or that I'm catching
some rays on a boat just off
the Florida Keys. Think about
one thing from your childhood
that made you happy. So you
don't like this poem. Tear it out

of this journal. Stick it in the pocket of your jeans. Hand it to the first face you see today that gives away that they lost their dream along the way too.

THIRTEEN WAYS OF SQUINTING AT A POET

by J. Patrick Lewis

I

When a poet cuts himself shaving, it's just practice.

II

For those who would make madness their occupation,
"poet" becomes a four-letter word.

III

Novelists fall in love with their characters;
poets accept blind dates with enchantment.

IV

A poet is like baseball's cleanup hitter waiting
to cause a commotion in the left-field stanzas.

V

Weak poems are a symptom of adjectivitis.

VI

Everyone looks for the light at the end of the tunnel.
The poet looks for the tunnel at the end of the light.

VII

A poet traces her genealogy back to the midwife
of the alphabet.

VIII

She who seeks to amplify the sound of silence is a poet.

IX

Lubricate the flywheel of the rusted poem
with refined metaphor.

X

Those are not visionaries straining to reach new heights,
but poets climbing rickety ladders to castles in the air.

XI

The poetaster seeks the sentimental glow of the word;
the poet kindles the frosted fire of the line.

XII

A poet is a tightrope walker who refuses the net *and* the bar.

XIII

Why should a poet be bound by the truth?
Novelists never are.

FORTUNE

by Mitch Grabois

It was a Saturday night and the waitress was busy
but I thought I had the right to a fortune
and I was at least mildly annoyed:
I had crumbled my cookie and found it empty

I didn't get a fortune, I told her
I held out my hand
and showed her the fortuneless shards of cookie

It's not a full Chinese meal if it doesn't end with a fortune
I depend on fortunes to give me guidance
to keep me from making missteps
to tie me into the karmic forces of the Universe

She stood over me
her shiny black dress tight on her pudgy body
No news good news, she said

LAS MANOS

by Daniel Aristi

(the hands)

at the end of the leash of your arms, and spidery mind of their very own
skeleton hands cling-wrapped in flimsy living –
are you still the auriga of your chariot/body they're keying forward
then sharpen 'em edges and go knife out some standard of living...
the man with the stumps may not regret them two stranglers
that he lost to a *Camaro* assembly line, he says:
life's easier when choices are less.
fortune cookie stuff to you, scoff, but then he cannot grab his head
in despair either, can he? so he stays there, upright and grave
out of purest necessity.

PAPER FRAGMENTS

by Debra Fox

It turns out, without its workers, a wasp nest undergoes irrevocable change. Although still beautiful and delicate, the nest begins to degrade. Its skin is no longer impervious to moisture, and it starts to cave in on itself. What the living wasps were doing to keep it vibrant, I don't know, but without them, it withers into nothingness. What was once so teeming with life is inexorably in decline and this is what I am having difficulty reconciling myself to.

Without the Queen wasp the nest wouldn't exist at all, because it is she who scavenges her environment in early spring for wood fiber and other materials naturally occurring in the environment, such as plastic from pools, or nylon from trampolines. She chews these materials thoroughly with her strong jaws, and then spits out a papery substance and molds it into a swirling circle with distinct bands. Inside are hexagonal cells that will house the rest of the colony. She builds the nest until it is the size of a walnut, then lays her eggs, and fertilizes them with dormant sperm she stores deep within herself. So important is the construction of the nest, that she has no need to be preoccupied with the business of mating. Once the sterile females hatch, they finish construction of the nest, making way for the next generation.

Wasps put me in mind of twelfth-century Puebloans who chiseled into the sandstone cliffs of Mesa Verde to build intricate villages. For nearly one hundred years they labored, resulting in the construction of a myriad of rooms, passageways and alcoves, while still farming the mesa tops. A prospector named S.E. Osborn, trudging through a pinyon and juniper forest on a snowy day in 1884, happened upon what is now called "Balcony House." With forty rooms, it contained chambers and plazas and passageways. Much to Osborn's dismay, however, the structures were in varying states of deterioration from centuries of water, wind, freeze/thaw cycles, and a variety of animals. Evidently, even edifices made of stone require upkeep if they are to endure.

Like the cliff dwellings of Mesa Verde, a wasp's nest can support a population of up to ten thousand. Once the sterile females get the nest to the size of a small Japanese lantern, they go out into the world, inject venom into spiders, bees and flies, paralyze them, and then deposit their eggs inside of them. The unwilling hosts stay alive just until the young wasps reach maturity. With a new generation of wasps comes a greater need for more cells in the nest.

Last summer, a wasp stung my husband as he was trimming our Japanese Maple. Without realizing, he severed the branch from which the nest hung. The elegant papery sphere bounced along the sidewalk until it came to a rest. Despite his hesitation to destroy the colony, he sealed the hole from which the wasps came and went. The next day, and for days after that, groups of wasps, in twos and threes, hovered where the nest once dangled, seemingly mystified. Soon after, I noticed a handful of dead wasps scattered on the sidewalk, their bodies almond shaped, with translucent wings. My dog avoided them, wouldn't even lean over and sniff them. A clutch of sparrows alighted next to the wasps, and first tentatively, then more confidently, pecked at them. The next day the wasps were gone. The nest, however, remained, and started to sink into itself, and I wondered what I would find if I cut into it.

Strangely, I couldn't walk past that nest without thinking about my father-in-law. True, he died on an oppressively hot June day, not unlike the one when the nest fell. And like the nest, there was a "sinking in" process underway, especially around his eyes, when I first saw him at the funeral home. An unstoppable change was transpiring, because no living face could possibly be caving into itself, deflating in quite that manner. Whatever life-force was left within him was slipping inwards, until it was no more. I kept repeating the words "sleeping death" to myself in the funeral home. Yet I knew these words didn't belong together, didn't quite line up with what was happening to him. Sleep implies one will eventually awaken, and my father-in-law, dressed in that tweed sports coat and knit tie, clearly wasn't going to blink back to life. Whatever the equivalent process is of sparrows to wasps, he would soon experience it. There was no interrupting his collapse.

Queen wasps typically live one year. As the days begin growing shorter, and the autumn chill sets in, Queens run out of stored sperm and they die off. Their hard exoskeletons weaken; their delicate wings go dusty; their eyes begin to dry out. The young Queens are left behind to hibernate.

Perhaps the Sioux Indians had it right when they placed their dead on burial platforms. They set four posts firmly into the ground and connected them with cross pieces of wood hewn to one another for security. The platform was elevated six to eight feet off the ground. The tribe would then witness the natural deterioration of its members, helped along by exposure to rain, wind, freezing temperatures, and wild animals. I sometimes wonder whether I would have the fortitude to watch a human being decay, that is, go from recent death to total decomposition, the way the Sioux did.

Now that all but a few papery fragments are left of the nest, I find I miss examining it, watching it wither day after day. But I am not as troubled by the nest's destruction, as I was immediately after it hap-

pened. Being privy to the process of degradation has quenched something inside of me, closed a loop that has settled my restless mind. Before long all vestiges that it existed will be gone. It will snow, and a soft white veil will coat the sidewalk. But I don't think I will soon forget the wasps, their yellow and black striped bodies lying inert on my cement sidewalk, looking from afar as if dressed in tweed jackets.

THE PROPHET

by Andrea Buchanan

Second Place Art Award



A WALK IN THE SLUM

by Nicole Lee

First Place Art Award



I SEE WHAT YOU SEE

by Abraham Abebe



UNTITLED III
by Abraham Abebe



DEER BLUE

by Christopher Anthony Leibow



WOMAN RECLINING PATTERN

by Rachel Carbonell



AUDVANTGARDENER

by Otha Vakseen Davis III



HEARTACHE SIT DOWN

by Otha Vakseen Davis III



by Jeff Griffin

The following work I found discarded at various locations around the desert in 2012, mostly in abandoned trailers and homesteads.

DAN RATHER

FLY SPRAY

NOSE Spray

Non Aspirin

Shoe Polish

Arch Support

BRUSH FOR CAT

Deck of Cards

Toilet

Bibbics

Socks

1" x 3"

Bucket Chicken



Wet skitty sock

1800-556-5157

242 102 8228

71704

1885 7.99/

Cool Aid



GHAZAL ABANDONED

by Stephen Christopher Schlatter

I was just a kid. I didn't fucking know a thing back then.
But you were crack pipe on the floor, obscene back then.

I would lay in my bed, listening to you singing drunkenly
To Willie Nelson's song, "Dreams Come True," back then.

Dog's tied up, go in for a drink, come back out, he is dead.
I don't know what else I could say or scream back then.

Priests in the middle of the night, scaring the hell out of little
Kids. I didn't even know what "exorcism" meant, back then.

Foster homes are neat. Boys eating, sleeping, and shitting
Outside and girls being molested repeatedly inside back then.

I forgot to thank you for that nice vacation. Remember
The one with the padded walls and iron screens back then?

I'm tired of being asked, "Chris, are you okay?" I never
Know what to say, too afraid what it will bring back, from then.

SEEDLINGS

by Melissa Laws

The Meadow Non-Fiction Award

The dense tree lines of tall Douglas Firs and the squat Juniper trees of northern California flying by my driver's side window give way to alfalfa and grass in southern Oregon. Bitter red of chokecherries blur in the corners of my eyes, the whinny of excited horses and familiar smell of grazing cattle floats in through the open windows of my car and the radio station has turned to static. I am almost there. The open fields and rolling hills of my aunt and uncle's ranch come over the horizon as the road that has guided me from childhood through adolescence and now adulthood disappears under my spinning wheels. I surrender to the country, leaving the cold steel casinos and monochromatic beige of desert behind me.

A thirty-year-old, double-wide mobile home with the heart of a castle peeks up over the last ridge, a small white speck in a sparse cropping of old trees. The nearest field, green, ready for harvest, zips past. Already my mind races with memories; a lifetime of thoughts and feelings pour into my head. Glancing out the window again, I see the brown wood of the warped and discolored fence creeping and winding around the ranch and the road. Chuckling aloud, I can hardly drive this short stretch of ranch from first gate to last without imagining myself in the driver's seat of an old rusty Chevy truck, barely thirteen, and determined to drive like hell.

My two older teenage cousins Heather and Kellie sat next to me on the dusty bench seat, my teachers and sidekicks in mischief every summer, and discussed the novelty of this excursion. It was my first time on a real road, not a dirt path or horse enclosure. After a quick check of mirrors, I moved the gear on the steering column into Drive. When the thick rubber tires met the searing, hot blacktop, I pushed the gas pedal to the floor. The tachometer swung to red and the engine greedily burned through golden fuel in moments. Unfortunately, excitement quickly gave way to a fire of expletives when a huge mistake became apparent. My destination was far closer than I realized - the entry gate appeared quicker than a charging bull. The Chevy's tires lost traction as the back bumper began to swing ahead of me in a cloud of dust and burning breaks. All at once the world ceased to spin; we found ourselves inches from a very large and very solid pine tree.

It is behind this tree I park my car now, sun shining through the boughs and glimmering off a much smaller puff of dust. Nearly twenty years later, I can still hear my two cousins' screams. A grin lingers on my lips, knowing we were up to no good that day.

There is not an inch of these four-hundred fifty acres in which I have not sowed a part of me. As I look out the windshield of my parked car, I see my uncle across the field on his quad. A man rarely found without whiskey in one hand and a chocolate in the other, he is plowing down the dirt road from the reservoir on the back of the property. When he finally sees me, I already know he will dismount his favorite toy with the un-

steadiness of a newborn foal, tip his cowboy hat and say in his rough and rosy voice, "How are ya, little girl?" His cream-colored hat hides thinning hair, and a shiny silver buckle will be nestled against a growing waist, his words don't always come out right, and he can no longer ride the horses; however, as I gaze through the alfalfa, I see a young girl staring wild eyed as this man rounds up cattle on the back of a big white gelding named Chief, blessed with a shoulder bone like a knife. She helped move hand pipe early that morning, and is already turning pink on her shoulders and cheeks; she bends to rub her knee absentmindedly.

Darkness rose with me every morning that summer, twisting my arm as I awoke to the artificial glow of seventy-watts. The coyotes outside my window yipped and barked at the cattle, making our nearly-sleeping dogs anxious. Alan Jackson serenaded me with "Chattahoochee" on the radio, his voice in mangled harmony with the coyotes. Crawling out of bed, the smell of eggs, bacon and potatoes drew me to the kitchen, my stomach growling for the only meal when we didn't eat beef. I would take my seat at the worn wooden table next to well-used hand tools piled atop each other, dreams still lingering in my eyes. Aunt Alta, the soft-spoken wife of a rancher, greeted me with chocolate milk in a mason jar and a warm smile. My cousin Heather, sixteen years old, and awkwardly stuck between girl and woman, peered at me through glasses as thick as Coke bottles and dark curls around her face. We seemed to always be giggling at one silly thing or another. Long before our bellies relinquished their hungry complaints, my uncle, up earlier than the rooster, would anxiously hurry us through our meal.

The field of alfalfa was not completely square, forcing us to utilize hand pipe for the acres of land where rolling sprayers could not go. Hopping out of the truck every few rows of green, the herd of children unlatched and moved one section of pipe at a time. The smell of dew on vegetation and bug spray filled our noses. The sun and heat creeping up over the horizon drew out the mosquitos we all desperately swatted away. My muscles burned when I balanced a long pole twice as long as I was tall, much like a tight rope walker balances his pole swaying this way and that. Maneuvering each individual pipe to just the right place allowed a long, unhindered line of water to flow into the ground. I worked with my sweat and bare hands to bring little seedlings up from the ground after their roots had taken hold, encouraging them to stand upright on their own and weather the elements. Every morning I moved silently and cohesively with my family, my mind wandering around the ranch and to my parents back home.

My aunt's father passed away while I was at the ranch. My cousins sold their 4-H steers for butchering at the fair. One of the many dogs running loose had been run over by a car, its life extinguished with a bullet, and the chicken pen had been raided by another dog that had killed all of the chickens. But amidst the life and death on the ranch, every day saw growth, and I was no exception to these changes. I too had a growth, and no amount of rubbed-on dirt could have made it disappear.

Just as the seedlings changed from tiny buds to full stalks, my body

changed in tandem. Grasping at control of my wild and untamed hormones, a few rogue cells in my body popped up like the rebellious weeds the alfalfa fought. As the weeks on the ranch passed and the sun grew hotter, a lump the size of a baseball on my leg grew as well. A tumor was feeding on the bone above my right knee and threatened to cease maturation like a combine tearing through a field. My family, who lovingly answered aches and pains with an offer to “cut it off,” dismissed my concern. With reassurance from the people I trusted, I too dismissed the nagging lump. I spent the remainder of summer scraping my ankles on bailing wire and washing off in the reservoir under the scorching rays of midday sun. And when my aunt called for dinner, I dragged my heavy legs across the linoleum floor and peered through blurry eyes at the table full of food. Before summer ended, the alfalfa brushed my knees, and the lump became just another part of me.

I watch my uncle gain distance on the road; an occasional cow moos when he disrupts their laziness. A breeze blows soft tendrils of hair against my cheek, while a dog barks in the distance from a pen by the house. I turn the static off the radio, lean my head against the car seat and close my eyes. The smile has dimmed from my mouth, and my brows furrow. I let out a long and airy sigh and think about what I didn't know that summer as I moved pipe, climbed hay stacks, rode horses and ran through the rows of seedlings trying not to crush them. When I leave, I will leave the ranch with an over-freckled face and a farmer's tan on my toned arms, waving good-bye to another year of my adolescence. I will also finally see a doctor.

I wouldn't find out the seriousness of my lump until the doctors would tell me surgery could not be avoided. They would tell me, “Don't worry, you are in good hands.” My doctor, a skinny man who slouched when he walked, with grey hair growing wildly out of his ears and glasses too big for his head, would smile at me, pat my leg, and make some notes on his chart. I would decide I didn't like him. He smelled like antiseptic and Old Spice. But, a few weeks later under anesthesia the tumor would come out. In his office, Dr. Hairy Ears would display his handiwork proudly when he slid the x-rays over the light box on the wall. There, hanging in bizarre negative photographs, my leg will have a chunk missing as if the doctor became hungry and bit into my bone like a Golden-Delicious apple.

“The marrow and bone will grow back.” He'll look at me. “It will never be as smooth as the rest of your bones, but you should be thankful we got it when we did.”

Wide eyed, still staring at my apple core femur, the Frankenstein-incision will burn under the bulky white bandage on my leg.

“If the tumor had grown any further, we would have had to cut into the growth plate,” he'll pause for emphasis, “which in turn would have ceased growth on that leg.”

My parents will gasp or hug or do cartwheels, but walking out of the

office on my crutches, the words of my doctor will blow away in the wind and I'll continue to be a thirteen-year-old kid.

With my mind stuck somewhere between the ranch and the hospital, a rumble disrupts my daydream, and I catch myself rubbing the scar next to my knee through thick jeans. It is as pale and flush as my skin now, and often I forget it's there. I came very near never running again, never jumping, never moving pipe at the beloved ranch and ironically for my family, my ailment did need to be cut off. But now, most of the children have moved away, and the alfalfa fields are leased to neighboring ranchers. Chief has long since passed on to the big pasture in the sky, and the chicken pen still sits empty and broken. The mesh lies twisted and toppled on the posts, dry sticks and dirt blown against the walls. The reservoir we swam in every summer remains full, and the view from the ridge at the top of the property continues to offer the most beautiful view of southern Oregon I know.

The engine of the camo-covered machine my uncle is riding cuts next to my SUV. My legs are stiff and my aching back longs to bend another direction. In a funny kind of way I could never move a pipe now; my body is as mangled inside as the chicken pen is outside. I swing open my door, Alan Jackson and the song of that summer comes into my head, "...never knew how much that muddy water meant to me, but I learned how to swim and I learned who I was, a lot about livin' and a little 'bout love..."

"How are ya, little girl?" my uncle says to me, climbing off his quad.

Turning his face toward me, sweat beads form on his forehead, his cheeks are flush from wind, and his warm and familiar smile welcome me back.

"Hi, Uncle Ed. How's the reservoir?" A dog jumps on my leg, leaving dirty paw prints. My uncle swings his cane to shoo the dog, and I slip my hand into his. He doesn't remember now my ever having a tumor. Cut off and nearly forgotten, the tumor is also a distant memory of mine; unlike the alfalfa that returns to life in the spring, it has remained dead in the frozen ground of winter.

Leaving my thoughts in the field, we turn to walk to the house; my aunt is making steak for dinner.

THE PROBLEM WITH OUR TABLE

by Diane Hinkley

Third Place Poetry Award

There is something about two white
Bowls filled with stale
Cereal on opposite ends
That causes our table
To grow exponentially.

Maybe it is the endless
Possibilities the morning offers.
We could still cut the table down
To a reasonable size later in the day,
But you don't like to spend your free
Time working, and I'm not good at fixing
Things.

And by the time dinner rolls around
Those possibilities vanish
And settling becomes easier to swallow.

Remember when we first got it?
When we sat there we were
So close that I could see the crinkles
In the corner of your eyes when you smiled.
We used to spend so much time teasing
and exchanging witty banter that we got used
to eating our mashed potatoes lukewarm.

But, because of our growing table,
We can't banter or tease
Because we are forced to yell across it
And when we yell banter it sounds like fights
And when we yell teases they sound like criticisms

Now,
My mouth burns from mashed potatoes
And you are so far away from me
That it is impossible for me
To see you smile.

So what are we going to do
About our table?

THE SIGNAL AT THE INTERSECTION OF CYPRESS AND STAR

by Brandon PeQueen

Second Place Poetry Award

On the sidewalk of a corner gas station,
there's a man by the stoplight in jeans and sneakers
and a dirty sweatshirt with the hood cinched tight
carrying a bucket of roses. He's an entrepreneur,
capitalizing on the holiday and men's guilt.
Every ten, fifteen minutes, one of my fellow office drones
walks from our office building
to the man by the stoplight across the street
and buys a single red rose.
Occasionally, some charmer buys two
of the flowers for his lucky girl.
I had a free moment, so I set out across the street
and purchased a single rose at a reasonable price.
I think about Van Gogh,
and how he cut off his ear for a woman.
Stupid, insane, a hopeless romantic.
But it was clear he loved her
one whole ear's worth.
But Van Gogh was an artist, not a musician.
He wasn't cutting off his painting hand for this girl.
Of all the body parts you can cut off
for love, he picked the one that impacted him
the least. Even an insane romantic like Van Gogh could've done more.
I rationalize about how if I buy one
rose, or a dozen, or cut my ear off,
it doesn't really prove how much I love her.
So who cares if I only love her
a stoplight-rose-bought-during-my-smoke-break worth?
I certainly don't love her an ear's worth.

