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Monolog of an Effigy

When my charitable fellow-writers
 were burning my effigy
 and not poking my guts with their pocket-knives—
 thank God!

They wasted on me
 their bottle of gasoline in vain,
 because I had already
 burnt myself down to ashes.

Inhaling the charming aroma of human shit
 near the wooden outhouse,
 I was minding
 radishes, garlic and onions.

I had stuck up too long as a romantic scarecrow,
 clumsily trying to embrace the world
 with my stiff pine hands.

I was stuffed with straw.
 I never noticed
 how life was changing,
 and how arrogantly sparrows were behaving.

I was burnt as punishment
 because of my dangerous talent
 for being so readily inflammable
 in politics, and in love.

Only my charred framework was saved in the clouds of smoke,
 but the fire couldn't altogether destroy my hands.

In the cinders of myself I was slowly dying,
 But my black stumps

 desperately wanted
 to embrace, to embrace, to embrace.

And when one of my brother-writers struck another match,
 I heard his envious whisper:

 “Scarecrow, you wanted too much, my dear!

A great role in history
 is not for you.

Trying to tower over the turnips and cabbages,
 you pretended to be a genius.”

And with my last, almost dead blue flame,

I sputtered like a torched fireman,
 who couldn't save himself from the fire.
All my medals of honor
 were melted like buttons.
If the Soviet Union were burnt down,
 why couldn't they burn me?
And when so-called patriots
 splashed the rest of the gas on my effigy,
and one nightingale from Army headquarters
 sang sadistically through his nostrils,
one unembraceably humongous woman street cleaner
was sweeping up my ashes with her tender broom.
And all the saccharine ladies
 and sleazy, vaselined intellectuals
were coolly observing
 my last convulsions,
and some of my comrades-in-arms,
 the noblest of my generation,
threw the finest oil onto the fire—
 their greasy goodbye.
My beloved, what are you searching for
 in the field of ashes?
My heart, if it survived after all,
was probably not empty, but still able to love,
not forgetting it too was loved.

—translated from the Russian by Geoffrey Dutton and Albert Todd with the author

(Vol. 3, No. 2, 1996)

Child Left Alone

When I heard the crying, I stopped on the hill
and approached the door of the hut by the road.
A soft-eyed child was watching me from his bed,
and a profound tenderness intoxicated me like wine.

The mother had been delayed, bent deep amid the fallow;
the child, on awakening, sought her pink nipple
and burst into tears... I hugged him to my breast,
and a lullaby, tremulous, rose up within me.

Through the open window the moon looked down on us.
The child was sleeping now, and the song bathed,
like another light, my breast made rich.

And when the woman, hesitant, opened the door,
she must have seen on my face such great joy
that she let the child sleep on in my arms.

—*translated from the Spanish by Thomas P. Feeny*

(Vol. 11, No. 1, 2004)

A Buddha in the Woodpile

If there had been only
one Buddhist in the woodpile
In Waco Texas
to teach us how to sit still
one saffron Buddhist in the back rooms
just one Tibetan lama
just one Taoist
just one Zen
just one Thomas Merton Trappist
just one saint in the wilderness
of Waco USA
If there had been only one
calm little Gandhi
in a white sheet or suit
one not-so-silent partner
who at the last moment shouted Wait
If there had been just one
majority of one
in the lotus position
in the inner sanctum
who bowed his shaved head to the
Chief of All Police
and raised his hands in a mudra
and chanted the Great Paramita Sutra
the Diamond Sutra
the Lotus Sutra
If there had somehow been
just one Gandhian spinner
with Brian Wilson at the gates
of the White House
at the Gates of Eden
then it wouldn't have been
Vietnam once again
and its "One two three four
What're we waitin' for?"
If one single ray of the light
of the Dalai Lama
when he visited this land
had penetrated somehow
the Land of the Brave

where the lion never
 lies down with the lamb—
 But not a glimmer got through
 The Security screened it out
 screened out the Buddha
 and his not-so-crazy wisdom
 If only in the land of Sam Houston
 If only in the land of the Alamo
 If only in Wacoland USA
 If only in Reno
 If only on CNN CBS NBC
 one had comprehended
 one single syllable
 of the Gautama Buddha
 of the young Siddhartha
 one single whisper of
 Gandhi's spinning wheel
 one lost syllable
 of Martin Luther King
 or of the Early Christians
 or of Mother Teresa
 of Thoreau or Whitman or Allen Ginsberg
 or of the millions in America tuned to them
 If the inner ears of the inner sanctums
 had only been half open
 to any vibrations except
 those of the national security state
 and had only been attuned
 to the sound of one hand clapping
 and not one hand punching
 then that sick cult and its children
 might still be breathing
 the Free American air
 of the First Amendment

(Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995)

Kenneth Patchen

A Letter to the Liberals

It's not enough
That doom shall find us whole of hate
And terror; valid ruin admires devotion
Growing out of wonder that it lived
At all. Can we admire and will the sport of clowns
Performing in their tents, enclosed
 from us
By shock of finding now that we
Have other things to do? For after all
The truth is out, the hour breaks, the bridges
Fall, the dams give way; our time's
At hand. We know the voices, the clumsy faces:
"Almighty ghost, have us. Almighty God, save us."

We bring no boxed solution; our flags
Stream out for use, not trumpet-masses.

I'm tired of all they say: "How do you say 'worker'?
Make it ring?" Near the run-down factory
The hills still climb to cloud and silence,
Birds singing, their notes no whorish alphabet
Or key to foreign trade; the horizon,
Indolent and shifting as men or tides,
Has scars and wonderment unchanged by general strikes.

Submit no more. They said the wind would polish names
And thunder clear the quiet streets: I saw them smile
I knew they lied.
Spies aware of danger grasp for guns
Not straws: be noble and be true
Your whiter cloaks provide a better sight on you.

(Vol. 7, No. 1, 2000)

One Year Later

Belovèd, brightest beacon-country,
look how far you've fallen

in lifting up this spotlight-hungry
Barnum crossed with Stalin.

(Vol. 24. No. 1, 2017)

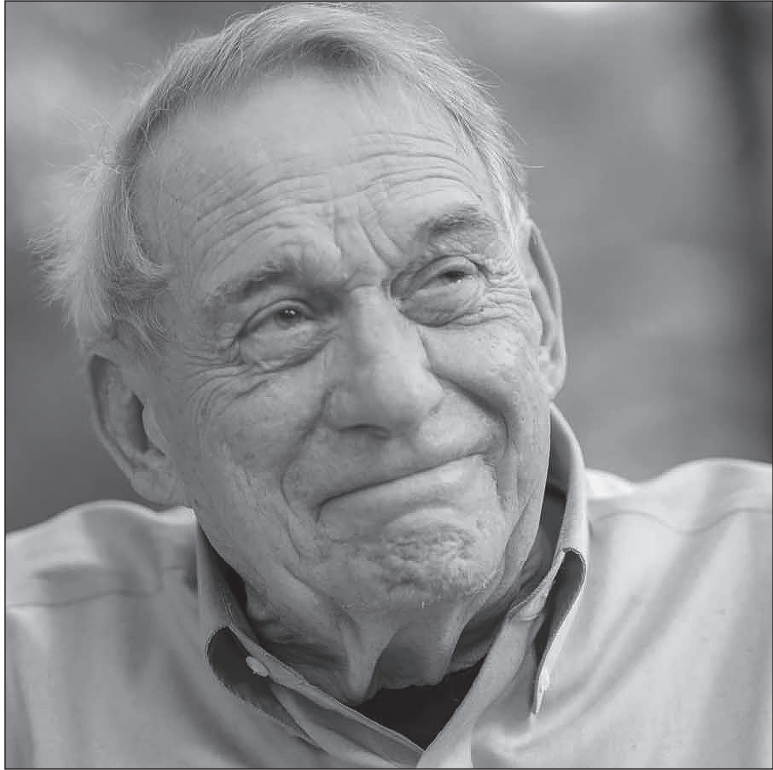
Donald Revell

In Memory of Denise Levertov

A calm mind neither appares
Nor judges the rained-upon zoo animals.
Anger only, as a child frustrated
With lions sleeping through mid-day,
Dresses them with terrors intact,
Damning them. Humanity is no bargain.
We've run out of options.

Kindness merely drags it out longer,
Letting the lions starve, too weak
Anymore to lift their mouths to the rain.
And of the angry martyr in me, less said
The better. There's terror in the milk.
Cruelly deprived of the civil cruelties,
We are beasts we never were, and the lions die.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)



Fred Chappell

Fred Chappell, Writer-Teacher, and Aesthete: A Way Post-Confessional Poetry Happened in Greensboro

Writers and teachers have described Fred Chappell in numerous ways in their efforts at characterizing his multifaceted career. Poet, novelist, short story writer and critic are the ones that most easily come to mind because they characterize Chappell's public persona. Those who have been close to Chappell, however, may be quick to add other identifying labels, including Southern gentleman, humorist, sci-fi advocate, loyal husband, excellent father, and reliable friend. No matter the model Fred has been for many of us in one or more of his efforts, little if anything specific has been said about Fred Chappell, the teacher, or Fred Chappell, the aesthete. That is what we hope to do in this essay, albeit as outsiders, never having been in a class formally taught by Fred Chappell, but conscious, as readers of his occasional but always relevant critical considerations, of Chappell's aesthetic preferences. We believe those considerations are the very ones that pushed many lovers of poetry into forward thinking when Chappell felt that it was necessary for us to change the direction of our writing during the last years of Confessionalism's dominance in American poetry.

Thus, our justification for studying Chappell in this essay as a teacher and aesthete (not theorist, but a commentator with an appreciation for art and beauty!) comes from our reading of his essays about contemporary creative writing, especially in light of recent thinking about the writer-teacher paradigm that has characterized conversations about writers who have taught in universities. We also believe that something important—but something heretofore unnamed—happened at University of North Carolina-Greensboro during Chappell's professorship there. Perhaps a more worthy justification for this essay is our interest in voicing appreciation for Chappell's success with writers as noteworthy and innovative as Robert Morgan, Kay Byer and Kelly Cherry,¹ who we believe enacted and even furthered many of Chappell's preferences in writing while they were gathered in Greensboro between 1966 and 1968—that is, during the Confessional heyday. What's more, though he denied any interest whatsoever in theory, Chappell's articulation of a changing aesthetic predates the work of some of the most visible theorists of our time, in particular Gayatri Spivak who advocated for a theory that she subsequently named Planetarity. Hers is a theory designed as an approach to comparative literature but one which Spivak argues has a much wider application. More specifically, Chappell's thinking about the "dramatic I" in poetry is worthy of scrutiny as it affected aesthetic theory

¹ For the record, Morgan and Byer received their MFAs from UNC-Greensboro in 1968 and Cherry in 1967.

and, especially, as it may have influenced a new generation of writers, including his former students who we will briefly study in this essay.

Robert Morgan, arguably among the best-known of Chappell's students for his work as both poet and novelist, has noted that "Chappell belongs to a small company of writers known equally for their poetry and their prose fiction" ("Foreword," x). More specifically, this group of poets and prose fiction authors includes some of the most notable names in British and American literary history. Morgan constructs a list of such personalities for our consideration in the following assertion: "In English literature we have Thomas Hardy, D.H. Lawrence, Robert Graves, and perhaps Philip Larkin. In American literature there are only Poe and Robert Penn Warren." Thus, Morgan rightly concludes, "The list shows just how rare such a dual talent is. Chappell has done outstanding work in both fiction and poetry, and he is widely known as one of the leading critics of poetry."

Indeed, Chappell seems to have had foreknowledge of contemporary aesthetics as suggested by his response to the cultural moment and in contrast with the efforts of a previous generation of Confessional poets. Like others of his generation disinclined to poststructuralism, Chappell expressed his aesthetic interests primarily in Formalist terms, professing to teach and evaluate how an author employs the elements of the genres he taught.² In "Thanks but No Thanks," his introduction to his book of critical essays, *A Way of Happening*, Chappell writes, "I have mostly restricted my critical writing to the area of practical criticism, to the nuts-and-bolts of poems" (5). In some ways, his "Preface" to *Midquest*, in valuing the world in which his narrators live but, *moreso*, the world outside the narrator's dramatic lifestyle, is a model pedagogical text identifiable as such by its broad understanding of the times in which it was written and perhaps as important to our generation of poets as the work of Wordsworth was to his. Wordsworth, by arguing in his "Preface" to *Lyrical Ballads* against poetic diction, took an aesthetic position that has affected the writing of poetry for nearly two hundred years. Wordsworth, more clearly than most, demonstrated his understanding of the culture in which he was writing and wrote not only about common folks—which itself was a political act at the time—but also advocated for writing that verse in the language people actually used. Chappell was equally tuned-in but to a different era still marked by the imposition of the dramatic I as narrator of poems, the solipsistic and attention-deprived self. In Confessional verse, *that* self is the subject of the poem. As important as they were to Chappell, the practical elements of poetry which he favored were among a variety of emphases of

2 To further consider Chappell's Formalist emphases, see his discussion of verse forms and structural forms in "Preface" to *Midquest* which "suggest a kind of melting pot American quality" (ix).

his rarely described critical practices. But, perhaps more than most, Chappell was conscious of the changing aesthetics of his time, as we will argue below. The Wordsworth connection is not hyperbolic; both came to enact an aesthetic that was simultaneously an ethical position, as we will explain.

The Writer-Teacher Paradigm

It seems important at this juncture in our literary history for someone to say that Chappell personified the kind of teacher that would have pleased Wallace Stegner at Stanford or Norman Foerster at Iowa, what has been called a “writer-teacher” (see Murray). Chappell, as a leader among teachers of his generation, found preparation for teaching not in methods courses but in his personal experiences as a writer and in his readerly responses to literature from his perspective as an experienced writer and Formalist. As we argue below, Chappell “taught” his aesthetic system in venues where he could likewise model that system at work, as his discussion of his poems in the “Preface” to *Midquest* attests. Importantly, that task enables us to garner insights into those values that drove his poetry as well as his thinking about poetry and thereby served to influence the generation of writers that followed him if the poems and stories produced by these authors are any indication. There is no way now to know exactly what Chappell might have said to these students, but they clearly adopted ideas from their teacher that have later appeared, in somewhat different form, in their work, often advanced upon. If one concludes that a measure of a teacher’s success *as a teacher* of writing is the success of his students, we are justified in calling Chappell-the-teacher “gifted,” at least “influential.” Morgan concludes: “Chappell was the best teacher of writing and of poetry I had ever met” (“Foreword,” x).

The writer-teacher model of instruction has served creative writers well. According to D.G. Myers in his ground-breaking *The Elephants Teach*, creative writing in the university became a self-perpetuating machine, “what American industry calls an ‘elephant machine’—a machine for making other machines” (146). This actualization might have been inevitable once the decision had been made in some English departments to teach literature from the inside out—that is, from the point of view of those who actually produced it—with the goal of bringing “the teaching of literature more closely in line with the ways in which (they believed) literature is genuinely created” (8). Myers writes, this change “was to seek to integrate and make consistent the knowledge and creative practice of literature. Literary professionalization was a way of taking oneself seriously; it was not a campaign for prerogative and authority” (147). In effect, the writer-teacher paradigm “demanded that literature be taught... as if people intended to write more of it,” and, according to Myers, this approach eventually evolved into the

practice of teaching creative writing, most notably at Stanford and Iowa. Soon, graduates of MFA creative writing programs (and especially those who had published) were the proper fit for teaching in those very same programs. In the words of Myers, this effort required that literature be taught “from the inside.” Myers’ memorable summation of that approach to teaching is that “it was intended to be an elephant’s view of zoology” (9).

Some might argue, as a result, that the writer-teacher paradigm in which the experienced writer is viewed as the best teacher of writing is a uniquely American invention, the point Myers argues so well. The value of the writer-teacher paradigm as it applies to Fred Chappell, as we express it in this essay, is based upon the long tradition of pragmatism in American thinking (See Roskelly and Ronald). By that we mean that, as with other skills as seemingly mundane as staying alive in the wilderness or building a fire for warmth, novices must learn from the experiences of their predecessors. This is not to say that student-writers who are good readers cannot by themselves figure out some solutions to problems they encounter in what they are writing. But even that view is built upon the belief that a good teacher of new skills in literature must also be a good reader, sensitized to “what’s happening” at a given moment and not only interested in hypothesizing what’s next but also in explaining why a new aesthetic is about to appear, as Chappell was. Bizzaro has “isolated” the three-stage evolutionary process of the writer-teacher by addressing that way of perceiving teaching from the perspective of the pragmatist. Bizzaro writes,

My perspective on pragmatism and therefore on the writer-teacher requires... that teachers experience solutions to the problems students confront as writers, reflect upon those experiences, and then share these insights with the larger community.
 (“The Writer-Teacher,” 413)

We will demonstrate how Chappell performed the tasks of the pragmatist, including gaining experience by writing and reading profusely, reflecting upon those experiences, and then sharing them. The “Preface” to *Midquest* offers a case-in-point. It is there that Chappell develops what in other times might have been called “A Defense of Poetry.” And he does this generously, long before the advent of Creative Writing Studies organizations in this country or, in any case, prior to their influence.

Fred Chappell knew the importance of communicating to others what he knew about poetry and fiction and, as a result, was one of the rare and few successful poets generous enough to spend time reviewing books by new writers, even first books, as he did in “Maiden Voyages and Their Pilots.”

Chappell issued fair warning in that essay, reflecting on his experience, even if honest reflection sometimes sounded gruff and foreboding:

While a poet may be justifiably or unjustifiably proud of a first book-length foray into the world, he or she will also feel trepidation, fear, and sometimes outright panic. The woods are dark and deep and filled with irascible critics like yours truly, monsters who make but fast-food snacks of maiden efforts, ogres who lie in wait for the sensitive young to attract our notice so that we can pounce. (78)

This does not sound like the “ole Fred” who we know and love, but it needn’t; after all, Chappell has no problem employing a persona that places him as critic among the “irascible,” the “monsters” and “ogres.” As he says about his narrators of *Midquest*, they are “to some extent a demographic sample” (x). No harm is done if we occasionally place Chappell among this group of literary hard-liners. Remarkably, the various voices in Fred Chappell’s oeuvre enable us to differentiate the world(s) of his writing from anyone else’s. The irascible critic may be, as Chappell says in the “Preface” to *Midquest* about narrators of those poems, “no more myself than any character in any novel I might choose to write” (x). This may no doubt be true about the voice of the critic(s) in both *A Way of Happening* and *Plow Naked* as well as of Jess Kirkman of the tetralogy or of ole Fred and the “I” of *Midquest*. Chappell’s preoccupation with the first-person narrator in much of his writing is what interests us in this essay because Chappell saw what was coming even as he assessed prior efforts at building an aesthetic and, indeed, in his various published pieces of criticism that forwarded and applied that notion. We see in his various emphases in *Midquest* as well as in *I Am One of You Forever* and *Look Back All the Green Valley* the importance of the *subject* of the poem or story rather than of the *observer* of the subject. Indeed, the diminished importance of the “dramatic I” in poetry allows poets to honor the planet—that has been “othered” and otherwise dismissed during the Confessional era, according to commentators such as Spivak, who we will return to in this essay. This important task is accomplished by documenting, preserving, memorializing and sustaining nature in their poems (see Dagenhart), as Chappell has the Appalachian mountains. What’s more, this shift constitutes a post-Confessional aesthetic that was in the literary culture and motivated some theorists to build a case for its importance, as we argue below.

The message in “Maiden Voyages” must be understood in light of other statements from the sometimes “irascible Fred” who is surely concerned about the young writers who followed in his footsteps as poets or novelists

or essayists, whether they were enrolled in his classes or, like us, simply interested in learning what they can from Chappell's wide experience and insightful observations. Several years before the publication of *A Way of Happening* (1998) in "First Attempts" from *Plow Naked* (1993), Chappell likewise gave young writers fair warning and did so in the following terms, employing his experience and thereby teaching young writers by employing a kind of pragmatism:

The real beginning of a writer's compulsion to compose is difficult to discover and he must be a foolhardy author who will attempt to sound these strange, moiling, storm-lit depths in search of an origin.... He has been forced to be objective about something, to try to see it in a *light* that permits description, however fumbling and inaccurate. (p. 4, our emphasis)

We are driven to know what light that is. What is it that Chappell saw in the nineteen eighties and felt compelled to articulate in the early nineteen nineties that young writers need to know and, because of their inexperience, may not be able to see at all for themselves? As a marker of professional difference, Chappell never stopped observing poetry to find that light though that light might flicker from time to time in the writing of his peers. His essays, then, reflect the notions that may very well constitute his teaching, keeping in mind that a poet's teaching may very well come in the form of modeling as well as commenting formally and informally on a student's work. Further evidence for this assertion may be found not only in his creative works but in the creative works of his students. We do not argue that Chappell gifted his students with their remarkable talents. Rather, we believe those particular ideations we find stressed in his critical work manifest themselves in the remarkable writing of the three of his students we highlight here. In any case, Chappell models those aesthetic and ethical notions for an entire generation of post-Confessional writers.

It must be said, in all fairness, that it was the "I" of the dramatic lyric that seemed most troubling to Chappell, as we see in his several frustrated attempts to explain the use of first person in his own poetry, fiction and critical writing. In "Too Many Freds," the "final word" in *More Lights Than One*, Chappell construes one Fred for each of the fifteen critics who wrote essays in that book about his many literary works, "all Freds similar but dissimilar enough... to be counted as separate entities" (266). He continues with the playfulness we enjoy in his writing:

It is geometry: By means of reflection, inversion, translation, rotation, and that mathematical process known as screwing,

we can produce as few as seventeen Freds and as many as two hundred and thirty—all in the literary, metaphorical sense, of course. (266)

In spite of this ironic reaction to efforts by scholars to better understand the narrators of his work, Fred resisted their judgments. He had something else entirely in mind, and many of us simply did not see it coming or, perhaps, were blinded by that light. Basically, he wanted readers to accept their responsibility for the way they construed his work: “What I will say at last is, I put as much autobiography into my poems and stories when I write them as readers do when they read them” (“Too Many Freds,” 262).

Though this view echoes the position held by many in the group we call “reading theorists,” Chappell did not further elucidate how, exactly, this works and, therefore, managed to avoid theorizing about his goal in designing his narrators as he did. But he did approach his understanding in a manner that might be described—following the lead of reading theorist Edward Said—as contrapuntal reading, always counter punching (see *footnote 2*, below). For example, in his “Preface” to *Midquest* in 1981, Chappell was willing to accept the standards of his time against which he offers an alternative view: “Ours is the time of the brilliant autobiographical lyric” (x). He seems to have acquiesced to this fact, perhaps unhappily, because the Confessional aesthetic was still prominent though it had certainly outlived its usefulness. Chappell was clearly conscious of that fact and, in this, perhaps impatient with his readers. From his perspective as a formalist, he identifies the qualities of Confessional verse that he values: “intensity, urgency, metaphysical trial, emotional revelation” but then he notes that they “are absent from *Midquest*” (x). *Midquest* is, indeed, a conscious effort to deviate from that norm. In fact, on several occasions, most notably in “Too Many Freds,” Chappell resisted the notion that his poems and stories *were or should be* autobiographical. He writes about the Fred and the I of *Midquest* by stating that “[h]e was constructed, as was Dante’s persona, Dante, in order to be widely representative” (“Preface,” x). Why was Chappell opposed to the readerly assumption that the voice of the speaker was the poet’s voice? In the end, it is not until he writes his important essay, humorously titled “Too Many Freds,” that we get a glimpse of that frustration.

Chappell concedes only this about Confessional poets in “Too Many Freds”: “[t]he frankness and candor of their poems struck a refreshing note in our literature and helped to clear away some of the prim and prissy pretenses of contemporary life” (259). But then, the teachable moment:

...the revelations that at first seemed shocking soon served their purpose and began to wear thin. By the 1980s there was nothing left to confess that could surprise, much less shock, anyone. (259)

Only then does Chappell define the emerging aesthetic: “The personal tone introduced in the 1950s still has not disappeared, but few poets nowadays strive for shock and unless they can come up with gaudier sins than heretofore—cannibalism, perhaps, or necrophilia—they will still fall short of surprise.” Chappell concludes that brief assessment with the sharp wit we come to expect from him when he quotes from “Upon a Confessional Poet,” an epigram written in 1985, which he describes as “an epitaph for this poetic subgenre.” Let’s enjoy it once more:

You’ve shown us all in stark undress
 The sins you needed to confess.
 If my peccadilloes were so small
 I never would undress at all. (259)

He concludes with a justification of his view:

A contemporary poet would be mad to turn his back upon contemporary idiom and upon post-Symbolist advances in sensibility if he had not some different and well-defined goal. For purposes of design, it seemed to me I had to choose, and so I grasped about in the past for comfortable examples. The question then becomes whether I lost more than I gained, a question not fitting nor indeed possible for me to answer. (“Preface,” xi)

But we now can see that Chappell was correct: confessional voices soon became a wild and untrustworthy cacophony, and someone had to say so. Chappell’s “Preface” to *Midquest* is one of the first explanations of how the narrator of a poem or story by authors could be employed to tell their narrative less to attract attention to themselves than to highlight their subjects, a technique we often associate with fiction and creative nonfiction. Chappell writes an explanation that the “I of *Midquest*,... is to some extent a demographic sample” (“Preface,” x). Rather, the subject of the poem, which is external to the poet’s self, is what Chappell wants to focus on. Often, in Chappell’s work, the subject is mountain life and people who live in the mountains. Again from the remarkable “Too Many Freds”:

My themes are obvious enough: the strength and resilience of family, the disappearance or diminishment of a former way of Appalachian life, the sense of community, the grandeur of place, the coming of age of young people and grownups alike, the

responsibility of the individual toward communal history, and so forth. (270)

These are the elements of his poetry and fiction that he wants readers to respond to, not the autobiographical facts they think they learn about Chappell by reading about the lives of his invented narrators. To make this point more succinctly, we will discuss *Midquest* in greater detail below. Suffice it to say at this point that Chappell has not gotten deserved credit for this forthright observation. The young poet benefits from the remark of the more experienced poet, even moreso if the experienced poet is the young person's teacher. Literary history is filled with expressions we have come to call "theory" which Chappell did not value and so his statements of poetic insight come variously in prefaces, introductions, review essays or other statements of aesthetic judgment in which he "obliged those who invited me because of vanity or economic consideration" ("Introduction" to *Plow Naked*, 1). And they constitute a position articulated more succinctly later by others, including most notably Spivak, but which Chappell espouses nonetheless, or they would not be worth mentioning at all, as we explain below.

Aesthete, Not Theorist

The issue of genre has become a complicated and enigmatic fact of literary study in the twenty-first century. We must be even more careful, then, about attributing purpose to statements that may simply be efforts by a writer to clarify his place among other writers. But confronting the aesthetics of Confessionalism—not only as Chappell confronts them, but as early as he does—foreshadows the development of a theory that values the diminished "self" of a poem or story or essay and does so for a specific reason. The new emphasis that results from the poet's intentional resistance to telling a confession in these poems enables the subject observed, rather than the person observing the subject, to be the focus of the text. While Chappell saw this new emphasis coming, the justifying argument had not yet been made, at least not comprehensively. Rather, the theory as it was developed in the context of comparative literature by Gayatri Spivak in the early twenty-first century is called Planetarity, and we will briefly refer to it here because it is that way of thinking that Chappell's own "practical criticism" foreshadowed. As a postcolonial thinker, Spivak studied the way certain groups were exploited (she calls this "Othering") so that more powerful groups might maintain their privileges. Even nature, she notes in her treatment of Planetarity, had been othered and exploited until we must now worry about its survival. Poetry allows us to demonstrate this othering rather than simply make a claim, and that is its chief feature as it evolved in Chappell's own work, as we argue below.

First, let's briefly consider how practice becomes theory in literary study. Historically, practice has typically preceded articulation of the elements of that practice, and Aristotle has modeled that for us in an early instance of what we have called "contrapuntal criticism," characterized as it was by its reaction to earlier endeavors.³ This view of criticism as conversation—a very healthy view, indeed—holds until the advent of theory in the university and its aggressive assertions of "otherness," to paraphrase Spivak, or what she terms "globalization" which she argues "is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere" (*Death of a Discipline* 72). The system of exchange she refers to is no doubt power-relations on the globe, which marginalize some groups even as they elevate the status of others. Spivak seems to object to the making of what Foucault called "power knowledge." Most objectionable to Chappell, as later found objectionable in Spivak's work, is global theory's absolute assumption about the subjects and forms of poetry, that they are fixed in time—that is, made prior to the making of a poem in that theory's image. It is no surprise that theory evoked strong responses, even anger, in reactions to it made by many writers of the late twentieth century. For instance, in *A Way of Happening*, Chappell writes with predictable wit and insight, "I have nothing against theoretical writing. Let every dogma have its day. Except in academic circumstances a literary dogma can do little harm, and the harm it does in universities affects only pedagogy and the personal careers of teachers. Literature itself is hardly affected, for though it becomes the patronage of the university, it does not depend upon it" (5).

Gayatri Spivak's notion of "Planetarity" from Chapter 3 of *Death of a Discipline*, as nicely elaborated on in essays edited by Amy J. Elias and Christian Moraru in *The Planetary Turn* (2015), may be construed as a theoretical incarnation of Chappell's way of thinking. This thinking by our leading theorists reflects a systematic argument that defends and deepens Chappell's position concerning first person narration in poetry and provides a foundation for our understanding of an new aesthetic. By holding a view that lessens the importance of the dramatic I in comparative literary studies and then expanding on that view, these scholars elucidate an approach to the first person narrator that succinctly characterizes an emerging post-Confessional aesthetic that we find not only in Chappell's poetry and fiction but also extended and further developed in the writing of Byer,

3 In his valuable "Introduction" to Aristotle's *Poetics*, Friedrich Solmsens argues convincingly for Aristotle's indebtedness to Plato for much of the analysis of Sophocles that we find in the *Poetics*. Indeed, we argue for the influence, even the necessity, that Aristotle respond to Plato and Sophocles as an essential foundation for the "theorizing" Aristotle does in the *Poetics*. Aristotle "counterpoints" Plato's argument about poets and poetry. To build his own case, Aristotle had to argue against the Platonic Forms: "In Aristotle's scheme the Platonic Forms have disappeared" (Solmsens XI).

Morgan and Cherry, as we will show as connected both to Chappell's aesthetic teachings and Spivak's ethical/postcolonial theorization. It is, indeed, a new theory that has not yet been thoroughly evaluated for its relevance to contemporary poetry and pedagogical practice, let alone to contemporary life. We hope its relevance will be apparent in our ongoing discussions of it in this essay.

Clearly, to overcome the burdens put upon our young poets by the Confessional writers, as Chappell has pointed out, we need a new theory to validate a poetry that focuses on and liberates the world *outside the self*. What is or can be outside the self in an age of social construction and subjectivity, an age characterized by globalization and the vital role of "othering" in global theories? And what would that poetry look like? Argued rhetorically, Chappell's view of the poetic narrator that amounts to a post-Confessional aesthetic comes from a slightly more figurative epistemology in comparative literary studies than Chappell's rather direct statement. If the subject is not the individual writer, then it must be something outside the writer. Spivak argues that the primary concern about the world outside the self is or should be its survival. So, we must see Spivak's notion of Planetarity, then, as a method of reading that advocates returning our planet to its original state, a condition that exists prior to the blame-theories of "othering." If we long to save the planet and restore it as a place perfectly designed for our living needs and on which we are merely guests, we must take individual steps and thus work holistically as a people, not individually as an author in isolation and without any social agenda whatsoever. The individual, thus, must be devalued and, in our influential literary works, become a secondary concern in the scrutiny leading to an understanding of the subject of the work.

More to the point, what does Spivak propose? Chiefly, she asserts a changing orientation to writing about the environment. In her words, it is essential that "the planet overwrite the globe," (72) that Planetarity become more influential than Globalization which has failed us as citizens of the planet because it has instituted "otherness." As a postcolonial theorist, Spivak notes that theories that "globalize the planet" do so for the benefit of one special interest or another. She does not object to theories that promote social equity; in fact, she portrays Planetarity as such an epistemology because it assumes social equality at the beginning of time. But a postcolonial positioning of concern with a matter as urgent as the well-being of the planet requires individuals to think about something outside their own narrow lives. The problem with most globalized positions is that they impose "the same system of exchange everywhere," monetary exchange which translates for Spivak into the distracting power conflicts involving class, race, gender and privilege. The problem with this global "standard" for human

activity is not only its advocacy of one group over another but that it results in what, elsewhere, Spivak calls “epistemic violence.” Because our ways of knowing, thusly, are affected by those who are in power, it seems reasonable to assume that the most oppressive and colonizing justification for power and control comes from individuals who are attempting to protect their own interests. Thus, in Spivak’s terms, “one system of beliefs” replaces all other global systems. The individual self by asserting itself through these systems comes to be at odds with people with alternative beliefs that, Spivak explains in “Can the Subaltern Speak,” they deem “inadequate to their task.” Spivak uses the term “humility” to describe the mental state required to “accept this planet-based totality”—Planetarity—and “to devise a way to share with all the rest our only true public space and resources” (cited in Elias xix). To a certain extent, then, Spivak’s view is rhetorical and offers an argument done better, perhaps, in poetry.

Planetarity has been made to blend so well with other social concerns under the auspices of Environmentalism that it has not been easy to identify in the writing of twenty-first century writers. No doubt, we must be taught how to adopt a planet-first mindset for use in our creative work and thereby proselytize in aesthetic terms rather than advocate for social and commercial interests rhetorically in arguments that have been ineffective, even though perhaps blatantly correct in their politics (depending on one’s point of view, of course). Stated bluntly, the ethic must become the aesthetic. We must write, from our perspective as survivors, about the survival of the planet and why we must intercede. Chappell’s repudiation of the “autobiographical I” is a starting point in that direction. His students as members of the next generation have continued that work, and to some extent that is a portion of his legacy that is easy to overlook. Something happened in Greensboro, something important to North Carolina poetry, that reminds us of Black Mountain or Warren Wilson where, for a moment in time, a few bright minds came together and whatever happened resulted in good writing, and literature was altered. That is the way of pragmatism, untheorized and persistent, and the product of the writer-teacher paradigm. But, to be clear, what is the aesthetic of Planetarity? A planetary ethic as aesthetic is one that insists we learn to model our behavior after what we observe on the planet. Chappell’s “Earthsleep,” the last poem in *Midquest*, makes this very point:

The way the light rubs upon this planet
So do I press to you,

Susan Susan

The love that moves the sun and other stars

The love that moves itself in light to loving
 Flames up like dew

Here in the earliest morning of the world. (187)

Though Planerarity is not yet employed as a literary-critical tool—because until Spivak enlarged its function it was chiefly a system of value—it gives us license to reinterpret the goals of theory, generally. In Spivak’s words, “I am not advocating the politicization of the discipline. I am advocating a depoliticization of the politics of hostility toward a politics of friendship to come” (13). Another way of thinking about the role of such a theory is that it does not designate power positions on the globe as much as it requires us to look at the planet as damaged but not yet destroyed, a nature disinterested in petty human power struggles at play even as the planet itself is in turmoil. If we hope to expand the function of literature in the post-truth era in which we live, literature from a Planetary perspective “may give us entry into the performativity of cultures” (Spivak 13), culture unaffected by material conflict and hostility toward the other. Spivak seems to say that we need to enlarge our understanding of the planet and the cultures that, for now, are living on it. Doing so is one of Chappell’s contributions as a pragmatist trying to help the rest of us.

His authorship of the “Preface” to *Midquest* is a model act of humility, nearly an apology for talking about verse that occupied us for nearly forty years what needed to be said. In that document, Chappell is an extraordinary teacher. In a similar vein, Spivak concludes, “We must persistently educate ourselves into this peculiar mindset” (73). We have already seen the evolution of genres, especially in prose poetry, as a response to the all-encompassing fixation of the self that marks the ongoing influence of the confessional era (see Bizzaro 2019). The poetic self as subject and narrator is changing to highlight a subject *other than* the poetic self. In the writing of Chappell and his much-valued students, Byer, Morgan and Cherry, that subject has not been the narrator. Rather, Byer, Morgan and Cherry write about the beloved mountains which have slowly been taken away from us. And the implications of this fact are far-reaching.

This “particular mindset” has not been easy to adapt to critical theory. The act of forbidding “intention” and “affect,” as the Formalists did under the auspices of the New Criticism, is in itself an act of epistemic violence. Much confessional verse can be found in our journals, and creative writing classrooms still advocate for students to write about themselves. But adapting to a new way of seeing the planet and, at the same time, teaching students to see the planet that way is the intention of this essay. Our decision to briefly bring together four poets, chosen precisely because they have

not previously been written about together in terms of their relationship in the classroom, is simultaneously an effort to underscore Planetarity's pertinence, perhaps more now than ever, and, by doing so, to examine the places about which they write.

More specifically, Byer, Morgan and Cherry instruct us in the four moves of Planetarity, the goal of which is to "unother" the planet, which include documenting a place to render it in detail, memorializing it by focusing on some historical event associated with the place, preserving it by asserting the need to restore the place to the way it once was, and sustaining it so as to argue against any further transformation of it, the effects of Globalization, according to Spivak. As a critical theory, Planetarity may function holistically in examining the work of a group of writers as we do in this essay. But it may also work atomistically as in our discussion of Chappell in the next section, who importantly subdues the poetic self and focuses instead on what, in his famous tetralogy, is the true subject of his poems and the poems of many Appalachian writers, nature under attack and changed by the violence humans have done to it, nature as other. Each of the poets discussed here speaks, as Cherry puts it, as if the muse will "allow a poet sentences with which / to praise a man, if not his killing weapons" ("Invocation," ll. 6-7). Morgan and Byer offer an eco-historical representation of life in these hills during the past 100 years and do so, inevitably, in an effort to portray nature in its uncorrupted and unexploited state, nature as redeemable. Their work is important in a practical sense because life in the North Carolina mountains is changing rapidly and, in a manner reminiscent of changes we have observed and mourned on the planet, generally. But the planet seems, otherwise, undisturbed. Like Chappell (or, should we say like Jess Kirkman?), industrialization of the mountains by science and industry are often portrayed as the culprit.

Fred Chappell as Pragmatist and Teacher: The Post-Confessional Model

When we envision a new aesthetic based upon a changing and more humble perspective on point of view, fiction is often the best and most natural genre to use to exemplify major shifts in emphasis as a post-Confessional aesthetic should. We do not want to reduce accomplishment in imaginative writing to "rhetoric," as most people think of it, where the author seeks to "manipulate" the reader as authors might in an argument. Chappell would oppose such a move: "All this style," Chappell writes in "Too Many Freds," "is now seen as 'rhetoric,' a term that coarsens the effects desired and cheapens the benevolent intensions of the author, she who, after all, has labored only to please" (264). For Chappell, identifying fiction with rhetoric, despite Wayne Booth's best efforts in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, is reductive, perhaps even insulting. Yet rhetoric gives us the tools to study

stylistic changes in the various elements of imaginative writing as that writing seeks to take its readers on a journey of importance to the author and, in Chappell's case, to demonstrate how the planet may "overwrite the globe," to use Spivak's terminology.

Chappell as Formalist often resisted such efforts to defend his poetry and fiction or to further explain his work. Though he bought into the affective fallacy in his valuing the participation of the reader in the making of a text's meaning (see "Too Many Freds" 261), he did not believe in intention in the writing of the new poets he was generous to write about and, thus, supported the notion of intentional fallacy. Bizzaro noted, in "Distance and Point of View in the Writings of Fred Chappell," that rhetoric provides tools that enable readers to describe changes in aesthetic performance, such as Chappell's:

...in reading Chappell's writings, readers might rightly feel that their educations have betrayed them—or, if not betrayed them, been revealed as inadequate to the task. It is fairly standard these days to locate point of view in terms of "person." Though this is often a useful mechanism for discussing literature, since it enables us to determine "who" tells the story, it does not provide the tools necessary if our goal is to understand and appreciate narration, as we must in reading Chappell, in terms of what Wayne Booth calls "distance." (*More Lights*, 73-74)

But in his approach to teaching, as we describe it here, Chappell was a pragmatist, first by discovering his aesthetic in his own writing and then by writing about it with didactic fervor. In "Maiden Voyages," Chappell identifies his source of intellectual curiosity, as a true pragmatist, basing his observation on his experience.

One trait that generally betrays a book as being a first effort is the usage of the first-person pronoun. Contemporary American poetry clings to its "I" like lichen to a sandstone boulder. Personal anecdote, personal observation, knotty personal reverie: these make up the ordinary shelf stock of the contemporary lyric. ("Maiden," 79).

Chappell believes that young writers should consider the fact that the poem of selfness has come and gone and that the narrator and the poet need not be one and the same. In fact, the poem is better if it enforces a distance between the poet and the narrator because it will thereby focus more fully on the subject. This observation is at least reasonable. For Chappell it becomes a standard useful in examinations of first books. He continues,

“The I of the poem is one of its methods of control, and when the poet forgets that the speaking I is not *and should not be* the same figure as the live person writing the poem, the result can be shymaking” (76, our emphasis). In a sense, when we return to the warnings Chappell gave in “Maiden Voyages” (1998), the I narrator-as-subject of the poem encourages readers to compare the new writer with “the beguiling self-celebratory” poems of poets who preceded them, like James Dickey and Anne Sexton. The advice to avoid such comparisons is, no doubt, good advice to young poets. Do something different, “make it new!”, as Pound would say in a different time entirely.

Chappell’s observations are based upon experience. His works of fiction offer the clearest demonstration of Chappell’s pragmatism. The author of *I Am One of You Forever* turns over the storytelling to Jess Kirkman, who holds that position throughout the Kirkman tetralogy. Nonetheless, the experiences of Jess so closely approximate what readers know about the life of Fred Chappell that readers came to see Jess as Chappell’s spokesperson. The problem, then, is readers misreading: “I put as much autobiography into my poems and stories when I write them as readers do when they read them,” he says in “Too Many Freds” (262). This remark echoes reading theory of the time, as Chappell no doubt knew. The reader-writer experience is a shared one. If the author did not live the experiences, he could not write them. If “the readers’ experiences did not contribute to their reading, they could not comprehend these products of shared imaginations.” By moving outside the self in narrating *I Am One of You Forever*, Chappell allows the planet to “overwrite” the globe. “The Overspill” section, which serves as an introduction to the world of Jess’s experience, sets the stage nicely for allowing Chappell, the author, to focus on the ways we have damaged our planet in exchange for the kind of fulfillment promised in globalized perceptions of the earth.

“The Overspill,” which introduces a central theme of *I Am One of You Forever* is well-known, but please tolerate some highlights. Jess’s mother has gone to visit her brother in California and is returning soon. Joe Robert, wanted to give her “something guaranteed to please her” (3), in this instance, a bridge over a creek on their property. But the focus is quickly turned from Jess and Joe Robert who are making this dream bridge possible, to the turmoil often seen to be at the heart of globalization in the western North Carolina mountains. Jess is the recorder/observer in this event, noting turbulence of some sort, during his conversation with his father: “Over the low mumble of his words I heard a different rumble, a gurgle as of pebbles pouring into a broad still pool ‘What’s that?’” (4), Jess asked as he and Joe Robert tried to put finishing touches on the bridge they had built to celebrate the reunion of their family.

Joe Robert answers: “Those Challenger Paper guys. They’ve opened the floodgates.” Helplessness in the face of this destruction is poignantly offered. It is Jess who effectively tells us, “My father and I watched the hateful battering of our work, our hands in our pockets” (5). This image of helplessness in the face of global pursuits is an excellent call to arms for other writers, not just a warning about impending personal loss, but a call for assistance in resisting the forces of the economy that threaten destruction of nature in exchange for personal financial gain, a product of Globalized considerations. Chappell calls for a merging of our grief. In the midst of such destruction, human contact occurs, almost unnoticed: “I don’t know how long we stared downstream before we were aware that my mother had arrived.” Confused by what she saw, “half amused, half vexed,” she too came to see that the “bastards” at Challenger Paper had behaved irresponsibly, broken a law that wouldn’t be enforced. That shared moment of regret is beautifully portrayed through Jess’s eyes as he shared remorse with his parents in the following passage:

The tear on my mother’s cheek got larger and larger. It detached from her face and became a shiny globe, widening outward like an inflating balloon. At first the tear floated in air between them, but as it expanded it took my mother and father into itself. I saw them suspended, separate but beginning to drift slowly toward one another. Then my mother looked past my father’s shoulder, looked through the bright skin of the tear, at me. The tear enlarged until at last it took me in too. It was warm and salt. As soon as I got used to the strange light inside the tear, I began to swim clumsily toward my parents. (6)

Chappell did not know, could not have known, at the time that this insight in his writing would have the affect it has had on readers. Nor would he appreciate someone categorizing it as Planetarity. But, alas, it has. And, alas, it is part of an unplanned pragmatic strategy we embrace as writer-teachers ourselves. It models the way others for at least two centuries have contemplated the best way to teach literature as though people would continue to make it. This insight into his own writing was accomplished long before he stated it in his prose. Theorizing was not Chappell’s forte. A young student-writer had to pay attention. The test would be that person’s writing, much as it should be.

We see a commitment by Chappell to a similar technique in his use of the first person dramatic I in his poetry. *Midquest* is an excellent case in point where the author wants to model the important view of the world as one in which we cohabitate as guests. Chappell envisions the four volumes as comprising “the single long poem *Midquest*” (ix). Each section focuses on

“one of the classical four elements,” and each one overwrites the globe with the planetary notion that we recall from the beginning of time how to intermingle with nature and each other. The Planetary poem is the teacher, first and foremost. The ethic is the aesthetic. To that end, the first poem of each section of *Midquest* makes the point that as we awaken, in the various senses of that term, “everyone begins slowly to reach toward another” (1). The very act of “Awakening in the Sea” is repeated in our own awakening, both physically to a new morning and intellectually to the value-based notion that the movements of the planet dictate our own movements, so interdependent are we. In “Fire Now Wakening on the River,” the narrator focuses on this interdependence: “My forehead enters your shoulder / As air and flame enjoin, nothing separate, / All selfless in all as we burn together.... / The world in sunlit half-sleep is a film of fire” (55). In “Dawn Wind Unlocks the River Sky,” the title offers a unification of special importance on this day, the day of the poet’s birth, the mid-quest now underway. He writes, “Wind drives me forward” (97). This special unification is symbolically enacted in his attachment to his partner: “This sea of music, / Pasticaglia to every ocean, I am swimming your skin / Of touchless fire and earth-salt.” We reach a consummation of sorts in “Earth Emergent Drifts the Fire River,” the first poem in “Earthsleep,” as he celebrates life on and with this planet, alongside his beloved:

Susan, we are gone we have come
 To earth.
 The resplendent house of spirit bursts around the body.
 Mind rises from the ravages of sense
 And clothes in dream. Mind, old Crusoe,
 Are you here lost with me on this island of fire,
 This bright and lonely spark struck off
 In the heave of bloodsea?
 Earth, where do you take us, will you
 Shed us upon the black waters streaming
 Deathward?
 Will you deliver us to wind,
 In wind to suffer shorn of flesh, crying
 Our mewling cry?
 Or thrust us
 Into the first, into the raging ecstasy
 Of purified spirit, of burning foreknowledge? (149)

These are the insights coming from practice that Chappell touches upon repeatedly in his “Preface.” With this we also receive one last paradoxical claim, that “the work is not autobiography unless it is deliberately

intended as such. If it is intended, it is immediately untrustworthy” (“Too Many Freds,” 258).

We see pretty clearly here that Chappell was overwriting the planet many years before Spivak advocated and systematized doing so. “Overwriting” is not a return to Eden as much of it is a realization that the wild, natural state of earth—without human subjugation—not only sustains us and models our relations with one another, but also more powerful than Global concerns themselves.

Our attempt here with Fred Chappell and his students, all of whom are concerned with Appalachia, is to show how their poems attempt to ‘detranscendentalize’ the mountains, rejecting patriarchy and oppression in favor of conversation with the planet. We use the word *place* to mean a space which holds meaning for the human inhabitant. Places are planetary, they are specific spots on Earth that humans call home.

Byer and the Detranscendentalized Mountains

“Transcendentalization” may have been an unintended consequence of Pantheistic worship of nature because by separating ourselves from nature in that way (even if by worshipping nature) we have nonetheless managed to exploit nature itself, making it meet the ends we have in mind for it. In *Midquest*, as we have argued, Chappell posits a relationship with a nature that models for us the way we should behave, if only we would pay attention. In a sense, Chappell’s nature, like Wordsworth’s, is a teacher. The benefit of this view is that it recovers much of what has been lost or simply ignored as we interact with the environment. But simultaneously, this Romanticized view creates a nature that could be denied and even manipulated. It is to that nature that the Chappell/Jess of *I Am One of You* stands by helplessly with Joe Robert, hands in pockets, watching their creek overflow, their bridge wash away. In a sense we see the respectful pair helpless as we all are in the face of the very industry that appropriated our mountains.

To achieve the high ideals of Planetarity, the othering of nature must be undone. Byer seemed to know the importance of reminding people of what the mountains were prior to industrialization and commercialization of the place. In the first poem of *The Girl in the Midst of Harvest*, she places herself studiously in a natural scene: “I’ve come a long way / from what’s been described as a mean and starved / corner of backwoods America” (3). In describing that journey, Byer offers an historical account of the process of reclaiming nature, a view that moves slightly beyond what Chappell envisioned, though his portrait of Jess and Joe Robert in “The Overspill”

certainly makes Byer's work necessary and even timely, especially as a mountain woman. In "Wings," she says, "'What am I doing here?' / Women build nests, / don't they? Who was it told me that? / How long ago?" (45). In the mountains, women accept their lot because it seems natural to do so but also because it has always been that way. But Byer is not resistant to change.

Thus, her poetry shows the impact of changes of time in the mountains and how it affects people that live there, including the way she differs from both her mother and her daughter. Her poetry records histories of the hills for future generations and, thereby, enables readers to travel back to the places of Appalachia, time and again each time the poems are read, and the people who lived there despite their differences. In "Like a Mother Who Never Sleeps, Rain," Byer confides that her mother "wants Snow White awakened, / a kiss on both cheeks. I want wind / on my face. We are caught in a story with no happy ending" (47). Her daughter is even less inclined toward obedience: "'My daughter does not sleep as the books say / she will..." (45). But more to the point, the poetry—the songs—sustain the culture of Appalachia through documentation, and by conveying Byer's life experience to the reader. Through participatory imagination, poetry allows the reader to experience the places of the southern Appalachian past and the people who lived there. Spivak would call this *telepoesis*, a term she heard from Derrida, which means to reach distant "others" through imagination. In this view of poetry's place in our lives, poetry actively engages the reader in the text through sensory experience. Rhythm, lyricism, form, sound, and other poetic conventions involve the reader in an experience that deeply connects them to the place of the poem. It does not matter if the reader has any knowledge of Appalachia or its history, because the act of reading the poetry includes the reader now in the place of the poem. This is one way Byer's poetry functions to sustain the culture of Appalachia.

Yi fu Tuan articulates one reason why humans feel the need to preserve an environment. In societies where people feel that they are "in control of their destiny, they have little cause for nostalgia"; however, when people think their community is changing "too rapidly, or spinning out of control, nostalgia for an idyllic past waxes strong" (*Space and Place* 195). Tuan states that this need for the past, this attraction to preserve historical buildings and artifacts, rises from the human necessity to support a sense of identity (*Space and Place* 197). Byer might have wanted change but soon saw the relevance of status quo in the mountains:

I wore my dresses short
And drove too fast
Around the curve my neighbor takes

At eight every noon,
Her hair blown like a battleflag.
But I go slowly now,
Am in no hurry, having come
To where there's no place else
To go. ("Soap Opera," 43-44)

Byer is not directly aiming to preserve the past through writing song as artifact, but she does preserve a way of life in the songs she includes in her poetry. Though her own writing of verse that shows the culture, it is often of the culture changing through no fault of its own: She identifies that moment when "what I know best is the emptiness. / In it the wind sings of nothing / but rocks crumbling, / roots letting go" (26).

If it is true that writing about place is more than a historical or cultural reading into that place at a specific time, it likely allows the reader to experience the place again each time the poem is read or the song is heard. The place, then, is always in the present as the poem is in the present and is, thereby, preserved. Poetry transcends time in this way and allows us to return to a time before the Romantics and Transcendentalists othered nature by worshipping it. If time and place are always linked, and time determines how a place is perceived, either through memory or the current time being spent at the place, then each time the poetry is read and the song is heard, the place is preserved historically in its original state for the reader. In her book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society*, Lucy Lippard comments on life and home as the center of human existence and that place and our attachments to place extend out from this fluid center in a "circular notion, embracing and radiating from the specific place." But the area away from the center out there "is a line of sight, the view, a metaphor for linear time" (23). Inhabitants of the place circle back to the idea of the place through time. These ideas make the history of the place, both as it was at a certain time and as it is in the present, pertinent and even possible for readers. In an interview for *Town Creek Poetry*, Byer echoes Lippard's theory of meaning growing out from the "center" of a place when she talks about her views of the intersection between place, landscape and memory:

Yusef Komunyakaa once referred to the landscape that one carries within one's imagination throughout one's life as necessary to the artist's vision. I would say that it's necessary to anyone's "vision." It derives from that first landscape to which we awaken, but of course it changes as one moves through one's life... how the interior and exterior landscapes interact, dance, dialog with each other, and when the two come into harmony, then the eye / I

of the seer and the writer expands and enfolds what she sees into her own creative center.

Poetry that heavily relies on place, or poetry with a strong sense of place, serves as a marker or tangible object that preserves the place even if the place is no longer in physical existence.

As readers, we move about the poetry in much the same way we might move about in the physical world: reading and circling back, both in the text and in memory as the images and rhythm of the poem trigger thoughts. Each time we read a poem, or hear a song, we experience that time and place again. The experience still is in the present tense. This is an important concept in Byer's work. For instance, in an essay entitled "Timelines" she talks about the similarities between physically hiking the landscape and writing poetry:

As I negotiated the trail, I negotiated the poem. What is poetry, after all, but the negotiation of time? (And prosody, as I once read somewhere, is the repository of time). All our rhythmic devices restructure time: a run of iambics does not move along in the same way as a gaggle of anapests. Moving through time is what a poem does, so why should anyone find it strange that the trail under my feet and the poem in my head became one? Sometimes, even back home as I read what I'd written, I couldn't tell the two of them apart. Come to think of it, perhaps the hiker and the poet ask the same questions, one of them being—how long before we get there? Or, asked a different way, as I did once when facing a section of cross-country hike that was pure laurel hell, how do we get through? How to get through, isn't that the most urgent question one can ask? How to get through the day, or the hike, or the poem?

When Byer writes about her Kanati Trail or Tuckasegee River, she writes of the place as she experienced it and so captures a "snapshot" to preserve the time she spent there. What's more, in the reading of the poem, the reader gets to be there too. This process of memorializing the mountains is a function of Planetarity as we understand it. The hills are important, of course, but so are the people who live in them and perform their various given duties, as Byer suggests mountain women have.

Kay's husband had something to say about a woman's duty too. James Byer's essay "A Woman's Place is in the House" refers to the twentieth century French phenomenologist Gaston Bachelard's notion that domesticity in the home establishes a "community of order: through which the poet relies

for creativity. The interplay between labor and thought is essentially creative and generates the world just as in Taoist thought the interaction of the yin and yang generates the ten thousand things, or all there is” (qtd in Lanier 170). Byer’s women of Appalachia are strong, grounded, and exert their voices through their daily existence in home and family. Instead of being oppressive and burdensome as it is often stereotypically seen, the work and resulting artifact in the poetry—an aria, a quilt, childbirth, or the task of hauling water—gives the speaker, and the reader, a standard by which to measure life. In “Peanuts,” Kay warns us that “idle hands / make an old woman weep” (10). Women in the mountains need to stay busy or lose their purpose. But that is generally true, according to James Byer who argues that Kay Byer’s poetry, “while deriving much of its subject matter and imagery from the Appalachian region, nonetheless transcends the ‘regionalism’ finding in home, in labor, in human relationships the source of that spring that sustains us all” (182). Kay Byer adds value and complexity to the reputedly simplistic lives of women and girls in the Appalachian Mountains while connecting readers to intimate details of the culture.

From an ecofeminist perspective, Kathryn Byer’s women, their domestic routines, and their attachments to heritage and family, build—at the bidding of Virginia Woolf—rooms of their own. Byer’s women’s rooms and songs exemplify their topophilia for their own homeplaces, but also for Appalachian culture and tradition. These women function in a male-dominated society through their actions, their domesticity, but it is their songs which work to give them rich voices that mesh into culture, place, and the very nature of the Appalachians. In her essay “Deep Water,” Byer speaks of singing as a method of travel for the mountain women unable to physically leave their homes:

To the women living in these mountains years ago, singing must have seemed the only way they could travel... they knew their place... and their place knew them. Out of that reciprocal knowing, they were able to sing their way through their solitude and into a larger web of voices, voices that I have come to see as connective tissue stretching across these hills. (63)

Poetry is Byer’s connective tissue linking the hopes, fears, and memories of those inhabiting the southern Appalachian Mountains. Byer’s poems sustain mountain culture and re-create the “places” of Appalachia that are disappearing. Her representations of women in the mountain culture as sustaining forces during a time in history when they performed a duty rather than were exploited advances the cause of Planetarity.

Robert Morgan: Contemplations of Place, Now and Then

Robert Morgan's poetry functions on multiple levels: to reclaim the place of the Appalachian farm through poesis, to connect readers to these places of his past through memory, and to sustain a place in the canon for Appalachian literature. Just as importantly, Morgan sees nature through the light of science and by doing so advances on the thinking of Planetary thinkers and connects, in his thinking, with the work of Cherry. We might argue that Morgan sees science's impact on a Global level, a macrocosm, while Cherry, as we argue below, sees the exploitation of the individual in her treatment of Oppenheimer in her *Four Quartets*. Morgan's poems form groundwork to stabilize the erosion of the mountains themselves by anchoring a poetic root system that undergirds the landscape of the literature coming out of the region. It holds onto the placeness of the Appalachian mountains and, as in Byer's poems, slows the disappearance of a lifestyle in an environment plagued by urbanization and deforestation. Morgan's writing liberates Appalachian literature from its chains of stereotypes in the oppressive world outside the coves. It uses the smallest of these places to construct meaning and significance, a topophilia, between his reader and his poems which actually carves out a space for Appalachia to remain, what seems the goal of Planetary, a position Chappell would have encouraged.

In "Fern Glade" from *Terroir* (2011), Morgan says it like this:

As wind stirs through an opening in woods,
 green feathers long as plumes on peacocks write
 in pools of sunlight from the canopy.
 And what they scribble must be dank as earth
 with ink of roots and alphabet of worms
 and rot of last year's leaves and fallen bugs.
 The syllables they seem to scratch now rise—
 yes, levitate—a spinning hologram
 of vapor glittering in the shaft of light:
 a visitation of illuminated gnats
 above the shadowy glade's scriptorium. (*Terroir* 14)

As the example of "Fern Glade" suggests, the landscape becomes writer. Planet as writing subject negates its foregone alterity. Morgan's poetry forms the groundwork that anchors both writer and reader to this place on the planet.

This bioregion of the southern Appalachian Mountains is crucial to the formation of Morgan's poetry and the effort to argue for the relevance

of Planetaryity. Fred Waage's description of the nuanced characteristics of bioregionalism informs our reading of Morgan's poetry based on the belief that the poetry of Appalachia grows from the author's place (the personal attachment), the ecological and geographical place, and also directly from the bioregion's culture. The planet itself informs the poetry. Morgan's portrayal of land, farm, and outside spaces unearths a connection to the physical soil where his speakers live. Readers of his poetry are physically connected to Morgan's places. His poetry recalls the past and tends to the homesteads, farms, and personal experiences of living in the Southern Appalachians, and not only recalls the past, but sustains it and slows the erosion of time and human impact on his mountain culture, preserving a way of life and landscape that are disappearing with the encroachment of urban development, environmental destruction, and economic depravity, all products of Globalization that exploit the planet. Morgan's poems remember the places of the southern Appalachian mountains. If memory and place are intertwined, as place-studies scholar Tim Creswell suggests they are, then one cannot exist without the other. To be clear, this reading is not nostalgic, but *solastalgic*, a term coined by environmental studies professor Glenn Albrecht to describe psychoterratic illness, "the pain or distress caused by loss of, or inability to derive, solace connected to the negatively perceived state of one's home environment" (Albrecht 35). Solastalgia differs from nostalgia in the fact that subjects do not miss the places they love because they are away from those places in time or space, but because they are still in the place and it is changing around them in undesirable ways, resulting in a feeling of dislocation. In Appalachia, this has certainly happened. From the flooding of the valleys to create power for the Tennessee Valley Authority and later Duke Power, urban development, building roads, tourism, to fracking and mountain top removal, the Appalachian region is a changing culture that once was insular and intact, but is now compromised and slowly disappearing. To a certain extent, Morgan blames science for much of the damage done to the mountains. Morgan makes his point about science by comparing now with then and proceeding to seek the cause of these changes.

While these concerns link Morgan to Chappell and Byer, Morgan's view of "unothering" is uniquely his. Byer touches upon ways nature might be liberated from modern humankind—that is, by people accepting their time-worn duties—but Morgan takes us further, especially in his powerful *Dark Energy*. The view of science's relation to nature and science's way of othering the mountains is nicely articulated at the very struggles for survival in the mountains highlighted in *The Mountains Won't Remember Us*, which by its very title emphasizes humankind's estrangement from nature. In the first story in this wonderfully articulate collection, the narrator helps us

envison our relationship with nature: “The warm fall woods just going on about their business, with no interest in human pomp and projects.” To a large extent, we othered and even worshipped something that is indifferent to us. We have only ourselves to blame, in this view, for the damage to nature that resonates in damage to ourselves. To be clear, transcendentalism is a high ideal and, as an ideal, might be incorrect. In any case, to achieve the high ideals of Planetarity, the transcendental view of nature, which seems harmless enough, must be overturned. Byer seemed to know this necessity by focusing on how people, women in particular, managed their affairs in the mountains. Her account is an historical one, a view in some ways more focused than Chappell’s.

Morgan’s effort to portray a nature that is indifferent to us and that merely requires us to reap what we sow, may serve as a macrocosm of an approach, a way of thinking, at the least, that articulates the relationship between humankind and nature and portrays it as one of arrogance and simplistic thinking. In this, Morgan’s thinking is connected to Cherry’s.

The preferred human behavior is nicely articulated by Morgan in “Carpet Tacking.” The community acts harmoniously, in a togetherness that refutes othering:

Back then whole communities gathered
 To raise a barn, shuck corn, kill hogs,
 Shell peas, or spread manure on fields,
 They sometimes would collect to tack
 A neighbor’s carpet down. (11)

He continues by describing this as a kind of communal living, possible at one time in the mountains, “The many hands / pinned down the fabric in an act / of social unity, the whole / community.” In “Flush,” we see nature’s indifference to humankind, much as it is described in “Poinsett’s Bridge,” the first story in *The Mountains Won’t Remember Us*.

So, what does this say about the human enterprise of science, the effort to better know nature so we can better manipulate it? In what amounts to a macrocosmic view of our relations with nature, parallel to Cherry’s microcosmic view which we address below, science is portrayed on the one hand as “too little too late” and on another, as an act of arrogant violence against an indifferent and indomitable opponent. Think of our audacity with the “Periodic Table,” in a poem by that name, a table that amounts to a “calendar of all / creation” (65). Again, in the title poem, “Dark Matter,” the admission that “what we know is just / a fraction of what is” (67). And later in that same poem,

...what we touch and hear
and see is just the tip
of unseen realms and laws

Indeed, we have othered and worshipped and then destroyed an environment fundamentally indifferent to us, one we know so poorly even though we are at “the start of our / intelligence. Science is certainly complicit in most Globalizing events of exploitation that have damaged the planet.

Science and Planetarity in Cherry’s Oppenheimer Quartet

Kelly Cherry’s *Four Quartets for J. Robert Oppenheimer* (2017) is essential reading for those seeking to trace the evolution of Planetarity as a literary practice characteristic of post-Confessional aesthetics, especially insofar as the aesthetic represents the ethic, the concern for the planet becomes the subject of the poem. Cherry echoes concerns about what’s “natural” as forwarded in the work of Morgan and Byer, but she adds to their observations the essential component of how a Planetary concern with the globe functions in the making of art: it is a product of enlightened consciousness that may inevitably be precipitated by entering a crisis in consciousness of the sort Oppenheimer endured.

This crisis of consciousness in Oppenheimer, as portrayed by Cherry, is a consequence of Planetarity taken seriously and represents how the planet may overwrite the globe, as we argue below. Planetarity does not advocate death of a discipline, to use Spivak’s language, but science is nonetheless viewed in large part as a study of the globe, albeit a study that must conform to the invented evidential standards, empirical evidence attacked by post-truth thinking. This view of a disinterested planet that is acted upon is connected to Morgan’s view as well. Planetarity is not concerned with how science serves individual interests, but with how it serves the purpose of overwriting the globe, thereby prolonging a healthy relationship with the environment.

Cherry offers a view of the effect of Planetarity on an individual, as it causes a crisis in consciousness for J. Robert Oppenheimer in Cherry’s *Quartet*. Her work demonstrates the very moves a writer makes in moving from a confessional tone to a Planetary perspective. In fact, the shift from the highly personalized narrator of *The Exiled Heart* (1992) to her approach to telling Oppenheimer’s now-popular story demonstrates Cherry’s magnificent range, a shift in point of view that characterizes the post-Confessional emphases we have thus far written about. Those emphases move toward what we are calling a “Planetary-focused treatment” of the subject, that we demonstrate below. This aesthetic in Cherry’s hands must be distinguished

from Environmental writing which, even in our example from Chappell's *I Am One of You Forever* posits a necessary othering and exploitation of nature. While Byer and Morgan move beyond the complaint Chappell makes so vividly through the eyes of Jess Kirkman and Morgan identifies science as the arrogant antagonist in the story of the world, Cherry traces how science invades a sensitive consciousness in Oppenheimer and creates the crisis that Oppenheimer unfortunately remedies by adhering to his appointed, Globalized task of developing the bomb. Point of view is a central component to how effectively the crisis is portrayed.

A side-effect of Planetary as a solution to confessionality is that poetry becomes a way of arguing and persuading differently in its fundamental strategy than prose. Here's Cherry from *The Exiled Heart*. Note how the tone of this passage tells us about the narrator's detailed experience while at the same time indicting global censorship, the enactment of what Spivak means by "epistemic violence." The narrator has been unable to contact her lover, Imant.

In my letters—the many I had sent up until the last, farewell letter, which I'd sent in care of Frederika—I very carefully did not refer to the absence of his, since then the censors almost certainly wouldn't let mine go through to him. Imant hadn't even known anything was wrong! (156)

Cherry demonstrates, in this passage, her competence in using the "meditative" voice and in her effective use of it to tell the story not only of her love for Imant gone awry, but also for the reason why her love affair failed, the politics involved in her relationship with Imant. One wonders, if Cherry's intent had been different, say to indict the restrictive and imposing impact of Russia on communication between people in different countries, how effective the tale would have been if told, then, by an omniscient narrator who would focus on global relations that negatively affected Kelly's love affair.

For the sake of contrast, then, consider Cherry's narration of the Oppenheimer story in light of her use of point of view in *The Exiled Heart*. While in both genres the central issue is othering, the autobiography features the narrator as the victimized other who seems to realize she has been othered. In the following from Cherry's poem, "The National Mood" from *Oppenheimer*, we receive a similar message concerning the way a globalized government dominates people on the planet:

An Iron Curtain divided
Humanity into opposing species,

And so began the Cold War that threatened
To turn hot, hotter, hottest. (*Oppenheimer* 85)

What could be a more exacting kind of othering than “Blacklisting,” which in that poem becomes a function of dividing “humanity into opposing species”? Interestingly, Cherry puzzles over similar situations in each of these texts but with different emphases: the discriminatory relations between Russia and the United States that prevented her from fulfilling her love commitment to Imant and the more global issue of Cold War that threatened the whole earth.

In tracing the whereabouts of a letter sent to her beloved, Imant, the narrator in *The Exiled Heart* explains the predicament in terms that connect thematically to the growing concerns of roughly the same time in history:

A shipping company I called by accident—because they had the word *mail* in their title—wished me luck, but added that they didn’t think I’d have any. “The Russians,” said the shipping company, “do whatever they want.” (109)

The Globalized perspective is highlighted here, but it is secondary to the personal in Cherry’s “Meditative Autobiography.” Indeed, the state blocked the love, and thereby othered the lovers!

Thus, the *Oppenheimer* poems more painstakingly demonstrate opposition to Globalization and thereby demonstrate one of Cherry’s contributions in modeling how “the planet overwrites the globe,” a kind of persuasiveness fundamental to our poetry when the ethic is the aesthetic, as we have been arguing, and as Spivak has theorized. This, it might be said, is a great strength of post-Confessional aesthetics. In *Oppenheimer*, as Cherry’s magnificent poetry and the award-winning movie by that title as directed by Christopher Nolan demonstrate, we see from the inside-out the crisis *Oppenheimer*’s commitment to the planet caused for him. And, in this, the argument is made that we have a choice though eventually *Oppenheimer* fell prey to the dictates of his Global commitments, due in part to the historical moment and where the spotlight shined. In “Scientists Flee Germany,” Cherry renders the moment of uncertainty Morgan notes when he considers what science has given us. For *Oppenheimer*, it was the uncertainty that led to crisis:

The children of that depressed age are called
the Silent Generation—earnest kids who
who knew their parents had it rough, kids who
did not want to trouble their hurting parents further.

It came anyway, as we all know—trouble, war.
And still America dallied on the sidelines. (34)

These were the conditions under which Oppenheimer was asked to invent a weapon that would change the direction of history.

Consciousness of when he lived and what he was asked to do is portrayed excellently by Cherry. That portrait is at the heart of Cherry's commitment to the planet as shown in her treatment of and sensitivity to Oppenheimer. On the one hand, Cherry writes, "he believed in duty. / He didn't know that he was stepping off / a plank, wherein / one could drown or be burned beyond recognition" ("Kitty," 36). In "Epiphany in Corsica," she describes his sleep as "waking, haunted" in which "he was the central consciousness / of all that existed to a world he shared / with others and for which he bore a shared / responsibility" (26). Fittingly, the poetic sensibility he had since childhood led him to the very crisis humankind needed then and still needs to experience in order to save the planet, because, as Cherry posits in "Paul Dirac," "that's the point of poetry, to bring / writer and reader into relationship / with truth and beauty" (23), merging truth (the ethic) with beauty (the aesthetic). And that's the goal of Planetarity as a critical theory.

Conclusion—Thanks, Fred!

We begin to envision Fred Chappell's impact on the literary scene in America once we acknowledge that, in addition to his important poetry and fiction, he was an influential teacher at a significant point in our literary history. To be clear, we cannot know exactly what Chappell might have said to his students. But we can trace the evolution of an idea from one influential person to another. Remnants of the thinking we have aligned with Spivak's Planetarity—even a deepening of it—appear in the mature writing of Chappell's students. We have tried to trace that thinking because it likewise offers insight into changes in Confessional verse and justifies those changes. Something happened in Greensboro in the mid-to-late sixties, and we credit Chappell for being a central figure in that event.

Current thinking posits that the writer-teacher paradigm is useful in drawing our attention to the pragmatic approach to teaching all writing, especially creative writing in the United States. The first and primary pragmatic move of our best writer-teachers is their recognition of what they do when they write and offer its differences from current aesthetic preoccupations. Chappell articulated this understanding in numerous critical documents highlighted here that offer critique of the Confessional poet's use of the dramatic I—indeed, what makes the verse confessional. But Chappell does not theorize as we have come to think of theory and even, in some quarters

resent it, especially in “Preface” to *Midquest* in which Chappell analyzes his accomplishment in that poem against what a Confessional poet might have done with that topic. By doing so, Chappell effectively articulates a post-Confessional aesthetic in which the narrator is not (at least, claims not to be) the poet. As a result, the poem focuses on its subject—a subject outside the poet’s self—and, in Chappell and his students, this subject reflects a view of the planet later articulated and systematized in its details by Spivak. She calls the theory “Planetarity,” a theoretical perspective the details of which Chappell would probably have resisted as a poststructural imposition on the aesthetic experience.

That we see the influence of that aesthetic in the work of Chappell’s students—particularly Byer, Morgan and Cherry—and its further development, especially in Morgan and Cherry, attests to a contribution made by Chappell that suggests his importance in contemporary literature as teacher and aesthete, an amazing feat in addition to the pure wonder of his poetry and prose.

Thanks, Fred!

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Kelly Cherry

Fog At Emerald Isle, North Carolina

Fog slips in from the south, takes out the horizon.
The white horses of the sea shake their manes.
Out of darkness, nothing. Out of light, nothing.
Silenced with great age. A view of America before it was America.
Time so slow its heart beats once in a century.
The tide an uneven hem dragging in the back.
Sea oats in lieu of a fence.
Cloud butterflies surveilling the area.
Yucca plants like sentries.
Shells scattered on the shore like spent bullets.
Feel the salted air, taste it, smell.
Can you find the seagull?
The footsteps?
Signs of a struggle?

(Vol. 21. No. 1, 2014)

Bruises Blossom On My Arms

Bruises blossom on my arms, disguised
As violets and roses. There is no pain,
I'm happy to say, but I think my friends
Would shy away from such a strange garden.

Here, this one: somewhat blue and purpling
Like a pond darkening as the day goes under,
Sinking into night. I sometimes think
That I will drown like Ophelia, flowers

Piled on me as ever closer I hold
to my breast the bit of rue she seized in her dying.
I turn away from sad mad Ophelia
To my gentle bruises barely sighing.

(Vol. 25. No. 1, 2018)

Kelly Cherry

Elie Wiesel

I didn't want to use the wrong words.

—Elie Wiesel

He vowed to wait a decade. Vowed to think
for ten long years before he wrote a word.
What he had seen required comprehension
of the incomprehensible. Each word must be
cared for, treated with loving-kindness, as
Jews say. They must have harrowed him, all those
unspeakable memories murmuring in his mind
like whole-earth-killing catastrophic germs
and yet he had to guard them—not guard against
them, but guard them, keeping alive the tragedy,
the horror, incubating the worst of the worst.

When Americans arrived he was sixteen
and had not eaten even the shadow of
a stalk of grass, had not gnawed a single
white floret from the common daisy (Chaucer's
cheerful “eye of the day” or “day's eye”). I
am sure you understand that had he been

a decade older he would have died and had
he been a year older he would have died
and had he been a mere month older he
would have died and truly had he been
even a day older he would have died.
Not a bite of food for six long days.
What kept him going? That he put his father
before himself despite the fury he felt.
To save oneself creates confusion in
oneself. To save another clarifies
what is important, the sick old man before
his healthy son, although of course the father
would rather have saved the boy now grown to manhood

or rather as old as time the day he learns
the father, who so loved his son, was burnt
to bone, which is to say incinerated
at Buchenwald and a dead man cannot say

hello, cannot say my dearest son,
 cannot touch or hold or talk to his son.
 Death is cruel and Nazis crueler still.
 So much cruelty, so much, so much...

The two men might have walked away together
 had the older and weaker not been "selected" for murder,
 (as if it were an award!). His son could not
 but blame himself, haunted as he was
 by the Angel of Despair, Satan, impostor
 with a thousand faces, intimate with
 the finest, saddest details of all love's failures.

Stars of David speak of Wiesel's Night.
 A book that tells the truth is a living light
 and thus awake, bearing useful insight.
 A book like that is like a beacon, bright
 enough to show us what is wrong, what right,
 and then, whether we have the courage to write.

Elie's tattoo was A-7713,
 a sign or stamp of Nazi efficiency.
 Loving-kindness? Don't make him puke all night.
 It might take a millennium for him to stop,
 and he already knows what it is to wear pig slop.
 Ten years was time enough for him to see
 what we all should see: that if there is
 a god, that god is in us, difficult
 to locate but wholly present, invisible,

voiceless, measureless, a relapsing synapse perhaps,
 often tangled with bio-electrical wires
 and lingering suspicions of something flat-out wrong,

this world we insist on trying to destroy
 even as we say thank god for Elie

and then the right words tumbling from his pen.

(Vol. 25. No. 1, 2018)

Kathryn Stripling Byer

Drought Days

for my grandmother, Carrie Mae Campbell

1.

Rain, because prayed for,
was always called God's answer,
God being what gave
or withheld whatever we needed.

A merciful God, we'd smell dirt beginning
to dampen. But judgement? Then He in the sky
would become in my nostrils the odor
of earth at its most forgiving.