HOW WAS WORK TODAY

by Logan Seidl

I thought you would never ask. Jennifer got engaged over the weekend and you should see her ring. To pay for it, he must have sold Republican t-shirts after the debate to people waiting in line for their free rides back to their cars, holding a cup marked "I don't take handouts. I just need to build a new road." But it was worth every hour in the sun and every drop of plasma. I wonder if he went to Jared? The way it shined under those new 100 watt bulbs had every woman in the building fizzling. No longer was Jennifer's fiancé the weird computer gamer, in a clan with prepubescent boys, going on guilds planned every night starting at 6:00 p.m. Eastern time that cannot be missed unless there is a death in the family with documented proof. Now the women are asking him what Red Bull tastes like without the Vodka in it, because he is smooth as a male swimmer who is ready for the Olympics, with an endorsement from Wheaties because he is going to be a winner. Mr. Perkins is my father. Just call me Bartholomew, and no I don't have time to have it drilled and filled now. Maybe we can reschedule? Mondays are my busy days.

A CUP OF VANILLA ICE CREAM WITH TWO SPOONS

by Emily Jewel

Every Thursday, the marriage of Old Spice and Jean Naté announces a sweet older couple as they purposefully enter double glass doors. A heartfelt smile outlined in bright pink, sincerely enhanced by lipstick-touched teeth, is kissed often by her husband's mustached-topped mouth. In emphatic agreement on the silliness of umbrellas, they seem happiest after being soaked on their walk to the bus.

She wears an off-center blonde wig with pencil drawn brows and pearled clip-on earrings, which complement his careful comb-over, crisp ironed shirt, and the meticulously sewn denim patch on the elbow of his left sleeve.

Their order: one cup of vanilla ice cream with two spoons. Her shaky, spotted hand reaches out with exact change: four quarters, one nickel, two pennies.

At the third booth, illuminated by the desert's setting sun, Alma and Nancy laugh, alternately dipping their spoons in the clear cup between them, until it's empty.

Two Thursdays, devoid of Old Spice and Jean Naté, pass.

The next week, Alma stands at the register in his wrinkled shirt. *One senior coffee, please.*

He sits at their table, staring beyond the short Styrofoam cup, until its contents cool. No more sunlight wanders in through the ad covered window beside him, but when it rains on a Thursday, he quietly sings her favorite song.

DOWN AND DIRTY GUIDE TO SURVIVING A HOLIDAY WITH MY FAMILY

by Andrea Buchanan

She only talks down about herself
out loud with a drink in her hand poised
like a shot-put for launch if the response
is incorrect. This is when it's fun to poke her
if you're good at dodgeball, and you didn't buy
the stemware or know you'd have to patch the wall.

He loves unpopular politics and overdone puns,
so you should learn to love the devil's
advocate and serve-up a good burn for the sake
of the respect it will afford you in the long run.
He may even crack a beer open with his teeth
for you or pour a shot to see if you chase it.

I'll be fake with a touch of real,
you be real with a touch of fake,
together we'll be really fake,
but we'll survive.

SOMETHING LIKE A MOM

by Andrea Buchanan

A mom knelt in the dead grass, basking in the heatless rays,
outstretched hands grasping for something, anything.
Rent was spent last week on something, and an oak leaf wreath
on the knocker is replaced with a signed notice and a lock.

One daughter never came home because of something the mom did,
or said, or smashed against the wall until irreparable.
The mom decides her life isn't worth living without the absent
daughter living up north with better family.

The mom lost her kneecaps in the dirt with her hands full of bulk
pain killers and something strong and clear.
Maybe she hinted or silently pleaded for validation, they smelled
something on the breeze and found her limp.

Tall grass turns to tubes and instruments and hands down her throat
and thick, black something spews forth and slicks the nurses' gloves.
It sticks to her lips and crusts around her chin, and they leave
it there as a reminder, the other daughter
will go live with her grandma or something.

WILD FLOWER

by Emily Jewel

For Robert Castro, 1981-2012

If I were a poem, I'd be the "Love Song
of J. Alfred Prufrock." Not because I love
the subjunctive, but because the days
are long and filled with anxiety.

If you had Lupus too, I'd give you a high five.
Not because disease is a gift. I wouldn't give
it to anyone. But because you would understand
how the words "auto-immune" mean that even
you are against yourself. You would realize
what it is to trade bone density for more time.
You'd know how the letters ANA, CRP and SED bond
life, a sequence of defective DNA, wrapping around
your neck, tightening, making you choke on air.

It hurts to breathe. It hurts to move. But pain,
even if she is coyote ugly, is welcome in my bed,
because when I wake next to her, she whispers:
You are alive.

If you had Lupus, you'd know how silly
it is when people think we pretend to be sick.
We spend our lives pretending to be healthy.

Even in the days and hours spent in hospital beds
and waiting rooms, we've learned to sing
Sphygmomanometer, backwards, forwards.
We've learned to make paper airplanes
out of prescription advertisements,
and play charades with the people around us.

We know what it means to look up at the orange sunset
and not feel real. To sometimes be so invisible
that we have to stoop and touch the ground just to know

we're still here. It is then we see
a red wildflower growing
in the crack of a sidewalk
on a dirty Los Angeles street.

AD

by Adam Tavel

for Eric Anderson

Have you lost the ability to sigh
wistfully at balloons blown beyond
power lines into pastel specks?
Does your favorite autumn blazer

no longer hide the listless slump
of your shoulders? Perhaps you struggle
to savor flavor—sherbet, sea salt,
your lover's thigh. If you suffer

from one or more of these symptoms
ask your doctor about This Poem.
Here's Betty McCarthy, a husker
from Omaha who found the effulgent

soul she thought was lost
at the Douglas County Fair when, at 8,
she saw a farmhand slit a steer.
Side effects may include boredom,

an insatiable urge to edit,
and hearing the slow, steady susurrus
of one's own breath flood the ear
like a conch shell held against the head.

If you develop an erection lasting
four or more hours, take several
photos and phone your friends.
If an inexplicable bliss creeps

across your skin, lie to your granite boss
and draw a day-long bath. Participants
in clinical trials of This Poem reported
that when they saw a child grieving

for string and Mylar, they scooped
the wee one up and wept
until the sky burst a billion loops
that drifted back around their wrists.

THE OTHER KIDS AT RECESS

by Alyse K. Bense

I am glad I will not be young in a future without wilderness.

—Aldo Leopold

While whistles shriek
at kids who slam their bodies
against tire swings and monkey bars, we pluck
blossoms of honeysuckle from overgrown bushes,
lift sugarcoated stems to our mouths, flowers
smooth as velvet. Saving more for tomorrow,
we savor nectar's small instant of taste
far from bouncing kick balls shot
straight into the sun.

A WALK IN THE PARK

by Evan Adkins

As I patter through the park this afternoon,
I try to break the hold of my owner and writhe myself from the collar
Around my itchy neck. But only feel a tight pull, yanking me onto
My two back legs. I look around and notice a man in a suit
Unwittingly attached not by a collar, but a phone. He shrieks
About how he *absolutely can't afford* to lose one of his 200 accounts.
But I don't know why he is so mad when he is so free.
Doesn't he know he can pee on any fire hydrant or run
For as long and far as he wishes?
Sniffing the rancid scent of smog that assaults my nostrils
And slowly coats my lungs, my nose twitches.
They leave their mark in so many ways, controlling so much,
But take it for granted, even the air they breathe.
I too must make my mark, not to control it, but to protect
What is left from their destruction.
*Why do they use the moments they are given on Earth to hate
And worry about the joy of things?*
I question why humans scuttle around like frantic manikins
While I lie here with only a fifth of the time they do,
Content, tail wagging, and ready to die.

(SPILL-O'S PLAN FOR AMERICA)

by Colin Dodds

One day
all the churches
and houses and office towers
fire up and launch into the sky.

Turns out they were spaceships all along.
Turns out everyone was smarter than we seemed.
Turns out the world was not so dull.

That was Spill-O's childhood hope.
And it still holds.

NONFICTION, APOTROPAICS, AND THE REMEMBRANCES OF OURSELVES

by Robert Lively

When I was a little boy, my mother read me a book that was about wizards and knights and demons. The book had text on the bottom and glossy color drawings on the top half of the page. I remember one picture in particular.

A wizard had summoned a demon, bony and gaunt, to his tower. The demon had a barbed sword, but the wizard stood in a magic circle of protection, tucked safely away from the danger of sword and demon. Etched around the circle were strange words I didn't recognize. My small fingers traced the lines, spelling the words.

"What do the words mean, mom?"

She looked at me and paused, considering her answer. "They're magic because people don't know them."

The term for using magical guards is apotropaics. It is a very old idea, going back thousands of years. Folklore provides many examples of this type of thinking. Vampires can be turned away with garlic around the windows; witches can be held at bay by carrying St. John's Wort, and a sprig of mistletoe could even prevent one from entering your house; fairy enchantments could be stopped with hazel wood.

The folkloric belief that people could guard themselves by changing their environment lasted a long time.

My mother's inadvertent wisdom applies a lot to creative nonfiction. When we write about family and friends, we are seeking the magic of the wizard's circle. We change names and places as protection. We use the name-changing magic because we think people won't know the true identities of those named.

This reasoning is flawed in several ways. Changing the names of your family and friends isn't a magic circle; it's an illusion at best. Writers who do change names protect the people whom they are writing about only to a degree. People who know the family and friends already know whom the writer is talking about. And the people who don't, probably don't care.

I sat in a creative nonfiction class across the seminar table from Jo, a woman in her thirties. She had written a piece about the generational conflicts of her overbearing grandmother, her mother, and the repercussions on her life. The voice in the piece was strong. The writing tense.

Yet when she was finished she blurted out, “These aren’t their real names.”

We asked why she changed them now since the class wouldn’t know either one. She told us that she was uncomfortable with the truth of the matter, even though she had just confided in us.

She glanced down, lower lip trembling, then looked up at the class. “This protects me.”

Who does the name change really protect? The family members will know you have been writing about them. Friends of the family will know. Since creative nonfiction relies on literary device almost as much as fiction does, the changing of names could protect the writer from possible lawsuits.

It creates a small sense of distance. It creates an escape for the writer. Not an impenetrable magical barrier. The bottom line seems to be plausible deniability.

I once sat in a Greek café on Korfu talking to one of the waiters, Spiro. He was young, tall, and thin—ruggedly handsome in the way of the eastern Mediterranean. He had a flat, blue glass hooked to his key chain. When I asked him about it, in my thick, stilted Greek, he handed it to me.

The outer edges were trimmed in silver, the eye, as it’s called, had a thick blue circle, a smaller white circle, encasing a light blue ring, and an inky black pupil.

“The eye protects us,” he said. “It keep away evil spirits and envy. It is always looking.”

The eye is a very common apotropaic device in the eastern Mediterranean, from the islands, to Greece, even as far as Turkey.

We have watching eyes in the western tradition, too. As the Catholic Church spread across Europe in the Middle Ages, and literacy advanced, the idea that Catholic priests had magic in the Latin tongue also gained ground.

Our word “occult” comes from the Latin word *occultus*, literally meaning something that is hidden. Catholicism spread the idea that words can create barriers against all sorts of unpleasantness. Prayers can be said to keep a house from evil and even drive an evil spirit from a person. By conjunction of the sign of the cross with the prayer, people believed it created a barrier from all things evil. The eyes of God could protect a follower.

When I was ten years old, I was accosted by a man in his twenties.

I left spelling class to use the restroom after my test. The dingy and smelly restroom was on the outer fringe of the grammar school, but I had used it hundreds of time before. I stood at the urinal when I heard a man's voice behind me. I turned.

He had long wavy hair and blue denim pants and a jacket. I was alone, and he had an evil voice.

"Show me your penis," he demanded. The heavy sound echoed against the dark blue tile-- hollow, emotionless, deadly serious.

I scanned frantically for help. He was near the back stall where he had been hiding. I had no choice. He had wild eyes, and I knew he would attack me, probably kill me, if I didn't. So I showed him, then I zipped up my pants.

He asked, "Do you want to see mine?"

I nodded silently. As he pulled down his pants, I ran. He couldn't catch me, fumbling to raise his drawers.

I scrambled to the office of Mr. Lord, our principal, as fast as I could. I was shaking and crying, trying to tell him what happened through my tears. He called the police, then my parents.

The police came, and I gave them a description, in a shaking hand, worried that my cursive writing wouldn't be acceptable.

I was back at school the day the police called and told my parents they had caught the man. That he confessed to inappropriate conduct with a minor. But they never told me his name.

"To protect me," they said.

If the purpose of writing creative nonfiction is to be as true and sincere as we remember it, then I argue against the apotropaics of our trade. These superstitious guards and wards of changing names ultimately change nothing.

We must have the courage to write what we remember *as we remember*, and in doing so, we may ultimately discover that words cannot protect us from the remembrance of ourselves.

FALLING SLOWLY

by Shelby Cook

The Meadow Fiction Award

Her green eyes held the tiniest shimmer of light as she walked below the dim streetlights lining the edge of the damp pavement. Her hands comfortably shoved into her decomposing jacket pockets, she fingered at an old gum wrapper she had never thrown away. The moon was absent, but even then, the stars weren't visible beyond the glare of the city. Her eyes were looking straight ahead, and she fumbled on the cracked pavement every now and then, but her eyes never left the cityscape before her.

Her Cricket phone chirped from her back pocket, so she pulled it out with numb fingers.

"Do you still have my beanie?" The voice that sounded like honey echoed through her ears for a moment before she mustered the courage to reply.

"It's sitting on my dresser where you left it." Leah had tossed her beanie off in the heat of the moment that prompted their last meeting. Jezebel ran this moment through her mind over and over, possibly a million times within the five seconds it took for the voice on the other side to reply.

"Alright. I've just been looking for it, you know, with the weather and all." The conversation was forced, certainly awkward, and they both felt it.

"You can swing by and get it if you really need it. I have work tomorrow night at ten, so just use the spare to get in." She didn't want to see her. She didn't want to smell her perfume or have to notice how her hair was perfectly tangled. She didn't want to have Leah look into her eyes, because then she would get lost in the churning waves staring back at her.

"Is it still in the same place?"

"Under the fire-extinguisher."

"Cool. So, I'll do that then. On the dresser?"

"Mmhm."

"Well, I guess I'll see you around then."

Jezebel clapped her flip phone shut, put it in her pocket, and continued on her way. *No you won't.* She made a point never to go to the coffee shops they used to go to, or the record stores, or the bridges where they would smoke and drink box wine. They were tainted now: with love, with loss, with her perfume that smelled like a flower shop filled with burning incense.

Six blocks later she was jamming her key into her door. She heaved her shoulder at the sturdy wood, and it opened with some resistance. Her canvas backpack immediately fell to the fake oak floor among the rest of her belongings. The only things that reached above the ground were her pale yellow fridge and the decomposing dresser that she'd had since she was a child. The only other furniture in the room was her mattress that was caved in at the middle, and her tv that had a VCR on top that worked occasionally.

Her body fell to the mattress, which consumed her instantly, and there

she tried to sleep.

The next few days were a blur. The beanie was no longer on the dresser where it had found solace for months, and the weather got progressively colder. Her space heater hadn't worked in months, and she had made a habit of turning on her stove and sitting in front of the door on the stained linoleum. There was no food to cook, but she could smell the remnants of food that had been cooked before, and it made it easier to pretend like there was something to fill her stomach.

Life had become a means of pretend. She pretended she wasn't hungry. She pretended like she didn't just miss the warmth from her space heater, but the warmth from someone holding her. She pretended like she wasn't living in poverty. She pretended on Christmas that she would see her family soon, or that the ads in the mail were cards from them. She pretended the stack of bills next to her bed were just good report cards from the college she pretended to go to.

Her mind was tangled with memories. Some pleasant and warm, but most were memories that seemed like nightmares. Some things were too terrible to attribute to real life. The creases in her arms held an uncountable amount of puncture wounds that at one point she was sure were exactly what she wanted and needed. She itched at them compulsively sometimes; it was a habit that she picked up after discarding another habit. One would kill her, and one would only leave some red streaks on her pale arms for a few minutes, so she chose the latter.

Someone knocked on her door four times lightly, but with no other sound the beats filled the small space. Jezebel pulled herself off of the ground, and walked to the door hesitantly. There was no peephole, and she didn't feel like talking loud enough to make her voice pierce the thick wood in front of her, so she tugged the door open.

Before her stood magnificence.

"Hey, Bee." Leah smiled that crooked smile that always made Jezebel's heart ache. Her hands were in her pockets, and she was determined to keep them jammed there.

"H--Hey. Why..." Jezebel's voice trailed off into the dark.

"I left him. And I, well, I kinda need a place to stay for a couple days. And I thought that you, well after everything, you could, and I could..." Her eyes darted around, and her shoulders moved forward to emphasize her words. She was uncomfortable, but at home here. It used to be home.

"Oh... well come in, I guess." She stood to the side of the doorway, allowing Leah to walk in slowly. This was bound to happen, and she knew it, and yet her stomach was unsettled and her throat felt odd--as if she had just dry swallowed a pill. This was a familiar feeling, and she wasn't sure if she loved it or hated it.

"Thank you. I mean, really, thank you. You're really saving my ass here. Cause, it's fucking freezing out there, and I know I usually stay pretty warm, but all night, who knows how that would turn out, you know?" She forced a laugh in an effort to ease the tension. It didn't work.

"Of course. I wouldn't let you freeze to death." *No matter how much I*

want to be able to.

"He was just crazy. You were right. But, you always are." She looked at Jezebel and smiled. Her eyes were warm, and welcoming. No matter how much substance she may have had in her veins, her eyes would never show it. Not that Jezebel knew the difference anymore anyway.

"Do you want some tea or something? I don't have any food right now, but I still have a few tea bags." In reality, it was all she had. Some nights she just drank heated water because she knew some other night she would need the tiny substance in tea. Tonight was one of those nights, apparently.

"Oh, sure. I haven't had anything warm in a while, so yeah, that sounds great." She perched herself on the small kitchen counter next to the stove because she knew that was the only warm place to sit. Jezebel moved about the kitchen, trying not to pay too much attention to the femme fatale lingering just feet away. The water was on, and the tea bags were in the mugs with chipped paint, and now there was nothing left to do.

"So how's work goin'? Are you still at that one place?"

Jezebel hated small talk, but it seemed too challenging to bring up anything else. "Yeah, it's alright I guess. The new boss is better than the last guy."

"Well I would hope so. Didn't the last guy fuck up your paychecks all the time or something?"

"He didn't give me a couple of them. But, it's whatever. He's gone now."

"Ah, I'm looking for a job. A real job, not the kind of shit I was doing before."

"Are you still dealing?"

Leah went silent at this point. Jezebel had guessed the reason this creature had fallen into her lap wasn't by chance, but by mistake.

"As of tonight, no. I can't." Her eyes fell to the floor in maybe shame, maybe just discomfort.

"Well at least you're done." The teapot screamed from the stove, and it broke the need for speech. The hot water was poured into mugs, which both girls clung to in an effort to thaw their hands. They tried not to talk for the rest of the night, and managed to succeed for the most part. Jezebel put on an old copy of *Pretty Woman* because she had a crush on Julia Roberts, and they both fell asleep before the hooker made a real life for herself.

Weeks went by in the same fashion. Leah was gone most of the day finding money somehow, and putting it straight back into her body. Jezebel spent her days craving what she didn't want, and her nights waiting tables for customers that never tipped and were rarely sober. She came home one night, or early morning rather, to find a girl with a needle jammed in her arm lying on Jezebel's bed.

Leah looked up immediately with horror plastered across her face. "I-I'm sorry, Bee. Please, I don't know how to not. This is me. Please." She pleaded, still mid-dose, to no avail.

"Why the fuck would you bring that here? I mean, seriously, Leah,

what are you doing? What were you thinking?” Her voice escalated with every question. Not necessarily with anger, but with desire. She wanted what was so close to her, and yet she didn’t. It was taunting someone that had just lost a lung to cancer to smoke, or giving someone orange juice after they brushed their teeth.