God stank like a singed field.
His taste in my mouth like a rusty nail.

I wanted him kept well away
from the places I loved,
his narrowed eyes raking the world.

2.

The sky must have shone back a message
on drought days, the way
she'd look into it over and over

to see if a cloud might be forming,
and inside that cloud a small storm seed
of hope from the heaven side.

*Let's pretend we could walk through
the mirror. What would we find on the other
side?* She never liked that game,

it went against God's design,
and too much like walking into her own dark
as if through the eye of a hurricane.

To enter the kingdom,
 she'd stand in the kitchen and look
 out the window at what He

had wrought, corn that sang when
 the wind came, a husband that shoveled hay
 into the cow pen, the empty yard waiting

for the child growing inside her, her life
 seeming suddenly all mass,
 and her knees almost too weak to bear it.

3.

Every shining surface seemed mirror.
 The shaft of a carving knife.
 Kettle-shank polished to clarity.

Windows that framed her by day
 and at night by the oil lamp
 revealed her as lost in a ghost forest.

Suddenly she'd set to work
 righting lopsided hair ribbons.
 A lapsed curl.

Even the yard that she walked upon
 served as a backdrop for shadow
 while she flounced her skirt like a jonquil.

Or playing at age,
 humped her back like a guinea hen,
 clucking her way toward the garden,
 grown old in a trice.

Was this vanity?
 To look on what she had been given
 and see herself everywhere in it?

4.

After supper she roamed to the highway
to watch how the sun swelled,
a hot-air balloon,
or else threatened to melt like a butter-pat

after which heat began loosening its tourniquet.
Then came the jays back, the grass-singers
piping up. Then came the moon over pitch pines.
Came wind and the screech owl.

She ducked into woods
where the sun seen through
pine needles wavered
like wild fire when she winced.

Just one spark.
That's all she ever wanted.

5.

At the moment of death he'd hear
rain, he joked.
Drought over. The pond
rising. Flint River cresting to record
heights. Heat lightning

banging its anvil. Sparks
flying. Rain thumping tin
like the school marm's rebuke
she knew he'd not forgotten.
The ruler's pop. Three times.

Swarmed by the dust he stirred,
he clenched his fists
round the tractor's wheel.
He ground his teeth
on the grit of his field.

6.

Now take this, she'd say, her mouth
 full of pins—a bird's tail
 of fastenings held tight
 against revelation. What now?
 And where? I was lost
 till she lifted the limp tape

and held my hand hard on
 the selvage while she reckoned
 grain-line and measurement.
 Taking the straight of it
 so that the garment would fall
 clean to plumb. What she called a good

finish. A clean sweep to hem-level,
 a dress in which she could walk out the front door
 or be laid down at last like the lady she knew she was.

7.

To measure the cloth needed,
 she'd hold each bolt against our flesh,

folding the crisp panels over
 by arm's length till she had her estimate.

She could spend hours stroking broadcloth
 and dimity, mulling the question of how much

of what and for whom while we watched
 our identity come down to color and texture.

Which of us orange-flowered broadcloth
 that shone like her kitchen linoleum,

which the cerulean-blue-dotted swiss
 (marked to half-price) that tickled her palm

or the lavender crepe de Chine
 sliding through fingers that soothed it?

8.

With feathers she had plucked herself,
she stuffed two pillows
for my marriage bed and crocheted

with silver hook a chain of white lace
to stitch round the edges of two pillowcases.
Soon her fingers could not thread

a needle, nor hold fork or spoon.
By then her man was gone,
wrapped tight inside a dream of trees

that leafed out every spring: time
to plow, time to seed, time to bury
yet again what he had sown.

(I wonder, do the trees commiserate
about the leaves they let go,
all the loosenings they must live with?)

If I could, I'd stitch a Double Wedding Ring
against the morning when they woke to sun
stuck, days on end, to every window pane.

9.

When the pond dried up,
my cousins and I filled oil drums
with my grandfather's hoses

and pulled on our bathing suits,
climbed in like daughters of lawyers
or bankers and stood there pretending

we dawdled at Myrtle Beach
or Sanibel Island. The clouds passing over
might that very morning

have darkened the boardwalk
in Panama City. Her white Leghorns scratched
in the sand. His pigs wallowed.

The water began to smell
rusty, more tractor oil to it
than tropical coconut. We hauled

ourselves out, feeling
silly and shriveled, our skin flecked
with rust, knowing we were still stuck

on the farm. We would always be
hicks. Pink and flabby like pickled
pig flesh in our grandmother's jars.

Soul food, I grew up to hear it called,
as if the collards and side meat
we set on our table had been sanctified

but by stories we knew were not ours,
in which we were no more than
bystanders, and not always innocent ones.

(Vol. 24. No. 1, 2017)

Nameless

The black men massacred in my hometown
lie unnamed in a graveyard called Sunset.
Nobody talks about this,

nor the lynching tree still standing outside
the courthouse. *No blacks in those mountains
you're moving to*, nodded my Uncle.

My great-grandfather worked laying railroad track
after he left Ireland. No Black Irish
was he, no petty larceny charges to cast him

in shackles like those that dragged nineteen men
down to their deaths in an ice-laden river,
December of eighteen and eighty-two, drowned

in the same Tuckasegee that runs past my driveway.
My ancestor moved on to gold mining in the Dakotas
before coming south to run Crown Mountain mine

in a town called Dahlonegah, gold at its source,
as the Cherokee named it before being forced from
their homeland at gun-point. What could the youngest

of those convicts, laying the tracks for a future
he would not be part of, have known of their history?
At fifteen he might have resembled the teenager killed

because he wore a hoodie, his dark skin becoming too black
on a rainy night, calling attention to what he was doing.
Dialing his pals on his cell phone. Lingered outside a window.

The old Sunset Cemetery's shadowed
by live oaks, the train depot less than a hundred
feet down from its gateway. The railroad tracks still rattle.

The bodies beneath the sod still wait to be named.
The bones of the black men who died laying track
over Cowee still wait downriver from where I live,

shackles still fastened round ankles that tried to kick free
of the ice before being dragged down
by the weight of so many doomed nameless.

(Vol. 24. No. 1, 2017)

Kathryn Stripling Byer

I still can't get it right

I don't know. I still can't get it right,
the way those dirt roads cut across the flats
and led to shacks where hounds and muddy shoats
skulked roundabouts. Describing it sounds trite
as hell, the good old South I love to hate.
The truth? What's that? How should I know?
I stayed inside too much. I learned to boast
of stupid things. I kept my ears shut tight,
as we kept doors locked, windows locked,
the curtains drawn. Now I know why.
The dark could hide things from us. Dark could see
what we could not. Sometimes those dirt roads shocked
me, where they ended up: I watched a dog die
in the ditch. The man who shot him winked at me

(Vol. 24. No. 1, 2017)

Parhelion

Look up into the winter sky,
the air all clear to grape-black space,
except the ether is on fire
with needle ice and glitter rays.
And not a single sun you see,
but blinding, reigning trinity,
like three gold apples hung above
a pawnshop door, and making three
a sign of earth's depository
where something left can be redeemed.
They blaze until you look aside,
and then there's only one, next time.

(Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007)

Confederate Graves at Elmira

Of eighty hundred prisoners here
for less than two-thirds of a year
more than a third would never leave.
They died of plain starvation, grief,
of cholera, typhus, black frostbite.
To eat they caught a bird or rat
worth pennies or a worn out blanket.
The local folks would pay a bit
to watch the Johnnys from a tower.
Their medicine was sold and never
reached the reeking tents of suffering.
The flats along the wide Chemung
would flood and freeze and then, melting,
would freeze again. Each day more had
to be carried to the coffin shed
and carted to the field around
the hill. When April came the ground
thawed out to putrefaction.
Those who survived for celebration
of peace, were loaded on the cars
and hauled back to the scenes of war's
calamity, the weaker dead
before they reached their charred homesteads.
It was a black custodian here
who dedicated twenty years
to finding out the name for each
Confederate grave and then had etched
the proper words on fields of stones,
to honor those lost far from home,
because it was the decent thing
he answered the neighbors' questioning.

(Vol. 16, No. 1, 2009)

Semper Fi

A hunter in the wilderness
accompanied by a faithful dog,
when struck by heart attack or stroke,
might lie for days in pain and fear.
The loyal dog stayed near and proved
a comfort to the fallen scout.
He licked the master's hand and lay
close by to keep the sufferer warm.
And when the hunter died the dog
kept vigil by the corpse for days
and warned away all predators,
and howled at stars and whined with grief.
Then as the body cooled and firmed
and ripened with decay the pet
remained on mournful guard. But at
the stage of putrefaction
the final act of fealty was
to feast upon the honored carcass
in a last communion.

Aftermath

When once a field of hay is cut
and raked and baled and carried off,
the stubble left is bare to sun.
The heated ground and sap in roots
force up a surge of later growth.
New shoots and sprouts from stubs
stretch out and spread as in a race
with season's end. The older roots
in place in soil fuel what is called
an aftermath or rowen, as
the blades mature for later yield,
this overplus, an opulence
of further growth, and extra juice,
the way some elderly that though
retired may have a second flower,
an Indian summer of late bloom,
with roots set deep in veteran earth
before the frost can work its math.

Calf Killings

The first time, they were clearly slaughtered,
dissembled in the mauling, bodies strewn
mangled over the pasture as though whatever
attacked them had fallen into a fury
at what it did not find in them. The men
speculated—wolves, they said, but there were no
wolves anymore, or panthers, all killed off
long ago in the stories of dead men,

so they debated but agreed on bear—
set traps that yawned, gleaming and clean, empty
for weeks. And so another season came
and went before another field nearby
turned up littered with dead, though this time
the bodies were unmarked, almost as though
they had simply lain down in their shadows
before rain. But it must have been the calves

who had churned the frozen ground alongside
the fenceline, worse in the corners, evidence
of a shared and violent end. The veterinarian
could say for certain only that they had suffered
pneumonia, brought on by nights spent
in icy rain, and while no one quite
believed it as cause, they turned to what
was left to do, gathering the remains

to burn. The only survivor of that last night
was a mule, moon blind and grazing calmly, ignored
old among them. But when the fire had become
one thick, impenetrable column, the men watched
as it drifted late toward them—pulling behind it
the rippling wake of a ragged shadow like a tedious
ghost—as though again reluctant witness,
even to this necessary warmth.

(Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011)

Claudia Emerson

Flocking Theory

At dusk each winter evening, in the half hour
before they must relinquish sky to night,

starlings quicken, flock in forms—symmetries
shifting—the likenesses so fast and fluid

I can't hold on to any one before
it dissolves into another, and I

have taught myself to accept the seamless
recreations not as uneasy

whimsy but as the musings of a lucid soul
or the disclosures of God: the wind

itself made seen, the shade a shadow casts.
No one knows for certain what controls this,

the flock moving by space measured and kept—
strict distances—between the bodies.

But the birds, I like to think, are having
none of theory, anyway, whatever

it may be, none of me, abandoning
themselves instead to the invariable

bliss of what is, the fact of flying
manifest in every changing figure:

one enormous wing, a waterfall
of bees, a murmurous curtain falling

to rise as smoke, a funnel cloud,
helix, an arm, its empty sleeve.

(Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011)

Like Supernovas

for Fred Chappell (1936-2024)

...a massive, distant star exploded in 2014—and also apparently in 1954.
 “Dying Star Keeps Coming Back...”, news item, Nov. 14, 2017

Though he is called “Fred,” the “I” of [Midquest] is no more myself than any character in any novel I might choose to write.
 (“Preface” to *Midquest*, x)

Let’s start with the easy stuff: God
 is credited with the accident of design.
 But, despite our faith, we cannot help wondering
 how the same star dies not once in the universe,
 but numerous times. Not people, but the supernovas
 in the news from 500 million
 light-years away. They grow faint and then bright
 and then faint again, maybe just a bad
 connection between here and there, we think
 at first, blaming ourselves for our clumsy
 misunderstanding of electricity.

But to learn from a universe in which
 a star is reborn and reborn a second time
 in the promise that death as we know it
 doesn’t really happen
 or that we are reborn into the many selves
 we’ve created during our lifetimes,
 as you have been, Fred—into
 Jess or Ole Fred or the “I”
 of *Midquest*—requires from us
 the proper connection
 for those who want to see
 the operation of the body
 in the processes of the universe
 “That’s how it happens to the trees,”
 Jess’s dad might have said, “So,
 to us too.”

I realize it’s all too easy
 to think these designs are repeatable.
 But if astrophysics is both

the body healing itself and
the universe reincarnating,
as it seems when science insists
planets are reborn to die again,
an act of science, an act of spirit,
the dying star just might be hope for
eternal life, or a metaphor
we interpret as belief
in a design we don't yet understand.
If we could only tolerate
our body's need to explode
over and over but then to recover and survive,
like the neutron stars beyond our skies,
we'd understand how we've sent
and continue to send
the wrong messages to each other
about the living and the dead.

Or, if our cores
could burn so hot the cold
outer shell would blow
away, leaving the molten spirit
whole and full of grace,
and if we could reinvent our notion
of body to take its place
in the universe beside
supernovas of our imaginings,
that core might be
who we really are and have long wanted to be
like characters we've created by our actions and imaginings—
like Jess Kirkman or Ole Fred (or even
someone in your essays named "irascible critic"
who wants to plow naked)—
and those who monitor the stars
will learn before our passing
how to monitor the various bodies
our souls have recaptured,
the other bodies we've
animated and left behind.
Let us live
like Supernovas.

Last Words and Latest: New Books by Fred Chappell and Ted Kooser

Ever After: Poems, by Fred Chappell. Louisiana State University Press, 2024. Paperback, \$19.95. ISBN 978-0-8071-8260-4.

Raft, by Ted Kooser. Copper Canyon Press, 2024. Hardback, \$23.00. ISBN 978-1-55659-701-5.

When Fred Chappell's self-curated retrospective, *Spring Garden: New and Selected Poems*, appeared in 1995, it exuded a surprising air of self-elegy and almost finality, an air rather at odds with the renewal suggested by the title. As John Lang notes in his essential study *Understanding Fred Chappell*, "Consciousness of time passing and of death's approach pervades the volume. At times that concern with mortality seems excessive, almost morbid, considering the fact that Chappell was not yet sixty years old at the time he published the book." For example, in "The General Prologue," a new poem written to introduce the selection, Chappell writes, "I feel, as any poet must, regret / I fell below the standards that I set / Almost every time I put my hand / To verse—but not because I didn't try / To write the best I could day after day." (Not "I've fallen," but "I fell"; not "I've put," but "I put.") Though about thirty lines later he admits, "I am precipitate to mourn so soon," in the book's "Epilogue" he insists he should "end on an elegiac note," and so he concludes by translating Pierre Ronsard's poem "To His Soul"; the book's last lines are therefore "Goodbye, my friends. The sun has set. / Now I lay me down to sleep." To Lang's point, Chappell was only fifty-eight at the time. Yet to come were five more remarkable books of poems—*Family Gathering* (2000), *Backsass* (2004), *Shadow Box* (2009), *Familiars* (2014), and *As If It Were* (2019)—not to mention his second book of critical writing, a third story collection, and his eighth and ninth novels. If Chappell was feeling old in his late fifties, he clearly found a second wind. His creative powers remained with him to the last: when he died in January of 2024, at the age of eighty-seven, he left behind the manuscript of *Ever After*—a book in which he again suggests a strong sense of his own mortality, but this time with better reason and more genuine pathos.

As of this writing, details of the book's composition and path to print haven't been made public, but the lack of acknowledgement of any magazine or broadside publications suggests that Chappell produced the manuscript not long before his death, with little time to arrange any such preliminary appearances. Some poems offer what seem to be portraits of himself in failing health. Reading "The Next Step," for example, one might bear in mind

that Chappell was a cat lover, and also that his obituary in *The New York Times* reported his cause of death as “respiratory distress”:

He no longer climbs the stairs to bring
firewood to the tidy white-brick hearth
and lay the oak-lengths down and draw a breath,
and give illumination to his evening.

No cat observes the kindling of a flame
with green-eyed, mesmerized intensity;
no smoke ascends into the star-flecked sky.
Tabby has died; the house is none the same.

He fumbles up the stairway empty-handed
this present hour and pauses awhile confounded
until the lungs reclaim the oxygen
he coughed away at step thirteen or so.
He counts the few stairs he has yet to go,
concludes that *this* is now and *that* was then.

On the book’s back cover, the publisher remarks that many of the poems here are “written in traditional sonnet forms.” With its fourteen rhymed iambic lines, “The Next Step” would meet anyone’s definition of a sonnet, as would about a dozen and a half other poems here—but much of the remaining work also clearly takes that form as its major point of reference. One poem, “Relic,” explicitly invokes that tradition as it takes the shape of the rediscovered draft it describes: “amid the attic clutter, / a lonesome sonnet in cobweb disrepair,” its “octave [having] lost its wonted stateliness” and its “sestet [...] a threadbare afterthought.”

Chappell is survived by his wife Susan, and so another poem that seems to reflect his age and the state of his health is “Later On”: there we read that “[t]he couple who have loved a long time together” now find themselves “hoping that today she might be free” but also “fearing that today he will be free.” In “Remodeling” there is some gentle amusement over workers’ noisy attempt to restore “a neighbor’s decrepit house,” which is then contrasted with “our old house,” where “the silence is not expectant,” and where “One of us turns one thousand years old.” Another such poem is “Song,” in which Chappell speculates on his afterlife:

When in my mind I look into my coffin
as one of eight attendees in a bored band of mourners,
I find the box is empty. I am elsewhere
or nowhere, occupying a private dimension

with walls not blank but calmly uninformative.
 These walls enclose but do not imprison;
 these walls admit the song of the mourning dove,
 three soulful notes that confirm the life and the death.

The presence of those poems and others—including some with such titles as “Recessional,” “Release,” and “Final Concert”—suggest that the poet knew this would be his last book.

That awareness may give the book a certain poignancy, but there’s little here that sounds like self-pity or despair. On the contrary, though they’re all relatively short (none requires a second page), to Chappell’s longtime readers many of these poems may suggest a newly invigorated imagination. Since the early nineties, Chappell’s poetry has tended to embrace a high degree of polish, clarity, and satirical wit; it’s been brilliant poetry of its kind, but it’s generally aimed less to inspire or astonish its readers than to offer them intelligent entertainment. At the outset of this period, in his 1990 lecture “The Function of the Poet,” he calls for just such poetry, echoing Horace by arguing, “The first responsibilities of the poet are to teach and to delight. Or, putting it in proper formulation: to teach by delighting.” *Ever After*, though, exchanges that Augustan standard for more transporting modes. Actually, the book often recalls Chappell’s early interest in the French Symbolists, an interest documented nearly fifty years ago in his self-deprecating “Rimbaud Fire Letter to Jim Applewhite.” Many of these last poems—such as “Orpheus,” “The Dreams,” “Imprimatur,” “Adagio, Pizzicato,” and “Now Then”—exhibit Symbolism’s special degree of musicality and suggestiveness, its embrace of mystery. (It’s worth noting too that the major Symbolists were all drawn to the sonnet. Think for instance of Baudelaire’s “Correspondences,” Mallarmé’s “The Tomb of Edgar Poe,” Rimbaud’s “Vowels.”)

Indeed, the book’s opening performance, “A Smaller Night Music” sounds—despite its Mozartian title—much more like Baudelaire or even Mallarmé than it does Alexander Pope or Samuel Johnson:

The trees give all to their casual artistries:
 The brawny black oak stalwart in Lindley Park
 gathers sunlight into its patterned shadow,
 amassing in heaps the spendthrift solar downpour
 until the largo sundown brings slow peace
 and these absented acres welcome the dark.
 Tomorrow will freshen the grove and patient meadow,
 the dawn will bring once more its deceptive candor.
 And now the night arrives and flows into

the shadow of the tree and draws it forth.
The daytime music it absorbed sounds out:
butterflies trilling gaily as they weave about,
the pebbled stream warbling its way through earth,
the silent tremolo shimmer of the dew.

Think of Chappell himself as that night-shrouded tree: having absorbed all he could through his life's daytime, as it were, the elderly poet known especially for long poems and long sequences is now prepared to produce the smaller music of his life's nighttime. And so he gives us all these short separate poems, the final concert of *Ever After*.

* * *

Ted Kooser is only three years younger than Chappell and is himself no stranger to the valley of the shadow. Mary K. Stillwell's book *The Life & Poetry of Ted Kooser* documents his 1998 first bout with cancer, and he has weathered more struggles with it since then. *Raft* includes some memorable responses to that ongoing experience. "Gauze" asks and answers an important question:

Can a man in his eighties, with cancer,
be happy? It seems that he can, cutting
yesterday's gauze dressing in pieces

to scatter over the grass for the wrens
who've come back again after another
long winter and are building their nests

in his birdhouses built with old boards
that he salvaged in happiness, which he
hammered together in happiness, too.

The word *poet* derives from a Greek word for "maker"; here we have a poet who delights in the creative life beyond language, beyond the fine arts, and even beyond the world of humankind. And there's something deeply appealing about someone who finds joy in reclaiming old boards, in building houses for animals, and in cutting up his used bandages so those animals can use them to make spring nests where they'll bring forth new life.

Much later in the book comes a poem titled "Cancer," in which Kooser fully demonstrates his long celebrated gift for metaphor:

I heard a little rattle, saw the doorknob jiggle,
then go still. How often I had seen this in a film,

but now I was the woman in the darkened
 parlor drawing back the curtain just an inch
 to see nobody there, the street, all up and down,
 a glaring void, no one to call out to, to cry to,
 the menace now an utter emptiness, so bright
 it seemed the sky was white as porcelain.

A bleached leaf that had fallen on the sidewalk
 wasn't moving though the light was blowing
 hard, a steady gale, it having scoured out
 everything beyond me. Death was gone, at least
 for now, it having tried my door to find
 the deadbolt held, the one that I'd been born with.

The conceit there isn't that poem's only remarkable aspect. Kooser has tended to work in free verse for decades, but "Cancer" is remarkably metrically regular, and it falls neatly into the octave-and-sestet shape of a sonnet—a fact highlighted by that double space. It's as if Kooser's giving as much solidity to that feeling of relief as he can, asserting the order and historical longevity of the form against the disorder and mortal threat of the illness.

Another poem reflecting on the poet's health is one titled "Under a Forty-Watt Bulb"; it's especially worth noting here given the earlier mention of Chappell's "The Next Step." In his contributor's note for the issue of *Rattle* where the poem first appeared, Kooser explains that this "he" is "yours truly."

These days he goes down the steep cellar stairs
 sideways, facing the wall, both hands clamped on
 the rail as he lowers a foot to the next step,

not looking down but feeling the way with the toe
 of his slipper, placing one foot firmly, then waiting
 a moment before lowering the other foot, fitting

it next to the first, his thin leather slippers
 parked side by side as they'd be in a closet. Then
 loosening one hand, sliding it down, getting

a good grip, the other hand following, gripping,
 one foot swinging out, swinging down, its toe
 tapping the riser to feel it, then setting it down,

the other foot following, step down to step without
 looking, his eyes to the wall as he counts his way
 lower, ten steps to the bottom, both feet on each step

down and down, as if to the bottom of time
 where everything's settled. Then back, step by step,
 but now climbing forward, a little more labored,

pushing a quart jar of peaches from each step
 to the step just above, one step at a time, a man
 following peaches, only one hand on the rail.

A number of things help make this poem as delightful as it is—all the alliteration and assonance, the comparison of his errand to a journey to “the bottom of time,” the postponed revelation that the object of this arduous quest is nothing but a small peach jar, and the surprising characterization of his ascendant self as “a man / following peaches.” What most distinguishes “Under a Forty-Watt Bulb,” though, is its careful, drawn-out description of a careful, drawn-out action: it imitates the action it narrates. In that regard, it’s reminiscent of William Carlos Williams’s little “Poem” beginning, “As the cat / climbed over / the top of // the jamcloset,” but blown-up to a much bigger scale, and with a good deal of pathos that’s entirely missing from Williams’s miniature.

Raft is a book of great variety, though, not one unusually preoccupied with the troubles of age and illness. There are a few more autobiographical poems, such as “A Straw Hat,” “The Blue,” and the book’s title poem. There are captivating poems here about animals, among them “Vulture” (on that spooky “crop duster, / passing low over the trees, spraying shade”), “A Fox” (about its stepping so dazzlingly through a cemetery that “the stones forgot / their names”), and “A Morning Song” (about an opossum finding her way through the predawn, “pink nose a struck match, its light probing / the depths of the darkness before her”). There are other poems of non-human nature, including “A Glint” (on the “morning sunlight / climbing a thread of spider’s silk”), “Nocturne” (evoking an October night with “tree frogs... ringing / their tricycle bells”), and “Heat Lightning” (about those “soft puffs of light” that look “as if the lid of the night were now and then lifted / on the steam of July”). There are poems painting scenes of people among people, such as “A Light Rain” (about the crowd descending church steps after a funeral, “a black avalanche / of umbrellas, dotted by bald heads / and white programs”), “In Transit” (on that moment when “the end of a factory shift merges / into the traffic, like teeth on one side // of a long zipper fitting themselves / into the teeth on the other”), and “The

Darkness Park” (on a site for stargazing, with “several / ghostly gray families taking orderly turns // at our telescopes, the ones waiting bent back / to look up, like bows strung with dizziness”). And there are portraits of individual people at work, such as “Room Service” (on a housekeeper stripping a bed, who “looked bone-weary // as she hauled in the bleached, empty net of a sheet, / heaping it, rank from the depths, at her feet”), “Shepherd of Carts” (addressed to a Walmart employee in the parking lot, “collecting your dingy, / belled flock gone astray”), and “Movers” (about three professionals navigating stairs while “doing / a round dance with a headstrong, unwilling, / 500-pound upright piano”). There are poems of pure delight, like “Mirroring Windows” (on a girl enjoying her reflection as she walks past storefronts, “not walking hand in hand with her pretty companion, / but the two touching fingertips, or nearly touching”), and there are poems for lost friends, like “Danny” (on the late poet Jeff Daniel Marion, whose voice on the phone was “soft / as a hand brushing crumbs from a table, / then a laugh like a splash, a kingfisher / slapping a stream”).

Raft opens with three epigraphs, one of which is the conclusion to W. S. Merwin’s poem “Berryman.” There Merwin recalls the elder poet’s stern words to him: “you die without knowing / whether anything you wrote was any good / if you have to be sure don’t write.” If Kooser has doubts about the value of his work, thank goodness he’s writing and publishing it anyway. *Raft* is an excellent book and a welcome extension of an essential oeuvre.

Rise

1.

We are taught to take the bread
into our bodies
as proof of Jesus's body.

The bread is metaphor.
The bread is Jesus transubstantiated.
The bread is simple bread.

I have taken all three
of those tenets into my body
though I am Spokane Indian

and also take salmon
into my body
as proof of salmon.

The salmon is my faith returned.
The salmon is simply salmon.
The salmon is not bread.

2.

Suddenly, we are wed
and I am just as surprised as you
that marriage has become our bread.

You, the Hidatsa Indian
from the North Dakota plains
who did not grow up with salmon

and me, the Spokane, who rarely trusts
the hands of the priest
as he delivers the bread.

During Eucharist, I am afraid
to close my eyes. I want to see
what has been set on the table before me.

Look, I don't know what
would help me believe
that we have become sacred.

Sweetheart, are we the stone
rolling from the mouth
of the tomb that cannot keep him?

Sweetheart, are we the salmon
rising from the mouth
of the river that cannot keep them?

3.

If that was Easter
then the church was full
as we stood against the wall

praying for an empty pew.
If that was Easter
then I rose that morning

in love with you
though I rise every morning
from the water, more or less

in love with you.
If that was Easter
then you were asked

to be the Eucharistic minister.
If that was Easter
then you surprised me

by placing salmon on my tongue.
Then I surprised you
by swallowing it whole.

Amen, amen, amen.

(Vol. 8, No. 1, 2001)

Catherine Carter

Ode: Erections in sleep

Far from the coast, the full moon sinks
toward the westward mountains outside
the cold glass; tree shadows stretch a scant inch;
and inside, in bed, the tide of morning slides
upstream through the elastic veins that feed
the quiet flesh pressed to my back, gradually fills
their blue walls like estuarine streams
inexorably pushed by bay, till the still
pause at the flood's crest, before the blood
tide turns and sinks to follow the moon's
pull back to the belly's deeps.

Later, as we lift and fall on swells
of dream, the same salt flush rises
once more, a mist on the face of the waters,
going only where it's always come
and gone, leading nowhere but back
into sleep, no curl and crash on marsh
or sand, that living flow, that slow, sweet neap.

The Change

The warm hormones, the hot soup and sweet tea
we were willing to feed others first, wanted
to feed others first, grow first cold, then mold-
coated, crusting the cauldron that'll later be clean
as bone. The hot bath of abnegation pours
slowly down the drain into the dark, becoming septic.
Ovary-opiates have run their course
in long-medicated blood, final dregs
flushed away, till we can no longer believe
we don't need what we need, what you need
is more important, someday there will be time
for what we need: there is today but no someday,
not for crazy cat ladies beginning to eat cats
or turn to cats themselves, natural-born killers.
Though we may do what you ask, now you have to ask.
Antennae turned to catch your wish
before you wished it are furred now, clean
laundry in a locked drawer. Like werewolves,
skins creeping at the eastern horizon's first
pewter moongleam, we begin to become and believe
ourselves, transformation we cannot stop,
for which we will never be forgiven,
we are bitches now, cat bitches, wolf
bitches, we must be shunned and killed, and we will.

Hayden Carruth

Sure, Said Benny Goodman

“Sure,” said Benny Goodman,
“We rode out the depression on technique.” How gratifying
and how rare,
Such expressions of a proper modesty. Notice it was not said
By T. Dorsey, who could not play a respectable “Aunt Hagar’s”
on a kazoo,
But by the man who turned the first jazz concert at Carnegie
Hall
Into an artistic event and put black musicians on the stand with
white ones equally,
The man who called himself Barefoot Jackson, or some such,
In order to be a sideman with Mel Powell on a small label
And made good music on “Blue Skies,” etc. He knew exactly
who he was, no more, no less.
It was rare and gratifying, as I’ve said. Do you remember the
Incan priestling, Xtlgg, who said,
“O Lord Sun, we are probably not good enough to exalt thee,”
and got himself
Flung over the wall at Machu Picchu for his candor?
I honor him for that, but I like him because his statement
implies
That if he had forseen the outcome he might not have said it.
But he did say it. Candor seeks its own unforeseeable occasions.
Once in America in a dark time the existentialist flatfoot floogie
stomped across the land
Accompanied by a small floy floy. I think we shall not see their
like in our people’s art again.

(Vol. 13, No. 1, 2006)

The Discovery of Scat

Long before Dizzy,
high on the rising tower of Babel,

a bearded carpenter turned
to a stonemason

(barely able to see him
through the veil of clouds),

turned to ask for a wooden nail
and said something

that sounded like
bop ah doolyah bop.

(Vol. 13. No. 1, 2006)

Benjamin Peret

Jesus Said To His Sister-In-Law

We made crap
for the heaps
gospel for the sheep shit
and the devil for the vamp

In those days
the earth was shaped like a horse's hoof
and the rest followed accordingly
precious rugs
adorned the most noble trees
and antique houses
swirled up in the sun and rain
Then a woman passed by
and bared her belly

translated from the French by Marilyn Kallet

(Vol. 18. No. 1, 2011)

Draft Dodger Blues

*No Viet Cong ever
Called me a Nigger*
—Muhammad Ali

What the word was
On the block was that they put
All the black guys on point,
Those white officers, who
Carried that brand of American
Onto those rice paddies,

And those black guys in those units was getting
The shit blown out of them,
Which fit what we knew, and saw
In our neighborhood; the cops,
Pulling down your pants in public,
That anger, so easy, and on tap,
Loaded and ready to be aimed,
How questions earned you the kiss of the billy.

That meanness had turned into
 a new, hard wind,
And we knew that as well,
The neighborhood term
Was shit-storm, or fuck-up,
And it lead to prison,
Where the guys with
The keys always waited,
Then Attica could finish you off.

Now it had another
Place to land you, and if it
Didn't kill you,
It would fuck you over-
-you could see how some of the
Brothers came back, wound up
Like a pissed off cobra,

Or missing things,
Some physical, not that it mattered
To the beat cops.

They came back, but they didn't fit,
They tumbled.

And unlike the guessing game of living
On the block, this one
Actually had a number that could
Come up, and off you flew,
To that cracker officer,
Capt. Two Birds with One Stone, who represents,
Like the principal who loves demerits, like
The county application clerk whose pet word is denied,
He's here to remind you the way things are.

That wind, that old, furious weather.
First they want to put your black ass
Into a body bag, then tell the world
You were all for it.

(Vol. 24. No. 1, 2017)



W. H. Auden

W.H. Auden's Change of Mind: Poets Speak Out, Your Voice is Important

With the election of Donald Trump as president and his putting on his cabinet many of the people who want to close down America, to deny human rights and public discourse, and to disregard the arts, I have wondered how I can, or any artist can, keep going on writing in such a toxic environment. I turned to an old friend W.H. Auden, who, early in his life, experienced a similar turn of events in Europe when one dictatorship after another took power, closed off communications, sent artists, gays, activists, clergy, and Jews to concentration camps.

At the time, Auden was dispirited.

Who wouldn't be?

Thousands fled Germany and other nearby nations soon to be swept up in the new Aryan World where everyone had to think, act, believe, and look alike.

For some consolation, I went back to read his book *The Dyer's Hand* to see what he was thinking at the time and how, if at all, his thinking changed after WWII. *The Dyer's Hand* is a collection of essays on the arts, politics, artists, music, and religion.

One essay stood out to me because it contradicted what I had come to believe was Auden's strongest tenet that poetry never makes anything happen. My impression was that Auden thought poetry really is for those who read it and otherwise, well, it doesn't matter. I was having the same thought as I watched Trump fill day by day his cabinet with people who often disdained the department that they would serve as a leader. He was in power now.

What could I say? What could anyone say that would make a difference?

What I discovered, time and again, in Auden's postwar essays was his pleading for the poet to speak out and to challenge those in power. Auden had another thing to tell us about poets that was quite different and important for those of us about to live through, if we do, the new Trump administration.

W.H. Auden gave a lecture "The Poet and the City" at Mt. Holyoke College, in 1962. It focused on the four aspects of our present world that make the artistic vocation more difficult than it used to be. At the time, he was speaking of a nation, a decade after victory in WWII, newly engaged in

a civil rights struggle, inspired by the youthfulness and hopefulness of a young president, that felt inflated with its new power, convinced that, with American ingenuity and investment, everyone could achieve greatness. The concept “everyone” was a bit delusional since Blacks and minorities, and even women, were excluded from the largess of free college education and fast track executive jobs and access to the arts.

He was speaking about certain attitudes that for the poet proved to be difficult hurdles to writing important poetry that are equally difficult today. His speech articulated the arduous task of being a poet, and how, even with many students wanting to be writers, that aspiration was not as easy as it looked. In fact, he was skeptical that many of those who aspired could achieve what they conceived as a career. He cautioned young writers at the college:

“Among these would-be writers, the majority have no marked literary gift. This, in itself, is not surprising; a marked gift for any occupation is not very common. What is surprising is that such a high percentage of those without any marked talent for any profession should think of writing as the solution. One would have expected that a certain number would imagine that they had a talent for medicine or engineering and so on, but this is not the case. In our age, if a young person is untalented, the odds are in favor of his imagining he wants to write.”

With that caveat about talent, he addressed what challenges writers faced in the second half of the twentieth century that now, as I look at them in our time, are even more challenging.

The first was the loss of “belief in the eternity of the physical universe,” and its being replaced with the ephemeral, fluctuating nature of modern society and social change. As such, the poet is faced with an enormous task of finding the language as well as the perspective to call attention to what must be enduring and commonplace to us all when, with 24/7 news, with rapidly changing information, technology, and social change, nothing seems permanent.

The second aspect was, according to him, “the loss of belief in the significance and reality of sensory phenomena.” His theory was that since Luther and Descartes we had lost faith in the primacy of sensory intelligence. “The traditional conception of the phenomenal world had been one of the sacramental analogies; what the senses perceived was an outward and visible sign of the inward and invisible, but both were believed to be real and valuable.” Modern science underlined that belief. The senses could not comprehend the nature of reality when, as quantum physics soon discovered, even the atom, once considered the essence of the material world, was

more complex, with more elements in and around it, that the human eye couldn't see. As a result, "the traditional conception of art as mimesis" was undercut because there was "no longer a nature "out there" to be truly or falsely imitated, all an artist can be true to are his subjective sensations and feelings." (78, *Dyer's Hand*).

On top of this change, Auden's third aspect was "the loss of belief in a norm of human nature which will always require the same kind of man-fabricated world to be home in." He explained that, before the Industrial Revolution, the diurnal life of man changed very little. With limited access to transportation—with the exception during wars—many people lived in small towns, relied on the institutions of those towns, to define who they were, what they did, how they believed, and where they were destined to be in the social order.

That all changed quite rapidly. "Technology with its ever-accelerated transformations of man's way of living," Auden noted, "has made it impossible for us to imagine what life will be like even twenty years from now." People didn't have access to, nor were curious about, other cultures "far removed from their own in time or space." Now we know through anthropology, archaeology, sociology and mass communication, that "human nature is so plastic that it can exhibit varieties of behavior, which, in the animal kingdom, could only be exhibited by different species. The artist, therefore, no longer has any assurance, when he makes something, that even the next generation will find it enjoyable or comprehensible." (79, *Ibid*) With access to so much information from vastly different eras, regions, and cultures, "the meaning of word traditions" have radically changed, too.

That was in 1962. Since then, the world has changed so rapidly no one can keep up with it. Internet, texts, news in sound bites, visual age, AI and virtual realities—all happening in a matter of a few years. What is real and what is virtual unclear.

In such an environment, who is writing the poem?

Does the poet, as a unique person, exist anymore?

Those were questions that Auden wrestled with in his lecture. He was worried, however, about another aspect of change that might be worse than all the others.

The fourth aspect that disrupts the poetic enterprise is "the disappearance of the Public Realm as the sphere of revelatory personal deeds." Auden explains, as Hannah Arendt also did in *The Human Condition*, a book

he admired, that once in the Greek state, the private and public domains were distinct. What happened in the household was kept private. If a person (mostly men with property in Greece and, until recently, most Western nations) were to make a statement, he did it in the public space. It was where he was free to be himself, to be a man of action, to make a name for himself, to write his poems to the heroes and leaders of this time, to create a legacy. Decisions about the state, the distribution of property, of the arts, of power, were determined in the polis.

Auden reaffirms that Arendt had said, “But in recent years, the significance of the terms private and public has been reversed; public life is the necessary impersonal life, the place where a man fulfills his social function, and it is in his private life that he is freed to be his personal self.”

What has compounded this reversal is, once again, technology and the rise of machinery that has replaced manual labor with more and more of labor and work being done by the machine. Men of action are relegated to engineers who designed new, more refined, technology for making products, for communication between people, and for designed and predicting future social order. Even in war, one warrior is not in armed combat with another soldier. A bomb is dropped. Hundreds are obliterated and the pilot never sees who they are, never knows if they were a civilian, soldier, child, poet, no matter, to use a military term, because they are relegated as “collateral damage.”

The nature of being an individual and having a distinct voice as a poet becomes more difficult in a more densely populated world and a world in which advertisers are geared to assess what the public would buy next and the politicians are told what will sell their message, and words, hundreds of thousands of words, proliferate hourly, daily, weekly in ear phones, on tablets, on cellphones, in texts about this and that. The words never stop. They go on and on. Words. Words. Words.

Auden explains how just as words have become a vehicle for promotions of products, another commercial entity, they have also become almost as inconsequential as individual poet desperately speaking against language as a sales pitch or sound bite.

The idea that an individual matters, has something to say, and should be heard is threatened by the way Individuals have become blurred into a general group called “the public.” The public isn’t comprised of unique individuals. The public isn’t like a mob that, in recent times, stormed the United States’ Capitol, fueled by heated rhetoric. Nor is it a crowd that assembles to hear a speaker.

The public is a more amorphous entity, odorless, inactive, unimpassioned, invisible. It's a fiction of the media, a word that, if a politician mentions it to rile up his mob, justifies his silencing his opponents. Although invisible, the public speaks like the dummy of a ventriloquist. Men in power tell others that "the public" is against abortion, against LGBTQ rights, against immigrants. Like Nixon's alluding to the "silent majority" who he claimed supported his war in Vietnam and justified his invasion of Cambodia, Trump credits his MAGA base with supporting the end of *roe vs. wade* despite the outrage of women across the country.

The invention of the public as a real entity can, of course, be used by any political group. In the hands of someone who is promoting civil rights, as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. the public can be called upon to demand justice for all. In the hands of a demagogue, the public can be used to rationalize the denial of freedom of speech and to justify oppression of anyone who disagrees with what runs contrary to what he believes.

For a poet, this new reality where the public is private, and the private is public, where identity as a concept becomes more fluid, where the individual is no longer a self but a public, what to say and how to say it without becoming another faceless, nameless, and bodiless voice is a challenge.

The haunting question with these four aspects of change in our world is "What is the role of the poet?"

Contrary to what Auden said in his poem "In Memory of W. B. Yeats," which, over the years, became both controversial and, sadly enough, a rationale for poets *not* speaking up, *not* taking a stand, Auden in this 1962 essay speaks a wholly different way. By then, he was no longer a young man. He had traveled the world. He had worked undercover for the United States military in WWII. He had seen the devastation of war. He knew what happens when people turn a blind eye to a demagogue. He had seen the concentration camps. He had experienced the rising voice of civil rights and had become an advocate for confronting racism in the United States as the major moral issue of his time. He heard advocates speaking up for gay rights, something close to his heart as a gay man. In some ways in this lecture, he was speaking against himself as he was, prewar, when he was thirty-two. At fifty-five years of age, he was telling a very different, more proactive story. He had seen more and knew more what it took for him to keep his faith and to keep writing as he did over the previous twenty years.

But first, lest we forget what was happening in 1939 when the demagogues and tyrants rolled unimpeded over Europe and Orient, when any words, no matter how noble they were, seemed infinitely meaningless, Auden was feeling desperate. He also knew that Yeats supported Irish independence

that, prior to WWII, had failed to materialize, just as Auden's support from Spanish freedom fighters failed to materialize. His tone was cynical but, at the time, realistic. His words set off a resounding sense of futility. For him, poets needed to know, no matter how glorious, ambitious, and noble their cause, their words had fallen on deaf ears, and the tyrants had seized power, and would keep doing so because their words made nothing happen. They were silly at best.

“You were silly like us; your gift survived it all:
 The parish of rich women, physical decay,
 Yourself. Mad Ireland hurt you into poetry.
 Now Ireland has her madness and her weather still,
*For poetry makes nothing happen: it survives
 In the valley of its making where executives
 Would never want to tamper, flows on south
 From ranches of isolation and the busy griefs,
 Raw towns that we believe and die in; it survives,
 A way of happening, a mouth.*” (*italics mine*)

Those words “for poetry makes nothing happen,” had an enormous impact on me when I was first writing. Poets I admired, when I spoke in my poems about civil rights, gay rights, environmental rights, cautioned me with the simple quote of Auden to stay clear of political or moral issue. Keep it personal. Keep it concrete. His words troubled me to this day. I too have felt the futility of saying anything, knowing how power, when demagogues have it, can, and will, destroy democracy.

But after reading his essays, I have a sense, frail as it is, of hope. My mentors didn't mention Auden's lecture in 1962, when he imagined a “college of the arts,” a precursor that later became known as Master of Fine Arts programs, and a world where, indeed, the act of writing was a political act against what he called “the Management,” those who were trying to dictate and determine what we should think, how we should behave, and what we should believe.

“In our age, the mere making of a work of art is itself a political act. So long as artists exist, making what they please and think they ought to make, even if it is not terribly good, even if it appeals to only a handful of people, they remind the Management of something managers need to be reminded of, namely, that the managed are people with faces, not anonymous numbers, that *Homo Laborans* is also *Homo Ludens*.” (88, *Ibid*)

By 1962, Auden had come full circle. He could affirm the playfulness of art. He could reclaim the poet's voice as a political act. He knew that the arts

spoke and was concerned with “the single person, as they are alone and as they are in their relations,” but the arts also spoke to our deepest yearnings as human beings for freedom and self-expression. Although poets may not be Shelley’s “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” they were persons of different races, genders, religions, cultures, and orientations who could speak of their lives and who, by speaking, could call on our humanity, and, as such, our common divinity, that could spark in each of us a realization of the sacredness of each of us, and of all of us, including that species without a voice whose place is the earth where we all belong and can be at home with ourselves.

Source: W.H. Auden. *The Dyer's Hand*. First Vintage International Edition, 1989

The Cockfighter's Daughter

I found my father,
face down, in his homemade chili
and had to hit the bowl
with a hammer to get it off,
then scrape the pinto beans
and chunks of ground beef
off his face with a knife.
Once he was clean
I called the police,
described the dirt road
that snaked from the highway
to his trailer beside the river.
The rooster was in the bedroom,
tied to a table leg.
Nearby stood a tin of cloudy water
and a few seeds scattered on a piece of wax paper,
the cheap green carpet
stained by globs of darker green shit.
I was careful not to get too close,
because, though his beak was tied shut,
he could still jump for me and claw me
as he had my father.
The scars ran down his arms to a hole
where the rooster had torn the flesh
and run with it,
finally spitting it out.
When the old man stopped the bleeding,
the rooster was waiting on top of the pickup,
his red eyes like Pentecostal flames.
That's when Father named him Preacher.
He lured him down with a hen
he kept penned in a coop,
fortified with the kind of grille
you find in those New York taxicabs.
It had slots for food and water
and a trap door on top,
so he could reach in and pull her out by the neck.
One morning he found her stiff and glassy-eyed
and stood watching
as the rooster attacked her carcass

until she was ripped
to bits of bloody flesh and feathers.
I cursed and screamed, but he told me to shut up,
stay inside, what did a girl know about it?
Then he looked at me with desire and disdain.
Later, he loaded the truck and left.
I was sixteen and I had a mean streak,
carried a knife
and wore such tight jeans I could hardly walk.
They all talked about me in town,
but I didn't care.
My hair was stringy and greasy and I was easy
for the truckers and the bar clowns
that hung around night after night,
fighting sometimes
just for the sheer pleasure of it.
I'd quit high school, but I could write my name
and add two plus two without a calculator.
And this time, I got to thinking,
I got to planning, and one morning
I hitched a ride
on a semi that was headed for California
in the blaze of a west Texas sunrise.
I remember how he'd sit reading
his schedules of bouts and planning his routes
to the heart of a country
he thought he could conquer with only one soldier,
the \$1000 cockfight always further down the pike,
or balanced on the knife edge,
but he wanted to deny me even that,
wanted me silent and finally wife
to some other unfinished businessman,
but tonight, it's just me and this old rooster,
and when I'm ready, I untie him
and he runs through the trailer,
flapping his wings and crowing
like it's daybreak
and maybe it is.
Maybe we've both come our separate ways
to reconciliation,
or to placating the patron saint
of roosters and lost children,
and when I go outside, he strolls after me

until I kneel down and we stare at each other
 from the cages we were born to,
 both knowing what it's like
 to fly at an enemy's face
 and take him down for the final count.
 Preacher, I say, I got my GED,
 a AA degree in computer science,
 a husband, and a son named Gerald, who's three.
 I've been to L.A., Chicago,
 and New York City on a dare, and know what?—
 it's shitty everywhere, but at least it's not home.

After the coroner's gone, I clean up the trailer,
 and later, smoke one of Father's
 hand-rolled cigarettes
 as I walk by the river,
 a quivering way down in my guts,
 while Preacher huddles in his cage.
 A fat frog catches the lit cigarette
 and swallows it.
 I go back and look at the picture
 of my husband and son,
 reread the only letter I ever sent
 and which he did not answer,
 then tear it all to shreds.
 I hitch the pickup to the trailer
 and put Preacher's cage on the seat,
 then I aim my car for the river, start it,
 and jump out just before it hits.
 I start the pickup and sit
 bent over the steering wheel,
 shaking and crying, until I hear Preacher
 clawing at the wire,
 my path clear,
 my fear drained from me like blood from a cut
 that's still not deep enough
 to kill you off, Father,
 to spill you out of me for good.
 What was it that made us kin,
 that sends daughters crawling after fathers
 who abandon them at the womb's door?
 What a great and liberating crowing
 comes from your rooster

as another sunrise breaks the night apart
with bare hands
and the engine roars
as I press the pedal to the floor
and we shoot forward onto the road.
Your schedule of fights,
clipped above the dashboard,
flutters in the breeze.
Barstow, El Centro, then swing back
to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico,
and a twenty-minute soak in the hot springs
when Geronimo once bathed,
before we wind back again into Arizona,
then all the way to Idaho by way of Colorado,
the climb, then the slow, inevitable descent
toward the unknown
mine now. Mine.

(Vol. 17, No. 1, 2010)

Morning, Missing Spring

Stirred by a wet rap of sleet,
eerie white bleed of light

through the curtains, wind tossing
and turning, the elm tree hurling

sundered limbs at the window;
yesterday, I watched a hawk

perched in its branches rend flesh
from a songbird, spitting feathers

like the darkest snowfall,
winter's grey void giving way

to hunger, riling wing and bluster,
the whole world ripping itself apart,

wrapping itself in white sheets
like a restless lover eyeing the door,

the thrall of heat spent, cold, blue
hours looming long and quiet;

I hear a rustling like feathers and
dream of birdsong, wake to talons.

William Rieppe Moore

“[Blue hunter moonrise over Buladean]”

Blue hunter moonrise over Buladean
come and see what’s seen, a breathy cloud
fall from Little Bald Knob like

smoke from milk pail risin’ to the cold
in the light of the lantern,
ripcurls into haints of waves

in the chomp of the goat eatin’ still
behind me on the stand at the head gate
gummin’ for cracked corn in the trough.

Now my breath is chopped like my lung
drew from the hip and shot me through
the back with a two-dollar pistol to haunt

my sleep, and my wife couldn’t find
the oil for anointin’ so she emptied
the can of Dr. Naylor’s udder balm

and ministered to me, sayin’, *Lord God*
to my unopened wound. In its dark
tear I could feel the lap and brush

piles draggin’ me through the day by
outstretched arms through stick weeds
slow goin’ to the hedges, grown up

to their own injury, pushin’ out
from the gunshot buckeye leaves
locust saplings, spruce pine’s basket weave

branches now somewhere inverted behind
my closed eyes, while I stretch out on this
cedar bench and glisten in starshade

to hear my old breath at the entrance
of the barn, head lifted to sycamores,
exhaling in waves to an outgoin’ tide.

From the Afterlife

My last days were not so bad, my ex-wife says, from the afterlife,
Not so bad as you think, so relax.

The Home Helpers you hired didn't steal from me
As far as I knew, neither money or my Dilaudid,
Or have their boyfriends over as if I were deaf *and* blind.

I especially liked the Dominican
One, Alaia—Lord, the stories she could tell!
I read, watched a lot of television, if you can believe it—
Baseball (if you can believe it), Maddow, the food shows—
You remind me a little of Bourdain. Sexy, but no beast. Seriously,
Though —*Chilaquiles! Tariflette!* I don't think I weighed
Ninety pounds. Can you imagine? White as a ghost.
But here's the thing: *happy*, Daniel. You can't imagine.
What did Thoreau say? *I grew like corn in the night.*
On the inside. Well, there was only the inside, really.
I was flying inside myself, like Bill Knott. It was dark,
But I wasn't scared. I made my own light. A bioflurescent jellyfish,
Like at Monterrey. Other times, I sprouted legs.
Long, beautiful legs with glitter-capped toenails like Alaia's,
I remember her mother's orchard,

I was the highest *lechosa* on the tree no one could reach.

What do the French say? The *disparition de*_____.

That's nice. When I woke up, I had disappeared.

My old grasshopper / lived in now by another generation /

Is decked out with dolls, wrote Basho.

Does that help, Daniel? Or, remember that trip to Lucerne?

Imagine it went on forever. Not so bad.

I, watching you write my name in fogged breath on a windowpane

And watching it disappear.

Stepping outside some inn or other after the thunderclouds rolled past.

Everything dapper, reticent. Like the Swiss

We could see the Alps from wherever we were standing.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Sonntagskind



Irmgard Hierdeis

If We Were Angels

Always trim the beginning, shorten it.
The world says make it better, but I think of the
subsoil, populate it with living creatures,
none of them from the biology book.
A world as made for me, locked in darkness,
drawn black, the contours ever blacker,
until everything dissolves in fluid swamp.
If we were angels, we would float above, though
the abyss sucks us in, mouth agape, shouts
its demands on life that dies out so quickly.
I drench the earth with my ink blots, I
come late or never to the end of it.
I hold on tight to the bag of alphabet letters,
I waver,
the rabbit, yet rigid before the snake,
runs away.
First, we invented stories,
then came the thoughts and revised them,
making them tame and civilized,
until they sank and disappeared.

Translated from the German by Nan Watkins

Playing Fate

Always recalling the
difficulty of writing, for the world
lies white and undescribed before me, a
mute invitation, a ruler's gesture.
Strange seasons, uncomprehending rain,
then again sun in excess, all this
in the middle of a moment, and not for me.
A teacher comforts me, just wait
until the sense and meaning emerge.
I bring the small black insects to
life, they crawl all over the immaculate paper
and play fate.

Translated from the German by Nan Watkins

Irmgard Hierdeis

We Looked for Messages

In the trees we looked for messages.
We were surprised when the autumn leaves
withered in our hand, looked up unbelieving
into the mysterious sky, and what did we see there?

Clouds of water, white jet trails
in impeccable chemistry, prepared during the night.
Go into yourself, spoke the other, and what do you feel?
Implanted joys, inherited melancholia,
eternal school grades and a packet of letters in the
drawer, with the famed pink ribbon.

I lie down in the grass and extinguish my thoughts.

Translated from the German by Nan Watkins

After the Hurricane

The lawn chair cushions could float a long time.
I imagine their adventures
among the bobbing houses,
over the flabbergasted forests
and the patios transfigured into pools.
Here the waters drop a farmer's field
onto another farmer's field.
They wait until you turn aside
to lay the children in their complicated beds—
gently, as the tempest understands these things.

A man of faith should be able
to persuade the winds, to suggest, instead,
a coastal region accustomed to such things.
Raze there, not here. Give them the heroic poems.
I speak to the gray face of the waters,
“That’s a bit of gouging and inundating
just to get back where you began,
down all the rivers to the unimpressable deep.”
They do not respond. Downriver of all that,
we are made as if we never were.

David Brendan Hopes

The Great Trees, the Little Trees

after Helene

The great trees, the little trees
must have discussed among themselves
who should crash into the roofs,
who, perishing, etch eternal memories.

Creeks kiss the bottoms of their bridges,
calling out ten thousand names for water
that recall when there was nothing else.
I try to learn some for the next time.

(The boy who wrote the poems
equating the Catastrophic with the Sublime
bends over picking remnants from the mud:
a narrow bone, a book, a clump of fur.)

If you number your losses you'd go mad.
So, tally the survivors:
the delicate bodies of the garden left
as if beneath the tempest's notice,

the catbirds, the pale blue butterflies
that favor the veronicas.
I asked how they might have made it through.
Nobody's telling.

I heard his voice a long way off
lamenting how two pens were spent
in the café writing all this down. Further loss
sometimes cannot be borne. Sometimes it can.

Some build naturally on high ground.
Some favor the wide rich plain.
No help here, no way of making
a distinction, good or bad, until there is.

That boy with the poems says,
"Let's go down to the riverside tonight.
Check whether oblivion has withdrawn
enough for us to turn, to take a stand."

Flood Stage

I can hear that bird again who doesn't understand the huge
dungeon the sky has become. Maybe it is trying to escape
our torrent of newsreel horrors. Maybe it thinks it could
save us like Noah's raven or dove. Rows of corn have flooded
and the fields bare their souls to the sky. The river's rising.
Sometimes the bloated bodies of animals pass by, but these are
nothing compared to what has been haunting me today,
the bloated bodies of children left as a sign by the Somalian
Al-Shabaab who deny the drought, who refuse aid from
the west. In the end, can't we just believe in ourselves?
Sometimes the incalculable detritus of the stars falls
around us, as and we no longer read the pleas of the dove,
the heart's evidence, the ravens that haunt mass graves of Srebrenica,
the Congolese women raped by soldiers in North Kivu Province.
Sometimes I think morning is there just to try wringing the last
drops of darkness from the sky. Sometimes the sandbags we live
behind are not enough, the sluice gates of horror keep opening.
But today, today I just want to forget the news that's flooding
the airways with an image of our days, the child born without
a brain, his head a collapsed balloon, his stars long ago drowned,
his sky tortured, beliefs floundering, my own words trying
desperately to drown in meanings that make no sense.

(Vol. 21. No. 1, 2014)

Jim Daniels

Hard Crust

Cancer, she said, *I've got fucking cancer*.
She dropped the phone, then dropped
into mad tears, flung tears, bullet tears.
I held her, swallowing my own.

We were stuck drowning
in a conference center out of town.
Twin beds, angled shadowed ceiling
suddenly compressing our lives.

C for Cancer. D for Death.
All other letters obliterated. We squeezed
onto one bed. The tumor bullied itself
between us. If we ate, would we be feeding it?

We wanted to rush to a hospital, have someone
cut it out. Or at least schedule surgery
within the next five seconds. The room smelled
like air conditioning and the sterile grief

of anticipation. If only—the sentence unfinished
due to the unfinished sentence. That sharp C
cutting into her clenched fist. I rose to pick up
her phone before we stepped on it. Though

I wanted to. We'd have to make our own calls
soon, say the word aloud, over and over, lacking
detail, explanation, running out of even tears.
We were expected at a potluck. Still

four more days of conference—no appointment
to escape to, so we stayed. With cancer,
you can be anywhere. It follows you
into dark, intimate places and shopping malls.

They caught it early. She is still with me.
With us. Remember the smell of pure panic
released, the evil genie leaving the bottle
for good? Remember trying to eat some tough

and tasteless thing, chewing and chewing,
the C caught in the craw as you gulped
and swallowed? I gave her regrets at the potluck.
Under the weather. Just a touch of cancer,

I didn't say. I forgot to bring our covered
dish. Summer—many pies, but few main dishes.
I watched my watch, then took my leave.
Take some for her, the host said, sawing off

a slice, shoveling it onto a plate so that I had
no choice. Store bought, not homemade.
Even the rain on the walk back to her
did not soften it.

Mid-February Encampment

*a group of tents or temporary shelters put in one place:
Many people are living in encampments around the city
with no electricity or running water.*

I'm becoming addicted to my therapy lamp.
The city tax department is supposed to call me
back. This morning on my walk I saw the city
fencing off the riverside trail from the homeless

encampments. I never heard the word encamp-
ment until it came attached to homeless.
Are they going to uncamp the encampment?
Guys are unrolling the cyclone fence to attach

to the poles. Stay tuned, not untuned.
The city is too busy to return my calls.
I admit a small qualified joy at the fencing.
I admit a cruel selfishness. A selfish cruelty.

Ah, the lamp, its bright rectangular glow.
Do they make pocket versions? The gloom
in the room. I want my property taxes
reduced. The homeless don't pay any.

I found an unfinished roll of tape
in my desk drawer today. I am on hold
with the city. With the homeless.
The encampment is unkempt.

Also, my desk. I was once
a proficient fence climber, a retriever
of errant passes and home runs.
I have in common with the homeless

the concept of being fenced out.
I have in common with the city
the concept of not returning calls.
I was once an avid camper next

to any body of water. To anybody.
 I don't believe a fence or a wall
 solves anything at all. Some homeless
 spray painted hundreds of penises

on the trail. C'mon, guys, I said.
 Really? Hundreds of penises never
 solved anything. In fact, just the opposite.
 Encampment. Sunlight for sale

though it's free, though fickle along
 the trail. Actually, nothing about
 being homeless seems fickle. I
 wouldn't know, is my pat answer.

My pet answer. Some of the home-
 less have pets and cellphones
 and serious drug problems. I once
 had all of those things. We have

so much in common, I want to say
 in a sardonic kind of way. A problem
 with no solution is the kind I solved
 best in math class. Thus, I was bumped

down to Basic Math. They have an
 annual walk for the homeless here.
 Nobody dresses up for it like they do
 the Turkey Trot or the Underwear run.

Mylar makes good balloons and blankets
 for runners and the homeless. I am not
 an armchair quarterback for the homeless.
 What side of the fence am I on? Can't

I just straddle it? Mid-February.
 They found somebody frozen
 to death in one of those tents.
 Can we all agree on that?

A View of the Transport

In this world, Charon is a young girl
wearing a violet winter coat. She accompanies
her dead brother across a turbulent river.

What is left of her family crowds around his coffin.
This is any river, anywhere on earth, cutting through
war-scarred land. Nothing grows on the river's bank

behind them, a remnant of a blown-out bridge stands
on two columns in shallows of the choppy water.
Twisted rebar and tattered banners hang from its end.

An abandoned car, and a broken power pole stripped
of its lines, sit on the shore they have left behind.
Whatever coins they may have amongst them

remain in their pockets. They don't have time
to even consider waiting 100 years for his passage
to the afterlife, they have taken this matter

upon themselves, procured a small rowboat
into which they dragged a hastily painted 2x4 cross.
The assembled passengers have a keen gaze

on what waits for them on the near shore. The coffin
is meticulously wrapped in a violet cloth and bow.
The same violet that colors his sister's winter coat.



Carol Moldaw

Suzanne Cleary

**Crossing from One World to Another:
A Review of Carol Moldaw's *Go Figure***

Moldaw, Carol. *Go Figure*. Four Way Books, 2024. 77 pp. \$17.95. ISBN 9781961897045

Go Figure, Carol Moldaw's seventh poetry collection, displays the painterly eye and lively intellect her readers have come to expect. Pointedly, the deceptively simple expression *go figure* reads as both bemused wonder and hands-thrown-up *wtf* frustration. Carol Moldaw would never write *wtf*. She doesn't need to, for her poems elegantly and unmistakably convey our vexed historical moment.

In a voice both graceful and searing, Moldaw continues to explore the interior world and the global, especially with regard to women. Longtime readers will recognize her interest in art and nature, but in this collection will also encounter poems that reflect our politically fraught times. Justice and the lack thereof inform *Go Figure*, as in "Painter and Model (I)." Its epigraph reads "after Lucien Freud's *Painter and Model*." The poem begins:

Because she paints barefoot, she's barefoot in his painting
of her painting. Well, not painting, but modeling for him
as the painter she is and gazing toward her ostensible model,

spayed nude on a battered brown Chesterfield.
Well, not gazing: her eyes, as he painted them, are downcast,
the lids closed. If they were open, it seems by the bowing

of her head that she'd be looking at the model's outthrust knee—
though what the viewer notices first and foremost is what
the paintbrush idling between her clasped hands is angled toward:

the model's resting uncut cock.

The poem describes Lucien Freud's "Painter and Model" and displays Moldaw's deceptively easy brushstrokes. She seems not to have labored to create this comprehensive yet concise picture for her reader, as she leads us into the interior world of the woman painter who poses for Freud. Despite the abrupt appearance of the cock, traditionally a scene-stealer, the reader simultaneously sees the poet's bold and deft recasting of Freud's painting. The poem's title now refers not primarily to Freud's painting, nor to the woman and her nude model. It refers instead to the woman herself, she

who is both painter and model, and who is poised to confront the male organ.

The visual pleasure of this poem is equaled by its cerebration, further seen in the phrases *Well, not painting* and *Well, not gazing*. In a 2020 interview, Moldaw discussed her penchant for fine-tuning her poems, saying, *I want the words—and the beliefs, metaphors, ideas they convey—to resonate and to hold up to examination* (Mills 9). This drive for precision invites complication that a less interesting poet might eschew as too risky, as too likely to throw the poem off-course. In fact, the well-crafted pause and reevaluation invites the reader to experience, almost physically, a poem's evolution.

The titular poem of *Go Figure* muses upon the role of woman as muse. It begins:

In her and her and her I saw myself.
 In carved sandstone, a voluptuary,
 my neck coiled to face my back, my back
 twisted to pinch and raise for inspection
 a small patch of almost-out-of-reach skin.

One foot planted, the other on toe,
 my toes on a narrow ledge high up
 the temple's façade....

Following several more depictions of the contortions required of the female model in the name of Art, the speaker turns to the viewer of these artworks:

You call me
 by the painter's name: a Lautrec. A Degas.

The address is direct, making the viewer writhe in their own complicity.

The poem "Olmec" likewise displays the poet's imaginative engagement with an artwork, a sculpture of a shaman turning into a jaguar. It begins:

The bone-crushing pain
 of turning into a jaguar:
 palpable in the shaman's
 cleft head carved in basalt

or jade; in his down-turned
 squared-off open mouth;
 lips stretched and dilated
 in birthing, in a scream.

Try to imagine yourself
 crossing from one world
 of pain into another, the quiet
 needed to summon the fury

needed to catapult you over.

Again, direct address heightens the poem's tension and links the poem to the world beyond art. The poet discovers, buried inside of this formidable figure, *the quiet / needed to summon the fury // needed to catapult you over*. These lines may be read as an *ars poetica* for the characteristic poise-and-spring of Moldaw's poems. Further ahead, these lines will lead to a stunning insight: the Olmec sculpture evokes televised figures of refugees crossing the southern border into the United States. In an interview with Tyler Mills on Ron Slate's indispensable site *On the Seawall*, Moldaw reflects on the writing of "Olmec":

I struggle with the idea that what I write might be irrelevant to the realities of the conditions of our world. I care about the inner world and the individual voice and the realities of the psyche, but these are obviously not our whole story. So, I'm always struggling with how to let more in, how to refocus and widen my lens. At the same time, I am drawn to internal states....[A]nything that doesn't acknowledge our new realities seems laggard or a product of nostalgia or wishful thinking.

In *Go Figure* Moldaw extends her impressive reach, writing about the struggle for healthcare ("Road Trip to Planned Parenthood"), the care of an ageing parent ("My Mother Tells Me How It Works"), and mortality writ large. This book also welcomes the humor subtly present in her earlier books.

"Keisaku Palm" begins with this stanza:

Gravity brought down the palm frond's wide
 and weighted sheath-end first: the bark,
 still loosely attached like coarse black fringe,
 lashed my ear when the stalk fell straight
 from on high and thwacked the top of my crown.

The third stanza ends with these lines: *It was like being clapped with the stick / a Zen master uses to wake a drowsy pupil*. The ridiculous becomes the sublime. And one should also note the startling concision of Moldaw's description, her spring-loaded line-breaks.

“Game Face” begins soberly:

I’ve seen the thumbnail photo of the tantric massage therapist
in the back of the free weekly for decades.

With shoulder-length dirty blond hair and a red paste bindi
she looks alluring without suggesting youth or age.

The newsprint muse inspires serious observations of the culture(s) within which this therapist operates, such as the plain-spoken, *To see the ravages of aging on one’s face used to be inevitable. / Now it means one’s taken a stance.* Further into the poem, the poet wryly observes:

I don’t want the same game face as a girl
but my face does seem to have lived more fully than me....

I am not convinced. Carol Moldaw’s *Go Figure* seems to me evidence of a life lived not just fully, but deeply. The vitality of this collection promises more rich work ahead.

Work Cited

Mills, Tyler. “‘The Impersonal Intimate’: A Conversation with Carol Moldaw.” *On the Seawall*, May 12, 2020. www.ronslate.com

Lucille Clifton

1994

i was leaving my fifty-eighth year
when a thumb of ice
stamped itself hard near my heart

you have your own story
you know about the fears the tears
the scar of disbelief

you know that the saddest lies
are the ones we tell ourselves
you know how dangerous it is

to be born with breasts
you know how dangerous it is
to wear dark skin

i was leaving my fifty-eighth year
when i woke into the winter
of a cold and mortal body

thin icicles hanging off
the one mad nipple weeping

have we not been good children
did we not inherit the earth

but you must know all about this
from your own shivering life

(Vol. 17, No. 1, 2010)

Garden Findings

I found beneath the tangled stems and furls
Of peppermint, a string of seven pearls,

Perfect and translucent, white as milk,
Connected by a strand like spider silk,

Eggs of a kind—resilient to the touch—
And wondered what had left this gleaming clutch

Here on the brink of warmth, with August done.
I thought of lizards dazzled in the sun

Or brilliantly enameled snakes, and since
The autumn was already dropping hints,

I took them in, and kept them moist and warm,
And peered inside to see the future form

Cloudy in those crystal balls. The catch
Was when I watched the brood begin to hatch—

Two probing horns, then with a sort of shrug
Out silvered the liquescence of a slug,

Devourer I had fought all summer long—
And everything I'd cherished had been wrong.

(Vol. 15, No.1, 2008)

The President Signs Bill To Allow Wolves And Bears To Be Shot In Their Dens On Federal Wildlife Refuges In Alaska

The storm hit from all directions at once. We thought we were prepared behind our double pane windows and dead bolts. Gales the size of congressional votes squeezed through cracks widening around the door where we had once let in friends and family to eat at the kitchen table. Rain soaked the floor under each sill. Rain drenched bird wings so they couldn't fly from the feeders swinging in gusts of bravado that brutalized eucalyptus trees, tore petals from the trumpet flowers on the porch.

All over the neighborhood sirens went mad calling from the House floor for the blood of the last wild animals on earth. Understand, the NRA has a lot of unused ammunition, itches to set steel-toothed leg traps rusting in the cramped closets of human cruelty, itches to pump bullets into wolf puppies in their dens, itches to rev slick private planes to slaughter grizzlies from the air.

Tornado sirens split the eardrums of babies sleeping in nurseries where parents thought they'd be safe. This was the longest storm on record. No one could remember a bigger disaster, bringing down trees, giant cactus, smashing houses, semi trucks overturned, spilling organic vegetables from Mexico. Rain wouldn't stop falling, drops as big as broken hearts, scarring windows with ash. Wind pulled on its fascist boots, kicked in each dissenting door. The babies couldn't stop crying, even as they were shot in their cribs.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Betrayal Is Behind the Spread of Humans Around the World

A moving van backed up beeping to the curb.
The corrugated door rolled out of sight.

Gorillas raised their heads from hammocks
that swung from the ribbed ceiling.

They blinked at the light.

One silverback shuffled to the edge of the open
hold and dropped his elegant, leathery hand
to the sidewalk.

He hopped to the pavement with easy grace,
and gamboled down the block.

The truck driver scrambled after him and stood
shoulders relaxed, head down, stroking
the gorilla's shaggy arm.

I was in a crowd watching, and felt a light tap—
the person next to me held out his hand.

Someone else softly stroked my back, and we
followed the driver's lead, touched each other
calmly, breathing slowly.

We enacted harmony, simulated love.
We created a tableau meant to be read as
Trust us, when we should have
yelled *Run*.

Frank Stanford

Terrorism

While my mother is washing the black socks
Of her religion,
I climb out of the washtub,
Stinking clean like the moon and the suds
In my ass,
The twenty she earned last week in my teeth,
My shoes and my pistol wrapped in my pants,
Slip off the back porch
And head down the road, buck naked and brave,
But lonely, because it's fifteen hours
By bus to the capital
And nobody will know
How it feels to nail down a heart
Black as tarpaper.
Mother, when you beat out my quilt tomorrow,
Remember the down in the sunlight,
Because I did not sleep there.
Remember, come evening, the last hatch of mayflies,
Because I won't.
They are evil, mother, and I am
Going to take it all out, in one motion,
The way you taught me to clean a fish,
Until all that is left is the memory of their voice,
And I will work that dark loose
From the backbone of my thumb.
Mother, the sad dance on fire.

(Vol. 7, No. 1, 2000)

Met II

Memory of night eruptions. Two men
paint the blossoms; the blossoms

are endless. We move in and out
of plum rooms; in nearly every one

is a boy with a sword. I ask too soon
about your mother. No one these days

is terribly at ease. In Tel Aviv, the air
is filled with terror but many such places

exist. Here, crusaders enter Constantinople
on horseback, on canvas. We ignore their war,

pause to listen to the Infanta's rustling
black ruffles. In brighter light, Olympia's

frazzled, wonky black cat has been out
spoon-feeding the caged moon. Moon

is what her mistress' flesh yearns
to be made of, but none of us are

that holy. It's like a game I saw
online: I put my nose on the black

dot and see the boys passing through
the circle, but the boys never really move.

You direct my eye to Degas' pouty, kissable
lips and how he paints his men all smeared

and blurry, barely there. Later in Nolita,
you drink something silly and we split

the halloumi. Then we are on the ground, legs
entwined, sandwiched between the door

jamb, caressing, comparing: my grandfather's
signature on my chest, your grandfather's

pear on your arm, more. Two men paint
the blossoms; the blossoms

are endless.

Tombstones

At first I saw nothing
I hadn't seen before.
I sprinted through
galleries, canvases
washed away behind me,
a smear of unmediated
experience of art.
I envied the empty room
of spare frames.
Lately I've been
as composed
as a brochure.
I've had nothing
to tell
you haven't already heard.

Once, in another museum,
I watched a model
stare at herself,
one painting
to another. Neatly
printed in small type
in a small white plaque
on a white wall—tombstones,
they're called—a curator's
note that several artists
found in this model a muse
and fought over her. Here
she appeared in Picasso.
And there she appeared
in a rival's portrait.
I'd like to believe in context
as much as text,
as if I can entangle myself
in art history by looking
close.

All the art
I've ever seen
belongs to one museum

inside me, just as
a plant called Castilleja,
called paintbrush
or prairie-fire, sneaks red
into landscapes
all the way from Alaska
to the Andes.

I remembered
that white plaque
on a white wall
as I drove away
from the Collection
on this cold winter day.
Turning the corner, I saw
ten tall trees, oleanders,
all bundled up
outside my wife's old office
in frost
cloth: trapping heat
in white polyester.
The light still going
through them.

Silent Movie

The falling snow turns the world
into a silent movie
animals hiding in thickets or burrows
while I peer through the glass of my own nest
which I did not make
where I was not born
and where most likely I will not die

Each flake is lighter than a drop of water
yet let enough of them accumulate
and suddenly there's a wave on the roof
ready to break on the shore of all you have

Our life is fragile indeed
I might as well be trying to guard
a handful of acorns against the cold and dark
and though there is a steady fire banked
in my blood, in my heart
that reaches so tentatively for the light
there is also a place of ice and silence
brother to the silent snow
without words it tells me
the cold is better, the dark is better
be still and become what is coming
lie down and let it cover you at last

Ron Rash

Linville Cavern

Past the tomahawks and cider,
the caged rattlesnake and postcards,
the day-glow bumper stickers
that would trail us home,
my father and I trailed a voice:
the others unwilling to wander
the bat and salamandered dark.

I was fourteen, almost as tall as my father,
old enough to know his life
had swerved to some bleak reckoning.

A handful of light
led us down the damp stairs,
the real light collapsing above,
deeper still Christmas lights
veining the cave sides, illuminating
nothing but the way.

“We’re almost there,” the guide assured.
Then we were: the stalactites like roots
anchored in air, the trout
pale and blind, quivering
in the bottomless pool.

Our guide clicked off the stringed lights.
“For the first time in your life,”

he drawled, “you are in complete
and total darkness.” I reached out,
but could not find my father’s hand.

(Vol. 3, No. 1, 1996)

Fortune

Through the window above the kitchen sink, I can see
the red feeder. Hummingbirds hover like magical creatures,
visiting when it suits them, when they're needed, both.

So much of our world is imagination, construct, like currency.
Hummingbirds live and breathe. A single species in this region—
ruby-throated—and it is enough. Back like a lily pond in blazing sun,

fifty wingbeats per second, feverish flight. I miss everybody,
even friends up the street, my head buried in work
until I look out the kitchen window.

I miss the hummingbird as soon as she buzzes away—
her strange warm-blooded body smaller than some insects.
I spend ages imagining her days, but I don't think I envy them.

In dreams I bend treetops to my mouth and feast. I want to be giant,
I want to be different, I feel physically sick, hunched before a laptop
ten hours a day. For the first time in my life, I earn a decent salary.

How garish for a woman to write that, like bright colors that catch
my eye. I make less than male counterparts, my blood pressure
rises each month, and still I feel like I'm getting away with robbery.

I breathe easier when I see a hummingbird, but I know it can't last.
Her green feathers shine like coins as she feeds on nectar. Little god.
When the leaves turn gold and flutter down, she'll be gone.

Eavan Boland

A Woman Painted on a Leaf

I found it among curios and silver,
in the pureness of wintry light.