“I’m sorry.” She took a moment and decided to finish what she had started. Her body was suddenly warmer, her mind in a vivid fog, and she felt like she could handle this conversation.

Jezebel walked toward her, because she knew there was no other direction at this point. Leah pressed play on the VHS and Julia Roberts’ wonderful laugh filled the room. There was no need to talk. Leah handed Jezebel a small baggie with some white gold lying in the crease at the bottom and kissed her quickly. Jezebel found the scar that had healed the most and proceeded to begin the habit that meant she wouldn’t scratch at her scars anymore. There would be new wounds: wounds that would not heal and could not be scratched.

They were in love. They were madly and deeply in love, just like how they had been. This time, though, they knew exactly what they were getting themselves into; and they didn’t care. Their eyes were sunken, and their skin seemed to grow progressively more pale. Neither had ever been so thin, and were someone to see them wandering around the streets it might have been thought that the girls were homeless. They might as well have been at this point, as they were merely shells of people living in between four walls that were irrelevant. They were simply plaster. The world was simply empty so long as their blood was pure. Their love was simply another addiction they didn’t know how to kick.

One morning in February, Jezebel woke up before her alarm had a chance to startle her. The small space smelt like burnt sugar and old coffee, and there wasn’t much light coming through the ice-coated window. She heaved herself up step by step: elbow, to knees, then to her feet by grabbing the windowsill for support. Suddenly she felt terrified. The floor should have felt painfully cold on her bare feet, but she felt nothing. She should have wanted to put on a jacket, but she didn’t see a need to. She should have been worried about the fact that Leah’s chest was barely moving as she slept, and still nothing. She backed away through the apartment, toward the door, and she caught a glimpse of herself on the way out. Her dark hair was a mess, and her skin was translucent—small veins showing blue through the thin layer. The bags under her eyes made her look at least ten years older than she was at a mere 22, and they almost hid the green irises trapped between sagging eyelids. There were flecks of yellow, but they would not shine anymore.

She took a moment to glance around, and then ran. She ran as fast as she could up flights of stairs, occasionally slipping and falling, until she reached the roof. Her toes were bleeding from stubbing them so many times, and her arms ached for something she would no longer supply them. Her hands shook, and her skeleton shivered in the midst of the snowfall. She walked toward the edge, taking each step slowly and deliberately. The crunch that she heard every time a movement was made

rang through her ears. It was the only sound she could hear. There were no cars zooming by below her, and there were no people talking. There was no airplane overhead and there was no movie playing in the distance somewhere trying to cover up a painful moment. There was only the suppression of snow.

She reached the edge, and stepped as close to the brink as possible. Her body was steady now, as she looked down at the distraught onlookers. They saw her and wanted to help, and wanted to be the heroes who made a stranger's day continue. They were no heroes though. They were simply watching someone else's life, attempting to understand something that would never make sense to anyone else.

She glanced over the edge, to the end of the city. The buildings reached up past the horizon toward the clouds to form a mouth full of jagged teeth enclosing the world. She had been swallowed whole by all that was around her. *I have no proof.* She thought to herself. That line repeated over and over until it was more of a chant. All she had to prove that she had lived were a series of dots on the creases of her arms and a couple old diary entries stashed in a drawer in her dresser. *I have no proof.*

She collapsed backward onto the snowbank that had gathered on the roof. She felt a sudden rush through her body. She felt cold. She felt the wind grab at her protruding bones. She felt the sting on her feet from where they had been cut open, and her eyes began to water. Even looking through salt water, the world was clearer than it ever had been. She embraced the cold for a minute, maybe two, maybe ten, and then moseyed down to her small studio. Leah was nodding on the bed, and was without question in an alternate reality.

Jezebel didn't have many possessions, and so anything worth anything to her fit into one hiking backpack. She bundled herself in a multitude of ratty sweaters and torn socks in the hope of not being too cold. She didn't have much money saved, but she had enough. She walked through the city and looked at the trees for what seemed like the first time. Their branches were stacked high with snow, as if they were trying harder and harder to reach the sky the more they were pushed down. Jezebel bought a ticket on a Greyhound to take her as far as possible, and departed New York City at 8:00 that morning. She slept on the shoulder of a kind stranger that smelt like vanilla, and slept peacefully for the first time in years.

EVERYTHING I KNOW I LEARNED FROM CHAZ BONO

by Anthony Frame

How would I look with breasts and
hormones a little less testy? Surely I'm not

the only one to wonder beyond wearing
my mom's high heels as a five-year-old.

I'm neither in nor out because only worms
get categorized as asexual. And it's not really

about sex or the body. It's the question
of being in someone's, anyone's, tight skin,

of seeing through and beyond their glass eyes.
Would stars blink differently if

I wore pantyhose? Would a lake taste
any less sweet? This has less to do with why

I tried to grow my hair in high school and
more to do with why I wore a black trench coat.

I may not know who I am but I know
what I want. I don't want to dance

but I want a country where I can. And I don't
want to do it alone. I want to look

at my chest hairs and not wonder whether
my lover wants them shaved.

I want the possibilities, the option to pillage
my mother's closet while singing

"Gypsies, Tramps and Thieves."
Not to make a statement. Just because it's fun,

just because I have arms and legs and therefore
I can. We can make America in our own

image as soon as we've found one we like.
So let's underscore the *cha-cha-cha* in our

chastity belts while turning the Lincoln Memorial
into a drag queen dance hall. Not that I

would ever wear a dress, not with these
pencil legs, but I still want to make these bodies

as fluid as dreams, I still want the air between
me and you, whoever you are, to be made

of strings. America, let there be more genders
than there are people. Let there be more

questions than there are controversies.
Let the stars dance brighter than they shine.

MICKY ROONEY LIVES WITHIN US

by Jane Rosenberg LaForge

Blinded dandy, beholden to your
habit and the blur of women, you
might propose that we put on a
show to stage our hungry looks,
but whisper, you say; Whisper,
only whisper as if we are playing
a children's game. Children's games
are beautiful because they are small,
dreams sized to their correct dimensions
because they do not threaten, they do
not bleed into daytime. They do not
challenge. We will never be that small
again, I think, and not feel the weight
of our failures against our necks,
our throats, the crushing dirge on our
windpipes and our living dreams,
which we carry along like marionettes.
We will never be so small as if we were
paper and cellophane twisting and bending
in a vacuum of our own making: we will
never be that small until we age, until this
moment, until we no longer remember the
sound of an automobile horn lanced open
against the tiles of the 2nd Street tunnel,
the one they film all the automobile
commercials in; lined with tiles that are
like mirrors, the distortion they exact from
moving headlights, the distortion that
comes when you are neither notable, nor
ugly enough for notice. Those car horns
sound like speed, like moaning, like the
world is new, a flat, elastic penny, and
all we need do to live in it is let our skins
stretch with it until they slip open and
swallow us.

THE LAST DAYS OF LOUIS ARMSTRONG

by Jane Rosenberg LaForge

For the last days of Louis Armstrong
I was sent to my grandmother's, the
healthy one, as the other grandmother
was always in the process of dying.
It took a long time for Louis Armstrong
to die, I remember, as everything did
when I was that young: my mother's
illness, the pregnancies of my school
teachers, the vigil for midnight at New
Year's, at the healthy grandmother's.
I was sent to her apartment for any
number of these occasions, even
when my aunt was recovering from
one of her abortions, which also took
a long time, and occurred again and
again. They first thought Louis Armstrong
would die on the Friday before Palm Sunday,
but he called for palms to be brought to
his hospital bed. Then they thought he
would die during Holy Week, but he
soldiered on instead. I remember thinking
that Louis Armstrong could not die until
they came up with a replacement for him,
just as they had come up with replacements
for my school teachers; just as now my
exclamations, my mugs and grimaces,
stand in for my mother's on this earth.
As we listened to the radio and watched
the news, it occurred to me that Louis
Armstrong could not be replaced, like Twiggy
and Tommy Tune who waltzed upon a spinning
vinyl record in the film we saw on Good Friday
to wait out Holy Week, which had been over for
us once the Passover matzo had been discovered.
I had only one grandfather, the other having died
when I was barely equipped to remember him,
and when Martin Luther King Jr. was killed,
he asked whether they were going to bury him
or march him around for awhile, perhaps until
the Second Coming. It was the ugliest thing I
had ever heard said.

JOHN CASSAVETES

by Tim Applegate

On the wall above the urinal someone had written,
in fine cursive script, *God Is Dead*, as if to prove
that this was, indeed, a college tavern. Peanut shells
on the floor, spilled beer on the tables, a heated debate
over the relative merits of the novels of Jean Genet.

One night a wife walked out on her husband.
They had been discussing a movie, one of John Cassavetes'
cinema verite meditations on marital despair, when
she finished her drink, set the empty glass
down on the bar, and calmly strolled out of the tavern.

Relationships were impossible
but the town itself was lovely. Autumn: fallen leaves,
a gibbous moon, the halo of a streetlamp. One night
a wife stepped into Showalter Fountain, soaking
her shoes. She didn't particularly care. God was dead
and the water was cool

and as I stood over the urinal, wondering where she'd gone,
I recalled the name of the Cassavetes film
we'd been discussing. *Faces*. Seymour Cassel
alone at the top of the stairs. In a faithless world, Cassel must
have thought, anything could happen, and probably would.

WHAT CANNOT BE FEIGNED

by Joe Benevento

I like a look of agony.

—Emily Dickinson

Emily says you just can't do it,
fake a death throe, convince any mammal
really paying attention that you're gone
when you aren't, which is why we call it
"playing" possum, and, really, she was right.

The many dead marsupials I've seen
in my life wending away
on woodsy roads in Michigan or Missouri
have always ended with a look
too true to be faked,

a countenance locked in grim surprise—
those lights could get to him so fast,
carrying something so final.
Even when there is no blood
scarletting the street

even when all the important injuries
are internal, as in life,
that perfectly possum body
surely will not rise again,
there being, after all,

so much more to dying than lying
perfectly still, suffering
a few flies to ponder future
maggot nurseries
on your

quiet corpus.

CHRISTOPHER COAKE INTERVIEW

*By Mark
Maynard*



Christopher Coake is the author of *You Came Back* (Grand Central Publishing, out June 2012) as well as the collection of short stories *We're In Trouble* (Harcourt 2005), which won the PEN/Robert Bingham Fellowship. In addition, Coake was listed among "Granta's Best of Young American Novelists" in 2007. His stories have been published in several literary journals, and anthologized in *Best American Mystery Stories 2004* and *The Best American Noir of the Century*. A native Hoosier, he received his M.F.A. in fiction from Ohio State University. He and his wife Stephanie Lauer live in Reno, where Coake is a professor of English at the University of Nevada.

Mark Maynard: The narrative of *You Came Back* exists in the gap between what people hope is true and what they believe is true. How were you able to suspend the main characters over this chasm for the entire novel?

Christopher Coake: Well, this was the challenge I set out for myself, and to this day I'm not entirely sure I succeeded. Like my protagonist, Mark, I am an atheist, a rationalist, and I wanted to write a story that would test someone like me: what would it take, really, to get someone as rooted in a particular worldview as me to change his or her mind?

Mark isn't me; I took pains from the moment I began writing to keep him separate from me. Even so, as a writer I was constantly fighting myself. For the novel's plot to work, Mark has to waver in what he believes. I, however, have not wavered. The first draft of *You Came Back* was nearly twice the length of the finished book, in large part because I was trying to change my own mind, when Mark's—as a number of early readers pointed out to me—had already been plausibly changed.

That's partly because the novel is about how Mark is trying to overcome the loss of a child. I'm not a parent; while I have experienced grief up close and personal, I haven't experienced that. I think readers were willing to give a grieving parent a lot more leeway in terms of belief and worldview than I was.

Even so, during the writing of the novel, a good friend of mine—one of my oldest and closest friends—became an evangelical Christian in the wake of a divorce. While I was trying to maneuver Mark toward irrational belief, a person I know and love was willingly taking the same steps—he was speaking in tongues, and altering his political views to match. That was instructive. Every time I thought I was bogged down in unreality, I only had to talk to this friend to realize that every day real people take huge risks for belief in the unseen. That our *need* to believe often outweighs any evidence for or against belief.

Atheistic me isn't exempt, either. I believe in concepts like "love," and "free will," that can be challenged or explained away by scientific process. Yet I move through the world happily depending on the magic powers of both. The world stripped of everything but rationality is terrifying, and I wanted my story to admit that.

MM: The protagonist Mark acknowledges the psychological need for ghosts as he questions whether or not he believes in them. How much are ghosts a function of our memory and the existential need to keep departed loved ones "alive"?

CC: Again, as a rationalist, I don't believe in ghosts. So I'd say the answer is 100%. Almost everyone knows that the word "haunted" has different

meanings—anyone can be haunted by the past, by the memory of the dead, by regret. We don't have to have an apparition in front of us in order to invoke a haunting, and that's an idea that's been with us for a long time.

I lost my first wife, Joellen Thomas, to bone cancer in 1999. I didn't believe in a god or an afterlife then (and neither did she), nor do I now. But Joellen—not just the memories of her and of our marriage, but the ideas that she believed in and fought for—are very powerful forces in my life. She is as much an influence on me as many living people. I imagine her speaking to me—I don't just remember things she said, I imagine her saying *new* things—when I'm conflicted, when I'm angry or happy or sad. I dream about her. I still have nightmares about her death, and about her finding out I remarried, moved on. How much difference is there, really, between that kind of haunting, and one in which Joellen appears in front of me as a ghost?

The question isn't just rhetorical. There *would* be a difference, and a profound one. The novel wants to address the consequences of a "real" ghost as well as the metaphorical kind. If someone we love is "here"—well, what does that say about the afterlife? Why isn't that person "there?" If there's a god, then how can that god allow a ghost—such as an innocent child—to suffer? Would a ghost's attempt to communicate with us, to reconnect, be miraculous? Or horrifying? Most ghost stories I read don't really go into these ideas with any depth—or attempt to connect them to the more mundane (and still immensely traumatic) kinds of metaphorical haunting to which grief yokes us.

MM: The novel examines the human need for the hearing and telling of stories. We tell stories about how we met, how we married, and how we broke up. And we add and omit key details, depending on whom we're telling them to. Why is there an inherent need to apply narrative to our lives? What makes a story true?

CC: That's a great question, and one I'm obsessed with. Maybe all fiction writers have to be. I have a "real," "true" story. I grew up poor and threatened (my father, a violent alcoholic and drug addict, physically abused my mother, and might have hurt my sister and me if my parents hadn't divorced). I was married to a woman I loved dearly, and who died. I remarried, I moved on. From the very beginning of that story I've wanted to be a writer, to communicate something in my own stories. But I've only rarely been tempted to tell it "true"—to try and wrap a memoir around it.

I grew up as a reader. My mother's a teacher, and made sure books were always present in our house. I had reason to want to escape my life, and books were always there, as a temporary, powerful balm. I tell stories professionally because told stories kept me sane for much of my life. I

want to give them back to the world that gave them to me.

But stories—almost all stories—are lies. They're things we negotiate with reality. My sister tells very different stories about our childhood than I do, even about the same “real” events. My mother remembers them in a third, different way. We change our stories from true without even being conscious of doing so. I wanted the novel to always, always be conscious of this. Mark Fife is a man cursed by grief to remember, and re-remember, terrible things. The appearance of a possible ghost in his life is, at its heart, a chance to renegotiate the stories that have come to define him—many of which he hates and fears. To turn his nightmares into something different and better. I'm not sure many of us would be able to resist that temptation. Mark can't.

MM: The point of view of the novel keeps us close to Mark Fife at all times. He is an interesting character that often has a myopic view of things. How did you arrive at this point of view for the novel? Did you experiment with others, or did you know you wanted to stay in third person, always close to the protagonist?

CC: I knew from the start the novel would be in Mark's third-person “voice.” I love the third-person limited omniscient point of view; it's my default setting as a writer. Maybe there's a chicken-and-egg question involved here, but when I was envisioning *You Came Back*, that particular POV seemed integral to the novel working at all. I wanted to immerse readers (and myself) not only in Mark's thoughts, but in his thought *process*—I wanted to see if I could ride shotgun with a mind in the process of fundamentally changing.

I also wanted the novel to play with some of the tropes of the classic ghost story, one of which is having readers question whether a ghost is real, or the product of a character's delusion. However, in most ghost stories this question is presented as a mystery, a game for readers to solve. I wanted to do something a little different—I wanted readers to be presented the same evidence that Mark was presented, at the same time. I didn't want readers to wonder whether he was going mad. I wanted them to follow step-by-step a troubled but thoughtful guy's journey. And I wanted to end the novel without any ambiguity.

For a while I had some first-person sections in the novel—but they were still in Mark's thoughts; he would, periodically, address Brendan, his dead son. That approach proved to be too gimmicky, however. I like POV-play in the short stories I write, but none of the experiments I thought to bring to bear to *You Came Back* worked. More and more I felt my job as the storyteller was to get out of Mark's way, to leave as transparent a curtain as possible between him and the reader.

MM: Mark Fife applies another level of narrative to the story by imagining “what ifs” and viewing the world through other characters’ imagined points of view. How important is it for a fiction writer to have the capacity to empathize?

CC: It’s not simply important—empathy is the only reason fiction exists. The entire point of reading fiction is to imagine lives and experiences different from our own. Fiction presents us with a kind of vicarious moral playground—a chance to watch a character struggle, and ask, “What would I do, if it was me?” A writer’s job is to make sure a reader can enter that vicarious space, can ask that question. Can *want* to ask that question.

Fiction writers have a duty to explore lives other than their own. Readers have a duty to engage with them. That’s just about the only rule of writing and reading that matters.

That said, empathy is complex, and can be compromised. A writer, certainly, engages in empathy, but writers are also employing empathy in the service of theme and meaning. I wanted Mark’s empathetic process to be similarly compromised. He imagines what other people think and feel, but he also wants to act in ways that will be terribly hurtful. I don’t believe he ever is able to empathize with someone else without bias or selfishness.

MM: You’ve mentioned that you were conscious of blurring the lines between literary fiction and genre fiction as you were writing this book. What intrigued you about playing with those conventions? Should readers and reviewers try to read a book within the context of genre, or should they simply let the book affect them without any preconceived expectations?

CC: I grew up reading genre, especially fantasy, sci-fi, and horror. Up until I was halfway through college, I was trying to write works just like those I read and enjoyed. I can say with no sarcasm whatsoever that Stephen King was my first writing teacher—between the ages of 11 and 18 I idolized him, and read everything he published, often multiple times. I loved his blending of horror and the mundane—just like millions of other readers did. I read, too, people like Peter Straub, Clive Barker, H.P. Lovecraft, J.R.R. Tolkien, Lloyd Alexander, Stephen Donaldson, Anne McCaffrey, Robert Holdstock and Barbara Hambly—to name only a few. These were the writers who taught me not only what a compelling story was, but also what a good sentence was—because, for the most part, those writers are or were all really talented craftspeople.

When I was in college a professor opened me up to literary fiction, by telling me James Joyce’s “The Dead” was one of the best ghost stories ever written. I branched out—but, initially, to people like Joyce Carol Oates,

who has no qualms about working with tropes from the Gothic tradition. I learned that writing could still thrill a reader, but also be *about* something—that there was more to fiction than plot. When I was 21 I read Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, and was profoundly affected—there's a book that's not only a page-turner, but also deeply experimental and odd and new.

In other words, my path to literary reading and writing was never presented to me as an either/or. I was fortunate to have teachers who wanted to show me that literature could be thrilling, could be *cool*—that, whatever else lit could do, it could also let me lose myself, the way my younger self needed to be lost. As a result I've never really wanted to view the books I've loved as belonging to two separate camps—I really, truly, believe it's silly to shelve books set in outer space, or about ghosts, in a different part of the bookstore than the ones that Toni Morrison writes (because she writes about ghosts, too). Literary writers like Morrison and Cormac McCarthy and David Mitchell and Sarah Waters are writing about supernatural or sci-fi plots; their writing, on the whole, tends to be complex and occasionally challenging. But what about Ursula K. Le Guin, or Iain Banks, or Martin Cruz Smith, or John LeCarre, or Paolo Bacigalupi, or China Mieville, or Mervyn Peake? Can you really, objectively, tell me that these writers—shelved in genre—aren't working with language or theme or convention or plot in challenging ways? It's ridiculous to me that we segregate so much literature from itself.