A woman painted on a leaf.

Fine lines drawn on a veined surface
in a handmade frame.

This is not my face. Neither did I draw it.

A leaf falls in a garden.
The moon cools its aftermath of sap.
The pith of summer dries out in starlight.

A woman is inscribed there.

This is not death. It is the terrible
suspension of life.

I want a poem
I can grow old in. I want a poem I can die in.

I want to take
this dried-out face,
as you take a starling from behind iron,
and return it to its element of air, of ending—

so that autumn
which was once
the hard look of stars,
the frown on a gardener's face,
a gradual bronzing of the distance,
will be
from now on,
a crisp tinder underfoot. Cheekbones. Eyes. Will be
a mouth crying out. Let me.

Let me die.

(Vol. 2, No. 2, 1995)

Long Gone

However short, the lecture seemed too long-
stodgy, predictable, an arid trek.
Where had my power of concentration gone?

Finality as in darkest before dawn?
An artifact that closes with a click?
However short, the poem felt too long.

Tiptoe forward, stone to stepping stone.
Arrival—or at least no going back.
Where had my balance and attention gone?

How much to cut: a syllable? A line?
Language the dream from which we never wake...
However short, the stanza seemed too long.

I tried to be polite and not to yawn.
Leashed impulses dragged me in their wake.
Where had my hard-won stoicism gone?

Shadows are lengthening across the lawn.
One chugs along for decades. Call it luck.
However short, the illness felt too long,
attention, patience already gone.

Rachel Hadas

James Merrill's Ninety-Eighth Birthday

March 3, 2024

Each year I learn it more,
how much we continue to feed

on what has been bequeathed us
by our beloved dead.

Seven years older than you
ever lived to be,

creaky today and slow,
how I would like to believe

that I'm approaching you
on the far side of some

invisible boundary
where free of space and time

we could talk together,
where there would be leisure

to thank you for all that
you offered and I took.

But the opacity
of that place not so distant

yet impossible to reach
except in rare dream snatches

flitting away by dawn
will not let voices through.

A shaft of light's here, though,
allowing me to look

at what we have of you.
Wouldn't I too turn,

*word by word, page by page,
into books on a shelf?*

I can feel bereft.
I shouldn't feel deprived.

You are forever gone
and are immune to age.

I open the book.
You have never left.

Mary Ellen Talley

“Everything I Have Lost”: An Overview of Two Noteworthy North Carolina Collections

Hettich, Michael. *The Halo of Bees: New & Selected Poems 1990-2022*. Winston-Salem, North Carolina: Press 53, 2023. 233 pp. \$24.95.

Erickson, Terri Kirby. *Night Talks: New & Selected Poems*. Winston-Salem, North Carolina: Press 53, 2023. 147 pp. \$24.95.

Two North Carolina poets, Michael Hettich and Terri Kirby Erickson, have given us new poems and collated comprehensive overviews of their oeuvres that honor their writing and publishing careers. Light, time, nature, aging, and family are themes that resonate throughout both collections.

1.

Michael Hettich speaks to readers as an honest everyman in *The Halo of Bees: New and Collected Poems 1990-2022*. Having published more than two dozen poetry books over a span of fifty years, his collection begins with new poems, followed by poems from eleven separate collections, titled with the names of the books from which the poems are taken. The sections create an arc of time and narrative that suggests an expansive life.

Some of Hettich’s poems allude to the quandaries and contradictions of our present time. In “The Secret,” the speaker sees a dead dog or coyote “lying in the swale.” Later, he wishes he’d “pulled over, maybe / dragged the dead animal off into the bushes // but I was hurrying somewhere,” one of modernity’s conundrums.

This is a poet who observes and reflects upon nature and society. For example, in the poem, “The Halo of Bees,” he writes of jasmine and bees, but also of humanity. His words are subtle zingers without judgment:

and listen to their blood
coursing through their bodies as if
their bodies were not them at all, but merely
the necessary vehicle, the structure that holds
the world intact. Each blossom held a bee
which buzzed until nightfall. And what if I’d stood there
while a thunderstorm pelted those blossoms to the ground?

There are old men huddled under cardboard, just outside
our neighborhood; there are barefoot women

singing as they walk through pelting rain
just before morning. And of course there are children.

Whether writing of love, marriage, grief, music, animals, or flowers, Hettich increases lyricism with metaphors and similes, as well as turns of phrase that allow the reader to bask in new comparisons and be nourished. “This Melody” is a six-part section from a longer piece. In it, Hettich writes “each moment is a living / animal, leaping // sunlight / to give us // these bodies.”

Hettich writes of joy, pride, and pain. Imagine the mother and father in “The Parents” surreptitiously following their eight-year-old child, proud of her independence only to discover the child had been crying because she surmised she was lost and abandoned. Hettich turns this into a poem about the unanticipated ways parenting goes awry. How many of us misread the cues of others as these parents did, “as she howled in such terror / we thought she was singing.”

Imagine reading a riveting narrative poem about a Woodstock-era counter culture couple in Vermont who are preparing for an idyllic unencumbered birth of their first child, with midwife, sans hospital, at home where the planned delivery takes a dire turn. In the first page of this eleven-page poem, “And We Were Nearly Children,” the speaker writes to his ghost of a daughter, “I rarely think of you, stunned, as I’m stunned now, / to stare off into space / and remember those days.”

We are compelled to keep reading this poetic saga, the pain of youthful hopes of a young couple who were beginning an art gallery and subsequently moved away from the painful reminders. Hettich captures the dreams and despair of a generation whose ideals sometimes got in the way of everyday realities.

This poet also incorporates fantasy, surrealism, and the abstract in his poetry. “White Birds” melds narrative with fantasy. An unusual woman seems believable when she reports that “birds like that always / brought good news when they landed.”

What a plethora of animals this poet must live near! In just one poem, “Moon Flowers,” opossums “shuffle / up to our back door ,” then “foxes // comb each other’s tails,” and “snails / take the slow journey / across our front porch.”

Poems in this collection speak of long relationships, marriage in particular. Hettich writes in “Even Sleeping” that “The truest love is every day, / we understand that now.” In “The Father,” a daughter asks for help building a wing like the one she made at school, so that she can fly. Her youthful

belief and imagination intrigue the father, as she "strapped the wing on and started running around / the yard." The father says afterwards, "I helped her fail, though both her wings are beautiful." The beauties of aspiration and of failure give pause.

Drawing from his many years of teaching, writing, and living, Hettich gifts us with his own revelations. He begins "The Stone Wall:"

I am coming to the end of something, I can feel it
like a bone that was useful in the past, that kept me
standing upright but has turned into a toothpick
or a splinter dissolving in my blood—and although
I didn't notice the changes at first,
recently I've found myself turning corners carefully,
holding my shoulders as though I were naked
even when I'm fully dressed, even in a winter coat,
without that lost bone.

The poem ends:

So when the morning brightened,
I gathered the stones I'd collected on my journeys
and kept on the windowsill. I carried them outside
to make a small stone wall, to remember something precious,
a stone wall without function, hidden in the grass.

Hettich delivers self-deprecating humor. The speaker accepts ageing; in "Howling at the Moon," Hettich writes about the "*haphazard / lexicon*," for "*what we call 'memories,'*" as the speaker reports in serious jest:

After my doctor tells me he's pleased
to tell me I haven't been growing old
nearly as quickly as I was
the last time he saw me, although I'm still aging
faster than I should.

Besides being a craftsman who has honed his compelling poems into honest and accessible pieces, Hettich wields his poetic tools organically and deftly. He employs simile, metaphor, assonance, anaphora, enjambment, braiding, and circularity in free verse and prose poems, all with lines of subtle cadence.

This collection is full of narrative poetry that slides into fantasy and the surreal. Words such as "darkness" and "silence" keep recurring, particularly at the end of poems. "Daughter in the Sky" refers to stepping off a ladder

“into a landscape of silence.” The poem, “Widow,” begins, “If silence were a creature like a dog, and could follow you / around like a dog does, and come when you call.” The poem continues, “If silence were the small birds who come to the suet / you’ve hung outside your kitchen window.” Then Hettich shifts to fantasy, “When it’s cold you make fires in your hair,” and to wisdom, “When it’s cold you understand things by leaving them alone.”

This collection delves into time, along with music and science. My interest piqued when reading reflections on what science calls “The Purposeful Hum” in a poem by the same name. Hettich’s line, “There’s a pattern to everything, of course, including time,” suggests many interconnections.

Hettich’s poems speak of an intriguing and retreating mother and of a musical father, as well as brother, children, loss of parents, and the end of life. So much of his writing deals with interiority that outward/inward is a woven theme throughout. Many of the poems also honor a long loving marriage.

The speaker in this poem appreciates both light and dark. In new poems at the beginning of the book, one titled “Liminal” refers to the expansiveness of sleep as the train of sleep moves “on through the darkness.” In “The Swan,” after a fishing trip, snow starts falling. A daughter listens to her parents “moving through the house, // talking softly and turning off the lights, / then lying down together in the darkness.”

In a complementary turn, several poems near the end of the book reflect upon darkness. “Waking to Rain” ends with “in the potent darkness;” Another poem, “The Journey Home,” includes a train “moving through the darkness.” Song and music reverberate, but in “I Wake,” a wife cries while the speaker drives, “so I drove on in silence, keeping my eyes / on the road, respecting that darkness.”

Hettich’s poems give us the moon. At night and in “The Dark House,” we view the dark “like the moon does, pulling / the tides inside us” as if “our lives there might go on without us.” In “This Melody,” #8, “The moon / rises // like a moth / into the darkness // inside us, full of satellites / mapping out our lives. But in “The Problem of Analysis:”

we’re nothing like ourselves, where bees still gather
pollen with a buzzing that fills the afternoon
wherever that afternoon is, and pollinate
other long-extinct flowers to make
honey as sweet as this brief time we’ve been given

In a recorded interview with Barbara Nightingale at the 2023 Miami Book Fair, Hettich explained that his poems are not documentarily true. He commented that "I've always had a resistance to the confessional poem, but I've also had a great need to write about things that have happened to me and the people I love." *The Halo of Bees: New and Selected Poems 1990-2022* by Michael Hettich is a long-awaited collection that honors his well-crafted poems and the passage of time.

2.

Terri Kirby Erickson's *Night Talks: New and Selected Poems*, her seventh collection, reads as if dropped down on readers from the celestial firmament. Each of the eight sections in the book is named after varied constellations' brightest stars, such as Antares, Arcturus, and Vega.

Three figures take centerstage. Erickson opens each section with a poem about the speaker's parents. Every section also contains a poem about a deceased brother. Mother, father, and brother shine as the magical distance of bright starlight reaches readers while honoring the gift of family narrative.

One might read the poems as bits of memoir; however, the poet said in an interview in an online *Writers Digest* on September 21, 2011: "I will have to admit, however, that I have a very vivid imagination that works alongside my memory for details."

Poems that begin each section tell the story of the speaker's parents' and their marriage by describing shared quotidian tasks such as: taking turns on laundry day, washing dishes together, the wife cooking as the almost blind husband sets up trays to eat dinner, and the final poem about the couple grocery shopping together. That title, "Cana," may cast a spiritual allusion, but the town happens to be in Virginia:

I can picture my parents moving
from aisle to aisle through that country store—how
my mother's face, as she turned to my father, was
filled with such light, even a blind man could see it.

In a poem of younger years, "Moon Walk" places parents, grandma, brother, and sister on a "faux / leather sand-dusted couch" to watch astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin "hop like bunnies on the rough surface of the same / waxing moon that shone through our beach cottage / windows." On this day, they all watch a "miracle" unfold on a "rented black / and white TV set." Suggesting the siblings were very close, such memories makes the one-year-younger brother's death at twenty a seminal event in the speaker's life:

my heart breaks like an egg against the rim
 of what comes next. But let's pretend for the length
 of this poem, that my brother's blood remains safe
 inside his veins, Grandma's darkening mole as benign
 as a monastery full of monks, and our parents, unable
 to imagine the depth and breadth of grief. Here, there
 is only goodness and mercy, the light of a million stars,
 and the moon close enough now, for anyone to touch.

Grief and empathy can go hand in hand. In the poem, "To My Brother Who Died a Virgin," the speaker imagines what her brother missed out on by dying young: "You never turned into your own driveway / the same time as your wife and kids," then "spent the evening // thinking how damn lucky you were."

Erickson doesn't advocate beleaguered grief. The poem, "In the Midst of Grief, a Heron," reads:

What would it hurt to loosen our grip
 on grief? To allow the soft gray-blue
 of a heron's body to soothe our eyes, tired
 of shedding tears? This day will never come
 again and the heron will soon fly.

Similes abound as nature filters through these free verse poems. This poet uses her observations of animals, plant life, and weather to add depth and detail. In "Fog," the deep mist "moves across winter-weary lands // like a stampede of silent, silver-coated horses." In "Bare Tree in the Afternoon," one can "tell a storm is coming by the dark clouds / gathering like a herd of gray sheep." In "Pigeons," heads are "tucked into their necks, their chests / puffed like rising pastries." In the poem, "Rain," droplets are:

leaping like an acrobat
 in silver leotards, landing
 nimbly and gracefully
 on leaves and blossoms
 and the upturned faces
 of little children who have
 no makeup to run or hairdos
 to ruin.

Bits of small-town Americana resonate as the speaker beautifully recalls quotidian events involving her mother. In "Thread Count," a girl on a swing is "pumping my legs until I touched puffy / white clouds with the toes of my shoes, the squeak // of the metal chain steady as a metronome" while her mother hangs wet sheets to dry on a rope, "her hands moving across the line faster / than squirrels on telephone wire."

Empathy and generosity appear when the speaker comes across the masses or the unlucky. In "Fund Drive," a little girl from the Norman Rockwell painting knocks at her door selling "candy bars and / caramel-coated popcorn." The speaker has no need to purchase items but when the speaker tells the girl, "*I'll take two of these and one of those,*" the girl gives her father who is waiting on the sidewalk a "thumbs up sign" and he "grins like an outfielder to whom the ball has / finally come."

In the poem, "Yellow Table," the poet writes of pumpkin pie, innocence, and of "adding, never subtracting, from / our joy. Nothing terrible happened to us or would." The characters are young and untouched by the callous hand of fate. Erickson writes, "Yet, I am the / last to remember the bright yellow table."

Although many of Erickson's poems are about family, she is skilled at capturing characters of small towns. In "Stan's Place, the poet writes of Irma, "For real troublemakers, / Irma kept a custom-made pool cue at arm's / length and she was lightning-fast at wielding / it." In "Betty's Roadside Diner," the "waitresses look like sisters," and "the greasy air coats // your lungs slick as corn oil / in a cast-iron skillet." In a poem built of couplets, "A Rancher Buries His Wife," Erickson's compassion is apparent, "He would die of it, this loneliness. / Already his hands were curling up, his fingers // turning blue." Thus, in addition to nature poems that give us a sense of place, Erickson gives us a sense of people in that place. In "Making the Biscuits:"

By all accounts, she was a hard woman,
but Granny's biscuits were light as clouds—
soft in the center, crusty on top, perfect
for sopping up redeye gravy or Blackstrap

molasses. But first, she had to make them, day
after day, week after week, year after year—
before the sun rose over the distant trees, its face
round as the biscuit cutter she jabbed again
and again on the flour-dusted dough, her motions
quick as an adder, striking.

Besides Erickson's skills depicting characters in her poems, she presents scenes with visual detail, almost as collage. In "Photograph of a Friend," the poet paints with words. She writes that "On a "gray, cloud-covered morning, a woman / wearing heavy boots, pulls a cart packed with // hay." The poet adds, "Her copper hair is as vivid / as molten lava." The poem keeps flowing in subsequent couplets as if characters are on stage and we are looking upon a *mis-en-scène*.

The wider world is also part of small communities, especially regarding the injustices and pain. In "Hate Crime," Erickson describes the violence a teenager inflicted on an "Asian American / taking out his garbage." Our experiences with Covid-19 pointed out many inequities we may have missed in the past. In "The Doctor Who Dies of the Coronavirus After The Hospital Runs Out of Gloves" the poet pays tribute to the physician, while mourners sing the doctor's favorite aria, "as they carry him to the place where / there is no grief or sorrow—and no need for gloves at all."

Terri Kirby Erickson's collection pays homage to the past, place, and family. She begins "When I'm With You" by reminiscing, "It's like I'm eight years old, sitting in the back / of a moving car, my feet hanging out the window." Then she adds, "The people I love most are with me / so the world is as safe as a blanket tucked under / my chin." We can't go back, but we can remember and share via poetry.

Erickson captures varied places, often without naming them, as she writes of the idiosyncracies of communities. She describes life in the desert, and then life in Alaska in the poem, "Bear Watching in Katmai National Park." The speaker watches river water:

rushing over rocks in the places where sockeye
salmon swim upstream. They jump high

into the air like corn popping in a hot pan,
their silvery bodies glinting like mirrors. No

wonder hungry brown bears heave their furry
haunches out of the long grass, mumbling

and huffing as they make their way to the rapids—
all vying for the best spots.

To add a little levity, Erickson adds an unsuspecting love poem, "Loving You Burns Like Shingles." The poet writes that, even though "I need you

like bad brakes," when "you" step into a room, "my heart bumps its mouth / against the bowl of my ribs like a starving / goldfish."

Night Talks: New and Selected Poems by Terri Kirby Erickson delivers poems that shine with a magical assortment of voices in the poetry universe. You will enjoy spending time with this collection.

Both of these well-regarded poets help us appreciate that we are observers as well as participants, and that we are creatures who make wishes to remedy our losses. Michael Hettich writes in "The Ache," that "I might reverse the direction of extinctions / harrowing our planet, though I know that's only / a lazy man's dream." Terri Kirby Erickson begs in "Sunrise Avenue" to "Let me / have again, if only for an hour, everything I have lost."

Chagall, “The Woman with the Blue Face”

The woman with the
blue face dressed in white queen for a day takes for her husband this
man green in the spring of his fire his body so next to hers he is
inside her another part of her becomes his green splendor in the red
snapdragon garden of her belly and in the darkness of their together
the horse gallops across the rooftops of the village the shadows of
his hooves are midnight crescent moons on the ceiling of quiet desires
let us listen to the music laughter drunk full in our cups and let the
bull flick his tail at the fly and let the fish stumble up the stairs
spawning and let the bird fly yellow into night let the angel fly blue
forever into white as the neck of a swan parts the darkness as Moses
parts the sea as our hearts adjust to the vastness like a marble sized
teacup in the galaxy of a saucer its center heavy and hungry it drinks
all things in and it splits apart and becomes many instead of one

(Vol. 1, No. 1, 1994)

Quincy Troupe

The New Dream of Ghost Voices

where does breath go after flesh falls away from bone,
does it remember

perhaps it's there
tangled in the fog
of our willful erasure

where does breath go when we disrobing history
plunder the gold coin chests of enslaving
callous men loving mammon,
blinded by evil, the earth now a furnace,

can we still be reborn

beyond structure,
tongues re-creating themselves,
changing, fusing inside poetry,
rhythms evoked by drum masters'
onomatopoeia, cracking
shrapnel flying inside words,
the moon rising from its dark grave
above the promise death kept,
voices of redemption
within healing songs of light.
raising voices of redemption
above the promise death kept

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Counting on You

*I had to make my life count before it was too late
so I crossed the Atlantic on a rowboat.*

—*Guardian* headline

If I could forget how to count I would,

enjoy forgetting
that the species I am in

is petty and hierarchical and takes
the synecdoche approach,

where the hat stands in for the realm
most of the time.

If I were to cross the Atlantic on a rowboat
I might forget.

It would seem longer, I'm guessing,
a moment when

nothing but waves, and the self I
keep trying to reshape

or escape. I am going to focus on
the idea of salt,

the huge fronds of seaweed that die
and float the surface

spread across beaches like minor decorations—

shawls or earrings. I loved in us
the sense of fleeting, that I counted harder.

But what was there, really?

I'm guessing a few clumsy pieces of furniture,
though I never looked at them much.

I am guessing a window framing a sky
that was often muggy, muzzy, clouded by fires

or simple humidity, a tree that stood as if

a little proud, a tad frail,

bearing traces of what the wind
did to beat on it.

The rain, too,
the rare rain, which I'm sure I

must have noticed at least some
of those nights,

counting the drops, thinking
of horses.

As Samson

They never told me that the world
could crumble with the snip
of scissors, that the hulk of a man
withers with age, that to stop

someone's fate is like plucking a white hair—
gone and still constantly growing.
I've learned ways to stop knowing
when death comes, means to stifle what gnaws

like old hunger—a small lump
in my breast, my father falling
into that snowbank, clutching too late
at his heart. There is a method to walling

the ache. Take a needle stuck
into your bare chest, a nurse
checking the monitor, the doctor's
tool making a sharp click

as she retracts the small specimen.
You do not think of hours
lost with loved ones or walks in the dusk
of late summer. You imagine your hair

on the tiled floor, a razor. You conjure
the power of old symbols—
a gold star or mezuzah, mother's blood
or your thick curls that aligned

you with him: dead Israelite; dead martyr; resurrected
to author himself his stone burial
chamber. When I at last said goodbye
to my father, his face was contorted,

his skin cold. My mother and I
both went cold when we first saw
the chimneys loom at the crematorium.
Epigenetic memory they say,

intergenerational trauma. They say
the lump is only a fibroadenoma,
common in women my age, benign.
They insist a soul can wind its way

among the living, that Samson's name
means the sun, so when the sun
is straining on the lake before it sinks
behind the blue mountain, when

I no longer hear my father's voice,
or see his silver hair
thick on his head still when he died
as it was thick and dark

nearly his entire life—I say
that when I shave my hair,
I bring my house down over
me. This is the only song

I know of burial—no furnaces,
no pyres. This is the way
the mountain grieves, the violet sky
keening, drawing itself around

the tender baldness of the sun.

Keeping Our Small Boat Afloat

So many blessings have been given to us
During the first distribution of light, that we are
Admired in a thousand galaxies for our grief.

Don't expect us to appreciate creation or to
Avoid mistakes. Each of us is a latecomer
To the earth, picking up wood for the fire.

Every night another beam of light slips out
From the oyster's closed eye. So don't give up hope
that the door of mercy may still be open.

Seth and Shem, tell me, are you still grieving
Over the spark of light that descended with no
Defender near into the Egypt of Mary's womb?

It's hard to grasp how much generosity
Is involved in letting us go on breathing,
When we contribute nothing valuable but our grief.

Each of us deserves to be forgiven, if only for
Our persistence in keeping our small boat afloat
When so many have gone down in the storm.

(Vol. 28, No. 1, 2021)

Robert Bly

The Lion and the Lioness

When the land whitens with winter,
You say, "I am lonely,"
Or "I need more than this,"
Or "What will I do now?"

The lonely man keeps living,
Half-starved and empty.
The lion with his ratchety teeth
Mounts the old yellow lioness.

(Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995)

Fifteen-Year Blow

Then, one spring, out of the hearsay of her mother,
the girl turned thirteen. The boys dribbled out
on blacktop, thousands of their shots
rimming in and out. Each evening,
from the neighbor's yard, they whispered

her name: Therese, Theresa, pagan for gathering
the plenty in. Before the police came,
behind the Amtrak, they queued up
for the loneliness of what they otherwise
took in hand. Some pure immensity

haunted them down to the slug of the river.
Above the rising, the falling of her black hair,
the locks opened, the Mohawk cracked
its back toward Schenectady and Albany
and towns as far away as that. No one

ever told her, even then she guessed:
For anyone who dared ever to leave
her own loved city, love was surely banned.
Any fool knew that.
So, she swallowed the salt of her own solitude,

the only seed she would ever know
of pleasure's hard hour as it clanged
off the boards of a shared bed,
of the thick men those wired boys
slackened into. Fifteen years ago, and now

in the 5 & 10, the 7-Eleven, in the nick of time,
only the luckiest of the bunch
breathes the stench of that first shot
when he runs into her again, the Mohawk
swelling in May's hot spring, the fat girl

panting hard, his friends all laughing.
As for the rest of them, in the face of all
they came to call love, whatever they told

their fathers they have hidden, now,
from the mothers of their slight daughters,

how they caught, in that season,
the foreign tongue of what
they didn't quite know was gathering,
the lilt of their own voices, the bark
of their own heads, the world gone small

in the smelt of someone else's mouth.
Now the men, in their yards each evening,
douse the perennials their wives dig,
water them down in the earth's split skin
of an August drought. They hose them near

the stoked coals of their backyard grills.
A couple of beers and more, more
than they know,
they've drilled the cracked root
of what one name might soften now.

Bad Bone Rising

I once made love to a woman and when she came
She cried more to herself than to me,
You bastard, you fucking bastard! And sometimes

She said it in Italian. It seemed the strangest thing,
The sheer delight of what she uttered as the fission
Of a shared spasm broke to the moment after.

But when I asked her, there was only laughter.
Dead when she was 55, all her life she framed
Her native state as it went skipping lightly by

Block houses on the city of a girlhood street.
Her father smoked a stogie, punctuated the air,
Shouted at the nightly Power Ball the one missed

Digit that would make him a millionaire. It was
The summer of the fire. Philly, 1985. She kept
Another artist in England. Together we simmered

In the long room of her welcome. Then they
Bombed them from the air, the mothers,
The armed fathers, all the dead children. The stone

Dirge of 61 houses. When the city went on a wilding
I would never soon forget, I also never remembered
Except as I slept by the small oil she gifted me.

Now, for no reason I can ever quite answer
Whenever I feel the litany of my own poverty,
Bone spurs prodding my right ankle, the jolt

Of my right hip, not even Tai Chi can help me,
Not even in the stripped dark of Taichung City.
My luck, my licks, just as I never wanted it,

That sweet wilderness. The bad bone rising,
The barometric pressure, the clef of that measure,
Sotto voce in the first tongued light of day.

J. W. Bonner

Love's Passionate Eternity: The Poems of Catullus

Eros weaver of myths,

Eros sweet and bitter,

Eros bringer of pain.

—Sappho #100, trans. by Guy Davenport

you burn me

—Sappho #38, trans. by Anne Carson

I hate and love. Why? You may ask but

It beats me. I feel it done to me, and ache.

—Catullus #85, trans. by Ezra Pound

Love Poems of Catullus ed. by Tynan Kogane. New York: New Directions, 2023. 96 pp. \$13.95, paper. ISBN 978-0-8112-3749-3

Catullus: Selected Poems translated by Stephen Mitchell. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2024. 168 pp. \$26, cloth. ISBN 978-0-300-27529-2

No poet has ever portrayed so abundantly and vividly the excesses of passion, especially erotic fervor, as Catullus. He's not the crusty Roman poet of Virgilian verse; he's not some bloody boor of a bureaucrat, or a pusillanimous, long-winded politician; instead, Catullus wrote, in the time of Julius Caesar, some of the most vivid verses about love since Sappho. Those two poets, one writing in Greek and the other in Latin, loom over all subsequent efforts to depict love's ecstasies and agonies. (What Catullus accomplishes in four or six lines took Proust six volumes and thousands of pages.)

Two recently published volumes bring to a modern audience the joys of Catullus's shorter poems, mostly a series of his invectives or paeans to sweet seduction. Stephen Mitchell's *Catullus: Selected Poems*, provides the standard apparatus of an academic press—original Latin facing the English translation, superb Notes and Bibliography (though lacking one of Catullus's newer translators and scholars, Daisy Dunn's 2016 complete collection, from which the New Directions volume draws two), an index of first lines in Latin and in English—while in substance collecting the poems which amuse and delight Mitchell—those, he writes in his insightful Introduction, “that gave [him] pleasure—the ones [he] thought... the best.” (And the best, as with the New Directions versions, generally run no longer than a page, usually half.) The New Directions *Love Poems* volume, small enough to carry in a jacket pocket, is, notwithstanding its size, the more far-ranging in scope, both in variety and approaches to translation. Further, in providing glosses of works from Shakespeare to Byron that are placed in proximity to the standard translations, the reader observes with immediacy

the influence of Catullus extending through centuries of English language literature.

Over his career, Mitchell has translated a small library of books, including the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, *Gilgamesh*, *Beowulf*, Rilke, and Neruda. In choosing from Catullus's poems, Mitchell works mostly the love poems, fueled by, as he writes in the Introduction, Catullus's "[foul] mouth" and "testosterone." Lesbia, the acclaimed lover in many of these poems, believed to have been married to a Roman of means, was so named by Catullus, Mitchell writes, "because the women of Lesbos had the reputation of being beautiful"—and this name connects Catullus's work with Sappho's.

Poem #86 posits Lesbia's beauty as something carnal: in comparing Quintia's classical qualities of beauty—"fair skinned, tall, / and well built"—to Lesbia's, the poet makes the emphatic point: Quintia, in contrast with Lesbia, lacks "one grace or hint of sexual joy." There's a heat to Lesbia that radiates a beauty Catullus finds irresistible.

Poem #5, a kissing poem, has the poet beseeching the lover for "a thousand / kisses," but that's not enough in number: he adds "a hundred others, / then a thousand, and then another hundred." Still insufficient: "once we have added tens of thousands / let's go bankrupt and cancel the whole number," Catullus writes, profligate, insatiable, ravenous as a mythological beast. (Sappho's #72, in Guy Davenport's translation, depicts a similar animal appetite: "And I yearn / And I hunt.")

That sense of erotic voracity is found in #32, when the poet asks to join his lover at her "afternoon siesta":

Just make sure the door's unlocked, and don't go
anywhere for a stroll, not even briefly,
but stay home and prepare yourself for me and
nine delirious bouts of nonstop fucking.
(If you're busy, then let me come right now: I'm
lying down after breakfast, going crazy,
punching holes through my underwear and tunic.)

But Bliss's Bower may be uprooted, and Catullus's scorn, withering. In #11, he asks two "comrades" to carry a message to his estranged mistress: "I wish her a happy life with / all three hundred studs whom she fucks at one go, / truly loving none of them but forever / draining them dry... // ...my love is now dead, a flower / fallen at the edge of a field, the ploughshare's / blade slicing through it." Three images of autumnal deadness: lovers "[drained] dry," "a flower / fallen" and ploughed under at the end of the growing season, and the poet's love. In #58, he bemoans that his former

lover “now gives handjobs in crossroads and back alleys / to the decadent progeny of Rome.” Yet, an ember buried amidst love’s ashes gives some heat nonetheless, or else why bother with decrying her at all?

That sense of love’s feeling smoldering under seeming indifference is one of Catullus’s truths: in #83, Lesbia’s invectives against the poet are “proof / that she can’t get me out of her mind”—further proof, as the poem concludes, that “she’s burning with passion” for him. No passion—no love, no hate—for what leaves us indifferent. Strong emotions erupt from what we value, from what’s sacred and dear to us—from what gives our lives meaning.

Eros’s heat, positive and negative, finds ample fuel in the poems collected in *Love Poems of Catullus*. And here’s where the pleasures of the New Directions collection emerge: two versions of #83 are displayed on consecutive pages—a rendering by Horace Gregory that attempts a faithful version, that approximates the strengths of Mitchell’s translation, and then a version by the poet Deborah Lasky (whose work in this volume is a revelation to me and has sent me to her own poems) that is all spine:

Lesbia speaks evil
 To a man
 About me
 Igniting his sagging jollies
 You jackass
 You know nothing
 If her mind were quiet
 And clear of me
 She would say little
 Instead she fumes
 Over me
 She burns for me

Lasky’s closing line invokes Sappho’s heat, and the Lasky version manages to be even more succinct than Catullus (39 words to the original’s 43).

For succinctness, for making Catullus’s poems her own, Anne Carson’s contributions (there are eight, the most of any contributor) shine. We examined the Mitchell translation of #86 above, six lengthy lines; here is Carson’s version in full:

There was a whiteness in you.
 That kitten washed in another world look.
 Good strong handshake for a girl but.
 But.

But. Not quite equal to Lesbia. (And is Carson punning here, allowing Catullus's speaker to prefer one ass to the other?)

Context embedded in translation is a strength of *Love Poems of Catullus*. For example, Mitchell, in #104, though sticking to the original's Latin text, must use a note to aid the reader's understanding; the Mitchell version's closing line references, as in the original, Tappo (Mitchell)/Tappone (Catullus). Mitchell's note explains that this name may refer to an Italian farcical, clown-like figure, akin to our Bozo. Roz Kaveney, in the New Directions volume, simply and adroitly uses that context to render the conclusion for the reader without need for further explication: "But you'll say what you want to put her down, / snarl like a monster, giggle like a clown."

Shakespeare, the juxtapositions in *Love Poems of Catullus* demonstrate, thieved several of his sonnets' themes and images from Catullus, just as Catullus had borrowed from Sappho. Other examples further the charms of the New Directions approach. Poem #87, for example, is rendered by Horace Gregory:

No woman, if she is honest, can say that she's
 been blessed with greater love, my Lesbia,
 than I have given you;
 nor has any man held to a contract made
 with more fidelity
 than I have shown, my dear,
 in loving you.

Facing Gregory's translation is John Donne's "Love's Infiniteness":

If yet I have not all thy love,
 Deare, I shall never have it all.
 I cannot breathe one other sigh, to move,
 Nor can intreat one other teare to fall,
 And all my treasure, which should purchase
 thee,
 Sighs, teares, and oaths, and letters I have
 spent.

(Another sense of bankrupted passion!) And one more translation by C. H. Sisson follows, so that the reader ends these three renderings with a closer version of the Latin original.

There is a minor annoyance with the New Directions book; the size of the pages, though delightful for ease of travel, means that lines are enjambed, and it takes a while to realize that some line breaks are functions of the

page dimensions rather than poet. But that quibble pales against the greater delights of the (frequently surprising!) voices rendering, and inspired by, Catullus: James Laughlin, Pound, Dorothy Parker, Muriel Spark, A. E. Stallings, Bernadette Mayer, Cid Corman, Samuel R. Delaney, Dunn, Carson, Lasky, among others—not to mention Shakespeare and the rest. Catullus's poetry inspires because what his poetry describes is life in the fullness of its interior passions.

The poems in both volumes depict for the reader the intensity of love, its pleasures and its pangs, its sweetness and sorrow. Kenneth Rexroth thought Catullus's lines "possibly untranslatable" (*More Classics Revisited*); Rexroth could point to no translation that did justice to the range and the art of the poet. Catullus's "sensibility," Rexroth suggested, was maybe only found "in the lyrics of Bob Dylan." (Today, then, would Rexroth go beyond the Nobel Laureate to the lyrics of The National or Taylor Swift or Chappell Roan or, perhaps best of all, Olivia Rodrigo, with her songs' combination of invective and longing?) Love has hurt for a literary eternity, and Catullus's poems, these two slim volumes, provide a measure of solace against the irony that what moves us so deeply may yet prove fickle as fate.

Encore

After Eluard

I love you for all the men I do not love
and for those I adore,

for the crackle of croissants
and the perfume of escargots,

for *Macho Macho Man*
at Café St. Victor

and the snobs
at Librairie Compagnie,

for *les chats françaises*
et *les chats américains*,

for all the Frenchmen whose beauty
tossed in olive oil

cannot equal the taste of yours.
I love you to love.

I love you for your silences,
but I prefer your songs.

I love you for your wisdom,
mostly in your arms.

Tell me who you haunt
and I'll tell you who you are.

You haunt me like a summer hit.
Replay me on your lips.

I love you for all the wine
I have not tasted.

I love you to stay drunk
on love,

ENCORE

Like Baudelaire and Arthur,
but breathing.

(Vol. 23, No. 1, 2016)

“I married...”

I married

in the world's black night
for warmth

if not repose

At the close—

someone.

I hid with him

from the long range guns.

We lay leg

in the cupboard, head

in closet.

A slit of light

at no bird dawn—

Untaught

I thought

he drank

too much.

I say

I married

and lived unburied.

I thought—

(Vol. 7, No. 1, 2000)

Promiscuous

“Mixes easily,” dictionaries
used to say, a straight shot from the Latin.
Chemists applied the term to matter’s
amiability.

But the *Random House Dictionary*
(1980) gives as its prime meaning:
“characterized
by frequent and indiscriminate

changes of one’s sexual partners.” Sounds
like a long way
to say “slut,” that glob of blame we once threw
equally at men and women, all who slurred,

slavered, slobbered,
slumped, slept or lapsed, slunk or relapsed, slackened
(loose lips sink ships) or slubbed, or slovened, But soon
a slut was female. A much-bedded male.

got called a ladies’ man; he never slept
with sluts. How sluts
got to be sluts is thus a mystery,
except the language knows what we may

have forgot. “Depression” began its career
in English in 1656, says
the *OED*,
and meant (science jargon) the opposite

of elevation—a hole or a rut,
perhaps, or, later, “the angular
distance of a celestial object
below the horizon,”

as *Webster’s Third* (1963)
has it. There’s ample record of our self-
deceit: language,
the furious river, carries on its foamed

and sinewed back all we thought we'd shucked off.
Of course it's all
pell-mell, head over heels, snickers and grief,
love notes and libel, fire and ice. In short:

promiscuous.

Robert Morgan

In Memory of William Matthews

A veteran insomniac,
if you had ever slept, you could not
have read so much and thought so much
and written so many pages.
Even awake, the rest of us
were never as awake as you.
I was in awe of your alertness
and your articulateness. I've
never met another who talked
so long and well. Tradition meant
a lot to you. You were a connoisseur
of wines, of things Italian, of
custom shoes, who would forget
to match or even to wear socks.
Of our generation you were the most
generous behind the mask of irony.
What is there to say now you are dead?
You were both old before your time
and younger than the rest of us.
That meant a lot to me, that
and your enthusiasm for words
and your quick snarls about the nature
of nature poetry. Bill,
wherever you are now, I'm sure
you're laughing at the way we poets
take ourselves so seriously.
And I concede the fault, except
I want to say I took you seriously
and was not wrong. Your death keeps on
astounding me with jolts of sadness,
as I think I'll never hear your voice
again or get a letter filled
with needled gossip. The book is now
both closed and open, the last
dinner and last jazz savored
in the fine hours over brandy
and smoke that hung like incense in
a Hindu temple everywhere
you lived. I want to note that you
were loved and that your work is loved

and will be. That's the final flower
I bring to lay at the place of
memory, even as I hear you snicker
beyond the wall of silence: Send
no flowers, bub, but maybe some
good claret might not be unwelcome.

(Vol. 19, No.1, 2012)

Mary Makofske

First Place, 2024 William Matthews Poetry Prize Winner

Sex, That Peacock

*Urge, and urge, and urge,
always the procreant urge of the world.*
—Walt Whitman

1.