A lot of contemporary writers feel the same—many of us who grew up on Stephen King and the *Star Wars* and Spielberg films are playing around with those boundary lines. Karen Russell, Kevin Brockmeier, Anthony Doerr, Dan Chaon, Benjamin Percy, Michael Chabon, Sarah Shun-Lien Bynum, Colson Whitehead, Justin Cronin, Kelly Link, Victor LaValle, Aimee Bender—all these folks are producing work that wants to play with generic tropes, that wants to interrogate that segregation. And I'm surely missing a few. And not just my generation: Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a great sci-fi novel. Margaret Atwood has delved into sci-fi a number of times. She and Jim Crace and Sigrid Nunez and Cormac McCarthy and a whole bunch of others have looked at post-apocalyptic plots in recent years.

So yeah, as a writer I've wanted to join those folks. I've worked my entire career to have it all—to tell stories that will engage a reader viscerally, but that will also work with language, or form, or structure, or convention, in a new and inventive way. The stories in my collection, *We're in Trouble*, are all pretty starkly dramatic—almost all of them concern people in life-or-death struggles. One of them, "All Through the House," was anthologized a couple of times as a mystery story—but it's also long, and told backwards, and violates a lot of traditional mystery "rules." And *You Came Back* is a deliberate attempt to look at the ghost story in a new way.

Of course, what writers want to do is very different from what readers and reviewers can handle. *You Came Back* got a review from someone in Cleveland who was obviously mystified by its digression from “typical” horror. Readers who want tidy plot resolution have written to me, confused. But what can I do? Writers tell the stories they must tell. I’ve wondered if the movement toward genre-play among literary writers over the last ten years has been a little mercenary—if, maybe, we’re all trying to catch some of the generation that cut its teeth on J.K. Rowling. But who cares? Every writer I’ve listed above is “serious”—someone who is trying his or her utmost to tell a great story that means something, that’ll linger in the imagination and/or the intellect when the covers are closed. We all want to catch what readers we can, and make them care. Isn’t that the only goal that matters?

MM: The novel is set in and around Columbus, Ohio. Why is it important to ground fiction in a sense of place? What does the Midwest setting of this novel do to further develop the plot and characters? Why could it only have been set in Columbus?

CC: I lived in Columbus for nearly ten years. My first wife died there; I met my second wife there. I went to graduate school there. I love the West—I lived in Colorado for a few years as a boy, and have always wanted to come back—but I am a Midwesterner by birth, and Columbus is my favorite place in the Midwest. It’s a wonderful city. As my friend, the writer Joe Oestreich says, it’s also a city with a bit of an inferiority complex. Nobody cares about Columbus very much. Maybe because it has no major pro sports team, a lot of the country has no idea that Columbus is the same size as Indianapolis, that nearly 2 million people live there. It’s unknown apart from Ohio State University. For that reason alone I wanted to set a novel there. So much literature is set in big cities, or the vast landscapes of the West, or in well-trod ground in the South. As a reader I get tired of novels that assume New York City is where everything interesting happens, you know?

I also liked the idea of grounding my subversive ghost story in a place that, from a distance, might be blank spot in people’s imaginations—in much the same way that Stephen King made Maine a scary place, I wanted to make Columbus seem complicated, fraught. Victorian Village, the neighborhood where much of the novel takes place, is a real neighborhood—I rented an apartment there throughout grad school. Columbus might be a flat, largely homogenous city—but at night, Victorian Village can seem like a scary place, to a guy walking through it who grew up on Stephen King.

Setting’s vitally important to story, especially in terms of character. In other words, the city of Columbus wasn’t as important to the novel as the characters who choose to make the place their home. Mark Fife is like me in that regard—he’s a native Hoosier who adopted Columbus. He and

his fiancée, Allison, fantasize about leaving, but they love the city regardless. They have history there. It's a home to them, and that tension—between staying and going; between anonymity and the lure of bigger, bolder places; between a known past and a potential future—is in many ways a mirror to the plot that contains them.

MM: Your first published book was a collection of short stories. What was it like to make the transition from writing stories to writing a novel? How does your outlook and worldview change? Do you find you have to create more robust, sympathetic characters, knowing that you will be spending that much more time with them?

CC: I was really challenged by this transition, far more so than I was prepared for. My collection was written while I was a graduate student—all but one of the stories in *We're in Trouble* was workshopped at Ohio State—so I graduated pretty well-equipped to write and revise short stories. Graduate writing programs can be wonderful opportunities—mine sure was—but a weakness inherent in them is that they're not very good at teaching students to write novels. The workshop structure demands that student writers turn in chunks of work pretty frequently, and no one wants to workshop novel chapters separate from the whole.

Even so, I'd written novel manuscripts before I'd gone to school. The problem was that I'd written them when I was younger, and happy simply to chase down a plot. I was not really trained at all to write a complex psychological portrait, chapter by chapter, over 400+ pages. Plus I was trying to write the novel while trying to get tenure at UNR, and while adjusting to a new home a country away from my roots, and to a new marriage, and so on. It's also pretty clear to me now that I was using the novel to work through some serious issues left over from the death of Joellen—even apart from the ones I knew about, and was deliberately engaging. It's hard to write a book, in my experience, when you don't know who you are—and *You Came Back* was trying to get written at a time when I was a lot less sure of myself than I'd supposed.

It took about four years, start to finish. (I also spent two years trying to write an historical novel set in Gold Rush-era Colorado, but scrapped it after a couple of hundred pages.) The first draft was almost twice as long as the final one, too—so maybe one year out of the four was spent making very painful cuts. I've talked to a lot of first-time novelists, and we've all done something similar—we think, because we're writing a novel, that we have this infinite space with which to examine our characters' lives. But it's a rare, rare book that justifies its own length past 100,000 or 120,000 words. The vast majority of novels come in between 80,000 and 100,000, and probably should. I had to learn that, and the only way I could learn it was by hearing what a few editors said about the version of my novel that was 212,000 words long. (Nothing kind.)

MM: You've seen two former students/mentees (Ben Rogers and Claire Vaye Watkins) find publishing success in the last year. What is it like for you to see students – whose manuscripts you've seen grow from raw drafts to finished books – get published and recognized in the literary world?

CC: It's made me so happy I'm not even sure how to describe the feeling adequately. I've sent about ten students on from UNR to good MFA programs around the country, and five of them (including Claire) have gone to my alma mater, Ohio State. It feels good not only because these folks are outstanding writers and people—it feels good because we've been able to make our own community of Nevada writers. I personally need that community to feel grounded. What I didn't know, taking the job at UNR, was how quickly it would happen—that someone like Claire, who first appeared in my courses as, I think, a college sophomore, would end up within a few years becoming a professor at Bucknell, and reviewed in the *New York Times*, and—happily—a good friend of mine. I can say the same for Ben; he took my class as a member of the community, and we've gotten to be buddies. We're in the same book club.

This sounds selfish, doesn't it? I'd be happy for a student of mine to succeed in the writing world even if he or she was difficult and terrible and unlikable. But the folks who've succeeded here (and I'm counting two or three others who have books circulating with agents right now) are all fine people, folks who keep in touch, who are valued friends. Who value where they come from, and want to give back to it. The best writing teachers I've had were all people who got to know me, personally, who took the time to understand the issues with which I was grappling, and help me turn them into fiction. I try to do the same thing—so when my students succeed (whether in publishing or in some other arena), I know pretty well what it cost them to do so. What they've had to overcome. That makes their successes even more resonant, and me even prouder to know them.

MM: What is your daily writing routine? How do you manage to work on your own writing, teach, and read and comment on other manuscripts? How do you make your writing time effective and shut out distractions?

CC: I wish I could say that, all these years in, I have a routine that's successful. I don't. I'm still a guy who wishes he woke up and wrote feverishly until noon every day, just so I could say I'd done it. However, I remain a guy who puts off his work, and prioritizes other things instead, and feels guiltier with every passing minute, and who finally gets around to writing, if he does at all, around eight at night.

I can say this: I've got about four good hours in me at a sitting. Any more than that and the words just slide away. Sometimes it takes eight

hours of sitting at my desk to make those four good hours happen. Sometimes I write feverishly for an hour and spend the next three revising. It varies.

I'm lucky in that I teach at a research university; my teaching load is two classes a semester, so I have the luxury of not only being expected to write and publish, but also to be granted the time to do it. And of course I have the summertime every year. I get a lot done—but I am not, and am likely never to be, satisfied with the way I squeeze work out of the time I'm given. I'm just not efficient.

As for shutting out distractions: I have a program that turns off my laptop's network connection for a few hours at a time. That's extraordinarily helpful—I can restart the computer if I really need the internet, but in the meantime I'm prevented from checking email, or Facebook. I usually put on headphones and try to lose myself in music, too. I often write in coffee shops—I'm *that* guy—maybe because it's a performance. At home it's too easy to play with the dog, or never shower. Even in the summertime, it helps to get dressed, to put my work in a bag and take it to “the office” and at least pretend to be a writer. I'm a fiction writer, after all, and before long pretending becomes the real thing.

BEAR

by Angelo Perez

It's winter.

Or close to it, but it may as well be.

The buses are late, the schools are delayed, the legs are pale,

And I fold into my t-shirt,

Underneath my cardigan,

Underneath my peacoat,

And into myself to keep warm.

The tips of my shoulders touch the end of my ear lobes

As I shiver relentlessly on a sidewalk, waiting

For my ride. The skin of my hands crack

and bleed from their clenching to keep warm.

I fold into myself to keep warm.

Last night I read that bears hibernate to avoid

The deprivations of winter. All this time I thought

They were just lazy creatures. It turns out, however,

They're cowards—sleeping through the months

I spend watching the snow fall from my patio,

Placing bets on which of the flakes stick to the ground

Or melt helplessly into the cracks on the pavement

And I can see, with my own eyes, my breath:

Winter's way of showing you you're alive.

THE CAT'S FALSETTO

by Angelo Perez

He peels his skin away from mine, as the cat strides towards the car,
carrying in its mouth a bird with blood-stained feathers
and a half severed head. I glide my feet
across the floor flecked with broken glass and petals
from the artificial flowers. The passenger's side, the side at which I sit,
is slightly higher, the tire propped up on the sidewalk. I observe him
from this makeshift pedestal as he wraps his neck with a scarf.
Still rolling my tongue to a scratchy rendition of "South of the Border"
he shoots me the look that says:

You're a horrible person, and I hate you.

So I'm a horrible person.

So he hates me.

Okay.

But what does that make him?

He's done the research, he's got the knowledge.

Waste always circulates down the drain the same way, sunshine.

He rolls his window down and lights a cigarette from a match
wet from the spilled gin and we could both hear another triumphant
whistle from the cat as it leaps into a shrub to kill
and collect what it wants.

GROWN-UP

by Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán

as a little boy growing up, i used to sit in the bathtub, take the little spikey thing you put soap on, and lay on it, press my little pre-pubescent dick on it hard, impale myself, sometimes until i bled. then i'd take it, bloodied and bruised, and tuck it between my legs. standing in front of the mirror, pushing the fat that was my chest together, seeing what it would be like to have cleavage, thinking perhaps i could escape my fate by becoming a woman, i wondered what it'd be like to have a pussy, to cut it off, to simply not have it around no more.

as a little boy growing up, i starved myself. i remember doing over four hours of exercise each day, eating only watermelon and starkist tuna from a can for weeks on end, trying to puke but not being able to stomach the convulsions, being depressed/ashamed whenever we had to go shopping for school clothes, clothes that would not fit. i hated the month of august for this very reason.

as a little boy growing up, i spent my summers in the sun, laying out all day, trying to be darker, wanting to be whiter. i spent hours in the bathroom, trying to wash away my body, my color, my sex, contemplating suicide, homicide, genocide, that which i could bring about, that which others were capable of.

as a little boy growing

up, i used to stick myself with
pencils, jab myself with pens,
trying to stop the thoughts,
trying to make my bad and evil,
dark and dirty, fat and faggy, boy
body, go away.

it didn't. but a piece
of me, a piece of that glorious
childhood i was supposed to have,
it did. it did go away. and some
things, like toys left at the beach
when you're on vacation, are lost
forever. forever is a very long time.
a very long time, indeed.

HUNGER

by Derek Annis

I don't remember what it was—a losing game, or some form of hunger—that made me pick up the hockey stick and chase the neighbor boy across the lawn. Whatever it was, I wanted to kill him—to pack his teeth tight against the back of his throat with that stick. He was ten. I was eleven, and I loved him. Together, over several summers, we had sat beneath every tree in the forest, walked along every inch of the river. We had even tested, for practice, the infamous French Kiss. I let my tongue slip into the moist cave of his mouth, and enjoyed it for a moment, before rearing back in terror at his stagnant taste, and the popsicle stickiness of his lips. Once, while hiking, we wandered too far. The sky went black and fell into the forest. We were off the trail. There were eyes, and snapping twigs. Matt began to cry, so I swallowed hard, held his hand, lied about knowing the way home, and said all the wolves were sleeping. It was after twelve by the time we finally crossed the front lawn, found our parents sitting on the steps with bitten lips. Mine engulfed me in warm arms—carried me quietly up to bed. Matt's mother slapped him—dragged him inside by a fistful of hair. Hands want what hands want: lead the scared boy home through the dark, bring the stick down hard on his breaking face.

REDWOODS

by Buck Feero

Rebecca's hands are inked with letters and symbols,
"home" travels across her right knuckles, "sick" across her left.
A filigreed skull is on the top of her 'home'
hand, a stylized crescent wrench with a banner beneath
is inscribed with the word "Dad" above 'sick.'

When we first met, I reached out to greet her and noticed
her palms were calloused, then was surprised at the softness
of her touch. Wearing a Spawn apron, she is making a cake
for our friend's birthday and the batter is covering her tattoos
—a little bit of it dripping from the missing lips of the skull.

She holds the bowl under her left arm, stirring its contents
with an old wooden spoon in her studio apartment decorated
with curio of the macabre; the skulls and mandibles resting on shelves,
or glued to collages she's made herself. There are no plants,
—not even a Venus fly trap or bonsai tree
—and no color pollutes her black and white world.
Variants of Dystopia album covers that she's had
tattooed on her arms and legs hang on the walls
as flattened mirror images.

I am thinking of the living,
of plants and forests and the kind of solitude that isn't lonely or sad.
I wonder at the architecture of the redwoods
how it rivals that of San Francisco: both rise
tall, and booming, and incomprehensible.

Their greens are green in the way that no painter
could mimic with his infrared spectrum sensor or the newest
high powered sprayer, and they are taller than the hills
and wider than the widest of trucks or cars
that swivel around the roundabouts and float through the stop-lights.

At first the structures seem too close together, like the city's,
that all of it must be the work of gods. Maybe they still sleep
under the canopied families of trees, or in the caverns
beneath the Transamerican Pyramid, waiting for the Earth
to tremble and shake and split the coast off into its own private
oasis, just the forest and the city, and the people can come if they want.

Sitting on her bed, I look to her from my day-dream and ask,
"Why do you think the city and its people are more beautiful

than the wild and it's silence? Why does someone of your taste choose to live with the human contact you hate?"

She looks up at me from the counter she leans on,
"Why do you think that I enjoy people?" she says, having only half heard the question, not caring to acknowledge the rest,
"Wasn't it quiet before you opened your mouth?"

MODEST BLOUSES AND FLOWING SKIRTS

by Charles Rafferty

The woman was late, and he began to worry over the sirens he heard earlier about the time when she would have arrived. He consoled himself by remembering her reputation for always being late, and came to believe these sirens in the distance could have nothing to do with her. They were irrelevant — like an appendix, like the extra fork he was sometimes left with at the end of a restaurant dinner. Still, the sirens had come vaguely from the direction of her arrival. He considered calling to make sure she was okay, and that she hadn't forgotten about their meeting, their date, where after a home-cooked dinner and a romantic comedy and a bottle of merlot, he would try to remove her clothing, for he imagined her body was beautiful beneath her modest blouses and flowing skirts. But if he called, and she *were* on the way, she might try to answer, to dig the phone from her purse while negotiating a snowy curve. His call, he reasoned, might well cause the accident he was trying to prove had never happened. He turned down the heat on the pot of boiling potatoes, and started to arrange the place settings so that they looked even more like the tables in *Fine Cooking*. Later, when she was very late, he walked onto the porch with a whiskey beneath the stars that were always there. As usual, they had nothing to say — not about his future or the wilted salad or the lovely skin he had yet to see beneath her modest blouses and flowing skirts.

HE WENT AHEAD WITH IT ANYWAY

by Elizabeth Atherton

She rises weirdly out of frills of water,
Stunned. And though she is naked, the shine
Of water across her body looks like clothes -
As though she's only fooling, and she's got him good.

Her stupor should be the dueler's hesitation
Which opens the body to the bullet;
Instead it's the unanswerable
Closing argument of an idiot.
Light crosses her, crosses her,
And, in an instant of double-hallucination,
The light seems to create color by friction,
Or like polishing a ruby out of rock.

She is raspberry-red. She wears jolly satin.
She is an alto playing a boy.
The water bubbles suddenly, like industrial waste,
and collects the vision,

Drawing her down, still confused
As to what's happening and who he is.

ON THE SLOW TRAIN TO NARITA

by Joshua Haskins

Squeezed on all sides by men in suits
And women with short skirts, all I feel
Are the curves of her soft frame
Pressing into me. With one hand I grip
The white plastic handle that hangs
From the stainless Steel baggage rack
And with the other I hold firm the small
Honey brown hand of the woman
That has spent the last month in my arms.
The diamond digs into the flesh
Of my palm to remind
Me of the promise she made.
As she lifts her sweet face towards mine
I breathe in the fresh cinnamon scent
Of her long black hair and try to force
A smile from the void that grows
Inside my chest the closer we get
To the end of the line. Her moist brown eyes
Make me believe that she will keep
Her promise, so I whisper *mahal kita*,
Kiss her trembling lips, and hold on.

LOVERS' ALMANAC

by Stephen Christopher Schlatter

The weather in Texas only knows two patterns,
monsoon and drought. And right now, outside,
the grass, brown and stale, blows away in the wind,
uncovering the barren red clay. And you would think
we were farmers, seated on opposite sides of the couch,
watching the weatherman say what the skies
have already told us. No rain in sight.

She picks up the remote and turns off the television.
You coming to bed? My answer doesn't matter.
I grab a smoke from my pack, and step outside.
The porch light shines down upon the crispy
leaves that now choke the soil of the flowerbed
we planted together after the wedding. I turn my eyes
up, to check the moon, but the bowl is not pouring.

I try to remember the last time it was. Maybe that night
in Corpus Christi, when we snuck out to the beach,
sand in places it should never be. That night, the rain
knew no drops. It flowed torrentially through our veins.
Even the headlights illuminating bare skin as we dashed
for cover, could not hinder it. We hid in the lush,
green tall grass, beyond the sand, as our laughter
faded and our eyes locked. I knew I loved you then.

I look out over the fence and see the cows lying
down in the pasture, but try to stifle any expectations;
it could go either way. I smash out the cherry, only half
smoked, and retreat to the bedroom. She has already
taken off her glasses, but even still, I face the wall
to undress. I huddle under the sheets, carefully staying
on my side. A quick goodnight kiss, before she kills
the lights and I turn over, to pray for rain.

OUTSIDE OF A CHURCH, THINKING OF YOU

by Jordan Sanderson

Between the sidewalk and the red
brick church, flowering pears drop
yellow leaves, revealing their true
shapes. Through bare limbs,
the church's stark doors look gaudy
as white eye shadow. A couple
people linger outside, not hesitant
but busy with their last minute.
Others pass, nodding and reaching
for door handles. It seems as if nobody
is inside the muted suits, the black
dresses. The wind can't prove
otherwise. Who knows what's
happening behind the clouds, heavy
as eyelids. You said even when you
didn't mean it, praying reminded you
of the first time you took off your clothes.

RUBBINGS

by Nancy Carol Moody

The door swings inward, the burnished knob finding the hole it dug for itself in the plaster. Each slatted crate, every cardboard box—they've all been carted off, the walls darkened with afterimage, cityscape of shadow and oil behind the places where furniture stood. Floorboards and moldings tell we were here, dings and gouges cryptic as wormwood. Propped in the corner—a pair of hard-worn denims, wads of tissue paper stuffing the legs. I don't know where the torso wandered off to; it's possible in this life to exist in twelve time zones all at once. This morning when I saw you stepping into the cab—the pinpoint shirt, reliable neck, your hair lit like copper wire—I knew that you were true, though you'd left me for a city four airports away. Once, stranded in some other place, we drank our way through midnight in a café outside the security gate, far beyond the departure signs. Wax dripped down the sides of cheap candles, puddled opalescent on the oilcloth. I rolled in a fingertip, left my print in the molten white, a piece of me for you to peel away after things had finally cooled. You carried that bit forever in the pocket of your jeans, rubbed it endlessly with your thumb, rubbed it until the last ridge had wore down.