At Four Feet Two
the acne-plagued employee
spread the hind legs of gerbils
to peer at their furry, pinhead
genitals. Though we requested
a pair of females, hoping for quiet
spinsters wringing their hands
over clutter, in mere weeks a litter
appeared, pinkish worms with knobs
for ears, all mouth, looking born
too soon. That wasn't the worst,
foreseeing an endless cycle
of generation. The male,
driven by some urge more raw
than hunger, turned on his offspring
like a protagonist in Greek drama,
leaving here and there a severed
head or barely visible paw.

2.

No such confusion with the peacock
unfurling his flashing bouquet of eyes,
and the peahen drab in camouflage colors.
How easily the tiger's hunger wakes
to the heavy train that slows
the peacock's awkward flight.
Such glamour serves only mating.
His life doesn't need to be long.

3.

The young male who enters
 class with spikes of violet,
 lacquered hair and sits behind
 the female in scarlet sweater
 yesterday camouflaged his crest
 in a derby and wore a morning coat
 instead of the studded leather jacket
 he sports today. He's trumped
 the poet in ruffled shirt whose dark
 curls shield his face and tumble
 to his shoulders. Each day the others
 scan the doorway for their entrance,
 displays that vibrate through the room
 like the mating roar of a crocodile.

4.

What brands the mated?
 Ring, locket, baggy letter jacket,
 blue bruise on the cheek.
 In my office, she shifts
 in the chair, explains
 why the essay is late.
 Books strewn in the drive,
 Emergency Room, concussion.
 She brushes advice aside.
 You know how hard it is
 to find a guy? All she wants
 is to have a child.

5.

The anglerfish sports from her head
 a rod to lure prey. Under her belly,
 the minute male clings like an afterthought,
 just large enough to provide the sperm
 she needs. No lesson here—each quirk
 of evolution fits its niche.
 Male fish that opens his mouth

to hide his offspring from predators,
alligator that devours his own young,
elephant aunties forming a ring around
the wounded orphan, female spider
whose after mating meal is her spouse.

6.

Stalking the aisles, the invisible peacock
dazzles. My students' glances ricochet
around the room. (How many times
do students think about sex
during one class hour?) The peacock sweeps
the floor with its train, ignoring me, flicking
its gaze to their piercings, tattoos,
how they mark the territory of their bodies,
how they publish the pain they can endure.
Clicking its nails on the linoleum, snaking
its neck, at last unfurling its deck of eyes
that deals their future. How can they resist
its extravagant cries, the brush
of its feathers against their shoulders?

Second Place, 2024 William Matthews Poetry Prize Winner

Only in Darkness Can You See the Stars

1.

I can hear them now, the distant voices
of field workers singing in the noonday sun,
I'll be so glad when the sun goes down.
Choir singing in Ebenezer Baptist Church,

I'll be ready when the Great Day comes.
Little Willie Farmer singing the blues
on town square on a summer afternoon,
What did I do now baby to make you cry?

The town square I stand on in Duck Hill
as a breeze blows through the empty streets
past a row of boarded-up stores. Nearby,
the Lloyd T. Binford High School is locked up,

a shrine to the time the fields near town
were alive with workers. A time when
the peace of an April afternoon in 1937
was broken by a bus arriving from Winona

with Roosevelt Townes and Bootjack McDaniels
on board, both just arraigned for the murder
of Gerald Windham, a merchant shot
in his store while he ate a sandwich for lunch.

Twelve white men dragged the pair from the bus,
chaining each to a tree as a crowd of 500
gathered to watch. A blowtorch to McDaniels—
and he confessed before being shot in the head.

A blowtorch to Townes—and he too confessed.
Pictures of the bodies appeared
in newspapers across the country.
On the tracks beside me the *City of New Orleans*

still runs daily, its whistle wailing as it speeds through town. A sound as haunting as voices echoing across the fields, across the years, from the sudden horror of an April afternoon.

2.

While a Wurlitzer plays, uninterrupted by title cards, the motion picture's story unfolds

in black and white. In close-ups, Lillian Gish's face glows, a vision as romantic

as officers dancing waltzes until dawn before they leave great rooms to join

columns of soldiers marching off to war. But the lie is real: how the villain,

played in blackface, cannot control his lust for a young white girl, the mere threat

driving her to leap from a cliff to her death. How the black mob turns menacing

only to be defeated by an army of men dressed in white sheets and wearing hoods.

Critics called it "the greatest picture ever made." On an evening in 1915 in The White House

when, after three hours and thirteen minutes, the music stopped and the last image faded,

President Wilson applauded the special screening, an act he would deny.

Two years later, in New York City, ten thousand black people walked in silence down Fifth Avenue.

Women and children, all dressed in white,
marched at the front of the Silent Parade.

3.

The darkness of the night
is the darkness in the hearts
of the men assembled in a clearing
near the banks of the Warrior River.

They have come from towns
with names like Dora and Cordova
to stand under a full moon
shining down on a summer night.

They surround a bonfire built
from planks and wooden boxes,
doused with gasoline and set ablaze
with a lit cigarette flicked from

the finger of a man wearing
a white robe, a black cloth belt
tied around his waist like a sash.
Most of the men wear street clothes,

having changed from the clothes
they dirtied putting in a day's work
in the cotton gin or coal mines.
The scent of lilac and honeysuckle

drifts in from the riverbank.
The men recite incantations
as if they were reading Bible verses
with the preacher on Sunday.

And there among them stands a man
— his tall, lean figure stooped over
from years of working in the mines—
who will often tell me he loves me

as only a grandfather can.
He has come here tonight

for the same reason as the others,
these men who have assembled around

a fire in a clearing near a riverbank
to profess their goodness
even as they contemplate the moment
when they will stop being good.

We shared a name, he and I,
— my middle name is his first—
creating a bond that came to be imbued
by stories my mother told me

of a passion we never shared
that drove him to leave his family
and stand among rancorous men
in the dark throes of a summer night.

4.

In the grainy kinescope Billie Holiday does not look
at the camera but at the studio audience. It is 1959.
She is appearing on a television show in London.
She has been singing “that song” for twenty years,
since she sang it each night at Café Society

to close out her set, a single spotlight fixed
on her face, the audience dead silent.
She was told not to record the song. She was told
not to perform the song. When she refused to obey
junk was planted in her hotel room

and she was sent off to prison. Fear of the song
consumed Hoover and others. If the song
took hold, if people listened, change would come.
So year after year she sang it, ignoring
her mother who warned she would be killed.

And on this night in London when she finished
you could almost see her frail body shake.
Within months, she would die in a hospital room

in Harlem, arrested and fingerprinted
on her deathbed while police guards stood watch.

5.

In Old Downtown Birmingham
in what was once Woodrow Wilson Park,
the Confederate Soldiers and Sailors Monument stands.
Its grey obelisk shape rises fifty-two feet.

It took a decade to create
before it was unveiled in 1905.
More than one thousand people marched
to commemorate its dedication. In its cornerstone

a sealed box contains a Bible and a Confederate flag.
The stone's north face features an inscription
honoring the dead service men:
"The manner of their death was the crowning glory of their lives."

Later that year, in October,
President Roosevelt spoke at the monument.
He was welcomed to the city, he said,
by an honor guard of veterans of the Civil War,

"the men who wore the blue,
"the men who wore the gray, forever united."
Through the years, the monument remained
as marchers were attacked by police dogs in the Children's Crusade,

as King wrote his letter in the Birmingham Jail,
as the peacefulness of a Sunday morning
was shattered by a bomb exploding in a church.
Tonight, I stand here alone.

I imagine the clamor made earlier
by city workers who arrived under cover of darkness
to unfurl a black plastic tarp they tried to drape
over the monument until they gave up

and brought in plywood to construct around the structure
the huge wooden box I stare at now,

as if history can be hidden
by sheets of plywood nailed into the shape of a box,

as if a nation can forget the sin
that led to a war that will never end.
Eventually, I turn to go, confident in time
the monument will be uprooted and carried off,

though removing it may not prove
to be the healing balm so longed for.
The sins of the fathers may not always
be absolved by the actions of the sons.

Only in darkness can you see the stars.
And as a breeze blows through the city
I walk the deserted streets in silence
under a cloudless sky radiant with stars.

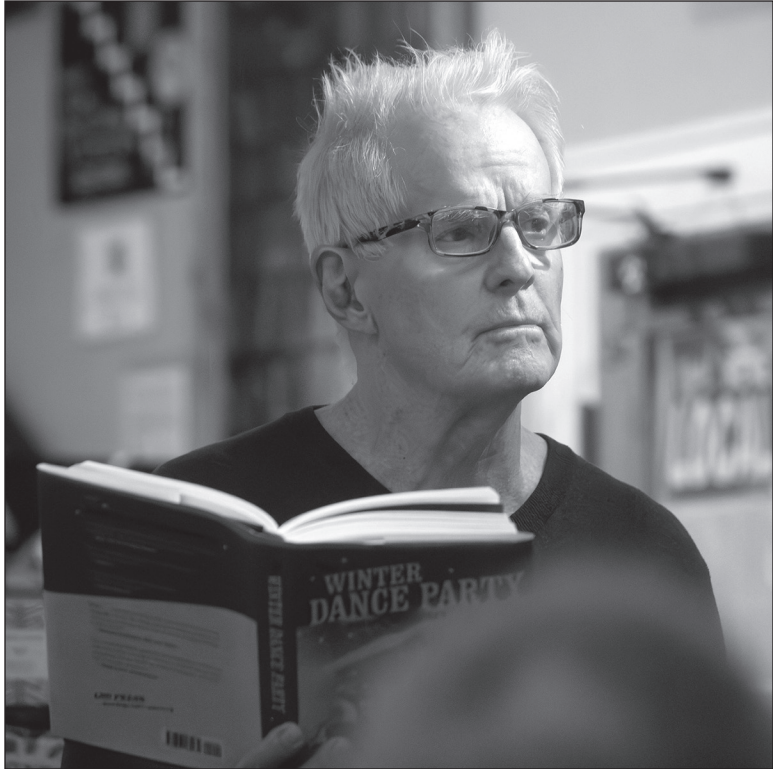
Third Place, 2024 William Matthews Poetry Prize Winner

Daylight Savings Poem

after Tishani Doshi

Because this is a daylight savings poem
expect to find the words firefly, hackberry,
beefsteak describing tomatoes or biceps;
deciduous swamps, lily pads, cattails
guarding the paper-thin eggs of red-winged
blackbirds. Expect to hear a lot about
the consolation of “nature” as in American
beech trees and sugar maples in slanted light.
Listen for the tymbals of dog day cicadas,
resurrected for two weeks after seventeen years
in the dirt. Watch the thunder-struck light fall
and fall on steeples and belfries, on porches
and rocking chairs, on Chevys and Schwinn.
Because a big part of you wants
to be consoled you may choose
to wallow in home-canned applesauce
and the late evening air that pauses
on its way through the Sabbath curtains.
But let me tell you how little is written
of the mania of overflowing daylight
or what it actually saves. About
the sucking sound of hooking a bluegill’s eyeball
for bait and how, by evening, the pond’s become
a piggy bank of writhing, one-eyed coins.
So much of daylight savings
has to do with the sun’s steady bludgeoning,
until every tomato becomes a toddler’s head
and every boy a feral action figure,
jeans splitting at the crotch. Come.
Now lick your Dairy Queen soft serve. Plunge
your tongue into the middle of the whole
melting mess. There is more to taste
and see—notice the two-backed frogs
clasping in the forest like obscene
garden statuary, the entire insomniac horizon
with its chattering lightning over an unrelenting

flatness. The mosquitos who sense the exhaust emerging from your pores. Notice how hardly anyone mentions the word sex, even though the swamp cooler never stops sweating, the bed sheets never dry, and the rain keeps on with its lispig pillow talk. In this technicolor congregation of steaming greenness, look at us boys—offspring of the remnant-saved—as we arm ourselves with slingshots and go in search of Philistine possums in need of slaying. The glutted light has nowhere left to go, so it whispers into our ears and blinds us and makes us gag on the never-ending now. And just who did the daylight save? you might ask after the clocks have fallen back and we are able to sleep at last. No one of course. We dream in the early dark of laying down between rows of corn, how the sun once tassle-shattered our skin. We forget how unforgivably the old hymns led us to believe the light was only and always ours.



David Kirby

Hustled Into a Waiting Car

When you ask your mom what it was like
when she lost your dad, she says it seemed
as though their life went by so quickly,
that for a minute, he was right there beside her,
and when you ask her what happened then, she says
well, that car was waiting, and he got in it,
and before you can say what car she asks if you

remember that time when you were in your twenties
and she told you she was so unhappy when she was
that age because she'd married your father
instead of running off to Hollywood with a boy
she'd known in high school, and you say yes,
you do remember, and back then you wished
you'd had the ability to time-travel so you could

fly to Brookly in 1983 and tell her to head west,
even though that meant you'd have never been born,
and your mother says, "I'm so glad you didn't!"
and "your father didn't know he'd disappoint me."
Besides, after a while, he didn't," and as
she says that, you remember how in one
of your science classes the professor said

that Einstein was on a train to Bern in the spring
of 1905 when he realized that for the speed of light
to remain constant no matter how fast one moves,
space and time must contort to keep the speed
of light constant. "A storm broke loose in my mind,"
Einstein recalled, and that's what you'd want
for your parents, for yourself, to be hustled into

a waiting car the way people are in the movies:
you're walking to work in your coat and hat
with your purse and sensible shoes when suddenly
a stranger grabs you by the arm and hustles you
into a waiting car and zoom, off you go to your new life,
although you don't know what that is yet.
"I wanted to be in love, if only for a little while,"

says your mother. “We were like everybody else,
I guess. I said the ugliest things to him!”
“Did he say them to you?” you say.

“No, but he thought them. You can tell.
And after that, we were in love a long time.
A long, long time.” You can’t explain
these things to somebody else, your mother says,

“they either happen to you or they don’t,”
and you think yeah, there’s a car idling by
the curb right now, but you can’t see who’s
driving—could be love, could be something
that you don’t have a name for, and here
you come, thinking about yourself, thinking
about your day and wondering, What’s next?

David Kirby

How to Pronounce Louise Glück's Name

My students are hopeless.
Glook, they say, or Gluck, which rhymes with “cluck.”

It's the umlaut that throws them.
They associate the umlaut with white supremacy groups.
Louise Glück is not a white supremacist, students!

But I know how they feel.
When I wear my Wu Tang Clan t-shirt in the park,
everyone points at my shirt and says, “Wu Tang!”
but when I wear my Hüsker Dü tee,
they edge away from me,
and no one points at my shirt and says, “Hüsker Dü!”

That's too bad.
Hüsker Dü was a great band,
and lead singer Bob Mould is one of my Elvii.
Hüsker Dü was a punk band,
meaning he and the other two musicians looked like thugs
and their songs were loud, fast, and deadpan.
They weren't Metallica.
Metallica had two airplanes full of equipment,
including washers and dryers, which flew from show to show,
one planeload of equipment leapfrogging the other.
Once Hüsker Dü were recording in the same studio
as Whitney Houston, who ordered huge deli platters
that she never touched,
and when she went home for the day,
Hüsker Dü ate Whitney Houston's cold cuts.

Hüsker Dü also espoused what they called the hot potato theory.
Bob Mould says, “It's like inspiration is a hot potato
you pull out of the oven and then toss to someone else.
So we listen, we become fans, we become inspired, we create,
and somehow the work we create eventually finds its way back
to the ones who inspired us.”

I don't think a lot of people know who Louise Glück is, either.
Louise Glück “shuns publicity,”
says the *New York Times* article that announced her appointment

as the 2003-2004 poet laureate.
 Also, she didn't work very hard at being poet laureate.
 Robert Pinsky started a project to record
 American's favorite poems when he was poet laureate.
 Billy Collins started a Web site to send a poem a day to high school students.
 Louise Glück said "she doesn't believe the poet laureate
 must create new programs," according to the *New York Times*.
 When her term was over, Louise Glück went back to being Louise Glück.

Louise Glück, you, too, are one of my Elvii!
 You are perfectly content with being Louise Glück!
 And why not?
 You won the Pulitzer Prize in 1993 and the Nobel in 2020.
 Lots of people win the Pulitzer,
 but not very many people win the Nobel Prize,
 or at least not very many anyone has ever heard of.

Who needs another service flooding your in-box every day with poems,
 most of which are crappy?
 And of course the best thing about being Louise Glück
 is that thousands of young poets adore her
 and listen to and are inspired by her
 and write their own poems and publish them
 so that anyone can read them, even Louise Glück.

You do you, Louise Glück.
 I love you as much as I love Bob Mould,
 maybe more.
 Bob Mould was a big nut,
 so I think about him when I want to be a nut.
 But you are steadfast and reliable,
 and so am I most of the time.
 I can always count on you, Louise Glück.
 You are rock solid.

Anyway, I know how to pronounce your name.
 That's because I was at a poetry reading in New York in 2003
 and saw you struggling to put on your coat
 and thought *This is my chance to find out
 how Louise Glück pronounces her name!*
 so I raced across the room
 and helped you with your coat
 and said, "My name's David Kirby"

HOW TO PRONOUNCE LOUISE GLÜCK'S NAME

and you said, “Louise Glück” and pronounced it “glick” like “click” or “kick.” No, wait: like “brick.”

To the Guy Who Just Sideswiped My Brand-New Corolla Hatchback

It was only a week old. My car was only a week old!

It was little and shiny and blue, and you hit it with
your big stupid Ford F-150. What do you need
such a big truck for? Not compensating for something,
are we? That's easy, I know, but since you sped away
and disappeared into the night, I have no idea
what you're really like, so I'm just going to describe

you the way I want to. You were probably drunk.

You probably either don't know about or don't
believe the findings of Dr. Peter Attia who says,
"Alcohol serves no nutritional or health purpose"
and even calls it "a potent carcinogen." You were
definitely drunk and I bet you have have terrible taste
in music as well. I bet you think you're all sensitive

and poetic when you hear a song that makes you want to
kiss somebody you don't know or storm
the Capitol or dance with somebody or get a stick
and whale the tar out of somebody else, and who
could blame you? Certainly not I, who grew up
thinking, like Lady Catherine de Bourgh
in *Pride and Prejudice*, that there are few people

"who have more true enjoyment of music than
myself or a better natural taste" until I learned
that specific musical keys trigger specific emotions,
something the great composers have known since time
immemorial: when Mozart or Beethoven or Schubert
composed a piece in A-flat minor, they were well aware
that this was the key of "grumbling, moaning, wailing,

suffocation of the heart, lamentations, life-long struggles,
and a negative look at life's experiences" and knew
that their audiences knew that as well, these terms being
those of Christian Schubart, whose 1806 treatise
Ideen zu einer Aesthetik der Tonkunst or *Ideas for an Aesthetic
of Musical Art* shaped the listening experiences

of 18th- and early 19th-century music lovers, at least those
who could read German. Very scientific and scholarly,
I'm so sure! Actually the Germans have a pretty decent
track record in the art world if not in other areas,
like world dominance. They did their best, but they didn't
reckon with Hedwig Kiesler, did they? Are you familiar
with Hedwig Kiesler? See, I knew you weren't.

She was a popular Austrian actress in the nineteen

thirties before moving to Hollywood and becoming
Hedy Lamarr, but you wouldn't know that, either,
would you, seeing as how, in addition to being drunk
and having terrible taste in music,
you probably think movies didn't even exist
until you were twelve and your parents took you
to see the first Marvel movie, which was as brainless

as the thirty-one Marvel movies that followed it,
even though Hedy Lamarr co-starred in one MGM
blockbuster after another and made (and spent)
\$30 million in her lifetime. Which is not important.
What is important is that in 1942 Lamarr developed
a new kind of communications system to send coded
messages: by then, both the Nazis and the Allies were

using a single-frequency radio technology that
allowed the enemy to find and intercept each other's
signals. Hedy Lamarr's innovation was to send
a message across a broad area of the wireless spectrum
so that if one part of the spectrum was jammed,
the message would still get through on one of the other
frequencies, though even she could not figure out

how to synchronize the frequency changes on both
the receiver and the transmitter until George Antheil
collaborated with her to synchronize the frequency changes
between receiver and transmitter, thus allowing torpedoes
and guided bombs to always reach their targets.

Sound familiar? Hell, no! Not to somebody like you,
who probably thinks history began the day

you were born, even though the same technology patented
by Hedy Lamarr and George Antheil is still used today

on wi-fi networks and in Bluetooth-enabled phones
 like that one you were probably using when you
 lost control of your stupid Ford F-150 while
 you were checking on some stupid sports score.
 Then again, maybe you weren't doing that at all.

Then again, each of us is unique, meaning each of us has
 a path to follow: once an interviewer asked Clint Eastwood
 if he was troubled by the fact that some critics said
 he was a one-note actor, to which the action-movie star
 said that may be, but there was a large and well-paying
 market for his talent, and while he probably couldn't
 do a creditable job with Hamlet, he couldn't imagine

Laurence Olivier playing Dirty Harry. Then again,
 it is just as true that, at the end of the day,
 we are all remarkably similar: as you were getting
 dressed this morning, did you not sniff yesterday's
 t-shirt and think either "All righty, then" or "I could
 wear this to the grocery store" or "*Mein Gott in Himmel*—
 I can't even wear this to the gym!" I sure did.

Maybe you're not a bad guy at all. Maybe you not only
 take your daughter to jujitsu but watch her as she
 practices instead of talking to the other dads,
 not only take your son to his basketball games but coach.
 Maybe there'd been a mishap and you were rushing
 a child to the ER the night you hit me. Hope things
 turned out okay. Nobody's perfect. Wait, wait,

I'm on the verge of forgiving you! Not going to happen,
 buddy. I know, I know: we're all human, right?
 We all make mistakes. Dr. Peter Attia says no one
 should ever drink alcohol under any circumstances
 but confesses that he himself enjoys a glass of wine or
 or shot of tequila from time to time
 and so urges his patients to limit their consumption
 of alcohol to fewer than seven drinks a week

or two drinks on a given day, noting that "I manage
 to do a pretty good job adhering to this rule myself."
 Thing is, you're a little human for my taste.
 Henry Fielding says "we are all as God made us,

and many of us much worse.” That’s you, pal.

You’re definitely in that second category.

Seriously, man, fuck you. You could have killed me!

By the way, I’m just assuming you’re a man.

This Great Tenderness: A Review of David Kirby's *The Winter Dance Party: Poems, 1983-2023*

Kirby, David. *The Winter Dance Party: Poems, 1983-2023*. Louisiana State University Press. Baton Rouge, LA. 2023. ISBN 978-0-8071-8244-4. 280 pp.

The Winter Dance Party tour is most remembered for the crash that killed Buddy Holly, J.P. Richardson, and Ritchie Valens, on February 3, 1959. David Kirby's four-page poem "The Winter Dance Party" includes one brief mention of this event: *Buddy Holly played his best set / the last night of the Winter Dance Party tour, / and then the little plane crashed in the Iowa cornfield*. The poem is mostly about a dog with a lampshade-like cone around his neck, desperate to sniff and lick the world while the poet enjoys a pastry and a day in a museum. It is a poem about hunger for life and passion for art, shadowed by a hovering sense of life's brevity. In other words, it is classic Kirby, and a most fitting titular poem for his latest raucous and moving collection.

In *The Winter Dance Party: Poems, 1983-2023*, the glaring light and sticky floor begins with the table of contents. Here is *Borges at the Northside Rotary, I Think I Am Going to Call My Wife Paraguay, Talking about Movies with Jesus, I Should Have It to You by Noon, Skinny-Dipping with Pat Nixon*.. Here is *Poetry is Full of Uncertainty These Days and for Good Reason*. Here is *The Little Sisters of the Sacred Heart*, the thick toes of their black shoes tapping.

Everyone is invited to this party.

Over the past 40-plus years, in 15 published books, David Kirby has stretched readers' notions of what a poem can do. In his preface to this collection, he describes his writing process: "I walk into a poem the way I walk out my door, which is to say I let the walk take me and not vice versa." This modesty and sense of adventure inform his poetry. He writes poem by poem rather than driven by project. He is committed to following each poem rather than leading it; that is, to let the poem reveal to him its own discoveries and depths, its own richer and wilder intelligence.

In "Taking It Home to Jerome" Kirby admits

Sometimes when I'm writing a poem,

I feel as though I'm operating that crusher that turns
a full-size car into a metal cube the size of a suitcase.

At other times, I'm just a secretary: the world has so much to say, and I'm writing it down. This great tenderness. (3)

The three foremost qualities of David Kirby's poetry are tenderness, tenderness, and tenderness, closely followed by humor and erudition.

The Winter Dance Party is the rare new-and-selected volume that does not chronologically represent each book, with a small selection of new poems grouped together. Over half of these poems are new; most have appeared in journals, but this is their first book publication. Kirby writes, "I put this book together not as an archival record, but with the reader's pleasure in mind" (xii). He intends for the book to read "the way a magazine does," that is, with poems—untethered from their publication history—arranged for flow and variety rather than for scholarly convenience. Fine teacher and scholar that he is, Kirby provides publication credits at the end of this volume. He also includes two brief essays as foreword and afterword, reflecting on his development as a poet and on his beliefs as to how a poet/poem ought to work.

Kirby claims no marked change in his poems across the years, neither in terms of subject nor style. His aim has always been to record what crosses his path. This is the markedly idiosyncratic path of a Southern, white, well-read and well-traveled, convivial English professor and family man, with a ready sense of humor and catholic tastes in food and music. In nearly all of his poems, Kirby is the ostensible narrator. Stylistically, he consistently writes the Ultra-Talk poem, a term coined by Mark Halliday in his review of Kirby's *House of Blue Light* (2000). Halliday describes Ultra-Talk poems as "wry, exuberant, talky, accessible.... They typically include detailed anecdotes, bits of pop culture culled from past and present, explicit references to books the narrator has read, and allusions to historical and literary figures" (Worley, online). Elvis, Derrida, Rossini, Galileo, James Brown, and Jesus are just a few of the figures who appear in Kirby's work. Humor further enlivens the mix.

Halliday dryly adds, "The art comes in weaving all these strands together" (Worley). The reader's pleasure in the Ultra-Talk poem is to be found not only in the wild perambulation, but also in the cerebral and self-conscious thrill of wondering Can a poem *do* this? Can a poet get away with this?

"More Than This" begins,

When you tell me that a woman is visiting the grave
of her college friend and she's trying not to get irritated
at the man in the red truck who keeps walking back and forth
and dropping tools as he listens to a pro football

game on the truck radio, which is much too loud, I start to feel as though I know where this story is going, so I say “Stop, you’re going to make me cry.” (157)

The stanza continues:

How sad the world is. When young men died in the mud of Flanders, the headmaster called their brothers out of the classroom one by one, but when the older brothers began to die by the hundreds every day, they simply handed the child a note as he did his lessons, and of course the boy wouldn’t cry in front of the others.... (157)

The stanza continues with a 22-line story about a cowboy entering heaven, followed by the poem’s ending:

You tell me your friend can’t take it any more, and she turns to confront the man who’s making all the noise, to beg him to leave her alone with her grief, and that’s when she sees that he’s been putting up a Christmas tree on his son’s grave and that he’s grieving, too, but in his own way, one that is not better or worse than the woman’s, just different, the kind of grief that says the world is so beautiful, that it will give you no peace. (158)

It is easy to imagine another poet deleting the final four lines. Ending with *grave* is almost guaranteed to produce that moment at a poetry reading when the audience audibly sighs, both moved and maybe a bit too proud of how moved they are, experiencing the poem as confirmation of their sensitivity. Kirby, instead, stretches this tender poem into what is essentially an intellectual place, a place much wider than personal grief. His poem is large. It contains multitudes.

One of the looming figures in Kirby’s pantheon is Walt Whitman. Here is the opening of “Walt Whitman Floors It”:

Walt Whitman, you should have been around
when the first cars were. Or wait, not the first:
Karl Friedrich Benz patented the first motorcar six years
before you took to your deathbed, but it was a novelty...

and was steered with a stick, like a toboggan.
 No, you should have been around for the sedan,
 the coupe, the hot rod, the heavy, aero-dynamic Chevy
 or Oldsmobile that burned rubber and outran cops
 (at least in the movies), that took Robert Mitchum
 down Thunder Road and carried Kerouac and Cassidy
 all the way to the coast (178).

From line one, Kirby floors it, using one of Walt Whitman's favorite techniques for accelerating a poem's momentum: the list. Readers have observed that Whitman's exuberant list, delightful for its music and content, further delights because the list's expansiveness suggests a world replete with other items that the poet might equally well have selected; that is, we sense a rich wide world beyond the poem. So it is with Kirby's poems, with their lists that not infrequently expand into playful examples, conjectures, riffs.

David Kirby is, by all accounts, an amusing fellow. For several decades, his humorous poems have expanded the possibilities for what a poem can accommodate. In 2010, he and Barbara Hamby—his talented and hilarious wife—edited the anthology *Seriously Funny: Poems About Love, Death, Religion, Art, Politics, Sex, and Everything Else*. The Introduction observes that much contemporary poetry lacks humor, and quotes Billy Collins explaining, "It's the fault of the Romantics, who eliminated humor from poetry. Shakespeare's hilarious, Chaucer's hilarious" (xiii)

Humor—and there are many types—generally works via unexpected shift or juxtaposition. As well as being deceptively intelligent and serious, and (one hopes) great fun, humor is disruptive. Humor threatens to derail the poem with new possibilities for development and complexity, not least tonal complexity. The sheer fun of the poem that employs humor is likely broadening the audience for poetry into the community beyond the academy, while it remains a hard sell to many literary institutions and long-established journals. David Graham regards Ultra-Talk poetry as a corrective to "theory-clotted verse, turgid political hectoring, and other varieties of aesthetic heavy-handedness" (online). Mark Halliday regards Ultra-Talk as welcome counterbalance to poetry that is "overly serious" (Worley, online).

In "Cinnamon Toast" Kirby pays homage to a college roommate who had a habit of accidentally burning toast, and then tossing it out of the dorm window:

...so if Ken

forked a dozen slices of burned cinnamon toast
out the window every third day or so,

there must have been people passing by
and being hit and saying to their friend,
You get hit by something?

And the friend bends down and picks
up this flat square and turns it over

and smells it and says,

Yeah. It's a piece of cinnamon toast.... 36)

At this point in their poem, many poets might decide that they had exhausted this subject. They would be satisfied to leave the reader to conclude, well, ok, toast happens. But Kirby decides to push, because it's fun and exciting to push, to discover. The scene shifts to sometime later, when two unidentified strollers encounter the crusty phenomenon:

things have been up and down
in their lives lately, but they're down now,
that's for sure, and they're thinking, God,
why bother, and then the first piece

of toast hits them on the shoulder...
and another piece lands in the bushes
a few feet away... (37)

Eventually, *they take a little nibble, / and it's not so bad, and they walk home / munching the warm cinnamon toast...*(38). That night, before drifting off to sleep, they each tell their lover about the toast. Who wouldn't? Then Kirby deftly launches into the poem this out-of-the-blue final stanza:

[I]n fact this [toast missile] is the type
of thing you want to happen when nothing
is fun anymore and you know
you have to make a change but you don't
know how, and you can't help thinking,
There's got to be more to life than this. (38)

This goofy poem seems to have slipped into another register. And the poet trusts the reader to reside there, uncomfortably.

The quintessential Kirby poem might be “Look, Slavs,” which begins:
(219)

Remember when you were a child and somebody said
“Slav” and you thought they said “slob” and wondered
if the two words were the same and then realized they
weren’t
but thought they might be connected in some way and that
maybe Slavs are messy and throw their underpants on the
floor... (219)

After more examples of imagined Slavic slovenliness, the poet manages to include definition, thumbnail history, reference to Freud, and also directly addresses the Slavs:

...What are Slavs, anyway? Answer:
an Indo-European ethno-linguistic group who speak the Slavic

languages, even though the members of that group are diverse
both genetically and culturally, and relations between them
are varied, ranging from a sense of connection to mutual
feelings
of hostility. Why, though? Listen, Slavs: your ancestors spoke
the same languages you do and shared cultural traits and
historical

backgrounds—why can’t you get along? I know, it’s because
of what Freud called the narcissism of small differences, or
“the need to distinguish oneself by minute shadings and to
insist,
with outsize militancy, on the importance of these shadings.”

But Marie Curie was a Slav, and so were Tolstoy and
Tchaikovsky.

Why not bond in pride over these illustrious predecessors? (219)

This poem now is just shy of midpoint. The next several stanzas revel in imagined details of life in the Doge’s court in 16th century Venice, where, in fact, the Doge hired Slavs for protection. Venetians would have been looking out for themselves, whereas the Slavs, hopelessly outsiders, proved dependably loyal. Kirby turns from the court, abruptly concluding his poem:

Only Slavs
can save us. Only people who aren't us can tell us who we
are. (220)

In the afterward to *The Winter Dance Party*, Kirby says that sometimes people ask him why he doesn't write political poems. He corrects them: his poems seldom announce themselves as political. He cites "Look, Slavs" as a rare instance of an overtly political poem, and points to its final lines as "a ringing call for diversity" (273). He continues, "See? Politics. But I began with word play. Politics only came up after I let my poem tell me what it wanted to be." He adds, "Recently someone described himself to me as a 'poet of protest,' meaning he thought he knew what he was doing" (274). Kirby's main objection to this protest poet is that they probably *did* know what they were doing, and that, instead, they should get out of their poem's way. Kirby may actually admire the poetry of this particular poet/generation, but he believes that their poem deserves greater dimension.

Over forty years of publication, Kirby's influence runs far beyond the Ultra-Talk style he shares, to various degrees, with near contemporaries Albert Goldbarth, Mark Halliday, Denise Duhamel, and Barbara Hamby. There are legions of poets who display Kirbyan influence. Kendra DeColo, Diana Goetsch, and Lisa Lewis come to mind for their energized voice and smart humor. The poems of Ross Gay, Kelli Russell Agodon, and Julie Marie Wade pop with Kirbyan pop culture and reference. The expansive narrative of the Kirby poem informs the poetry of Dana Roeser and Al Maginnes, who writes a restless and tender narrative that embraces meditation.

But Kirby's greatest influence on contemporary poetry may be his long championing—by practice—of clarity, accessibility. Kirby dares to be understood and understood by an audience beyond poets. One might imagine that in his classroom he presents the provocative notion that, pretty often, simple language conveys complex ideas, while complex language masks simple ideas. The Kirby poem eschews experimental form, punctuation, and typography, instead deploying language—colloquial, pop culture catch-phrases past and present—in declarative statement, albeit often in sentences baroque with syntactical panache and improbable leaps and turns. Readers always know what is happening in a Kirby poem, even if they cannot quite believe that a poem can, well, *do* this.

One of the new poems in *The Winter Dance Party* is short enough to quote in its entirety. "Van Gogh," in a single brief stanza, manages to tell a nearly untellable story, then make a stunning leap. It begins:

I say, “How was your summer?” and you say,
“We had our ups and downs,” and I say,
“Well, I hope it was more ups than downs,”
and you pause for a moment, and then you say,
“Liam died,” and before I can bite my tongue off,
you tell me about the bike, the stop sign,
the distracted driver, the call to you,
the call from you to your wife, your parents, hers,
the service, the stunned look on the faces
of Liam’s friends, the look the grownups
gave you, the sense you got that they, too,
were devastated yet felt lucky and guilty
about their luck. I let you talk,
though as I did, I imagined you getting the call
and looking around and realizing
you were seeing for the last time the world

The phrase *I let you talk* might be addressed, as well, to the poem itself, which the poet follows to its conclusion. The poem resumes, and ends:

as you had known it. And then
you called the others. Van Gogh said
he saw things as if in a dream, as themselves
yet at the same time stranger than reality.
On the last day of his life, he shouldered
his bag of brushes and paints
and canvases and made his way
to the wheat field where the crows cooed
and cawed and rattled and clicked,
unable to believe their luck. (139)

What great good luck it is to have David Kirby among us, to have *The Winter Dance Party* to add to our bookshelves, and to talk about with each other, even reading our favorite parts aloud. That would be a real party.

September 26, 2024

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Hollywood

Five square miles of ultra-contemporary nymphomania,
Two dozen homos, to every sapiens, at last countdown,
Ugly Plymouths, swapping exhaust with red convertible Buicks,
Twelve-year-old mothers suing for child support,
Secondhand radios making it with wide-screen TV sets,
Unhustling junkies shooting mothball fixes, insect junk,
Unemployed pimps living on neon backs of
Unemployed whores.

Bisexual traffic lights, red-faced, with green shades,
Fastest guns in video West slinging lips with slowest fairies in Ivy East,
Unlit starlets seeking an unfilled galaxy, with an opening,
Ranch Market hipsters who lost their cool in gradeschool,
Yesterday idols, idle, whose faces were made of clay.

Horrible movie-makers making horrors that move,
Teenage, were-kids, hot-rockers, rolling with the blows,
Successful screen writers drinking down unsuccessful screams,
Plastic beatniks in pubic beards, with artistically dirtied feet,
Recreated Jimmy Deans, pompadours looking for sports-car mothers,
Sunset strippers, clothed to the hilt—and no further.

San Francisco poets looking for an out place, looking way out of place,
Televised detectives getting waves from television defectives,
Disk jockeys with all-night shows and all-day habits,
Bored Fords, with nothing in their future but grease jobs,
Hindu holymen with police records clear back to Alabama,
Mondrian-faced drive-ins featuring hamburger-broiled charcoal
Served in laminated fortune cookies.

Channel Something piano players down to their last mom,
Down-at-head pot-smokers with down-at-heel eyes,
Death faced agents living on ten percent of nothing,
Lady painters with three names having one-man shows of expensive
framing,
Unemployed Broadway actors with nothing to offer but talent trying to
look stupid,

In-group sick comedians, a lot sicker than their comedy, REAL SICK,
 No coast jazz musicians uncommitted, waiting to be committed,
 Scoopy columnists with two punctuation marks, both periods,

Native-son Woodmen of the West, utterly convinced that Donald Duck is
 Jewish,

Legions of decency borrowing their decency from the Legion,
 Impatient Cadillacs trading in their owners for more successful models,
 Lanky Calypso Singers, caught with their fads down, trapped in beat coffee
 cups

With small-chested actresses, bosomed out by the big breast scene,
 Unsympathetic dope-peddlers, who refuse to honor credit cards,
 Carping critics refusing to see what's good, just because it isn't present,
 Lonely old De Mille-divorced God, seeking a new producer
 With a couple of rebuilt commandments...

Hollywood I salute you, artistic cancer of the universe!

(Vol. 7, No. 1, 2000)

Horace Coleman

Missing in Action

for Bob Kaufman

He was poeting before half the others had paper.
He was talking that talk of music and soul and self
and the disease called America while
walking that walk past the mugger critics
and the indifferent crowds who
only read words cut in stone.

He was soap scrubbing minds clean and
the abombunist poet of these and those
abobminable times that wore him away
till he was left in solitude
crowded with loneliness
and the smell of a golden sardine.

Every one wants to know where?
is Bob Kaufman at?
since they did that TV program on him.
He's supposed to be lost in San Francisco
or LA
but he's missing elsewhere.

He knows where he is and ain't got no truck
with them who sent for him tomorrow
when here he come yesterday.
Let them freight themselves—the frinks!

He's famous cause he was one of them beatnik poets
but really, he was a nik beat-beat back!
cause he got there too fast
(you know we ain't culpable of no literature).

(Vol. 8, No. 1, 2001)

God as Glacier, College Fjord, Alaska

We poise for joy for calamity.

We yearn along the gunwale against the railing on Deck 7 toward you.

We want with our whole want your inkling spill of obstinate thaw,
pebbling its trickle.

We shiver flesh to flesh. Our soft, punished faces search your frozen
bulwark of face.

You are the opposite of our gasps. You will never gasp at us, forever and
ever.

You the ever-emergent submerged merging with the tide, unmoving,
unmoved by us.

You: recalcitrant, obdurate, fluid as brittle glass, you thunder and crack.

You teethe on gravity, you shear your flesh to light & warmth, least
animal-like animal

movement, calving without umbilicus or breath.

You groan and breathe only with the dying breath of your birthing.

Close enough to feel the danger of your closeness, we are filled past filled
& never filled

enough, wanting closer yet to breathe the breath of your living zero.

You are the color we have been searching for which we didn't know we
searched for.

You are the density of all color except this blue escaped to light.

We are here because here you are this perfect blue escaping everything that
is not blue.

You become our eye perceiving your blue escaping everything that is not
blue.

You are the crevasse & the ice around the crevasse & you are us knowing
the forever unknown crevasse.

You are the ice thick with itself so black and deep we cannot know your
black core self.

You are that forever umbra, black until the center is not whole without
whole blackness,

which stays because of the black which is changing places with the black
which moves.

You plunge demise cluttered into icebergs, your melting ice reborn again
to ice.

You are the whole and the partial which was whole.

We want your wholeness whole & we want your wholeness partial.

You are the gallop of eternity at rest, crested crystals big as hills cresting
over crystals.

You are the clock of ice which never started before it always was.

You are the absence forever of all human touch, which we want you to want to touch.

You are that which cannot love us in the way we know how to be touched & loved.

You are that we don't know how to love & that we don't know how not to love.

You: shivering paralysis of vibrating quake, the wake of vibration out of your long

breaking groan which shivers and paralyzes us.

You are the plinth of the planet, steadily unsteady yourself forever, undying in your forever collapse, eddying forever toward cessation's creaking collapse,

which we want forever for ourselves—

to be the uncollapsed forever within you & the nearly collapsed

& the urge ever toward collapse. For we would almost believe that in your forever collapsing, you

yearn toward us.

There Is a Permanence That Obliterates the Present

In that moment required to transfer
lives in a glance,
the light that passes between eyes
has rerouted my life time after time

and I have known
in a manner no court of facts would admit
the fine wrist or steady eye of one
I love in a time parallel to this

of the blue lips of a man
in whose arms I have died
or the broad hands I have killed
or shared bread with on a road

lined with olive trees
as cicadas buzz from the dry shade of stones.
Or I look at a woman and know her
as a father knows the daughter

grieving her lost child,
or as the child has known her,
nuzzling her breast and looking up,
eyes half closed, at the bright chin.

A glance, a tremor in a voice,
the posture a hand assumes
as someone speaks to a stranger,
or simply a human odor

and for an instant this life
is unrecognizable to me
while a code I can neither break nor deny
registers and I respond

with a poem I gaze into later
as in a fire obliterating
the present with its permanence,
hearing as one hears in a shell

THERE IS A PERMANENCE THAT OBLITERATES THE PRESENT

the sea suddenly more substantial
than those waves at your ankles
whose foam you may wipe away with that towel
which will never touch the roaring deep within.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Americana

I.

Drunk—fell & froze. My grandmother
signed her name, Elsie Mae, beside *witness*
on her uncle's death certificate.

Everyone called her Peach.
She'd traveled from Baltimore to Culpeper
to stand in the coroner's office.

Central Virginia chilled her.
Her sister, six, had died of diphtheria,
of emptiness in that house,

where not a single man could sign
his own name. Each left behind
a shaky X witnessed by women.

II.

While F. Scott was playing tennis
at Princeton, my grandfather was five,
rolling a newspaper wagon

on the sidewalk with his brother
when two men held up the grocer
and pushed the boy into the street

where a truck struck him at the corner
of Gay Street & North Avenue.
Gangrene burned his leg off

length by length for seven years
in a Baltimore hospital.
Whip smart, they said. He strapped

his wooden leg on, built cemetery walls
studded like stone snails, stood on corners
for a day's work, fell finally from a roof,

which broke his neck. I was less than
the air under a pin oak, each of us
moving in every scale when he died.

III.

Penniless, in a rocker on the porch
of the house we share with her,
Peach looks at the camera.

On her lap, I'm strawberry hair—I'm five.
I read and reread the Walt Disney
book series she saved for to give me,

inscribed in her electrocardiogram script.
Mickey and the Beanstalk.
The Brave Little Tailor. Goofy's Gags.

Jimbo lies at her feet. I look away.
In my long dream, I am a button
rolling elsewhere in soft air.

That time in *Huck Finn* when people
poured kerosene on dogs and lit them up
for spectacle, for all that red clay.

Practicum

I gave the running-reading test
in the school library
beside the Easy Street picture books

where the students read and I recorded
their fluency, their small mouths
opening and closing in the safe, warm room.

A test is a procedure, a sequence
of events, one, two, three—open
like a child's mouth to what will come

as she reads the words.
Before this, my baby
had been missing at four, five, six

in the morning, and in the years
that followed deformed fish
swam up, day and night,

their guts full of pity
swallowed from the mudfloor of my mind.
As I worked, I saw children's eyes pierced

with knitting needles,
my arms sliced with a garrote—
no matter how well the child read

or how evenly I penciled
the small arcs,
word to word on test scripts.

As they decoded, my body slipped
from bridge after bridge
onto the gemcut surface

of water. Procedural concentration
will get you through mornings like these.
I sat very still before them,

in sensible shoes—smiling and wishing them
the best possible life.
How sorry I am

anyone would suffer like that.
Not every inwardness is a find.
Today, over the Eastern seaboard,

bees ingest radiocesium
(their bodies take it for potassium)
and secrete it in their honey

sixty years after test-bombs sent dust
from western deserts
over Shoshone Mountain and the mesa.

Landlord

As a king's public room
Needs the assistance of a chair,
His house needs the height of a hill
To assist the public mind.

The downcast upward look
Is a hill's requisition
No less than a chair's claim
Plus the hill's supplement.

Once in our country lived a king
Who sat daily on the veranda
Of his house in fat fame,
Not knowing he had succeeded:

Joiner of mule and plow,
Hairy harrower, lord of the laden
Haywain, scythe, and enflading file,
He sat, ignorant of elevation

Reigning under the bulk
Of his noticeability, atop the hill
Like a great frog prince laid back
In his high, hand-hammered chair,

His hands like lily pads
On the ponds of his knees, looking down
Because we were looking up
Into the great groin of his greatness,

Unblinking. We did not know whether
He ever blinked or smiled because
We could not look that far,
And approach was forbidden.

He ruled our lives thus
In his hundred weights, guessed at
Until he died: then we went and made
Him obeisance underived:

But this only after they had sawed
Another door beside the other to tilt
The coffin through: from downhill it looked,
We said, like a cruising cattle car.

Two teams tandem were enough
To get the catafalque to church,
And a dozen prime tenants with pulleys, ropes,
And chains to drop him in his grave.

“The king is dead!” we exulted,
Throwing our roses down.

(Vol. 3, No. 2, 1996)

Bette

Youngest, and most stylish of my father's three sisters,
her name pronounced in two syllables. Blond crop, moonstone
bracelets, a gold anklet, short tight skirts and silk blouses,
a gal's ready laugh. She'd make her striding entrances
in gusts of jasmine and civet, Fabergé's *Tigress*.

Wartime weekends, she'd had drinks and late-night dinner dates
with Michael Rennie, on leave from Moody Airforce base—
until, demobbed, he repatriated to England.
First-grade reader, pausing at a strange word, I asked her
what "power" meant. "The thing people have if they are strong—

like Superman." Soon after, she married a flyboy
named Lance... last name? Engine failure, a flameout, a crash.
Hearing which, Daddy drove us through the dark to their place.
Their car—her car now—gone, he began to cruise town streets
and alleys until, spotting her braked at a red light,

he pulled up beside. Howls, tears, her diamond-ringed hand
gripping the wheel. "Bette, it's time to get you home now."
No, no! she shook her head. He pushed harder, as the light
changed, changed, changed. Powerless, she caved. Surrendered
Lance to his tombstone, with a farewell to his parents.

Eclipsed in mourning a year, she reemerged, married
to a working man whose blue-collar moods and guff earned
Daddy's scorn—and her unspoken response, *Back at you*.
We did call (once, pre-shootout) at their five-room tract house
in a downwardly mobile street not on our radar.

One day her not-so-good provider came to suspect
the lady-killer next door was hitting on his wife.
Out popped a .45 bought for just such purposes.
Pow! "Temporarily insane" saved him from the chair.
She visited every month, their kids in tow or not.

Meanwhile, we seldom saw or even heard about them.
Welfare checks and food stamps possibly helped make ends meet?
Single mom at the helm. Farewell *Tigress* and bracelets.
The convict's premature death cut no ice with Daddy.
Sort of hardhearted, I thought, but didn't dare say so.

My expat years in England, I got a birthday card,
followed by several jaunty letters—cheerful, strong,
chin held high. Then came a grim verdict: stage four, the Crab.
Daddy swore and made arrangements. No whining, no tears.
Statistic recorded for the global superpower.
“Death's dateless night.” Let her not disappear into it.

How Is That Meant?

Entrenched habit, light at the standard slant.
Rooms all yesterly, rote fact that stopped
recognizing—doubtful, numb—their tenant.
Pictures whose magic's gone inactive, books
still unread, their batteries set to expire,
mirror that first turned stagnant and then froze.
Into it plunges the old unnerving news.
It's down to this? What am I doing here?

Yet. From some otherwhere, a surge, a flare,
fresh colors breathing, swelling, the wilderness
cascade onscreen, deciphered page of sheet
music, this scented pillow, children's games
outside the window, and the summer green-up—
Alive: and brimming to know just how that's meant.

Christy Prahl

Before the Demolition of the Evangelical Church of Stull

West of Lawrence, along an artery
of gravel road, stood a gateway to Hell

where sun bloomed through ruins
in some embarrassment of light.

Do you remember the tiny church
above the river, nearly liquified in the heat,

or the legend of the boys who'd disappeared there,
ambushed by demons?

Drunk kids from the neighboring school
showing up every equinox

to throw bottles at the south-facing wall
and wait for the boomerang, ducking?

You held my left hand
in your right as you drove,

our palms harrowed by the sweet and
dangerous knowledge of your wife

letting herself into your apartment,
sifting the mail, calling for you.

You carried a gun to that hillside
in a dark metal case,

loaded the cartridge with gold bullets
and aimed at tin cans floating in the scum of the river.

You warned me never to point a gun at a person
unless you meant to kill them.

I spied a branch in the water,
reared back and pulled the trigger,

windy kickback knocking me
over in the rye.

But for losing that vial of cocaine in the dirt,
you might have shot me right then and there.

Instead you kissed me square on the lips,
and we knew we were as corrupt as those devils,

our mouths opening up
as barnswallows flew out.

If I shot a muskrat that day in the water,
no bad dream ever told me.

A Child's Bedroom of Owls

i. two owls

appear as shadows on a child's bedroom wall.
Strange place to roost in a corner
of dream.

Whiff of childhood talc floats
loose to question what's breathing in the next room,
and farther away.

Layers of likelihood. *Long-ago* needs a future to hold it.
Thought that come twice keep repeating.

Night after night she is one of three experts on flying—
this child and the two owls.

No one is silenced in her world. Each is given
space to speak, and to wander.

That's how things are at night when she's dreaming.

These owls are as mercurially free
as the facedown humans studying concrete
are not.

ii. enter, storied ones

A child plus two owls.
The latter know where she is nightly.

Small sounds from sleep guide them.

Any house nearby could be the wrong one;
but she's the right girl, and that's for sure.

Owls have reason to be here—to call attention
to The Big Ones (*dreams*, she whispers softly).

vi. *half a pair*

doesn't add up to much in our language. Shadows
on a bedroom wall make nothing happen until one of our owls
almost dead-ends in a real curtain.

Hey, dive that way again!

Repeat that superfluous stunt you're so perfectly dressed for.

Seriously, how do you these birds ever make a decision as half
a pair of feathered magicians who'd steal the soul, if you let it?

The Flood

It had been years since I'd seen the watermonster, the snake who lived at the bottom of the lake. He had disappeared in the age of reason, as a mystery that never happened.

For in the muggy lake was the girl I could have been at sixteen, wrested from the torment of exaggerated fools, one version anyway, though the story at the surface would say car accident, or drowning while drinking, all of it eventually accidental.

This story is not an accident, nor is the existence of the watersnake in the memory of the people as they carried the burden of the myth from Alabama to Oklahoma. Each reluctant step pounded memory into the broken heart and no one will ever forget it.

When I walk the stairway of water into the abyss, I return as the wife of the watermonster, in a blanket of time decorated with swatches of cloth and feathers from our favorite clothes.

The stories of the battles of the watersnake are forever ongoing, and those stories soaked into my blood since infancy like deer gravy, so how could I resist the watersnake, who appeared as the most handsome man in the tribe, or any band whose visits I'd been witness to since childhood?

This had been going on for centuries: the first time he appeared I carried my baby sister on my back as I went to get water. She laughed at a woodpecker flitting like a small sun above us and before I could deter the symbol we were in it.

My body was already on fire with the explosion of womanhood as if I were flint, hot stone, and when he stepped out of the water he was the first myth I had ever seen uncovered. I had surprised him in a human moment. I looked aside but I could not discount what I had seen.

My baby sister's cry pinched reality, the woodpecker a warning of a disjuncture in the brimming sky, and then a man who was not a man but a myth.

What I had seen there were no words for except in the sacred language of the most holy recounting, so when I ran back to the village, drenched in salt, how could I explain the water jar left empty by the river to my mother who deciphered my burning lips as shame?

My imagination swallowed me like a mica sky, but I had seen the watermonster in the fight of lightning storms, breaking trees, stirring up killing winds, and had lost my favorite brother to a spear of the sacred flame, so certainly I would know my beloved if he were hidden in the blushing skin of the suddenly vulnerable.

I was taken with a fever and nothing cured it until I dreamed my fiery body dipped in the river where it fed into the lake. My father carried me as if I were newborn, as if he were presenting me once more to the world, and when he dipped me I was quenched, pronounced healed.

My parents immediately made plans to marry me to an important man who was years older but would provide me with everything I needed to survive in this world, a world I could no longer perceive, as I had been blinded with a ring of water when I was most in need of a drink by a snake who was not a snake, and how did he know my absolute secrets, those created at the brink of acquired language?

When I disappeared it was in a storm that destroyed the houses of my relatives; my baby sister was found sucking on her hand in the crook of an oak. And though it may have appeared otherwise, I did not go willingly. That night I had seen my face strung on the shell belt of my ancestors, and I was standing next to a man who could not look me in the eye.

The oldest woman in the tribe wanted to remember me as a symbol in the story of a girl who disobeyed, who gave in to her desires before marriage and was destroyed by the monster disguised as the seductive warrior.

Others saw the car I was driving as it drove into the lake early one morning, the time the carriers of tradition wake up, before the sun or the approach of woodpeckers, and found the emptied six-pack on the sandy shores of the lake.

The power of the victim is a power that will always be reckoned with, one way or the other. When the proverbial sixteen-year-old woman walked down to the lake within her were all sixteen-year-old women who had questioned their power from time immemorial.

Her imagination was larger than the small frame house at the north edge of town, with the broken cars surrounding it like a necklace of futility, larger than the town itself leaning into the lake. Nothing could stop it, just as no one could stop the bearing-down thunderheads as they gathered overhead in the war of opposites.

Years later when she walked out of the lake and headed for town, no one recognized her, or themselves, in the drench of fire and rain. The watersnake was a story no one told anymore. They'd entered the drought that no one recognized as drought, the convenience store a signal of temporary amnesia.

I had gone out to get bread, eggs and the newspaper before breakfast and hurried the cashier for my change as the crazy woman walked in, for I could not see myself as I had abandoned her some twenty years ago in a blue windbreaker at the edge of the man-made lake as everyone dove naked and drunk off the sheer cliff, as if we had nothing to live for, not then or ever.

It was beginning to rain in Oklahoma, the rain that would flood the world.

(Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995)

Birthing in the Darkness

God, am I your eyelid? by Aakriti Kuntal. Sigilist Press (sigilistpress.com), 2024. 22 pp. \$20, saddle-stitched. ISBN 978-1-957857-09-1

I. Title

We start with the title, which is a question that raises another: whether the poetic, all-seeing, omniscient eye/I is open—or if it is closed and all cast into darkness? Seeing or unseeing?

II. Visual Images

We see threads suggestive of hair, clumps falling from a head.

Clots of thread, clots of hair, an unravelling. Instead of “a thread stitching all mass into a tune” these images depict discord, tonelessness, unharmonic distortions—a body and harmony undone. Even the red that appears in the earlier images has bled out, leaving a desiccated clump of darks: black and gray. A blot. A void. A closed eyelid.

Loss. Obliteration.

These visuals of evisceration, of viscera, establish not only a pictorial representation for the clots of text but also the tone for the mostly prose poems that follow: a body that has malfunctioned, a body fallen out of grace and lacking its former grace.

And because the body fails, the soul falls into terror and rises into anger.

III: The Poems

There are ten images, eight prose poems, and one, “Clock,” a more standard poetic structure.

The title poem suggests the chapbook’s scope and subject: “This body in the hospital room is a tongue forged on a pair of scalpels.”

The voice of these poems arises, phoenix-like, a self remade by a Frankenstein, forged out of the metal of surgery, instruments that pierce, that cut, that open, wound.

So do these poems: despairing, distraught, destroyed.

How remake/reforge the self when the body, that body we take for granted and treat too frequently so casually, when that body falters, stumbles, falls, fails us, becomes, as in the poem, “half imaginary.”

To move from open lived life to the confines of a hospital bed: the hospital routines and needs, its “pile of pills,” driving one’s daily and nightly schedule.

To live in a hospital room and bed and to dream of that life outside, now “a neglected occasion.”

Life: moisture, blood, bone, mouth, flesh—faltering flesh.

So many treasures, nonetheless, emerge into light. This image:

“My long body is a cathedral.

Its decomposition is holy.”

And, later, in the same poem:

“The one eye blinks, blinks.

Salt rushes in to save the paper.”

This work, a beautifully rendered edition of full-color visual and dark written images, preserves the experience of pain, of a body in crisis, and the solitude of spirit when we dare to disbelieve.

Frank Paino

The Burning of Giordano Bruno

Rome: 17 February, 1600

Perhaps you, my judges, pronounce this sentence against me with greater fear than I receive it.

—Giordano Bruno, upon being sentenced to be burned at the stake for heresy

They have driven a spike
through his palate.
As if holding his tongue
might stop the earth in its orbit.

They will set fire to the man
they held seven years
in a lightless cell,
the damp so heavy it numbered
his joints for the counting.

In the marketplace they have
stacked a pyre of sapwood,
green-skinned and rain-moist,
to slow the coming of his
last ragged breath.

The Inquisitors strip him,
chain his arms to the splintered
stake, then step back beneath
embroidered canopies
as the crowd puts torches
to tinder and begins to dance
for god's delight.

Giordano is unafraid.
These hard years have taught him
to drift beyond the shadow
of his flesh, observe the claws
and thumbscrews,

the rakes and studded racks
as if they tore only the body
of an uncanny effigy.

What matter, then, is fire?

He understands their blinkered faith,
 their refusal to see
 the universe is centered everywhere
 without perimeter, and they,
 spinning around the planet's
 most brilliant star, are kindred
 to infinite worlds beyond.

If he could part his lips,
 he would proclaim it even now,
 as the holy men thrust a silver crucifix
 through the shivering wall
 of smoke and cinder.

Bruno turns from that dying god
 without regret. He has no use
 for such brute salvation.
 His hair lifts in the updraft,
 transforms to fiery wings,
 then disappears.
 He feels his skin draw closer to bone.

Soon, there will be nothing.

Or, perhaps, something
 he could never have supposed.

He gazes down on the gathered
 throng: brightly-clothed
 women and men—
 here and there, a small boy
 or girl—a glorious,
 dancing host that moves
 in tireless orbit around the light
 he is becoming.

Jack Spicer

Suicide

a translation for Eric Weir

At ten o'clock in the morning
The young man could not remember
His heart was stuffed with dead wings
and linen flowers.
He is conscious that there is nothing left
In his mouth but one word.
When he removes his coat soft ashes
Fall from his arms.
Through the window he sees a tower
He sees a window and a tower.
His watch has run down in its case
He observes the way it was looking at him.
He sees his shadow stretched
Upon a white silk cushion.
And the stiff geometric youngster
Shatters the mirror with an ax.
The mirror submerges everything
In a great spurt of shadow.

(Vol. 7, No. 1, 2000)

The Book of the Dead Man (#23)

1. *About the Dead Man and His Masks*

When the dead man thinks himself exposed, he puts on a mask.
Thinking himself exposed, the dead man puts on a mask.
Before he needed a mask, he wore his medals on his chest and his heart on his sleeve.

The dead man wears the mask of tomfoolery, the mask of assimilation, the mask of erasure, the scarred mask, the teen mask, the mask with the built-in oh, the laughing mask, the crying mask, the secretive mask, the telltale mask, and of course the death mask.

The dead man's masks are as multifarious as the wiles of a spider left to work in the bushes.

To the dead man, a spider's web is also a mask, and he wears it.

The trail of a slug is a mask, and the vapors from underground fires are a mask, and the dead light of sunset is a mask, and the dead man wears each of them.

The dead man curtained off the world, now everything between them is a mask.

He weaves masks of sand and smoke, of refracted light and empty water. The dead man takes what the world discards: hair and bones, urine and blood, ashes and sewage.

The dead man, reconstituted, will not stay buried, reappearing in disguises that fool no one yet cast doubt.

He comes to the party wearing the face of this one or that one, scattering the shadows as he enters.

When there is no one face, no two faces, no fragility of disposition, no anticipation, no revelation at midnight, then naturally years pass without anyone guessing the identity of the dead man.

It is no longer known if the dead man was at the funeral.

2. *More About the Dead Man and His Masks*

The dead man's mask prefigures all isms such as surrealism, patriotism, cronyism, futurism, Darwinism, barbarism, Dadaism, Catholicism, Judaism, etc.

Many of the dead man's masks are museum pieces: final expressions from death row, those startled at the last second in Pompeii or Dresden or

Hiroshima, faces surprised in the trenches, the terror of furnaces and lime, a look formed from suffocation or lengthy bleeding or embalming. The dead man apologizes for leaving a sewing machine and an umbrella on the operating table.

The dead man catalogs war memorials, potter's fields, he takes stock of undiscovered suicides, pseudonyms and all instances of anonymity. The dead man's masks are composed of incongruous materials accidentally combined and are as rare and wild as certain edible fungi that closely resemble poisonous mushrooms.

He doffs his hat to long hair, moustaches and beards, but does not give himself away.

He greets the grieving, the relieved, the startled, the victimized and the triumphant without letting on.

The dead man's hands are twice as expressive in gloves, his feet deprived of their arches gain momentum in shoes, and his mask shields him from those who wish to trade knowledge for truth.

The dead man's first mask was a hand over his mouth.

More Honored in the Breach: The Long Departure

If I told you that man there, paused
out of sight of the crone singing
like an angel to her rows
of tender corn, that he believes in his bones
he's archangel of the last god standing,
The Great Deity of Faithlessness,
you'd wouldn't believe a word. You shouldn't.
I can testify, though, one morning he woke
and his beard was white, the taste of ash
souring his mouth and the gospel of futility
was his own. Follow as he approaches
a last time the dark men congregated
in the door of the village bar. It is his
final morning among them, and he offers each
a silent blessing none will notice,
crosses the sheared flocks of the field,
crosses the stupid animals of the courtyard who
copulate in their own shit. In ten minutes, believe me
or not, no matter, the church bell will shudder
under the awful new hour. Our holy man will be gone.
He had prophesied that the sun would rage
red and full for his passage, and thus
the cold clouds of heaven descended.
I tell you, such is his terrible power.

(Vol. 20, No. 1, 2013)

Lisa Morphew

Bipolar Lover Cento #1

It meant something different to her
fermenting, transfiguring snag to songs
that dip thunder and vanish.
I have stood for a long time
just to kiss her mouth.
Such fragrant distractions
like overturned cups
in an open field with nothing to find.
I learned to be her
would get lost
like a house ruined by water.

Condemned House Cento #1

My house could not give chase
exhausted, giggling, ashes, ashes
smiling and waving at eternity.
Fixed against the horizon
the bones of the house
the shape of a thing to do.
There were no locks at the time
beneath a moon marked by birds.
This is a woman's confession,
living here is forever.
Don't tell me there is another.

Listening at the Door

I don't understand what drove me
to the rhythm. My mother behind a closed
door, locked and bolted from her side,
failing to separate us, keeping only my body out.
And from beneath that door, I could almost see
the nasty mix of tobacco and English Leather,
slithering. Mama laughed with her teeth clenched,
which meant potential husband sitting stiff
and spitshined on our pockmarked couch.
The needle hit that first groove and I wondered
why my mother had chosen the blues
when it was hope she needed to convey,
why Tyrone Davis bellowed and begged *baby*,
won't you change your mind, squealing 'bout what
he'd do if he could just *turn back the hands of time*,
then Gloria Lynne's voice cracking hard across heartbreak,
and I pressed my ear against the door, listened to
their wet breathing and the uncertain click of glass.
I felt sorry for them needing someone else's ache
to climb on, while I had Smokey Robinson to
fluff hair, lighten skin, make panties so much silk.
I was sleek thin Marvelette, each of my fingers
a magic wand and on the receiving end of each wand
a man, cramped and confused with wanting me.
But what drove me to listen on those nights
when my mother let that fragrant man in, banished
me to the back of the apartment, and pretended
she could shine above hurting? I rested my ear
against the hot wood all night, trembling, as he
flipped through the 45s, looking for somebody blind
this time, somebody crawling on their knees toward love.

(Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995)

The Book on Trane

In “Alabama” an off version of spiritual
J. Rosamond Johnson’s hymnal holdovers

from his brother’s gatherings in the field
James Weldon Johnson not allowed to beckon

his students into his Fisk ‘sitting room’
because his wife has covered the furnishings

so James Weldon Johnson stood at the fence in Nashville
talking to his children in creative writing class

ex-slaves accommodating only the highest plane of service
refusing segregation as a supremacist covenant

enacted to prohibit any development
except the group areas acts (in the fields)

yet he has built a church on these vestments
passageway etched in exquisite pain

only tone remembers a scale untended
by the best technicians without the beloved’s kiss

the vessel of song is the spiritual
the essence of singing the spirit itself “a love supreme”

(Vol. 13, No. 1, 2006)



Gwendolyn Brooks

Gwendolyn Brooks: Blues Deluxe

The magnificent Gwendolyn Brooks was born on June 7, 1917, and now that we have lived a century with her poetry, it is inconceivable to imagine American literature without her. Tough and tender at once, Brooks' characters do not shrink from violence, or from a challenge; they give as good as they get. Willie Dixon once wrote that the blues ain't nothing but a good man feeling bad. In the world of Gwendolyn Brooks, this theory often gets dumped on its head. For Brooks, the blues ain't nothing but a bad woman feeling good. This is from her poem, "a song in the front yard:"

I've stayed in the front yard all my life.
I want a peek at the back
where it's rough and untended
and hungry weed grows.
A girl gets sick of a rose

Brooks was born in Topeka, Kansas, but moved to Chicago when she was six weeks old, and learned to mimic the cool vernacular patterns and colloquialisms in the speech being spit on the street, like this last stanza from the poem quoted above:

But I say it's fine. Honest I do
And I'd like to be a bad woman, too,
And wear the brave stockings of night-black lace
And strut down the streets with paint on my face.

Though Brooks is sympathetic with the plight of her people, and knows their needs explicitly, she always casts her vote for gumption, not compromise, and endorses all that is "luminously discreet" ("The Sermon on the Warpland"). As a consequence, Brooks's work represents her enormous witness, explaining her city, and describing her community, in a dialect that can unfold into an elaborate diction, a mastery of her line that can suddenly explode into a refrain, or sharp rhythmic observation. Brooks brought black Chicago into full focus, for an American literary community that had devolved into critical theory and increasingly formal constraints. In her poem, "kitchenette building," Brooks gave her blues a bite and a smell, positing that she would like to have "a dream send up through onion fumes. / Its white and violet, fight with fried potatoes / And yesterday's garbage ripening in the hall..."

In an interview in 1994 with B. Denise Hawkins, Brooks talked about what Chicago meant to her development as an artist. "Living in the city, I

wrote differently... I am an organic Chicagoan. Living there has given me a multiplicity of characters to aspire for. I hope to live there the rest of my days. That's my headquarters." Always ambitious, even as a child, she was encouraged by the strong presence of her mother, a schoolteacher and classically trained pianist. "You are going to be the lady Paul Laurence Dunbar," her mother said, and little Gwendolyn believed her, taking her strong example as a template for her steely and independent female characters, a liberated feminine voice long before Confessional poets like Adrienne Rich, Sylvia Plath, Elizabeth Bishop, and Anne Sexton became all the rage in the late 60s. Gwendolyn Brooks had already won the Pulitzer Prize in 1950 for her collection, *Annie Allen*, the first black author of any gender to do so, and had staked out her territory, preferring the wild girls to the safe ones, and especially liked the ones who jumped in with both feet:

Maud went to college.
Sadie stayed at home.
Sadie scraped life
With a fine-toothed comb.

She didn't leave a tangle in.
Her comb found every strand.
Sadie was one of the livingest chits
In all the land.

from "Sadie and Maud" (Stanzas one and two)

Maud eventually became "a thin brown mouse. / She is living all alone / In this old house." ("Sadie and Maud"). Brooks knew early on that she would work, earn her own money, and take charge of her own life, and many of the early models for free and fiercely independent black women were the classic blues singers from the 1920s and 30s.

In the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, the prized possession in most homes was the wind-up Victrola, playing a vast array of music, emanating through the needle and out of the horn from the early record's deep wax grooves. And every time the machine wound down, the listener had to wind it back up, using a crank on the side, singing back the music they had just listened to as they turned the crank. By 1920, Americans were buying 25 million records a year, and the most popular recordings were ragtime and jazz. But the music that jazz was based on, the blues, began to emerge in popularity during the 1920s. The first blues recording, "Crazy Blues," was released by Mamie Smith, to wide acclaim. A trio of women followed, each with their own distinctive charm: Bessie Smith, Ida Cox, and the sly and slinky Ma Rainey. Bessie Smith combined gospel

chops with a weary blues tone and a vivacious vibrato to become one of the biggest recording stars of the decade, influencing a whole generation of singers, most notably Billie Holiday.

Robert Hayden paid tribute to the trials of the blues queens in his “Homage to the Empress of the Blues,” and Sterling Brown was moved by her predecessor in his poem, “Ma Rainey,” which was the most popular and largely successful articulation of his own lyrical aesthetic. And though it may be impossible to state with certainty just how profound the influence was on all of the poets and songwriters coming of age in the Depression Era, little Gwendolyn was definitely paying attention. This is from her poem, “Queen of the Blues”:

Men don't tip their hats to me
They pinch my arms
And they slap my thighs,

But when has a man / tipped his hat to me?
Queen of the Blues
Queen of the Blues Strictly, strictly
The queen of the blues

That refrain could be taken straight from the songbag of the previous Queen, perfected in the full-throated moan of the great Bessie Smith: “I got the St. Louis blues, / just as blue as I can be / He's got a heart like a rock cast in the sea.”

Classic blues is called “classic” because it was the music that seemed to contain all the diverse and conflicting elements of the black musical experience, from slave songs and ragtime, plus the smoother emotional appeal of “the performance” itself. It was the first black music that appeared in a formal context as entertainment, though it still contained the harsh, uncompromising reality of the earlier blues forms. It was, in effect, the perfect balance between the two worlds, and all of the great classic blues singers were precocious females. Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, and the others became professionals at early ages; Ma Rainey started when she was fourteen, Bessie Smith before she was twenty. Though the majority of all the formal blues in the 1920s and 30s were sung from the point of view of proud and confident women, they were forced to mature in a hurry.

Brooks published her first poem in a children's magazine, *American Childhood*, when she was 13 years old, precocious by any standard, but seemingly in line with the great female blues singers I've mentioned above, who also began to create in their teens. By the time she was sixteen, Brooks had

compiled a portfolio of around 75 published poems and had her work critiqued by poet and novelist James Weldon Johnson. At seventeen, she started submitting her work to “Lights and Shadows,” the poetry column of the *Chicago Defender*, an African-American newspaper. Her poems, many published while she attended Wilson Junior College, ranged in style from traditional ballads and sonnets to poems using blues rhythms in an irregular free verse. “I lived in a small second-floor apartment at the corner,” Brooks said, “and I could look first on one side and then the other. There was my material.”

In her poem, “the ballad of chocolate Mabbie,” from *A Street in Bronzeville*, Brooks begins to form her ideas about black female identity and its requisite beauty, which seems to contain great promise, but dwindles due to continual rejection and injustice. Initially, seven-year-old Mabbie “cut from a chocolate bar / ...thought life was Heaven.” Then the poem begins to push against the child, opening her to an immediate rival. Mabbie waits “without the grammar school gates” for a little boy on whom she has a crush, but she quickly gets her first rejection, experiencing the hurt that Willie Boone inflicts because of his preference for a “lemon-hued lynx / With sand-waves loving her brow.” Mabbie blames herself for the rejection as Brooks ramps up the poem’s tension through the incremental repetition of specific lines. In the six-stanza poem, stanzas 1 and 3 are identical; then stanza 6 turns ominous, changing the words slightly with each recurrence until “It was Mabbie alone...” sharply accentuating the ultimate isolation that Mabbie feels as an alien presence, hidden in her blackness, or perhaps more importantly, she is aware for the first time that the color of her skin made her different.

In her autobiography, *Report from Part One* (1972), Brooks wrote: “I—who have ‘gone the gamut’ from an almost angry rejection of my dark skin by some of my brainwashed brothers and sisters to a surprised queenhood in the new Black sun—am qualified to enter at least the kindergarten of new consciousness now. New consciousness and trudge-toward-progress. I have hopes for myself... I know now that I am essentially an essential African, in occupancy here because of an indeed ‘peculiar’ institution...I know that Black fellow-feeling must be the Black man’s encyclopedic Primer. I know that the Black-and-white integration concept, which in the mind of some beaming early saint was a dainty spinning dream, has wound down to farce...I know that the Black emphasis must be not *against white* but *FOR Black*....”

Mamie Smith’s initial recording of “Crazy Blues” on February 14, 1920, was not expected to be a success, but from the outset it sold 8,000 copies a

week for almost three years. Classic blues became big business and the lyrics were saturated with sex, like Ida Cox singing “When your man comes home evil, tells you you are getting old, / that’s a true sign he’s got someone else baking his jelly roll.” Or Sippie Wallace telling the girls “don’t advertise your man.” Hoodoo, too, is a big part of the blues. Ma Rainey’s “Black Dust Blues,” for instance, tells about a woman who is angry because Ma took her man. “Lord, I was out one morning, found black dust all ‘round my door,” the song begins, but the speaker starts to get thin, and develops trouble with her feet: “Black dust in my window, black dust on my porch mat... / Black dust’s got me walking on all fours like a cat.” The subject here is “throwin’ down” on someone; in African magic, the feet are considered to be a specifically vulnerable entry point for evil. Magical powder sprinkled in socks or shoes might bind the evil spell; in love spells, socks might be tied together.

One of the primary rules of voodoo is to never drink from an opened container that you did not witness being poured. Robert Johnson had broken this rule to his great detriment. Local legend held that a woman who wanted to gain love and control a man by exciting his passion beyond all reason, might put menstrual blood in his drink. An enemy might put any manner of potion inside; a charm could make snake eggs hatch in his belly, a powder from a witch could cause madness, a root extract could make a man’s legs swell up and his hands shake.

When Gwendolyn Brooks graduated from Wilson Junior College, she worked for a quack “spiritual adviser,” her job being to write hundreds of letters to prospective patients. Her office was in the Mecca Building on South State Street, where some of Chicago’s poorest families lived. When she refused to take on the duties of “Assistant Pastor,” she was fired from her job. Her book, *In the Mecca*, draws much of its material, as well as its title, from this period. It is a long poem about a mother’s search for her lost child in a Chicago tenement building, and was nominated for the National Book Award. The poem traces her steps through the long halls, revealing her neighbors to be indifferent or insulated by their own personal obsessions. The mother finds the body of her little girl, who “never learned that black is not beloved,” who “was royalty when poised, / sly, at the A and P’s fly-open door,” under a Jamaican resident’s cot, murdered. The murderer, Edward, is eventually captured, but no joy comes from this, and there are also poems for Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, and for the famous Chicago gang, “The Blackstone Rangers” whom Brooks mentored in a series of workshops for years. Brooks describes them as “Black, raw, ready...” and “Sores in the city.” “Their country is a Nation on no map,” she writes.

Gang girls are sweet exotics.

Mary Ann
uses the nutrients of her Orient,
but sometimes sighs for Cities of blue and jewel
beyond her Ranger rim of Cottage Grove.
(Bowery Boys, Disciples, Whip-Birds will
dissolve no margins, stop no savory sanctities.)