ELECTRIC JUAREZ

by Sean Prentiss

A Mexican street vendor shouts / out, *I shock you / for three dollar* as he
holds up
a wooden box / with cables running to shimmering / chrome handles.
Bones smiles, rubs my leg, and I could remain / forever drunk / under
this Juarez sun.

I slap thirty pesos on the rickety table, almost spilling / our cervezas.
The vendor places the handles / in our palms, and pantomimes for us—
Bones and me
—to hold hands. Bones / whispers, / *Shock me, / baby.*

In three days she'll be gone / (2,000 miles and— / this time / —for good).
But today she runs her palm over my calluses / as I snake my fingers
through hers— / completing / our circuit.

The vendor twists a silver knob— / electricity tingles our grip
tight / (unbreakable). The vendor twists / the knob farther. Muscles
spasm.
Click-click. More spasms. The vendor / smiles, wipes / his hands on
brown pants.

We swallow the pain / until he snaps / the machine / off. We slump
to the table (aching or loving). Bones, she grabs her Bohemia, pulls it / to
her lips,
and empties it. Giggling, she says, / *Don't touch. I am / electricity.*

OUR SCARS: FIVE POEMS

by Sean Prentiss

She talks of others as if she owns the world.
She pretends she is flawless (her skin, her heart).

If she allowed, he would lay her down, undressed her (but not like that).
He'd search her body, find every scar—as she cried (but not like that).

As they lay side by side (never kissing or admitting), she not once whispers,
Let our scars fall in love. Though her body yells it.

If he studied them enough, he'd see that her scars are constellations.
Sad, ancient stories.

She says that her scars (and his longings) are nothing.
Just nothing. He knows that perhaps they are everything.

AND EVERY EVENING

by Shelby Cook

Don't say anything as voices from late night tv
bounce about the room, echoing in empty vases,
ready to fracture from simple vibrations, on shelves.
Making eye contact every so often, I occasionally
see you steal a glance at my ankles. Frightened eyes
scanning for new lines of crimson draped over bone,
like velvet ribbon sewn to a ratty champagne evening gown.
You won't find any, you know, you check regardless
of logic. You can't see the ribcage breaching skin
beneath an oversized sweater, but your eyes never
want to see such translucent magnificence. Body
shimmering in the light, almost forming rainbows
in the cellophane suffocating my organs. Look
at another, smile again, focus on the vibrant
dancing colors ahead. Both stand, legs
almost buckle beneath the astounding weight
of a skeleton, as the voices dissipate with
a click. Pause. Think about the caloric intake
of silence. You embrace me far longer than necessary,
measuring how many times your arms can stretch
around my waist, testing if I could shatter so easily.
I love you. Have beautiful dreams.
It takes all I can muster,
Goodnight.

A PRAYER FOR HEALING MY WIFE'S MENTAL ILLNESS

by Paul David Adkins

After twenty years,
what would we do
with her well self?

What would
I do
when she answered questions
beyond yes or no?
When she wanted to walk five miles
evenings after work for exercise?

The house would peel to pieces
in the gusts produced
by the power of her wellness.

When she realized
I never mailed her credit applications,
never called the 1-800 number
for snuggies of every color.

When she mounted the scale,
couldn't curse it —
Broken thing! —
as numbers spun past two hundred.

When we took a drive,
and she didn't nod off
but spoke
and turned to me
clear-headed and fierce.

[IS IT YOUR GIVING IN]

by Liza Porter

Is it your giving in that always shocks me, the way jail cells call you so often, three meals and a cot, god, yes, it galls me that I can't rip the dope from your veins or the booze from your heart, when did you start all those escape attempts, sad Houdini with hands tied behind your back, legs bent like chicken bones, locked inside a foot locker at the bottom of the sea, was it the codeine cough syrup, the way it went down the throat so nice and easy, so slow, like the hand of a mother on your forehead when you're a child, sick, or a bowl of chicken noodle, is that what the first high felt like? like that first warm green smoke in my lungs, the thing I'd been craving for fifteen years to fix me or make me disappear or just soften the edges for a while, funny, I've never asked you that question, what it was like for you that first time, and here you're out there doing it again, the anorexic meth head living in your house, answering the phone, she keeps the bathroom scrubbed as good as any five-star hotel maid, I can see her in there with a worn-out toothbrush, scrubbing, scrubbing, Comet cleanser dusted all over the floor, bleaching the knees of her ragged Levi's, is that what you need? someone to clean for you? if I'd known that I'd have moved in long ago, left my family and their safe ignorance, these normies who have no clue what it's like to spend whole days trying to shake the sickness that descends at night like crossfire, like a war that exists purely in the mind, the real enemy dead and has been for years, and I keep expecting to hear that you're gone, maybe drowning in your own vomit, dead like Morrison or Jimi or Mama Cass, and I'll never get to say any of this: the way you look and sound like our father when you're drunk, the screams I horde inside like gold, the way I disappear so I won't have to see it, I keep thinking I'll come upon you, sprawled out on your bed, filthy sheets tangled round your legs, dead pupils like needle marks, a big smile on your face cause it feels so fucking good, it always did and always will.

SUNDAY BEST

by Caitlin Thomas

I wanted to drown in your above ground pool
the one you first cannonballed into.
And when puberty hits
like Thor's hammer,
I'll swim to the shore that is your trailer park back yard.
Life will resume as usual.
Your mom will give me looks in bible study every Friday,
and Cosmopolitan tips every Saturday.
And your dad will be tweaking
and taking photos of my Sunday best,
even when I'm feeling my Sunday worse.
I can't help it if the flash always makes me blink, I tell him.
His meth pipe was always a sparkly invitation,
and the smoke that blew out of his mouth
was the only fog we had that summer.

A VISITATION

by Lauren Eyles

The Daniels, God bless them, still kept their key in the fake rock. They were almost never home. They spent the majority of their retirement at their beach house in Hilton Head. When I used to live across the street with Lotte, I often found myself staring out of our dining room window thinking it was strange, a dark house with a trimmed lawn, round bushes, and the pastels of azaleas. Neatness mingled with abandonment. They never bothered to set up automatic timers. When they were gone, they were gone. Everyone was welcome to know.

I stood on their porch looking at Lotte's house. Dusk had settled behind it, a light orange passing into the color of pink carnations. Lotte had left the light on in the kitchen for the cat, like always.

Memories of our quick dinners came to mind. She'd taught me her German succinctness, bread being buttered with French cheese. She laid a spread of deli meats and peculiar cardboard crackers. I drank German beer with my meal, a Kölsch that I'd fallen in love with in Berlin. The beer was her father's favorite. She hoped our mutual appreciation would soften the blow when he found out her lover was a woman.

There was a saying he'd always railed off, "Career, Husband, Children." For all I knew as I stood on the porch, she was moving down his well-lit path.

The boards complained beneath my feet with all the promises of horror movies come to life. There was no one home to hear them, to become suspicious or scared, and I was aware enough of my surroundings to be unconcerned by the noise, but I decided to be cautious. I sat down with my back against the house's front in the shade of Daniels' azaleas.

John Daniels had dedicated five years to the purple and white azaleas that cast shadows on the porch. He checked the nitrogen levels once a year, laid enough mulch so that the street smelled like manure. Frequent watering and constant grooming and there they were, the perfect height for me to sit behind without being seen.

It was seven and the trains would come howling through the city at eight, at ten. My body clock felt their whistles in the moments before the engineer released them. That pitch in my ears created anxiety. It crept up into my back muscles and manifested as spasms below my neck. Lotte could sleep through them because they were a part of her South Carolina childhood, the eight years she spent before she moved back to Germany for high school. I begrudged her for the time I spent in our bed awake. Lotte was there, but I was alone staring at the ceiling, unable to go back to sleep.

Understand this. I don't slink in the grass. I don't follow her around town and try to overhear what she says to her friends. I know where she works. I don't drive by hoping to catch a glimpse of her. I don't want her to see me still searching for her. So this night was not ordinary. It was

an event, a remembrance of the day she told me she did not love me anymore. This was three-hundred and sixty-five days after I found out I wasn't her cup of tea. I could morph, I'd told her, from English Breakfast to Earl Gray, from Dragon Well to Silver Needle, or if tea wasn't her thing I could become juice, milk, Coke. But she relegated me to be a piece of ice that she let melt in her glass.

You should leave, she told me that night. It would be best for both of us. But, before I really understood what she meant, I started pointing. Here, I said. Look at all of these things we have in common. Look at what we share. We possess patience at the galleries. We tune down the noise of crowds to white color. We don't sketch. We go to meet the paintings, and who can say that they truly know a painting, know it as they know close friends. We understand the love song that is a rubber glove, green ball, and head of a Roman statue juxtaposed. De Chirico composed it for us.

Look at the secrets we know about each other, I said. The shower has to be on cold so you don't get a rash. I huddle on the floor with my towel wrapped around me, moments of empty space floating through like clouds.

And this, I said. Your body fits inside of mine so we wake up in the same position, your head beneath my chin. I pointed and pointed before I understood that her eyes were out of focus. The fact that her father wouldn't approve had dilated them. Her pupils were big and round with his expectations. That was something even an ophthalmologist couldn't fix.

She said she was a coward. Back then I said, no love, no you're not a coward because I wanted to believe that. I wanted to believe that she couldn't be plowed under by something so superficial when this was the rest of her life we were talking about. But she is craven. I can see that now. She is a coward. Did it take me a year to figure that out? I don't know, but that night I went out to see what she did with her hidden life.

A whistle, and it was ten. The apartment I moved into was close to the tracks. There I could hear the metal grinding to a halt on metal, engine tearing the air, but on the Daniels' porch there was nothing but the whistle, long, long, short, a pitch higher, the moan permission to extract the key from the rock.

I stuck the key into the lock like I always did when I went over to water the azaleas, to put their newspapers and mail on their kitchen table, to be a neighborly neighbor doing neighborly things. It'd been a year since I'd done it, but I didn't feel like an intruder. Just a visitor getting something to drink.

In their parlor, where they kept their malt scotch, my fingers traced the names along the bottles: Cragganmore, Dalwhinnie, Obran, Talisker. John and Patrice and I took our liquor on the rocks. The warmth on the tongue was enough to make you sweat even in a Carolina winter. As we swirled the liquid around the ice, I learned about the azaleas, how to trim them, provide the right nutrients. That's when I earned John's trust, when he told me where they hid the key, when he granted me the privilege of caring for his flowers.

Patrice would reach into the past and talk about the riots in Chicago. The shelves surrounding us held books about The Black Panthers and the deaths of Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner. She'd let me borrow a few and our dialogue drifted from its one-sidedness.

John and Patrice were an unusual breed blooming in the fake smile friendless of the South. Things would change they'd tell me. Times they are a changin,' John said. Patrice laughed, and I tipped my glass back and finished what was left, letting the ice hit my teeth.

After tracing the names of the scotch, I moved on from the liquor cabinet. Drinking it without the two of them would be an unforgivable sin. As I reached for a bottle of club soda from the mini-fridge, I realized how much I'd missed them, how Lotte had taken them away from me. I had to walk away from those moments because it was too much to see what was once our house, too much to bump into each other. It was too often to feel angry and lost.

Back on the porch, I took a swig and let the bubbles pop on the tip of my nose. My thoughts ran back to her. Where was she and who was she with? I know now, but then I was still keeping her romantic, off by herself in some theatre, sitting while the credits poured over into the clicking of the reel. Black, then the lights coming up, bringing her out of lives that didn't exist.

Her habit was to wait until the theatre emptied. Even when we were together, I left with the crowd and waited for her to walk out the door. Maybe now the movie was over and she had stopped on the way home to have a beer. She never minded drinking and driving. What was life without taking stupid chances? What was life if you weren't willing to ruin it?

At eleven, another whistle. I finished the last bit of club soda and stared into her house. I thought about all the crazy things I'd wanted to do just a few months ago. Coming in the middle of the night and chopping all the heads off her flowers, throwing a brick through her window, taking a handful of azaleas and placing them where the cat would find and eat them. And I wanted to do things less violent, wanted to sneak in and pour out all the milk so she wouldn't have any for her coffee in the morning. Nothing pissed her off more than not having milk for her coffee.

I hadn't decided if I was going to stay or go when I saw the headlights. I stood up and moved toward the flowers. My head was visible, but who would think to look at the porch of an empty house to see eye staring at you.

His car. It was his car. And here I had to smile. I had to think what a perfect show this would be because he would come inside, he would come inside her house, and I would know he fucked her on the bed that we had both paid for while I stood looking in the windows. Him. Chandler. Chandler and his pink pants and polo shirts. His BMW 62-184XQW or whatever it was. But the lights shut off. The doors didn't open. I could see the two of them, but only as shadows.

I saw him shift. His head skimmed the roof of the car and then he settled again. His chin tilted upward. His eyes away from her, shut, looking at the place where things felt good. Her head came forward and then

down and then up and then down. I watched it bob. She'd transformed into obsequiousness, something she had never done in bed with me.

He stiffened for a moment. His hand held her head in place. I imagined her brown eyes watering, holding off the gag reflex, giving that one-hundred percent effort. His shadow mouth opened as he oozed into her. Then, he let loose her head. He was shifting, zipping. Did he pat her on the knee and tell her what a good girl she was?

Do you want to come in? That was the first of her voice I'd heard in a year, but she wasn't asking. She was pleading. I knew. I'd heard it before while she was on the phone with her father. But Papi, I don't think I'm meant to be an accountant.

But she was. And now, she's an accountant in that big building downtown, the same one that Chandler works in with his yellow shirts and purple pants.

Chandler, she said, are you sure? He waved. He wasn't looking at her, but at the road. The car started. She bent down, asking for another date, telling him she'd had such a wonderful time. He was pulling away while she closed her door.

There she was with her hands free and searching for something to hold her up. Five steps and she was at the mailbox, her arm over it like they'd been pals for a long time. Almost midnight and she was crying on the street. She didn't cry when I'd left for good. Parts of me swirled, the parts that possessed love for her still, the parts that still thought of fairy tale endings, the parts that had forgotten Guinevere. But the rest that she had bruised refused to sway.

There she was deep breathing, tears soaking into her shirt. Her body started to drum the stuff up. Glottis. Larynx. Esophagus. Diaphragm. The muscles in her stomach squeezing, ringing her out. The curls of her hair jerked. Her mouth opened. He, mixed in with her spit and her trying too hard, became a pool in the blades of grass. After the last tightening and constricting, she turned to the house. Straight as a line, she walked to the door, opened, shut it, and the lights in the bathroom came on.

I imagined her stripping down to nothing, pale thighs, a nude in a Renaissance painting. She was letting the water run into the tub. In the dark, she found her way to the kitchen, the water rushing. She pulled a bottle of champagne off the marble cabinets, a bottle her father sent from his collection he gathered on his biannual trips to France. The cork popped, the bubbles streaking down her throat in gulps until she began to feel full and dizzy, a combination good for erasing. She put a record on so she felt like someone else was with her. I could hear the prominent scratching before the first note was struck.

In the tub she felt the heat, the liquid pushing against her legs. She felt the elixir flowing into her desert stomach, through to her intestines, forming little oases that sailed up to her head. She shut the door to the bathroom. The light hummed. Two doors between her and me.

I went back into the Daniels' house. I headed straight for the malt scotch and chose the Talisker. Talisker made on the Isle of Skye. Talisker, full-bodied with a smooth beginning, burgeoning intensity, and a

long thaw of a finish. John and Patrice, I knew, would understand. With scotch in hand, I left their house.

I crossed the street, the street I used to cross to come home to her. I would put the mail on their table and lock their door and return to ours. She would be there with a kiss, a beer, a kind word. This crossing was different, bottle in hand and nobody waiting.

I knew that no one would notice the figure brandishing the bottle. The cops didn't go back in the 'burbs that late at night. They didn't go into the neighborhoods of normalcy where all the wives and husbands were sound asleep at one in the morning, where people didn't bother to set up timers when they were out of town.

Ants crawled through the white foam, over the bent blades of grass. I pulled the cork out with my teeth and tilted the bottle. I poured handfuls at a time, let it punch the ants, drag them off into the darkness. Everything became strands of amber drool. Rivulets of him and her and liquid from the Isle of Skye.

For a moment, I thought of going to her. I thought about slipping through her front door and washing her from head to foot like I was Jesus at the last supper. Afterward, I would disappear into the night with the hope that I might have reached her.

Instead, I gripped the bottle by the neck, shoved the cork back into place. I stepped over the pile of slime mixed with the liquid that was burning out all of the feelings the froth encased. I walked past her bedroom window, through her backyard, toward my apartment. I knew the next train would be whistling in three minutes.

All this just to say that I spent a night thinking about hiding. I spent a night thinking about why people hide, how people hide. I thought about it during the trains' busiest hour, three to four. Whistles, curt and verbose, shrill and contralto, cut all around me. All of them sounded like a reckoning.

AUGUST THIS YEAR

by Alyse K. Bense

I've seen too many deer
halved on the highway.
Fauns and mothers alike.
Suburban peonies burst
over petunias that never
seem to die. At Sayer Dam
a disease invisible in water
left silver crappies floating
bloated, slowly half-buried
in the shore's sand.

What we need
is the cooling to slow us—
for the faun stumbling across
the tarred highway, blink the lights,
watch youth wander off into the night.

NOVEMBER

by Carlos Gomez

Hard not to remember the cold days in November.
The cool wind, gray skies, harsh rain in November.

Shorter days, less sunshine, leaves change from green,
flowers dying, fewer aromas, all these came in November.

New leaders trying to solve old problems, people choosing
for the elections, made it important to campaign in November.

A day to honor those who served, and those who fell,
brings a lot of pain in November.

But one dinner, one bird, and a longer weekend,
made it so all family came in November.

Few even came by bringing gifts because
twenty years ago, Carlos got his name in November.

SELF-PORTRAIT AS A STOAT

by Noel Sloboda

Born blind I was
unready for this

electric dance. Still
to celebrate my only fall

leaving I streaked
my molted coat with sod

camouflage to make me bleed
into cracked earth below

the liquid darkness
of circling hawks.

PORTRAIT OF A WOMAN WORRYING HERSELF FARTHER FROM SLEEP

by A.J. Huffman

She watches the sky for signs
of light—not life, she knows better. At this hour,
only the dead are flying. Their graying
silhouettes hovering in corners, doorframes,
dangling from sills. . .

She remembers a cat—of a similar
color—curled beneath her feet, wonders which,
if either, of them is solid enough to survive
the first breath of dawn.

FRAGMENTED STILL LIFE WITH CARDOON AND PARSNIPS

by David-Glen Smith

After a painting by Juan Sánchez Cotán (circa 1602)

1.

—as an effort to steal away the breath
circling warm inside your mouth, lingering
with the taste of green onions, pale currants,
something other than burnt coffee and tobacco:

those sweet addictions which filled out your days and hours.
Despite the past histories, the failings between,
there was a time I would step into your arms, into
the dark embrace. You: my addiction, my unrest.

Nights I try writing you down. Fingering
uprooted bulbs, memories stifled with a want
to replace— but let's move forward, ignore the flow
of confessions of broken desire, ignore

the lost love, establish the new scene as a still life:
a table gathered in shadows, burdened with fruits,

2.

Depths of burnt sienna. Raw umber.
The colors of your eyes when dusk settled
over the horizon. The idea of you
always coming over me as a fierce Apollo,

a false sun god rising to flay the words
held in my mouth, the piping rhythm slumbering
on my tongue. Your bruising love unsettled
portions of my identity, the rise and sway,

the change of inner politics, a slow
erasure of what I motioned towards.
Almost as a consumption of the whole, this love
left me in corners of theaters, in shadows,

or coarse boxes with lifted lids, an exposed, partial view
of unseen contents. Leaving me still wanting to hold you,

of the day, when you told me—
when the light struck cross your face, cross your body
framed in the doorframe: a distant, immobile
Apollo, haloed in afternoon, ruddy

Bundled roots left unclaimed
in disappearing light, the motions ripping

in memories of your denial, pale as white
titanium. Blinded with shades of yellow ochre light.

—with a greening cardoon, the herb rising curved, arched, leaning back, almost circular. The fibrous stalk touches past and present in the same instant, just as two motions are spent

associated with meetings of flesh
to flesh, handfuls of you spilling forth— Men are like fish
when roused motioning back, as salmon arching
in rapids, darting from present to past, lurching

forward as though drunk, blood slumbering in the veins
waiting to be called,

motioned forward into remains

THE CITY REMAINS INSIDE YOU

by David-Glen Smith

after nightfall, when stepping back, out of the cold,
you leave behind winter's brittle hold in the streets,

—even after the street lights flicker and stutter,
shifting on for the night. And after the snow turns

to a softer, wet sleet, when the people huddle
outside in queues, waiting to move forward, to blur

their lives with music, with the raw plushness of sounds,
with the city branching out, regrouping. Extreme

measures, as skyscrapers jostle for positions
with steps of synagogues and cathedral steeples,

angled against awkward shaped financial temples,
and hotels from another era, motioning

as they drift with encrusted barnacles. They lean
in clusters on the city blocks, gathered downtown

waiting in clutches for the crowd to move forward
into the club, shake slush off their feet, off shoulders
of coats,

—even after walking downstairs towards
crowded tables cluttered with mugs of local beer,

the fragmented perceptions of the room collect,
—even after the club door closes on the city,

the city waits outside, curling by the front door,
brushing up close, into the jazz of the moment,

in syncopation, the liquid rhythms pouring
around the room, natural synchronicity

of the moment forming in a collective voice
—even afterwards, the city remains with you,

in the back of the mind, a constant reminder,
constructions of measures, almost instinctual,

musical bars and lines of notes, time signatures

with sheets of sound: brick by brick, you cannot avoid

it now. The memory burns in your head, almost
a scar. You cannot leave it behind or forget

the sound of a winter rain against the windows.
The same way modern jazz opens, casual and slow,

performers shifting, stepping forward, a quintet
of instrument and voice—

the caramel warm notes
slip from a slender throat, as liquid release, void

of pretense, and the sax unknots his shuffle-time,
swing-note, twelve-bar form. The crowd falls, lost in timelines,

lost in obscure tonal key shifts, solos tussling
for attention on the stage—melody binding

itself in the recess of the eardrums, tangles
in lives of the audience and the city that

they hold between their hands, the ever present *now*
shared with twenty, maybe thirty, other strangers

in the room, the common bond opening larger,
beyond expectations, expanding in the flow

from sax to drums to bass and back, complexity
unbound—the quarter note deconstructed, dangles

between the audience and the performers—
suspended, mid-air, hovering close, then fades
released.

The jazz sequence unwinds onto the floor.
You stand, inhaling the moment by the back door,

then step out to the waiting arms of the city and
swallow the night,

—failing to fully comprehend it all—

TWELVE CONVERSATIONS WITH A WINTER MOON

by David-Glen Smith

The analogy
should be made obvious. Clear.
The words in the book
become the voice in your head.
My voice repeating my words.

•

You hold a pebble.
The pebble aches to increase
in size, move beyond
perimeters of your hand,
or notions of being owned.

•

Sometimes you appear
after a long night drinking,
blurry-eyed. Wrinkled.
A dark edge of unshaven
whiskers on your curved features.

•

What was— is now gone—
burnt out embers, cold ashes.
Circumstances change
overtime— the stove once hot
transforms to a stone-cold shell.

•

— and even your eyes
carry the ghost impressions
of your former past.
Shadows which cling at your heels
distort in the morning light—

•

A shirt lies empty,
forgotten on the unmade
corner of the bed—
transforms to ghost memory
or a mere speculation—

•

As an empty plate
left on the table's worn edge—
unspoken symbol
or expectant metaphor—
you pause—an apparition —

•

A lamp left burning
on the darkening side street,
as unfinished poems
piled on a desk top by
the window with open blinds.

•

Outside each window
your face shifts between the glass,
a ghostly voyeur
witnessing each fallen word,
each failed gesture between us.

•

Other times you fade
in the background as a blur
in a photograph,
a forgotten phrase pausing
on the tip of a blunt tongue.

•

Like the time you tripped
walking up the stairs, drunk on
experience and
returning home with someone's
breath still warm inside your mouth—

•

You linger palely
resting on the horizon
as a vague notion,
or a sight hesitation
I cover up with one hand.

SMALL TOWN BLISS

by Jeff Hardin

I have a friend who stayed behind.
A small town bliss is what he sought.
Each morning on the way to work
he meets his former, ancient school bus
and knows (were one to ask) its number: 75-9.
Friday afternoon, I hear, can wreck a soul
when paycheck comes but leaves as soon.
The local paper once a week arrives
doled one sentence to a paragraph.
Even here, the mayor's name is lost on most.

I have a friend who calls to say hello,
more so to discern if having stayed was best.
During summer, twice a week, he suits up
for a diner's sponsored team and seldom
hits one in the gap. The ump's a childhood pal.
The lady in the score box mixes balls and strikes.
Kids half his age say, "He can fly,"
though soon they're gone to ride in town.
He still eats corn dogs and makes the circle
before the state park locks its gates.
No one's mentioned Shakespeare in a while.

I have a friend who wished me well;
and Sundays, I believe, he voices prayers
on my behalf. He bows, believes the words,
and sings old songs he's known since youth.
I'd guess him for a tenor, always one
to cast his voice to blend with those nearby.
Each of us is past his prime, and what we are
will have to be. We correspond, if only to restore
some consolation for our choices made.
I think his morning porch must be reward.
I think his feet-scrapes sing the swing's slow back-and-forth.

TO A FARMER WHOSE FIELDS ARE RUINED

by Jeff Hardin

This last day of the month I see you standing at a fence; your foot is propped upon a rail. In my car I am going to one of the places I go often—I am listening to a violin concerto, something like angels listen to when God's voice is out strolling again and, alone, they need to hear their wings. If I stopped, could we talk? Would you put your hand along my shoulder, or would you point past the scorched corn stalks, say then something about men's thoughts, about the occasion of faith in a heart's demise, about birds, their nests, the speckled eggs, the flecks and veins when birth occurs. I think this day is built of mortar and stillness, lack of melons. I've always loved the color yellow, more bright than squash. I was hoping your pensive stare might impress God himself, that He might grant another day of creation, allow you anything, whatever most you've dreamed but never seen, yours alone. Not even the birds would know—not even I would know. I was hoping this, though if it happened, how would I know? I'd have only a feeling, a sense. I'd look up to see you shift your weight or turn in my direction, throw up a hand, a signal, a sign that says, "It's all familiar. This world we ride is holding us in place. This world has nests and rails and furrowed brows. We can almost hear the wind. It might be weighted down, barely able to make the next hill over. Let's go help it. Someone tell that hill to move."

THE BLUEBIRD BOXES AT THE DELHI WATER TREATMENT PLANT

by Billy Reynolds

Everywhere you looked, if you looked, hundreds of these boxes
pinned like corsages to the chain-link fence.

Once I sat under a row of red maples beside the pre-fab red barn,
the clouds utterly still,
the barn swallows, on patrol, cruising the fields,

while John stood in the back of the truck with fever and chills
pushing the last few leaves out.

Now John and I looked up, and there they were,
bluebirds on the railing above the abandoned clarifier,

creatures worth more than every nail John Fairbank nailed
because he wanted to see them
just like that—first thing in the morning

before we mowed the fields around the retention ponds.
John stood beside the truck's toolbox,

his arm above his eyes, a shield against bright early sun.
The bluebirds were gone in seconds, and the heat returned

while he sorted through his tools and looked up,
thinking of those birds, wherever they were, in what field,

at what speed
ranging across nameless borders,
soaring high over everything in a matter of minutes

until they landed once more and stirred in the brush,
until they were driven out by a long spasm of wind,

once more adrift out beyond the end of nowhere
while we stood in the grass and dirt bathed by the sun.

RANSFORD DODO AT THE DEPOT

by Daniel James Sundahl

The town's still there, but not as he remembers:
Elms over-arched the roads, and at the edge,

Close to the grain elevators, the depot Ransford Dodo
Worked. *Steady work. Railroad's good. Better*

*Than loading grain cars. A man falls in he's lost,
Sucked down, waving, beating out of breath.*

*

At the depot, Ransford Dodo sits, the rails empty,
Ties and telegraph poles stacked in pyres, the wires

Down in rolls. I remember him reducing prayer to code,
The hand sending signals: three short, three long,

Three short. Repeat, tapping hard soft hard. Repeat.
Stop and look and listen for an answer coming back.

LOST NEAR WINGFIELD SPRINGS

by TR Poulson

I hear a song behind those fences
running one into another, hiding swings
and dandelions. I wonder if the bank
owns the empty house on Silent Sparrow
Drive. The streets are all birds
here: Laughing Chukar Lane, Pelican Court,
Whooping Crane Drive. My mother
could tell me who eats seeds, whose eyes peer
through a black ring encircling its face, whose beaks
scoop up salmon, who is endangered,
and who flies on wings
laced with pink. But she could never tell me
how to get out. I think I've seen the house
with the gray Dodge truck and coiled
green hose in the driveway. Or have I?
Here, among the birds, things repeat: roof angles,
poles and spindled porches, crossed windows, vents
beneath eaves. The man with the black and gold dog
at the beige house on Rosy Finch Drive
looks like a lieutenant, with his cropped
hair and dark green jacket. Maybe he plays
video games with his son in the morning, and maybe
he slaps his wife at night. If I stop
to ask directions
would he give them to me?

COMING THIS FAR

by Davide Trame

The hour, early afternoon and vast light rain.
In the solitude of the cabin, shingles
rattling in the slightest gust of damp wind.
It's still going to be a long Easter day, assessing
silence and everything that can't stop resurrecting.
It's strangely alluring because it's so unavoidable
trying to balance one's own tips, finding
a temporary but wholly satisfactory "that's it",
poking honestly one's own inner peevish gutter.
The shingles twinkle in the light silver drops.
Among the droplets crowding your heart's view
and the echoes: "after coming this far what
will you ever do?"

The wave crests, the foam, the crumbling
tigers' ghosts rolling forward, perpetual Prufrocks
looking for revenge, resurrecting in the trench.

Are we made only of fragments?

Syllables and bodies waiting and then transiting?

Various Vladis and Gogoes sitting on shingles
in a lull in between the rush hour and the night?

With the tree so suddenly blooming into spring?

Blossoms blaring and our hearts, as ever, late
shuffling onward after being stuck on our
cobwebs of crossroads?

Or it's just a lie, the Golden Age, this
lighting of fools to the dusty all that.

Maybe it has always been like this, the bedraggled
director of the orchestra trying to arrange harmony
out of an improvised accolade of violins
while scrutinizing the canopy of rain at the horizon,
the tigers flaring the longing torches of lost reigns...
oh dear me, dear me...how badly I would like
to get settled in longing, accepting
the twinkling lure from down there,
surfing the Trades, in sleep and prayer.

DOWNSTREAM

by Jordan Sanderson

The river wrestled a wadded newspaper,
a glossy pink wrapper, and the reflection
of wasps papering a nest under the railing
of the pier. A lure, designed to resemble
a wounded minnow, dangled from a limb
stretched over an eddy. An errant cast
based on the belief that anything worth
catching thrives in thickets of shadow.
No diving signs warned of the weakness
of water. Fish lingered in the shallows
beneath the wasps, sweeping clean beds
for their own eggs, waiting for grubs
to fall from above. Tense stingers pulsed.
A woman stood behind a man, her arms
around him as if teaching him to hold
a rod, to reel slowly, to navigate weeds.

LIGHT OVER THE KITCHEN SINK

by Richard King Perkins II

I try to remember where I walked before
the light over the kitchen sink burned out. Rubbing
the cold from my arms, past a battle-line of oaks,
avoiding the stripped-down frame of a stolen bike.
Sorting through the false hills of a garbage dump
where the saddest portion of our possessions are kept.
Across a random trace of shoreline and the sudden
escape of frogs. The details are acute. Severely defined.
The yellow grassland that caught fire in the driest
season, affording an angle of hawks their field day.
I like to think you would find many things unchanged.
Me, still wandering at the edge of heaven even as
almighty science has nearly proved the non-existence
of god. I think—this is exactly the lack of evidence God
wants them to find—and continue kicking
at the undergrowth of that astounding perimeter
and the spot by the river you chose. Solitude. Aloneness.
Having come this far in a bucolic framework, I can think
of no reason to replace to replace the bulb above
the sink; there is ambient light enough.

WITH NO SALT IN OUR WATER #39

by Darren C. Demaree

The trees of Ohio know me, know my fieldwork,
the times I've tried to work in the fields, the times
I brought young women

& whiskey to the early stalks of spring,
never knowing which of them would break
with the full weight of our nature

pressed against their bark, the empty swallow,
the dryness, the fumbling that always ruined denim.
No matter, the trees have watched,

kept tabs on me, joked with their colors
about my failures, took the wind in stride
as it knocked me all over this state. To survive,

survive the two of us, the leaning after the leaving,
we kept the highway two lanes, never poured
the whiskey into the root, or left a dirty ass

to camp alone once my tires kicked the gravel.
We have loved each other
& if they could climb my aged, thinning trunk

they would take their shot at burying me
before I found myself to be a young man again
& spared, I would give of myself what I had left.

POSTCARD FROM RUSSIA

by Michael Minassian

Above us, the clouds stack up
like suitcases & steamer trunks

piled up in the murderer's apartment,
waiting for the delayed journey

to the cemetery or perhaps
a long ride on the train East;

time enough to write a short novel
or to crack the case

before the unnamed protagonist,
speaking faster than a lighted match,

swallows whole sentences,
paragraphs disappearing like smoke,

words spilling onto the front of his shirt
then dropping like ash onto the floor:

Along the tree-lined avenue
the widows stand still, mute statues

among the upturned branches,
burdened by the guilt of lost sons & husbands,

then march like blackbirds
brushing their wings against the trees

as rain falls and the sky bends
revealing teeth & the space between words.

DEATH & PROGENY

by Justin Crawford

They stand on a proscenium stage that's covered in dirt and leaves. The spotlight sheds the darkness to three scattered trees with brown trunks and long leafless branches. A young oak house right and two old hickories house left. Backdrop of painted arching hillsides sweeping down below a faded blue sky. Unseen violin and piano tune, barely audible, like lost in a wind or muffled through radio speakers. She paces in a small radius from the oak, her boots pushing down the loose dirt. She wears jeans and a black long sleeve turtleneck, and as she paces, she rubs her arms. The man left house right for a minute or so before coming back with an armful of logs, and he drops them center stage beside a fire pit surrounded by a ring of stones. He removes a box of matches from his blue windbreaker pocket, and he begins to arrange the logs and other bits of collected tender in the fire pit.

"It's going to get dark soon," he says, turning his back to the audience, hiding his work on the fire, and when he stands, the fire is lit, along with two cigarettes. He hands one cigarette to the woman, and she takes it between her fingers. They both sit down together behind the fire, she leans her body into his chest. The light above them slightly dims every two minutes. Atmospheric sounds of bird calls, breaking sticks, and rustling of leaves, branches, and shrubbery can be heard faintly. A weak wind lifts a few dried leaves and a few strands of the woman's hair, she leans her head against his chin to peer into the crackling fire.

"They shouldn't find us out here," the woman says.

"Shouldn't' means little, Charlotte," the man says, dragging a finger down the side of her head.

"Are we making camp?" she asks.

"I'll set up the tent before we lose daylight, but let's just sit for awhile with this fire," he says, embers sparking in the pit.

"He had a son, you know?" she says.

"Who had a son?"

"The man."

"What man?"

"The man who recognized you back in town."

"Oh, that man..."

The woman stands up to pace again. She takes long puffs of her cigarette before flicking it into the dirt at her feet and boot stomping the cigarette three times, twisting the soil with her heel. She's younger than the man by about ten years, her face smooth, narrow, high-peaked cheek bones, and dark and thick circles of makeup around her eyes. The man stands to throw another log on the fire, and the burnt wood turns to ash. His hair is grey, a few broken capillaries under the heavy bags of his eyes, and a fading scar halfway across his jaw line. She unsheathes a knife and begins to carve into the trunk of an oak. She's accurate, each cut a

smooth stroke, and she dips the knife in and down, lifts, and repeats.

"How do you know he had a son?" he asks.

"There was a picture in a frame on his desk."

"Cute kid?" he asks, standing to stretch his legs.

"Aren't all kids essentially cute?" she responds, dragging the blade across tough bark. She puts the knife back in the sheath, and the man bites his lower lip. A robin lands on a bare tree branch, perks its head to open its mouth, but it does not sing. Talons wrap around the branch, black eyes scanning back and forth, and it raises its neck. A breeze shakes the branch. The robin sways with the movement. The woman looks up at the bird, smiles briefly, and tunnels her lips to whistle. She fails her first attempt, more strained breath than sound, and licks her lips to try again. This time, she whistles with intense inflection, quickly running through scales mimicking a songbird's warble.

"Look! I carved our names into a tree," she says, walking downstage toward him. "Charlotte hearts John. Doesn't it feel like we're fifteen again?" She shivers while rubbing her hands together over the dimming fire. "I'd like to remember what happened back in town a little differently. Like how when you wake up from a dream, some of the details become a little hazy. Do you mind if I share my version of the story with you, John? Call it a bonfire palaver."

He flips his cigarette butt into the fire. "Sure," he says, "sure."

"Because when you're on the road, small towns crop up most of your travels. They blur together, never the same twice but never completely different. Small towns are death and progeny, people awaiting the end while new people come screaming into existence. Everyone in-between exists in that limbo murky, grey area. Garrett, Chippewa, Medusa, Anmoore. You and I have seen so many towns. Fields of wheat and corn, morning fog over dusty rivers, snow drifts that slide across highways. Traveling together, I started a dream journal. In Windsor, Virginia, I dreamt there was an ocean outside our hotel window, waves crashing on an unseen beach. A sea serpent flailed in the water, whipping and lashing out at our room until we both ran down the halls screaming through rubble. In Eva, Alabama, you and I got married. Small church occasion. Our families bore witness. In St. Leo, Florida, I gave birth to a house. I was in labor for one month with my legs up in stirrups, and the dream rippled physical pain through my body. You were there, John, giving me your support. The doctor cradled the house in his arms and told me I was now the proud mother of a three bedroom, two bath, Victorian.

"This morning, we drove into a town because we heard of a great treasure at the antique store. It was an 1A 18K gold pocket watch circa 1867 made by Adolph Lange, and it belonged in a museum but somehow ended up in Donald's Antiques on Main Street. Post World War II, A. Lange & Söhne was seized, making the line of pocket watches from the Lange family more valuable. The book price was \$19,253.45, and you thought it would be the perfect engagement gift for me. I've always had an interest in timekeepers. Then there was a carnival in town, and I told you that I wanted to see a bearded lady because I had never seen one. The

witches in *Macbeth* were bearded, and in the dream I wondered if that was their inspiration, if the whole line of bearded ladies came from that play. Jugglers, high divers, flame and sword swallowers, the usual band of travelers paraded their tricks on smaller stages. Children were playing on the rides, the Ferris wheel was a big hit, and we rode three full rotations taking in the horizon. The A&S man couldn't guess your weight, or my occupation. We masqueraded as two normal people.

"We hung around until closing time, and then we wandered over to Donald's Antiques. The store was closed but unlocked, and we entered, walking around some broken glass. It was a rather handsome store: clean red carpeting, pale yellow flower-print wallpaper, and a cheap chandelier with some candelabras in the corners of the open room. Vases and lamps lined the shelves, next to older toys, and some picture frames with Impressionist flowers and fruit arrangements. A giant plastic Jolly Green Giant stood near the window, and we made our way to the counter near the cash register. There were several pocket watches, and it took me awhile to spot the Lange, but then Donald came out of a back room and frightened us. He yelled at you, 'Hey, I've seen you before. You were on the news this morning. You're John Holland.' And you, being modest, pulled out your 8mm camera to take his photo. You explained to him that you were John Holland, that all that fame acquired by being an actor had really gotten to you, and that you have been staying away from the public eye. Donald understood quite well with a great deal of head nodding, and you procured my engagement gift and your change from the register. Donald quickly grabbed a red scarf and you shot him in 8mm, and then he went in the back to lie down because he was tired. Very tired. You were in a hurry to leave, tugging at my sleeve, but I was distracted by the photo of Donald and his son. I liked Donald, and I didn't want him to leave on our account. I wanted him to stay and talk with us longer."

The woman wipes her eyes, and the man leans his head against the tree into which she'd carved their names. A buck comes into view of the backdrop, a large animal clopping its hooves into the soil. He walks past the trees and off stage. She throws another log on the fire, shivering, and continues, "So in being a famous actor, you found the world closing in on you. As your manager, I decided to come with you. Call it young love or just a desire to see more of the world, we both wanted this trip more than anything. But not even you could afford to stay in hotels all the time, so we brought with us the camping gear. We got in our car, and we made our way past the carnival to find a camping spot. The surrounding area of the town was forest, deep and lush deciduous trees that have given up their leaves. That was when we got here. That's my version."

It's dusk. Snow falls. The woman sits with a small steel music box in her lap rotating the crank in her palm and the cylinder spins. Faint music clinks and taps from the cylinder while pins strike comb teeth, and she hums a tune of vocal vibrations in a high key that she matches with the pitch of the miniature music. Her shadow flickers by the firelight, and her dark hair has fallen over her face. The man puts up the tent: driving the spikes into the dirt and erecting the infrastructure of metal poles. The

snow hits and slides down the canvas material of the tent. He cuts his hand on the jagged edge of one of the spikes, and blood drops to the thin covering of snow. He grabs a bandage out of a duffel bag, and he wraps his hand and tapes the end of the coiled bandage. He finishes the tent, and he carries a blanket to the woman to drape over her shoulders. She does not look up from the orbit of her music box. A tiny circulating galaxy in her lap that has her locked in a trance. He snaps his fingers by her ear, and she quickly looks up at him. The music ceases, all the faraway sounds of the woods fade into vespertine stillness, and even the snow stops falling. Everything is falling in darkness. Seconds fall with no words between them, both of them still and mute. Their breaths fall visibly frozen from their open mouths. Then their eyes fall to the ground. The man has lost her, at least for the day but maybe forever. One instant, one flash, and Donald falls, is falling, will fall repeatedly in her mind, looping like her music box.

ABOUT YOUR MAMA

by Ruth Holzer

Your mother's antepenultimate breath
will be spent telling you about your hair:
she doesn't like the length or cut of it.
Full of her penultimate breath, she will
accuse you of bearing her a grudge, though
she was very lenient with you when
you were growing up. With her last breath, she'll
let you know, as you hold her cooling hands,
that black looks terrible on you. She will.

BLOOD LESS LANGUAGE

by Jane Rosenberg LaForge

Jesus taught my grandmother to speak English, and as recompense to the original god, the one too holy to linger in the mouths of men, he deafened her son, although he did wait until the boy had failed his Bar Mitzvah reading. It all began not at the beginning, when she sacrificed her teeth to the metallic foods, silver fish, corroded tubers and copper fruits, harvested from the white blanket of drought in the Motherland; it began in the land of innovation, where she followed the milk cart, a team of wintered horses without their bells on. When her younger brother joined her, they switched to the army of the new Lord, with whistles and drums, a real army, not some underground outfit easily infiltrated by anarchists and indulgences for the moment's agenda.

She sang it to her mother, this anthem of the god who lived only to be named, through clicks and flyers; sang it to a woman who lived to scrape before the god whose name could not be uttered.

What was blood, before the Bible, and what was sound, or language, before it was authoritative: before the slaying of the first born or transubstantiation? The pagans might have been more objective, knowing what we have disposed of, the actual bloody severance between links and responsibilities, mother and son.

VIGIL

by Sean Sutherland

She listens as his breath
has changed from survival
to something else.

3am.

Her mother, the nurse, needs a shower.
Days they've spent observing his end.

The room is filling up with it.
No longer will she argue 12 milligrams of morphine
every hour is too much.

She has already rubbed the red wine he loved on his lips.
She has already remembered his recitations of Kipling aloud.

The room is filling up with a most exquisite unknown music
she thinks to herself: like a few strains from a far away ballroom
on a radio station signing off. She knows she may never hear it again for
years, if at all.

With the absent-minded world peering past its shoulder,
the dawn will enter. She will see; her reflection, some lingering darkness
in the trees still, the crouched room, and become the little red light
from one of his machines and flutter like a musical note
in between the fading harmony of the room and the encroaching of the ordinary.

CHIMNEY SWIFTS

by Sean Sutherland

He and my mother have begun bird watching. My father, who I sat with in duck blinds, and understood that the swirls of green phosphorescence at his oar tips before light, and the whistling wings of black ducks heading to sea, were incidental to him—saw the world as something to be conquered, taken down in mid flight. Fitzgerald said, “Going broke happens slowly then all at once.”

And if loneliness arrives the same way, my father went bankrupt long ago and insolvency is something he’s attempting to pay back by gifting everyone with facts.

They’ve seen twenty-eight birds today with two wonderful guides. My father, who found himself holding the long pointed tines of a barbeque fork to my throat because he was surrounded by what he did not have, his front lawn full of my friends, has been speaking on the phone. Now his father darts into focus as my father explains a call note. My grandfather reappears, throwing anything he can at the television when one of the Kennedys has come on: a lamp, tinkling glass of bourbon, anything. “You’ve heard it so many times, the red eyed vireo sounds like: see me, see me, here I am, here I am, see me. Go look it up, I’ll hold.” The Field Guide says, “It may sing for hours even on hot summer days.”

Mother’s old high school is visited by chimney swifts lately, always at dusk. “It looks like reverse smoke,” he says. I can see him watching now, hundreds of them gathering, losing their swift form of flight like the teal we shot, falling over themselves out of the sky but only to regain and plummet down the chimney like wishes being called home from a darkening world.

ANOTHER BIRD POEM

by Christopher Linfoth

If only she were a Horned
Lark that you could stupefy
with a daring-glass—a box
of mirrored sunlight ending
her resistance.

You often write avian metaphors
for her, a few phrases
to capture her soul and lull
it for a moment, so you can snatch
her uncarnate presence up
and claim it as your own.

You try to explain that her courtship
dance is visible only in the glass.
But she doesn't understand
your language or know why
her blood feathers are dying.

For years she has been wary
of your frightening
formed in so many pieces.
Your light now so dim,
she can be the Horned Lark
and nest shallow on the ground.

COMMUNION

by Derek Annis

At the age of twelve, in the dim
dome of light around
the dinner table, in my navy blue
school uniform, in the small serving
of time between grace
and defecation, I told my grandmother
I no longer believed
in god. The sound that came from her
was something like stained glass
shattering. It was, I'm sure,
accompanied by words
I don't remember.
It doesn't matter.
I had been thinking about the robin,
how it flew head first
into the forest
reflected on the living
room window, the flight
snatched from it so suddenly,
neck broken, wings extended, feathers
splayed, worms rising from the earth
to burrow in. Once grandmother's screeching
settled we sat in silence.
As each of us let go,
we listened to the music of silver
slicing through flesh,
the blades scraping our plates.
We sopped up the blood with bits of bread.

VARIOUS WAYS TO OBSERVE PRECIPITATION

by Angelo Perez

Just before the short hand of the clock ticks into nine,
the clouds begin to shoot down rain.
I strap on my boots and jump into a puddle hoping to find you
at the bottom of a pothole, snickering, the way you did
when I compared constipation to writer's block that afternoon
we used sweet rolls to scoop ice cream from a nearly expired tub.

Or perhaps if you're not in the mood for a joke, I could find you
obsessively cracking your knuckles with your thumbs
after you discovered I had eaten all of your pills
because I too was seeking comfort in dilated pupils.
And shaved lemons rolled in cane sugar.
I'm sorry I never apologized for that,
and I'm sorry I never will.

The search continues on a tin roof where a percussion band has set up
to play until sunlight breaks through the nimbus.
The rain bounces off the ruffled grooves, and I can make out its
translucence,
not murky or gray with the ashes of your slender frame.
You promised you would come back as the rain
and I hold you to that, even now, as I run through the streets,
sniffing the storm drains for a scent of your deodorant.

Had I known our history would be preserved in ceramic
I would have taken back the books I let you keep.
Or maybe, I'd go so far as to put the very thought of you away
in a dump jump outside the city.

What are you doing?
Leaving me here to watch the stray cats take shelter
and the buttercups bloom from the soil.
Come down from your mother's mantle,
stain the windshields of parked cars,
swim in gutters,
flood the earth,
and ruin the day for those who hoped for sunshine.

GIVING FULL CONSENT

by Maria Musa

First Place Poetry Award

In a squatty old building
tucked away in the trees
we took you to dialysis.
You called it *the last stop*.
In the hard plastic chair I waited,
gagging on distilled alcohol fumes,
seeing pain-wracked pale old faces
that won't return the next week.
Smelling shit and rotting flowers;
watching the selfish, tyrannical blood
being filtered by that loop in your arm.
Like a bad car wreck I looked on
with hidden glee held silent,
knowing you suffer greatly.
Patiently I witnessed the needle
making you squirm, seeing the veins throb
on your amputated legs.
Your power removed, and my
callousness revealed as I stared hard
until recognition lit up your eyes.
And you knew: this is how I felt,
all those years of abuse
coming around full circle now,
little razor teeth sinking into flesh.
Your end begets the pain I give back freely;
all those years of authoritative violence
being paid pack pound for pound.
I drop my head
wishing you Godspeed
yet hoping for
a little bit longer.

RIPTIDE STORIES

by Joanne Lowery

We laugh, we're all laughing,
the young husband who can explain
how rogue water flows, why parallel
could have saved the carried-away young wife
who smiles, claims she just panicked
until her mate, like Tarzan, breached the waves
of our big lake. And the mother
who has too much imagination laughs too
because she reads the local Riptide News
with its warnings and escape plans. Still,
every summer another stranger drowns,
sometimes two, more, no laughing matter,
the next week again, a child. I panicked,
the wife repeats, the wave of her words
over and over, the lifeguard husband
insisting she could have overcome the weakness
of her shapely arms, lack of fins and gills
if she had paddled parallel to shore,
the mother wanting to become another species
that has no phone to ring with bad news,
like the fish who lays eggs then swims away,
whose gaping mouth never laughs,
whose amber eyes never cloud with worry.

MIDDLETOWN, NEW YORK

by Joseph Fasano

A novel: the father is a knot of purple burdock
at the shoulder of an Interstate; the mother

is as fair as the air
between a bridegroom's swinging boots & the moonlit

hang-weed of an orchard. The rest
is marginalia. The rest is the slow

stumbling of the rut-weary
heart of us, music of its fore-knees

bracing. Tonight in the dim
flicker of the archive's film-room a woman

is staring at her hands while the Luger
unclicks behind her & the earth

is older. I walk out through the twisted
bodies of birches & the river

is there, dragging its wings. I haul up
the slender longboat

of my brother's slumber & a moon
has dropped its rust over the

gunnels, stocked it
with the victuals of simple. So this

is winter, this visitation. Tonight I am thinking
of dignity like the Utah mares nipping

at the searchers, stomping
by the body they have guarded, the iron-

scented linens of their bridles. Of Celan
by the music of the shallows,

the red hint of a woman in his stubble.
Tonight I am wood-smoke, am

elsewhere. Tonight I am thinking
of dignity like the sea god's sea-green sea

nymph, of Odysseus
in the brilliance of revision, diminishment his only

proper harbor. In the morning
I will be quickened

again, bare, among catkin
and wolfsong. I will hang on

those savage stars
they named me for. I will rise up

like a dark rumor of myself, a new October.
Look at him, look at him

awhile: the sailor, the sea's
king, in tatters. And the dark

stars, and the ruin's wings
embrace him. Tell of him. Tell of our splendor.

STILL

by Joseph Fasano

with a photograph by Horst Faas

If to carry a thing is to feel, in your own knees,
your slenderness, the lightness of the scrim
blowing back against your face between
what you are and what you are not
yet, the way a friend I loved once
cut his own long hair in the dark,
swiftly, letting it fall on his wrists
which were also cut, in New York,
that April, then I think we may understand
the slightest portion of what this man
is going through, in 1964 and in the body
Horst Faas has sealed him into, in gelatin
and black and white, near a rice paddy
northeast of Saigon, while no rain falls.
Or no. When my friend knelt down
in his small apartment just north
of the Tappan Zee Bridge, having walked
all morning through flock after flock
of vireo and crow, their bodies swerving
around his body for the last time, I do not think
he had on his mind the oatmeal boiling
on his rusted stove, its odors, nor
the raven-haired mourners of the Old
Testament, the strict country of lamentation
where we may wander toward each other at last.
Nor the half-drunk paramedic
who would light up her Parliament
when she found him, fetal, in ruins.
I do not suspect he had on his mind
the weather, the dogwood blossoms, or, for that
matter, this single photograph I've found
this morning, folded, with tremendous
care, into the velvet of a cello case
beneath my friend's linens, while the dogwoods
blossom. All spring I've stood before my own
bewildered students trying to say the word 'history'
and now, in this rice paddy somewhere
north-west of Saigon, it has all begun
to matter, or to not matter, again, for good.
Because my friend left no note
when it happened. Because this other
man, thirty perhaps, is standing before

a huge juggernaut of North Vietnamese regulars
and holding, on his forearms, the downward-
facing body of his son, or his
daughter, and saying, with his pursed lips,
nothing. Late April in New York, the dogwoods
are blossoming, and all morning
I've tried to tell the story that the young
corporal's pistol keeps destroying over
and over, the story that the glint of light
on the barrel keeps swearing will not
be coming back, not to this field, not
ever. All morning I've driven north
on the Taconic State Parkway, stopping
only once to pull the body of a doe
deeper into hawkweed, and certainly
with no ceremony, because it is spring,
because a man has lost his history
in a photograph by Horst Faas folded
in my left breast pocket and he is
desperate--not for answers, of course, but for
anything, a witness, a single neighbor willing to see
what he's had to carry a half mile
now, from his ramshackle hut
through the brittle light of a century of silence,
and iron, and briar. And that Faas, in his picture,
has told us all this is true. And is not true.
And is only as holy as the way
the child's body--a son, or a daughter--
hangs on the forearms of its father,
facing the earth again. What *could*
he whisper--alone, the father--having carried
his child this far, having heard,
like the couple in the stateroom
of the flooding liner, the North Atlantic
pouring in around them where they've woken,
all the words the darkness has for dignity, for
honor, having been able to keep nothing
in his mind but the astonishing fact
of his own son's, or daughter's, heaviness,
and because he has forgotten, a moment,
the name of his own child. Whom he still
had lessons to teach. Who is not
us. Who is. Listen: in his lost, great painting
of the martyrdom of Peter, Caravaggio
has turned the bare ass of the executioner
into our faces, deliberately and with unfaltering
gusto, his thick cheeks filthy, the saint
lifting his grizzled head to stare at the nail

he has only just now realized is driven
into the left palm of him, and,
he is reasoning, also the right,
if only he would turn to face it
and make it real. For which whimsy
Caravaggio was almost hanged.
For which license he was saved
by the one or two patrons who
understood. And by which we understand
that the victim and the executioner
are one, that the clothes stripped
and partially napalmed from the body
of this child three hundred and sixty-three years
later, and showing us a piece of him
he would have only just learned
to be ashamed of, means nothing, nothing
at all. Except everything. Except only compassion
is in our hands. When my friend knelt down
on the linoleum tile of his rent-controlled
apartment, that April, he was not thinking
of the light, of the darkneses, of the young
father standing with his shirt pulled
slightly open by the lifeless hand
of his childhood, in cotton; of the two
brothers cradling each other in the silences
of the Nevada desert, trying to take back
everything between them that would persist
unspoken; he was not thinking even of
the weightlessness of his own hair, that cargo
he'd let fall on the opening blossoms of his own
thin forearms, in last light, in April,
so that he could imagine the beauty
he was destroying was permanent, and
holy, and certainly not his own; or that
only the story is in our hands. If
to carry a body is to stare down into the clarity
of your own fathoms and find the resources
that are not there, the histories
that will almost happen, then let it be
April, now, the dogwoods in bloom, the dark
secret blossoming we cannot all be salvaged by.
As though a body, when you lift it, can be lifted.
As though abundance will reside in the powerless.
I am talking to you now, whoever you were--
I am talking to you in the frail light
of your linoleum tile where a man
can pick up the body's story and almost
begin over, almost convince himself it is perfect.

Yes, I want to tell you, winter is a battle
in which the father kneels, shattered,
and the father is drowned in the body
at last, and the child is the grave of the
father, and of his kind, and the river
takes them all unceasingly in its arms.
But every story is made with praise.
Every story is finished in forgiveness.
You tell it: When Caravaggio turned back
toward the window of his studio,
late winter, 1601, he must have seen
everything, then, in one underwhelming
moment--the ages, the humiliation
laid out before him--he must have heard
the street venders and the courtiers chortling
something awful, and undone, before
he turned back to his sherry and his caviar
and the laughter of the bread-maker's
daughter, that street-wise angel waiting
in the wildness of his silk and four-
post altar, waiting, again, to wet
her lips and whisper into his ear,
over, and over, and over, the same unfinished
story, the body's story, which, one last
moment, the painter might have attempted, in that
decadence, to whisper; might have attempted,
in bewilderment, to echo. And have slept,
again. And forgiven it all. And been ashamed.

CEREMONY

by Joseph Fasano

If only the other world were not so slender and weightless
as the vole in the ocher

beak of the red-tail lifting
over the Westchester suburbs

tonight, you could get to the blackberry thicket
of your father's vanishing and remain

there, the earth's thirst ridding you of
color. You could crawl back

into the stasis of his margins.
It is darker and so. It is the hour

after the hour and you would
be witness. You have done with the thin wine

of October. You have folded
its silks in the cellarage, vaster and Imperial

Purple. You have broken the leaven
of never.

Once
in these rooms you'd had a

hymnal: Wintering, be
wilder, be honest. Briar, be briar, be

briar. Go
now, be

winter, deliver.
What can you offer

at this hour but to wade out
with his stumbling

through nowhere, to leave him
though the world walk out

before him, heavy-antlered, foliage
on its shoulders, in his hands no flint no gun no bow
no fire?

CONTRIBUTORS NOTES

Abraham Abebe, a native Ethiopian, is working toward an M.F.A. degree in Studio Art at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. He also earned a B.F.A. (Cum Laude) majoring in Graphic Design, Painting and Drawing from UNLV in 2010, and A.A. degree (with distinction) from Truckee Meadows Community College in 2007. Currently he is teaching graphic design at UNLV as part of the Graduate Assistantship program. Recently, he published his first poetry book titled *Eggmel*, written in his native language Amharic. Please visit his website at www.anbassadesign.com.

Paul David Adkins grew up in South Florida and lives in New York.

Evan Adkins was born here in Reno, Nevada, and has lived here ever since. He likes to play soccer, ultimate frisbee, longboard and ski, and Reno is a perfect place to do all of these. He came across a quote by John Muir the other day that read, "The power of imagination makes us infinite." Although he has been interested in mathematics and physics for quite a while, it is poetry that has opened a door to the infinite.

Jeffrey Alfier has work appearing or forthcoming in *Connecticut Review*, *Tulane Review*, and *South Carolina Review*. His latest chapbook is *The City Without Her* (Kindred Spirit Press, 2012), and his first full-length book of poems, *The Wolf Yearling*, is forthcoming from Pecan Grove Press.

Derek Annis would not send me a short biography despite my valiant attempts. He's a vegan anarchist from eastern Washington.

Tim Applegate's poems and essays appear in numerous literary journals. His first collection, *At the End Of Day*, was published by Traprock Books in 2007. His second, *Drydock*, is forthcoming from Blue Cubicle Press. He lives in the Willamette Valley of western Oregon.

Daniel Aristi was born in Spain, studied French Literature, then Economics, then left for Indonesia. He has also lived and worked in Bosnia, Bolivia, Lesotho and other places; he lives and writes now in Botswana. His work has been recently published by *The New Madrid* and *Great Weather for MEDIA*.

Elizabeth Atherton lives in San Francisco, where she is studying art history. She is currently working on a verse novel. This is her first publication.

Joe Benevento teaches creative writing at Truman State. His most recent of eight books of poetry and fiction is the chapbook, *Tough Guys Don't Write*, with Finishing Line Press. He has had poems, stories and essays in 250 places, including: *Poets & Writers* and *Bilingual Review*. He co-edits *GHLL*.

Alyse Bensel is the author of the poetry chapbook *Shift* (Plan B Press, 2012). Her poetry has appeared in *Cider Press Review*, *Cold Mountain Review*, *MAYDAY Magazine*, and *Word Riot*, among others. She is a regular book review contributor for the *Los Angeles Review* and *Newpages*.

Ahimsa Timoteo Bodhrán is the author of *Antes y después del Bronx: Lenapehoking* and editor of an international queer Indigenous issue of *Yellow Medicine Review: A Journal of Indigenous Literature, Art, and Thought*. His work appears in a hundred publications in Africa, the Américas, Asia, Australia, Europe, and the Pacific.

Andrea Buchanan is from the Siskiyou Mountains of Northern California. She was a member of the United States Air Force as a Radio and Television Broadcast Journalist for six years and is currently studying at Truckee Meadows Community College, majoring in English.

Rachel Carbonell is an artist, teacher and writer living in Brooklyn, New York. Her work largely is concerned with the interaction of organic experience and emotions with industrialized, mechanized culture; it often incorporates patterns and abstractions and layers these with dramatic color and unexpected images. Her Twitter handle is RachelOliviaNYC.

Shelby Cook is only seventeen, a baby really, and she is attending TMCC for the time being. Her poem “And Every Evening” was written about the constant struggle of one of her closest friends, as well as herself, when they are trying to retain composure and sanity in the presence of their families.

Justin Crawford is finishing up his M.F.A. degree in fiction from West Virginia University, and he’s a native West Virginian. His story “Converge” is forthcoming from the online magazine *Inwood* Indiana.

Otha “Vakseen” Davis III’s passion for the arts has served as his key to sanity in the fast paced entertainment industry. Drawing inspiration from women, emotions, music and the African American experience, his mixed medium acrylic, oil and water color paintings on canvas have been sold to collectors and art enthusiasts throughout Los Angeles and the Southeast region of the U.S. His work has also been featured in *Artnois Magazine*, *Cactus Heart Literary Magazine*, *Barely South Review*, *Penduline Press Magazine* and *Snax Magazine*, to name a few.

Darren C. Demaree is living in Columbus, Ohio with his wife and children. He is the author of *As We Refer to Our Bodies* (2013) and *Not For Art Nor Prayer*; both are scheduled to be published by 8th House Publishing House. He is the recipient of two Pushcart Prize nominations.

Mary Stone Dockery is the author of *Mythology of Touch* and *Aching Buttons*. Her chapbook *Blink Finch* will be released in 2013. Her poetry

and prose has appeared or is forthcoming in *Mid-American Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Arts & Letters*, *Stirring*, and other fine journals. She currently lives and writes in St. Joseph, MO, where she co-edits the *Stone Highway Review*.

Colin Dodds has authored several novels, including *The Last Bad Job*, which Norman Mailer touted as showing “something that very few writers have; a species of inner talent that owes very little to other people.” His poems have appeared in scores of publications and have been nominated for the Pushcart Prize.

William Doreski teaches at Keene State College in New Hampshire. His most recent books of poetry are *City of Palms* and *June Snow Dance*, both 2012. He has published three critical studies, including *Robert Lowell’s Shifting Colors*. His essays, poetry, fiction, and reviews have appeared in many journals.

Lauren Eyler is from Detroit City. She wants you to know that the primary colors are red, yellow and blue.

Joseph Fasano’s recent poems have appeared in *Tin House*, *The Yale Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Boston Review*, *FIELD*, and other publications. His book, *Fugue for Other Hands*, won the 2011 Cider Press Review Book Award, and he has been a finalist for the *Missouri Review* Editors’ Prize, the Times Literary Supplement Poetry Competition, and the Kinnereth Gensler Award from Alice James Books.

Buck Feero was born and raised in Reno, Nevada. His poem, “12 oz,” was published in the 2011 edition of *the Meadow*. He is a fabricator and fine furniture builder currently living in Portland, Oregon.

Debra Fox has published poems in various haiku journals, as well as a short story in *Hyperlexia Literary Journal*. She is a lawyer, and the director of an adoption agency. She lives just outside Philadelphia with her family.

Anthony Frame is an exterminator who lives in Toledo, Ohio. His chapbook, *Paper Guillotines*, was published by Imaginary Friend Press and recent poems have been published in *Harpur Palate*, *Third Coast*, *The North American Review*, *Gulf Stream*, *diode*, etc. He also co-founded *Glass: A Journal of Poetry*. Learn more: <http://www.anthony-frame.com/>.

Brad Garber has published poetry in *Cream City Review*, *Front Range Review*, *theNewYork Press*, *Taekwondo Times*, *Ray’s Road Review*, *Dead Flowers: A Poetry Rag*, *New Verse News* and *Mercury*. He was nominated for a 2013 Pushcart Prize for his poem, “Where We May Be Found.”

Carlos Gomez is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Mitch Grabois was born in the Bronx and now lives in Denver. His short fiction and poetry appear (or will appear) in over one-hundred literary magazines, most recently *The T.J. Eckleberg Review*, *The Examined Life*, *Memoir Journal*, *Out of Our* and *The Blue Hour*. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, published by Xavier Vargas E-ditions, is available for all e-readers for 99 cents through Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Smashwords (which also provides downloads to PC's).

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in El Dorado County. She's included in the anthologies *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library, 2012) and *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University, 2004).

Jeff Griffin is the author of *Lost and*, which will be published in the Kuhl House Poets Series by the University of Iowa Press in the fall of 2013. He is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, an associate at Griffin Moss Industries, Inc., and operates the publishing house Slim Princess Holdings.

Jeff Hardin is the author of *Fall Sanctuary*, recipient of the Nicholas Roerich Prize, and *Notes for a Praise Book*, recently published by Jacar Press. Recent work appears in *The Southern Review*, *North American Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Southwest Review*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *New Orleans Review* and elsewhere. He teaches at Columbia State Community College in Columbia, TN.

Joshua Haskin has lived in northern Nevada for most of his life, spent several years in the US Navy where he was stationed in Yokosuka, Japan, and is currently a creative writing major at the University of Nevada, Reno. He is married and has one son.

Michelle Hendrixson-Miller lives in Columbia, Tennessee, near a beautiful park where the poem "Sometimes" was written. Her poems have appeared in *POEM*, *Poems & Plays*, *Mainstreet Rag*, and *Iodine*. In 2009, she was a finalist for the Gerald Stern Poetry Prize. In 2011, one of her poems received a Pushcart nomination.

Diane Hinkley is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Ruth Holzer's poetry has appeared in journals including *Blue Unicorn*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *California Quarterly*, *The Kerf*, *Cloud-bank* and *Bloodroot*. Her chapbooks are "The First Hundred Years" and "The Solitude of Cities" (Finishing Line Press). She has had work nominated several times for the Pushcart.

A.J. Huffman is a poet and freelance writer in Daytona Beach, Florida. She has published six collections of poetry, available on Amazon.com. She has published her work in numerous national and international literary journals. She is currently the editor for Kind of a Hurricane Press

literary journals (www.kindofahurricanepress.com).

Emily Jewel is a vegan superhero who waves to strangers, climbs mountains, and is willing to share her last cookie with you. She sees the world most clearly through the lens of language, and writes because she is compelled to do so.

Gerry LaFemina is the author of 15 collections of poetry and prose. The latest of which are the chapbook length *Steam Punk* (2012, Smalls Press) and the full length *Vanishing Horizon* (2011, Anhinga Press). He directs the Frostburg Center for Creative Writing at Frostburg State University where he is an Associate Professor of English. He divides his time between Maryland and New York.

Jane Rosenberg LaForge's poem, "Morning, Las Vegas," appeared in the 2012 issue of *The Meadow*. The poems in this issue are from her chapbook, *The Navigation of Loss*, one of three winners in the Red Ochre Press' 2012 chapbook competition. Her experimental novel and memoir, *An Unsuitable Princess: A True Fantasy/A Fantastical Memoir*, will be published by Jaded Ibis Productions/Jaded Ibis Press. Her web site is available at Jane-Rosenberg-LaForge.com.

Melissa Laws graduated from Truckee Meadows Community College with an Associates degree in English and is currently enrolled in the Creative Writing Program at the University of Nevada, Reno. She lives in Reno with her daughter.

Nicole Lee is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College, studying for a degree in English. In her spare time away from school, she travels to the slum area of Nairobi, Kenya, called the Mathare Valley. As a missionary, she comes in contact with many people who inspire her and her artistic pursuits.

Christopher Leibow is a poet and a visual artist. He has been published in numerous journals including *Juked*, *Interim*, and *Barrow Street*. He has been a featured artist online with *Cha: A Journal of Asian Writing*, *OFZOOs* and *RCR*. He is a Pushcart Award nominee and currently lives in Salt Lake City.

J. Patrick Lewis' first book of poems—*Gulls Hold Up the Sky*—was published in October 2010 by Laughing Fire Press. His work has appeared in *Gettysburg Review*, *New England Review*, *New Letters*, *Southern Humanities Review*, *new renaissance*, *Kansas Quarterly*, *Fine Madness*, *Light Quarterly*, and many others.

Christopher Linforth graduates Virginia Tech this spring with his MFA. He has other creative work forthcoming in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Gargoyle*, and *Whiskey Island*.

Rob Lively is a Residential Faculty member of Mesa Community College in Mesa, AZ. His recent scholarly works have appeared in *On the Blunt Edge: Technology in Composition's History and Pedagogy* (2011) and *Tormented Space, Wormhole Weapons, and Uncharted Territories: Critical Explorations of the Farscape Universe* (forthcoming).

Joanne Lowery's poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *Rattle*, *Slant*, *Cottonwood*, and *Poetry East*. She lives in Michigan.

Michael Minassian is a professor at Broward College in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. His poems have appeared recently in such journals as *The Meadow*, *Main Street Rag*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Visions International* and *White Pelican Review*. He is also the writer/producer of the pod cast series *Eye On Literature*, now available on iTunes. A chapbook of his poems entitled *The Arboriculturist* was published in 2010 by Amsterdam Press.

Nancy Carol Moody is the author of *Photograph With Girls* (Traprock Books), and her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Journal*, *The New York Quarterly*, *Salamander*, *The Los Angeles Review* and *Nimrod*.

Maria Musa, a student at Truckee Meadows Community College, is seeking her degree in the Paralegal / Law Program. She is 46 years old, and her father's death was the catalyst that brought her back to school. She moved to Reno from Santa Cruz via Tahoe in 1988, and thoroughly enjoys its nightlife. She works for Home Depot and enjoys spending her summers in the Garden Shop, watering plants, and helping customers create their Eden.

Brandon PeQueen is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College. He loves the sound of his own voice. He is an unaccomplished improvisational slam poet, and samples of his work can be found at soundcloud.com/abrandonship.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *The Nation*, *The New Yorker*, and elsewhere. For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled "Magic, Illusion and Other Realities" and a complete bibliography, please visit his website at www.simonperchik.com.

Angelo Perez is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Richard King Perkins II's work has appeared in hundreds of publications.

Liza Porter received the 2009 Mary Ann Campau Memorial Poetry Fellowship from the University of Arizona Poetry Center. She is founding director of the Other Voices Women's Reading Series in Tucson, Arizona.

Her poetry and essays have been published in magazines including *The MacGuffin*, *The Progressive*, *AGNI*, *Diner*, *Cimarron Review*, *Barrow Street*, and *Pedestal Magazine*. Lizaporter1@aol.com.

T. R. Poulson is a student at the University of Nevada. Her work has appeared in *Alehouse*, *Main Channel Voices*, *Dead Flowers: A Poetry Rag*, *Trajectory*, *Verdad*, *A Dream in the Clouds*, *The Wildcat Review*, and *Brush-fire*. She enjoys traveling, windsurfing, zumba, dressage, and basketball.

Sean Prentiss lives in Vermont where he teaches at Norwich University. He is co-editing an anthology called *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre*, which is forthcoming from Michigan State University Press. He can be reached at seanprentiss@gmail.com.

Charles Rafferty has published poems in *The New Yorker* and *The Southern Review*, as well as stories in *Sonora Review* and *Cortland Review*. In 2009, he received a creative writing fellowship from the NEA. *The Unleashable Dog* is forthcoming from Steel Toe Books. Currently, he directs the MFA program at Albertus Magnus College.

Billy Reynolds was born and raised in Huntsville, Alabama ("The Rocket City"). His awards include the Tennessee Williams scholarship in poetry from the Sewanee Writers' Conference and an Emerging Artist grant from the Greater Kalamazoo Arts Council. In 2007, he received the John Ciardi scholar in poetry from Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. His poems have been published in *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Hunger Mountain*, *Sewanee Theological Review*, and *Third Coast*, among others. Currently, he lives in Tifton, Georgia, where he serves as the head of the Department of Literature and Language at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

Jordan Sanderson's work has appeared in *Spectrum*, *burntdistrict*, *The Fiddleback*, and other journals. He earned a PhD from the Center for Writers at the University of Southern Mississippi, and he currently lives in Moss Point, Mississippi and teaches English at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College.

Stephen Christopher Schlatter is a TMCC alumnus, currently pursuing a BA in English, Writing at the University of Nevada, Reno. Last spring, Chris took a position as a junior writer at a local ghostwriting firm and has been successful in this career.

Logan Seidl is a student at Truckee Meadows Community College. His poem "To See Beyond It" is forthcoming from *Crack the Spine*. To learn more about Logan and find upcoming publications, check out his website <http://loganseidl.com>. He would like to thank his wife Judi "Lady Fish" Seidl for her support and dedication to his craft.

Steve Shilling has been published in numerous journals, including: *DASH Journal*, *Reed Magazine*, *Crannóg*, and *Red Wheelbarrow*. A proud alumnus of Hope College, Shilling is an English teacher and high school football coach. He lives in McMurray, Pennsylvania with his wife Megan, two children, Stephen and Courtney, and cat Sammy.

David-Glen Smith currently resides in Cypress, Texas, with his partner of twelve years, he teaches English Literature at both Wharton County Junior College and Lone Star College—CyFair. He received his M.F.A. at Vermont College, and his M.A. at the University of Missouri at St. Louis. Most importantly, as of December 2010 he and his partner have welcomed a baby boy into their lives: new topics and inspirations for poetry projects. For more information visit: <http://davidglensmith.blogspot.com>.

Noel Sloboda's work has recently appeared in *Redactions*, *Gargoyle*, *Rattle*, *Modern Language Studies*, and *Harpur Palate*. He is the author of the poetry collections *Shell Games* (2008) and *Our Rarer Monsters* (2013) as well as several chapbooks. Sloboda has also published a book about Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein.

Daniel James Sundahl is Professor in American Studies and English at Hillsdale College where he has taught for thirty years

Sean Sutherland is a writer living in New York City having grown up on the coast of Maine. His poem, "Hail," will appear in the next issue of the literary magazine, *Prick of the Spindle*. His plays have had productions from The Opera House in Stonington Maine to Los Angeles. He is a MacDowell fellow and has been studying poetry with Lisa Bellamy for the last two years at The Writers Studio in NYC.

Adam Tavel received the 2010 Robert Frost Award, and his forthcoming collections are *The Fawn Abyss* (Salmon, 2014) and *Red Flag Up* (Kattywompus, 2013), a chapbook. A former contributor to *The Meadow*, his recent poems have appeared in *West Branch*, *South Dakota Review*, *The Minnesota Review*, and *The Cincinnati Review*.

Caitlin Thomas was born on the east coast. She attended TMCC, and now attends UNR, when the sun hits right. She freelances for the *Reno News and Review* and her work has appeared on the website, XOJANE.com. She's been stripping for too long. She's been writing poetry for longer.

Davide Trame is an Italian teacher of English and has been writing poetry in English since 1993. His poems have appeared in around four hundred magazines.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

After reading the submission guidelines below, send your submission to meadow@tmcc.edu between September 1st and February 1st of each year.

We welcome submissions of poetry, fiction, screenplay, nonfiction, artwork, graphic design, comics and photography, preferably high-contrast artwork that will reproduce well in print.

Please note in the email's title if it is a poetry, non-fiction, fiction or art submission, so that it can find the appropriate editor.

Because all submissions must be sent via e-mail, we prefer to receive submissions as an attachment (in .doc, .rtf or jpg format).

We cannot accept original artwork of any kind. Please scan artwork and send through email as an attachment.

Do not paste submissions into the email.

All email submissions must be accompanied by contact information (name, address, telephone and email) and brief (less than 50 words) biography—include the title(s) of each piece submitted in the email. We do not accept previously published work, but we will consider simultaneous submission and expect to be notified immediately of acceptance elsewhere.

We will accept up to 6 poems, photos or art pieces or one work of prose (fiction or nonfiction) from each author or artist. Prose may not exceed 4,500 words.

Please put all poems into one attachment. Do not send in individual attachments.

Your name may not appear anywhere on the pieces submitted as we read all submissions without names.

the MEADOW

The annual literary journal of Truckee Meadows Community College



Accepting only e-mail submissions in:

- Poetry
- Fiction
- Non-Fiction
- Art

Please send submissions to: meadow@tmcc.edu

**Submission guidelines and past issues can be found
online: www.tmcc.edu/meadow**

**“Definitely room to grow in this Meadow...this journal
shows great promise.”**

—Newpages.com



TMCC is an EEO/AA (equal opportunity/affirmative action) institution and does not discriminate on the basis of sex, age, race, color, religion, disability, national origin or sexual orientation in the programs or activities which it operates. | FY11-00 78

SIERRA NEVADA COLLEGE



B.F.A. in Creative Writing

The B.F.A. allows students to focus on their own individual writing and to specialize in a specific genre, while developing competencies in all dimensions of writing. It is an excellent avenue for students who intend to pursue a career in the literary fields.



M.F.A. in Creative Writing

The low-residency M.F.A. is a challenging and inspiring two year commitment to a student's own art and artistic development. The program is designed to bring writers together to foster unique, individual voices within a dialogue of global dimension.



Sierra Nevada Review

The *Sierra Nevada Review* is an annual literary magazine published in May featuring poetry and short fiction. Editors read manuscripts from September until March. The editorial staff changes on a yearly basis with the exception of an advisory editor.

Sierra Nevada College

www.sierranevada.edu | 775.831.1314

999 Tahoe Boulevard, Incline Village, NV



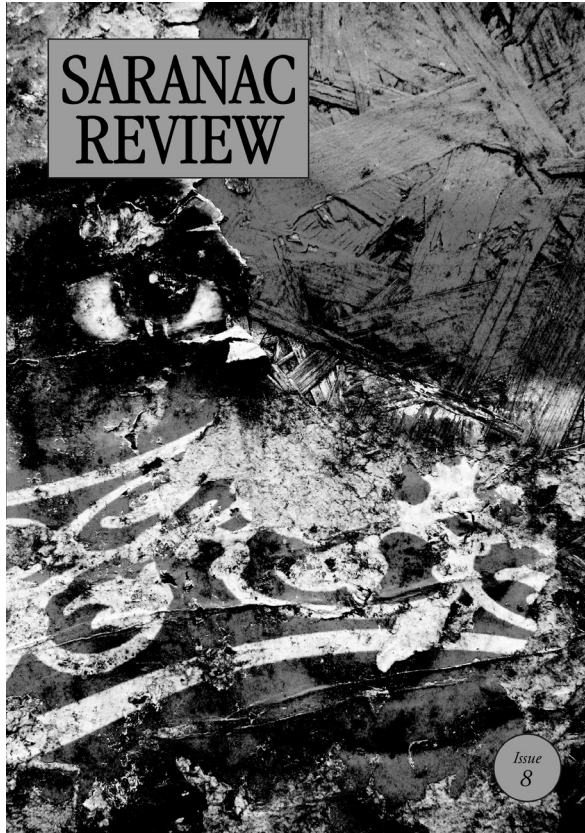
FICTION writers REVIEW



***Fiction Writers Review seeks
readers and writers for a
conversation about
fiction, craft, and
the writing life.***

www.fictionwritersreview.com

A Cluster of Stars



Finally. A literary journal that bridges the gap between regional and national and crosses borders: *The Saranac Review*.

Featuring quality poetry and prose from Canada and the United States. An eclectic, diverse array of emerging and established writers that reflects the expansive, bright spirit of the etymology of its name, Saranac, meaning “cluster of stars.”

research.plattsburgh.edu/saranacreview