Mary is
a rose in a whiskey glass.

— from “The Blackstone Rangers” III. Gang Girls *A Rangerette*
(first nine lines)

In 1923, Bessie Smith made her first recording with the Columbia Gramophone Company. She hollered her vocals into a funnel, and sheer sonic vibrations were converted into grooves on soft black wax. The record was “Down Hearted Blues,” and would be an immediate smash, selling 800,000 copies in six months, and she was instantly known as the “Empress of the Blues.” She would go on to make 200 more records for Columbia and, when she died, she had been paid a total of 28,575 dollars. She was nearly six feet tall, weighed over two hundred pounds, and walked around with her money stuffed in her clothes. But Bessie was not to be trifled with. One man tried to rob her, stabbed her in the stomach, but she chased him down and tackled him, holding him until help arrived, and only then she collapsed. Once, to convince her husband she’d been hit by a car (and not on a two-day tryst with another man) she threw herself down two flights of stairs. The chorus girl who slept with her husband? The dancer exited the train in the middle of nowhere, at full speed, with Bessie’s foot firmly planted on her behind. Bessie met her demise on the mythic Highway 61 near Clarksdale, Mississippi, not far from the devil’s crossroads, after leaving a concert in Chicago. The car her husband was driving plowed into a parked truck in the dark beside the road. Bessie’s arm came out of its socket at the shoulder. A white doctor drove by and stopped, but instead called for an ambulance, supposedly to keep from bloodying his white car.

As much as Brooks decries the injustices done by men to her female heroines, and they are many, Brooks herself was a beneficiary of much admiration and support from male mentors for her entire career. There is a clear influence from fellow Chicago poet, Carl Sandburg, whom Brooks followed as Illinois poet laureate, and in 1941, Brooks was taking part in a particularly influential poetry workshop organized by Inez Cunningham

Stark, an affluent white woman with a strong literary background, who offered writing workshops to African-Americans on Chicago's South Side. It was here Brooks gained momentum in finding her voice and a deeper knowledge of the techniques of her predecessors. Already famous, Langston Hughes stopped by the workshop one day and heard Brooks read "The Ballad of Pearl May Lee." He would later befriend her and her husband, Henry Blakely, and they frequently threw parties at their apartment at 623 E. 63rd Street. It was in the kitchenette of that apartment that Brooks hosted a party for Hughes, who became a mentor to her.

Other men also championed the young Brooks, including Paul Engle and the novelist James Weldon Johnson. Brooks's first book of poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), was published with Harper and Row after a strong show of support from Richard Wright, who wrote to the editors about her, saying that "There is no self-pity here, not a striving for effects. She takes hold of reality as it is and renders it faithfully...She easily catches the pathos of petty destinies; the whimper of the wounded; the tiny accidents that plague the lives of the desperately poor, and the problem of color prejudice among Negroes."

If Mary came would Mary
 Forgive, as Mothers may,
 And sad and second Saviour
 Furnish us today?

She would not shake her head and leave
 This military air,
 But ratify a modern hay,
 And put her Baby there,

Mary would not punish men—
 If Mary came again.

—Gwendolyn Brooks
 "A Penitent Considers Another Coming of Mary"

Though the blues is often about irretrievable loss, loss that brings with it all the energy we commonly take for granted, it is still a presence, Richard Ellison says, "which mocks the despair stated explicitly in the lyric, and it expresses the great human joke directed against the universe, that joke which is the secret of all folklore and myth: though we be dismembered daily we shall always rise up again." Langston Hughes knew the hot blue jet of deprivation and it informed all his poetry with a brooding sense of

solitary loneliness, the singular beauty of corrosive sadness. He was just twenty-four years old when his first book, *The Weary Blues*, was published in 1926.

I, too, sing America
 I am the darker brother.
 They send me to eat in the kitchen
 When company comes,
 But I laugh,
 And eat well
 And grow strong.

—Langston Hughes (first stanza from “I, Too, Sing America”)

What Hughes said of the blues is often true of his own work, that “the mood of the blues is almost always despondency, but when they are sung people laugh.” He published more than three dozen books during his life, starting out with poetry and then expanding into novels, short stories and plays. He also wrote liner notes for albums by Harry Belafonte and Nina Simone, who recorded a version of his poem, “Backlash Blues.” The blues is the closest music ever comes to imitating the human voice in all its complexity and tone, which is why the blues is the Rosetta Stone for the genres that have followed it, or blended into it, to form the consilience of all popular music to follow, folk, gospel, jazz, or rock. “If I can sing it, then I know it’s a song,” says Bob Dylan; “if I can’t, then I call it a poem.”

“What is poetry?” Hughes was asked near his death. He answered, “It is the human soul entire, squeezed like a lemon or a lime, drop by drop, into atomic words.” He wanted no definition of the poet that divorced his art from the immediacy of life, and his influence on a maturing and ambitious Gwendolyn Brooks cannot be underestimated. “A poet is a human being,” he declared. “Each human being must live within his time, with and for his people, and within the boundaries of his country.”

And far into the night he crooned that tune.
 The stars went out and so did the moon.
 The singer stopped playing and went to bed
 While the Weary Blues echoed through his head.
 He slept like a rock or a man that’s dead.

—lines 31-35 from “The Weary Blues”

Since the time of Hughes and Brooks, the blues poem has become a viable form, often in the musical tradition of the blues in which a statement is

made in the first line, some slight variation offered in the second line, and a type of alternative, perhaps ironic, declared in the next or third line. Brooks described her own creative process as having evolved in a similar fashion, in this interview from *Artful Dodge*, where she speaks of forging “three stages of creativity. One, I call my ‘express myself’ stage, because I was writing about anything and everything in my environment just because I wanted to express myself—flailing about. And second, my ‘integration flavoring’ stage when I wrote a lot of poems which I hoped would bring black people and white people and all people together, and they didn’t seem to be doing that (laughter) in great numbers at any rate, and a third stage governed by that little credo that some of the Black poets had in the late sixties, ‘Black poetry is poetry written by blacks, about blacks, and to blacks,’ and then, I’m trying very seriously now to create for myself, develop for myself a kind of poem that will be immediately accessible and interesting, immediately interesting, to all manner of blacks, not just college students though they’re included too. That kind of poem will feature song, will be *songlike*, and yet still properly called poetry.”

From this song-like intention, Brooks has written some of the most powerful small poems in the language, such as the now-famous “We Real Cool”:

We real cool. We
Left school. We

Lurk late. We
Strike straight. We

Sing sin. We
Thin gin. We

Jazz June. We
Die soon.

Notice echoes from the Hughes poem above, but Brooks is more terse, and muscular, with a bunched line that allows the word “We” to reverberate at the end of every line break but the last, allowing the release of the line’s tension to resonate in the air. Rilke instructed the poet to start a poem in action already taking place, and leave a final abiding conceit to reverberate. In the ninth of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*, he instructs us not to tell the gods about glory, or even the reflected glories of their presence, but to talk about the creatures and faces we know, the heroic accumulation of things and days. “We Real Cool” is bluesy (it almost swings), but it does not kowtow to the reader. Brooks is almost always direct, and although her poetic voice is objective, there is a strong sense that she—as an observer—is never far

from her action. Not to dwell overlong on the ethos or impact of the very different constructions invited by “We,” I add Brooks’s own commentary on the poem, which is delivered as stage directions for her public readings: “First of all, let me tell you how that’s [‘We Real Cool’] supposed to be said, because there’s a reason why I set it out as I did. These are people who are essentially saying, ‘Kilroy is here. *We are.*’ But they’re a little uncertain of the strength of their identity. The ‘We’—you’re supposed to stop after the ‘we’ and think about *validity*; of course, there’s no way for you to tell whether it should be said softly or not, I suppose, but I say it rather softly because I want to represent their basic uncertainty.”

On one level, of course, Brooks is a protest poet; yet her protest evolves through suggestion rather than through a bludgeon. She sets forth the facts without embellishment or interpretation, but the simplicity of the facts makes it impossible for readers to come away unconvinced—despite whatever discomfort they may feel—whether she is writing about suburban ladies who go into the ghetto to give occasional aid or a black mother who has had an abortion. Whether it be Annie Allen trying on a hat in a milliner’s shop, or DeWitt Williams “on his way to Lincoln Cemetery,” or Satin-Legs Smith trying to decide what outlandish outfit to wear on Sundays; Brooks’s exacting eye always retrieves the intimate details that make her characters reveal themselves. “The blues are the three L’s,” says B. B. King, “and that would be living, loving, and hopefully, laughing—in other words, the regular old E formation on the guitar with the regular three changes. The blues is like a tonic. There’s a blues for anything that bothers you.”

Poetry changes by touching other poetry. In this manner, the composition of poetry is like the blues tradition. A constant borrowing takes place where ideas and lyrics overlap, and are passed down or shared from artist to artist, or one generation to the next, in seemingly different contexts. A blues song has life only as long as the musician is playing it, but it changes the player. Words are music; the poem and its sound have always walked together, or one inside the other, for the poet wears his music like a skin. The poem is the force the music exerts. Gwendolyn Brooks’s poetry is made from music, but is not the same thing. Her poetry stops time, freezes historic instances on the page, and blues music depends upon the constant movement of a beat. Also, poetry and music are mongrels; when properly fed they gather things to them and are comprised of the things they gather. A poem has “a fictive covering,” but a song and its singer are naked, and must be so. But the radiation of sound guarantees we are not alone, and we call the others to us, by repeating our favorite sounds.

Poets and musicians have fostered a symbiotic relationship in America; especially in the last fifty years when they have begun to morph into the same thing. Brooks's influence combines a strong commitment to racial identity and equality with a mastery of poetic techniques, but she has also managed to bridge the gap between the academic poets of her generation in the 1940s and the young black militant writers of the 1960s. And the list of poets who have been influenced by the blues poems they have heard from Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks is constantly growing. Amiri Baraka, Jayne Cortez, Lucille Clifton, Marvin Bell, Michael Harper, John Berryman, Joy Harjo, Vachel Lindsay, Langston Hughes, Patricia Smith, Hayden Carruth, Jack Kerouac, William Matthews, Yusef Komunyakaa, Horace Coleman, Lyn Lifshin, Sonia Sanchez, Quincy Troupe, Rita Dove, Leonard Cohen, Patti Smith, Bob Kaufman, Natasha Tretheway, Saul Williams, and Kevin Young are just a few of the poets whose work would be impossible to imagine without a prolonged exposure to these poets. Improvisation is the art of presence, and what did not exist a moment before is the testament the next performer is building his instant upon. Communication (and history) requires two. Maybe music does, too. Rhythm forces everyone to join it, like birds overwhelmed by the sound of beating wings, compelled to take to the air.

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Dolphy's Aviary

We watched Baghdad's skyline
ignite, arms & legs entwined
as white phosphorus washed over
our bedroom, the sounds of war
turned down to a sigh. It was one
of those nights we couldn't let go
of each other, a midwestern storm
pressing panes till they trembled
in their sashes. Eric Dolphy
scored the firmament splitting
to bedrock, as the wind spoke
tongues we tried to answer.
At first, we were inside
muted chords, inside an orgasm
of secrets, & then cried out,
"Are those birds?" Midnight
streetlights yellowed the snow—
a fleeting ghost battalion
cremated in the bony cages
of tanks in sand dunes. Dolphy said
"Birds have notes between our notes..."
I could see them among oak rafters
& beams, beyond the burning cold,
melodius in cobweb & soot.
Like false angels up there
in a war of electrical wires
& bat skeletons caked with excrement,
we in winding sheets of desire
as their unbearable songs
startled us down.

(Vol. 13, No. 1, 2006)

Ode to Restlessness

Mother Restlessness, from your breasts
I suckled electric milk,
a rash act! A gesture
that did not reveal to me
the moon.
It is restlessness that sustains
the ecstatic flight
of the ship,
agitation of the engine that determines
the thrum of propeller
and without the renowned restlessness of the bee
honey would slumber forever in the corolla.
I don't want escape
To any solitude.
I don't wish
for my words to enclave men,
I don't wish
for a sea without tides, poetry
without people,
vacant
paintings or music
without the wind!
Restless is the night,
restless its beauty,
everything under its banners
pulsating,
and the sun
an incandescent motion,
a gust of joy!
Stars rot
in standing water
just as purity sings
in the waterfall!
Restless thought
originated oceans
and made buildings to rise up
out of chaos.
The city is not immutable,
nor need your life
be built of death stuff.

Come with me, traveler.
We'll give stature
to the gifts of the earth.
To the most remote chastened heart we'll carry light.
I believe
that under the restless spring
even as dazzling fruit
is consumed
it expands
the circumference of its scent,
struggling against death with that motion.
And thus
does the sweetness
of those glorious fruits reach your mouth,
in that victory
of restless light
as it lifts up lips of earth.

translated from the Spanish by William Pitt Root

(Vol. 19, No. 1, 2012)

Orpheus Practicing

After he'd strung the turtle shell with catgut,
the ends of his numb fingers (which he's thought
he knew how to bring together and tell apart)
had trouble deciding which of the strings to pluck
and which to press down on. But because
he'd been swearing with it, his ordinarily
so-so baritone voice had soured, had gone
to hell and back and kept refusing to meet
or match the strains he could still hear in his head.

He sat down on a rock and tried his damndest
to think about something else. He thought of the woods.
He thought of weather. He thought of picking daisies.
He thought of selling his lute and leaving home
and going to sea and forgetting about all this
music business, all this mechanical strumming
sharp and flat and all this memorizing
and rearranging the picking at dull tunes.
Meanwhile, behind his back, the trees bowed down.
Snow melted on the mountains, wildflowers flourished
in a constant springtime, and the noisy ocean
lowered the crests of its waves and paused to listen.

(Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007)

Canzone In Blue Then Bluer

There wasn't music as much as there was
terror so the music became as much a
part of the terror as the terror it-
self the swell of the arpeggio building
and breaking, building and breaking, upon the
shores of you. Your shores washed slowly away but
not slowly enough, you feel it, every grain
of sand a note going under, bluing the
body, granular and wet. This has happened
before. You were not special. You belonged to
no group of any more particular concern
than another. But the music has become
you. The hurt coming out, from your open mouth, could
open a grave. Let every done-wrong hain't throw
its head back and groan. Not done-wrong as in some-
body loved left, somebody is always left,
but someone who deserved to live as much as
anyone else who died by another's hands
or neglect or the indifference of someone
who cared less or just not about you. And you sang
like you cried until the music of leaving,
of long-gone became you. Does it matter how
many strings? It only takes one to make this
music. But let's say it was the sound of
a choir that accompanied the run of
blood down a leg. Let's say a violin sped
its notes down the side of a neck, a tirade
of pricks. Or a high C from a voice thrown sharp
as the pieces of skull a bullet through the
head would leave. Or the river, the river rush-
ing cold and rock-bottomed, with its own furious
song carries you with it, sings you right over
the falls. That is when terror is not blue but bluer,
blue, as capillaries bursting from an eye,
blue as the vein under this razor, blue as
the skin beat so far it breaks into song, a
song like this. I've sung this so many times dear
my voice has almost given way, and I'm so scared.

(Vol. 24, No. 1, 2017)



Jessica Jacobs

Jessica Jacobs Converses With the Book of Genesis

Jessica Jacobs. *Unalone: Poems in Conversation With the Book of Genesis*. New York, New York: Four Way Books, 2024. \$17.95 ISBN 9781954245839

Theology is humankind's way of talking about the divine and letting others in the faith community know that the deity is not a stranger but someone who is knowable, if not in words, at least in spirit. But every attempt to enshrine God as some purveyor of peace or conveyor of salvation often creates a stultified image, something like a holiday Hallmark card, always pleasant and kind. But these days faith doesn't lend itself to agreeable metaphors.

Jessica Jacobs in her book *Unalone: Poems in Conversation with the Book of Genesis*, explores how the stories of Genesis speak to the difficulties of fronting the realities of our times. Her poems act like a poetic midrash that interprets the sacred text by creating startlingly new ways of seeing the text. Genesis speaks to her own agonies, frustrations, and joys of being a woman in the twenty-first century.

The book is broken into twelve sections, each drawing from a different part of the Genesis story from creation to the founding of Israel. In her poem "Prayer should be a tunnel," drawn from the creation stories, Jacobs revisits her own Floridian childhood where she enters Sea World's Tunnel of Terror and discovers what her Hebrew teacher has told her about her own hidden terror in the face of God:

For those, like me, rooted
in terror, a moving sidewalk keeps us in motion,
easing us through the eerie underpass, acting just like

time, which moves us without the need for us
to move, which moves us whether or not we want it to. (9)

Jacobs lets her imagination draw off the text and re-envision them in her own life. She is asking us, as readers, to reclaim the old stories in our own lives. The theologian Sallie McFague in her book *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God In Religious Language*, makes the point that the image of God as authority, as a male, and as king or ruler, had predominated what we conceive as God, and, as such, has also pervaded how our society is structured and how religions view women, minorities, and those of a different class. She distinguishes metaphors that have become sacramental, have become ossified, conventional, and, therefore, have lost their vitality, from metaphors

that come alive, challenge, and change how we conceive of the world. Her belief is that we must use new metaphors to recreate a new way of being in relationship to the sacred. That's exactly what Jacobs is doing.

She's taking the patriarchal tradition and reconfiguring it. In the poem "Imposter Syndrome Among the Thorns and Thistle," she invites the text about Eden being over to weeds, to become her own, using the image of a lawn.

And now, decades on, I'm trying to grow a lawn
on me, to zip myself into Judaism
like a patchwork parka of grass, hoping it might take
hold, might one day fit snug as a golf course greenway. (12)

In the next section of the book, the poem "Collective Nouns" pulls out all the stops and speaks of her deepest yearning and severest doubts about the use of words and the destruction of the environment. In a flood of words in the 24/7 news shows, claiming to be "late breaking," "just in," and "live updates" as if what is, in a moment's flare of information is what makes it worthy of our attention. The poem reminds me of T.S. Eliot when he was getting his poetic feet under him, making no claims to glorify the immediate moment, but had in *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* the narrator admit

For I have known them all already, known them all—
Have known the evenings, mornings, afternoons,
I have measured out my life with coffee spoons

By focusing on Noah's ark as her metaphor for our present dystopian reality, Jacobs shows the ark as a coffin-like vessel:

From planks of gopher wood smeared with pitch,
Noah built the word and God shut them up
in it. Water crushed down from the sky, fountained from the seas,
dissolving
living dust and breath
to reefs of hushed mud. (23-4)

Then she asks questions about the credibility of any public figure claiming to speak for the people

Is a man good,
she wondered,
who can construct a word
large enough
for only
a chosen few? (25)

In the poem “Elegy in Prophetic Perfect,” she takes on the big issues such as God presaging what will happen next. Wrestling with the power to see into the future, she questions the notion of divination, only to resolve it by coming back to the mundane, some simple declaration of her own mother’s battle with Alzheimer’s.

Like my mother,
decades before
she would forget her own name
or the fact she’d had children, saying,

You’ll miss me when I’m gone.(29)

In the next section of the book on going forth, she again takes a text “Sing, O Barren One, Who Did Not Bear a Child” from Isaiah to confront her own choice to have no children. She asks like a nagging parent the “what if?” about being a parent. She expresses the doubts of those who, at their best, are trying to live by whatever rules they have come to accept, whatever fates they’ve been handed to be this way or that and to have her voice heard. She lets her poems address her being different, her being a lesbian, by also affirming her connection with Sarah, with one of those who had to fight against her barrenness.

God said, “I’ll call you
by a different name and your destiny shall change.” *Saria*, barren,
had no children but *Sarah* did. Mom is a name I’ve cried times
beyond counting,
yet is a name I’ll never be called—less a name than a state of
being; once borne,

innate as DNA. “Wife” or “writer,” though, are titles non-familial,
vocational, requiring daily upkeep, a renewal of Yes, I will still
bear

this—and be stronger for it? Who can say. Perhaps we’ll end up
most defined by what we are not....(41)

She turns the rumination, the expectation by many that a woman should bear children ending with her confronting her own self by linking her name to the text

Iscah—precursor to the name Jessica—like all women,
torn between being
a seer

and being the one seen. So, prophet, tell me: Is the
 only happy ending really
 a baby? (42)

Her being able to enter into the text and discover a way to have it speak both to her and to others is what makes these poems extraordinary. It is as if she has taken the ashes of old text and brought them back as flames.

Her scholarship into the Talmud, both its ancient and modern commentaries, is woven into her poems. In the poem “Why There Is No Hebrew Word for Obey” she ponders the story of

Abraham and Isaac and Sarah—the triangle and web of faith and belief—and what it means to obey or be released from obligation.

Judaism is not a faith
 but a tradition.

And isn't doubt
 the crux of conscience? (58)....

▮ What if we turn
 from certainty and arm ourselves

instead with questions?
 Obey, obey, obey is everywhere
 in translation. The real word is
 שמע shema: listen. (60)

Yet what is remarkable is how, even amid the scholarship, she manages to bring her poems back to earth, to her life and ours. In “Kaddish for the Living,” she moves from text to her bicycle, and from it, to her mother's plight.

Stopped
 as a perpetual motion machine

given in to its impossibility—
 though how we love

the myth of them, how we believe our bodies are,
 until they, abruptly, aren't. As the brakes

on my bike, which the mechanic said were
 worn to paper, worn out

from working so well for so long. As
my mother's mind.

Like Isaac, my mother is dead
but not: the automatic operations lost—

driving, turning on a stove,
following a plot.... (61)

Jacobs's own struggle to find herself is never far from the Genesis text. In "Another Calling," she turns to Jacob's prophetic dream in which he saw "a sky filled with angels and ladders... and cried out,... (How fearsome is this place) and returns to her Floridian roots and her near escape.

Inside me, the girl who'd balanced
on the back of a gator and lived
to remember it. Who'd returned the following week
to that same water, which was cold and clear
as air in winter:
paddling up, plummeting down,
it was a city of swimmers on invisible ladders, and I dove
past them into the spring rising from the dark
karst cavern, swam into the narrow parting
of those walls, a slot just wide enough
for one, down into the hissing, bubbling cascade,
the torrent strengthening the closer I came, afraid
but still swimming, toward the upwelling source. (101)

Jacobs uses the text to speak of her relationships, her wife, who is afraid the woods may be "of a constant danger," who will "lose herself / among the trees" (113) The Old Testament becomes her testimony, her way of reentering her life from a different perspective, refreshing her vision.

For me, any poet who can converse with God without being sanctimonious has accomplished a remarkable feat. She often does this by undressing the original language and recontextualizing it.

In the poem "Godwrestling," Jacobs defines a Hebrew word that means "the open gate at the center of our eyes," which speaks to what the Jacob's quest to revision the Biblical text. (117)

The river has tasted the salt of your skin, has lapped
at your calves with its current. The river has swallowed

the press of your steps. There is no record of your crossing.
The river is between you and everything you call your life.

So you step into a stranger's arms....(118)

Jacobs has seven poems that are titled "And God Speaks," which is an audacious way to title a poem. Who can speak for God? Yet her God isn't so much an overbearing parent lecturing her about his world view as much as another quester, one searching for how to be in the world. She takes God speaking to her namesake, Jacob to build an altar and then asks with an open-ended statement how Jacob—and by analogy, she— must have felt

Your whole
body arched and open—a conduit,
a tuning fork. Not terror but

awe—fear with a hinge
toward entrance: (123)

Biblical stories, ones that have resonated over the years, of Joseph being thrown into a pit by his brothers, are recast as modern parables about each of our lives. In "When He Was Not," she offers us a way to claim our own vulnerability and brokenness.

...And for the rest of his life,
he was a man putting himself
back together. A man with this pit
inside him, with the knowledge
that everyone he met carried
a similar cistern: an emptiness
that doubles as a reservoir. (132)

Aphorisms spill out of her poems that, in turn, come from the text, from wrestling with what sets the sacred text apart from secular text in that it is asking larger questions about life and what we are doing, or not doing, with our lives.

The New Year's horn calling us In "Wake, you sleepers from your sleep, " near the end of the book, she asks the question, "Are creatures' only value the sounds / we make through them?" and answers it with a proclamation.

Each living thing
is its own call to attention. (134)

She ends the book aptly with a quote from Viktor E. Frankl, the psychiatrist and Holocaust survivor who said that everything can be taken from us but the one freedom: to choose one's own way. Jacob reaffirms that idea in her poem "In the Breath Between,"

If all that happens
 is fate, who we are
is the meaning we make from it.
 And in that breath
 between what's done to us
 and what we do with it
is the crucible of our becoming. (164)

She has taken the sacred text of her heritage and transformed and renewed it, brought it back from ancient history into a living testament of a life, of our lives, that speaks to the trials, the agonies, and yes, the joy of being alive in our times. This book is a treasure of insights and revelations, of honest testimony, and of truths that never age. It is a book one should keep close at hand and be a source of hope and solace in these times.

Autumn

Orange moon, wound
in a frozen puddle. Oh face
in the ice-rimed window. Not yours.
Not mine.

Rind of night, its layered darkneses
peeling away. There's no taking it back,
the slammed doors, the sad disagreements.

What can I say to myself that would be
simple enough on a fire escape at dusk?
Oh ripples of laughter below
in the violent street, uncombed head
bent to a book, chewing a nugget
of hard bread, a boiled egg.

Oh mother in your blue dress
and new persimmon red shoes,
scuffs sending out sparks
against the rug as you walked
across the room

to the ritual of your piano, black
as a theology book, the first
harsh chords flying up
through the chimney flue.

(Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011)

Antonio Machado

Rainbow at Night

for Don Ramon del Valle-Inclan

The train moves through the Guadarrama
one night on the way to Madrid.
The moon and the fog create
high up a rainbow.
Oh April moon, so calm,
driving the white clouds!

The mother holds her boy
sleeping on her lap.
The boy sleeps, and nevertheless
sees the green fields outside,
and trees lit up by sun,
and the golden butterflies.

The mother, her forehead dark
between a day gone and a day to come,
sees a fire nearly out
and an oven with spiders.

There's a traveler made with grief,
no doubt seeing odd things;
he talks to himself, and when he looks
wipes us out with his look.

I remember fields under snow,
and pine trees of mother mountains.

And you, Lord, through whom we all
have eyes, and who sees souls,
tell us if we all one
day will see your face.

Translated from the Spanish by Robert Bly

(Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995)

Lucifer Wonders About His Mother

What color was her hair? How dark
was her skin? Was she thin
like the angels are? Which star

did she escape to, when she needed
some quiet? Is that
where she is, now? Did she like to read

before going to sleep? Was having a son
a joy or a chore? What more
could my Father have done

to keep her from leaving? Does she know
I've learned to count, to mount
sunlight, that my entire body glows

without ceasing? Can she see me
from wherever she is? Or is she
simply a story—there are so many

and most of them false, old jokes
the Word likes to tell. Does hell
frighten her? When she spoke

to me, that first time, what phrases
did she select? Do insects
excite or disgust her? When she prays,

to whom does she pray? To my Father?
Or does she pray at all? If I fall,
can she breathe before I stand? I'd rather

know than not know. Was she tall?
Was her favorite color the color
of my eyes? I'd prefer to recall

a voice I've never heard than lose
the songs I know she must have sung.
Was she bright or easily confused?

Why was she chosen? What did she choose?

(Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007)

The Promises

for Rachael Allen

Staking the pain
is worth it

when the isms come
in bottles.

How much do I want
for the bed.

How much for the bedside table.
Despite my promise

the sofa's no longer for sale;
I want to keep it now

in the garden
and sit on it

and look straight ahead
till it's dark.

Matthew Rice

After Football in the Royal

In the world of auditory pareidolia
the cry of a newborn is hello backwards.
The internet says it's intrin(sic).

They wheel me past a bunch of babies
all greeting each other,
to the fractures ward

where my leg is angled upwards
and dangling and comedic.
Goodbye they say leaving the room,

goodbye. Goodbye I say.
Despite the window
the sky is Lucy

and the sun's an outsider
in the very building
I came into this world.

Jim Ratt 3

He loved to shoot the basketball,
And when he was a kid,
His father's church had a gym
Where he spent enormous days
Spotting up "around the world,"
Getting his full court dribble to speed.
He shot on one goal,
His brother on the other
Till they knew Momma
Was putting the final touches
On plates of fried spam and
Packaged macaroni and cheese.
His crewcut, gawky brother
Would gallop on to the parsonage,
But he had to splash his last shot,
Which he described in a play by play
Voice, imitating the voice of the
Guy they called the Mouth of the South.
He called *his* shot the Doxology.

Years later at the farm, he shot
Foul shots on his son's goal
On the black top driveway.
He'd mostly lost his handle,
Though he could go between
The legs, behind the back
And all that stuff.
The kids were gone to college now,
And his wife would call him to supper,
But he'd stumble or dribble the ball
Off his foot, retrieving it from under
Enoch's old beaten to shit pickup,
And somehow before her second,
Much more annoyed supper warning,
He'd make his last shot
Which he now called
The Obituary.

Jeanne Wagner

Experiment on a Bird in an Air Pump

on Joseph Wright's 1758 painting depicting a recreation of Boyle's experiment in which a bird is deprived of oxygen

A glow of candlelight illumines each taper-lit
tuck of lace pulled back to show

the paleness of the women's wrists and breasts,
while melting tallow sends its reek

of wick-singe around the tired old magus
at the center, who looks past them all

as if he's performed this task far too many
times to care. Someone's wife

weeps daintily, comforted by her husband's
reassuring grasp, while the lovers

embrace, attending only to each other, as
if there's just one experiment

they can bother with. Only the girl stares up
at the bird and watches him drown

in his flask of preempted air, as she does
each morning when the bell

of her dress is pulled down over her eyes
and mouth, and she feels her arm flail,

uncertain of its sleeve, like the bird, his
one extended wing, a single oar,

rowing him round and round
inside the glass.

(Vol. 18, No. 1, 2011)

Undressing the Muse

*when do our senses know any thing
so utterly as when we lack it?*

—Marilynne Robinson

Whatever you do, don't
be overwhelmed. Or,
be overwhelmed. Why not?

To the best of my knowledge,
no one has ever died of desire.
Its consequences, maybe, but not
desire itself.

A wish or a want,
no matter how urgent, is not
the absence of food or water,
clothing or shelter. It is not air,
nor love, nor loving, even.
It is not
something we can't live without,
nor something we can't live with.

It is not poison; it is not a bullet
or a knife. It is not madness, exactly.

It is like hunger, but it is not
starvation.

And sex
poems are not sex, so why not
swerve away?

The imagination promises
no one anything. The imagination cannot
make promises and therefore
cannot be unfaithful any more
than the wind can be
unfaithful.

Our minds may be
the masters of our bodies, but
the imagination has a mind
of its own.

Just look at it:
undressing us, shamelessly, in that

stark room full of natural light. Letting
the strap slip from my shoulder, my dress
fall to the floor.

Pulling your pullover over
your head, unbuttoning your button-down,
unbuckling your belt.

Pushing you
back against the wall. Bringing me
to my knees.

Part Bull, Part Priest

My father threw off his holy robes
to ram the lovely cows,
Hera-like goddesses, though less vengeful.
When he left these cocottes in Pigalle
to their devices, he mounted my mother
near the Sorbonne,
her wet eyes glistening with awe
as she breathed a low moan.
The moon, a horn, rubbed against their windows.
Seeds of milky residue carried
the promise of my hooves and snout.
Our galaxy, a thousand-eyed
cow, awake and vigilant,
even to that doubling,
and the one-backed beast
I would become,
looking for my counterpart.

(Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007)

**“In Time, Maybe the Land Will Decide”: A Review
of *Bridge at the End of the World* by Scott Starbuck**

Bridge at the End of the World. Starbuck, Scott. Blue Light Press (2023), 108 pgs.

Scott T. Starbuck is an award-winning poet, career fisherman, climate activist and longtime resident of the Pacific Northwest. His most recent book *Bridge at the End of the World (New and Selected Poems)* is a culmination of his major published poetic output. He is described by Jerry Martien on the back cover of the book: “As a poet of climate change and a vital witness to what is at stake, he is a voice we should be paying attention to. Fisherman and teacher, public citizen and lover of the living earth, he wakens us to the beauty and peril of our moment.” After reading this collection, I agree whole-heartedly with this cover statement and would add that *Bridge at the End of the World* is probably one of the strongest political and environmental activist poetry collections I have read. While his style is not that of “rant and roll” but is very poetic, he allows his message to be clearly present and understood with flair and feeling. The editor’s quote “Poets can serve as the conscience of our society” also grounds the perspective of this collection. In this sense, and somewhat in the spirit of Native American culture, Scott Starbuck is a contemporary wisdom-keeper, sharing his knowledge and insightful experience, here, with us all.

In this book with five sections referencing his previous collections and an additional section of “New Poems,” we have poems titled “Bumper Sticker: *Extinction is Forever*,” “At Nevada Nuclear Test Site,” “View of Modern War from Space Station,” “Coyote’s Prediction,” “Salish Sea Prophecy,” “Thoughts at the End of Empire,” “Ghost of Bukowski Speaks of Climate Change,” “Recycle,” “Welcome to the Future,” “On Earth With Big Oil.” While many of the poems in this collection hint at rather dark subject matter, in the end Starbuck’s poems, while being honestly straightforward, are also and at the same time, positive and hopeful. Such is his oeuvre, his heart. “The real work / is daily practice / in order to be / of greater service / ...while truth / like a cedar raven / waits and speaks / at in-between / silence,” he writes in the poem dedicated to the Beat eco-poet Gary Snyder. And then in a poem devoted to the extinction of otters, he ends his poem with the words “Children drew otters / in schools / and noticed / in river shadows // asking why we lost them / and what was more important / than having them here.”

In “Salish Sea Prophecy” Starbuck writes: “Ancestors had it all—snowy Thunderbird Mountains, / vast mysterious sea, uncountable salmon / returning each spring and fall.” Or in the poem “Coyote’s Prediction”

Starbuck ends the poem with the lines "Only things / that belong here / will last." But then there are lighter, more personal moments like in the poem "Earth Like the Deck of a Ship" where he writes "Maybe there is a spaceship you navigate / with an electric guitar. / In the 60s we made songs like that." As a baby-boomer from the 60s, myself, I resonate and relate to that!

Being that this is an election year, I would be remiss to not include a quote from Starbuck's poem "Election Year" where he states: "...the way humans / hear of melting / Arctic, / blink, and do / nothing." In the poem "Thoughts at the End of Empire" he shows us his more inquisitive side when pondering "It's possible future generations will redefine / family, community, work, value, happiness, / life, dirt, success. / It's also possible, based on our collective / behavior, there won't be future generations." But he continues in a positive vein, ever hopeful and optimistic in a later poem: "Exxon Mobil Became BlueOrbSolar...Each country committed to saving / one thing from extinction—them." And it always seems to come back to nature and the natural world with Starbuck, as in the poem "After Dreaming Extinction of Birds" where he writes: "... winged creatures / of every color and shade / filled skies with song. / ...Their migrations signaled / change of seasons / when there were seasons."

On this path, Starbuck continues, back and forth, from fact to fiction with his wake up call for us all to become more observant, diligent, and active when it comes to the future of planet and humanity. As a teacher, he suggests that we practice "deep listening / and long walks by still / or moving water / with wisdom / of stomach, feet, nose, / tongue, ears and intuition." And so it is appropriate that he should feature the following words in the poem "Disabled Dancer" toward the end of the book: "...changing shallow / perceptions / that must be changed / to save what remains / that must be saved" and similarly in his poem "Above the Fish Hatchery" with "dreams connecting us to everything here / and beyond." Other memorable lines in his book are "we would show up / to do the work / that must be done."; "to swim free in moonlit surface, / listen to / or sing ancient whale songs."; "The refuge this time / is going inward, / making peace with yourself / and those you love." And, finally, in the book's last poem he puts everything in the collection together in a final "doxology": "the old ones say, / love is the only thing / to escape black holes." So, like Starbuck, I'll leave you with that. With love. Which in the end is all there really is that matters.

The City Limits

When you consider the radiance, that it does not withhold itself, but pours its abundance without selection into every nook and cranny not overhung or hidden; when you consider

that birds' bones make no awful noise against the light but lie low in the light as in a high testimony; when you consider the radiance, that it will look into the guiltiest

swervings of the weaving heart and bear itself upon them, not flinching into disguise or darkening; when you consider the abundance of such resource as illuminates the glow-blue

bodies and gold-skeined wings of flies swarming the dumped guts of a natural slaughter or the coil of shit and in no way wincing from its storms of generosity; when you consider

that air or vacuum, snow or shale, squid or wolf, rose or lichen, each is accepted into as much light as it will take, then the heart moves roomier, the man stands and looks about, the

leaf does not increase itself above the grass, and the dark work of the deepest cells is of a tune with May bushes and fear lit by the breadth of such calmly turns to praise.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Road Trip

I was in for arson. You were in for arson.
Katrina flooded us out of that prison,
handcuffed evacuees two by two in orange jumpsuits.
We drove the hijacked schoolbus north through Alabama
and the storm winds swept our trail of Snickers wrappers.
Ditched the bus and the jumpsuits ten miles north of the rain.
The Klansmen didn't know what to make of us
streaking through in our undies.
In the slough of despond
you wrestled the alligator while I slapped leeches.
After that, we had only two hands between us,
enough to split tips at a piano in Tennessee.
You slept with the redhead. I slept with the money.
You caught the clap. How did I catch feelings?
One picture in a newsletter, thumbs up at a cancer walk,
and somewhere the mug slips from a D.A.'s hand.
Good thing you knew how to fly that Cessna
over the cop cars and into the Colorado Rockies.
I lost my toes. You found the Book of Mormon,
abruptly respectable in a sober suit.
I nodded along but laced your chocolate milk with California.
Fugitives again, this time in a hot air balloon
we crash landed in the cannabis field, where we bedded unwashed vegans
until the old song played in our ears and we set fire to the white van.
You called me a bad influence, but you had all the tattoos.
We peeled the sunburn off our faces and backs
but found the same fools underneath.
You wanted to count the money. I said I didn't have it on me.
The flags were at half mast. Had we missed an assassination?
You were tall enough to tear one off, and you set it on the ground.
You sat cross-legged on that magic carpet, whose edges fluted and
shivered as you rose.
I saw the stars through your body. You were already gone.
When I stumbled across the 101, the cars could not touch me.
I waded into the ocean. I turned around and for the first time
called my mother country by her name.

(Vol. 26-27, No. 1, 2019-2020)

Wills

He'd howl from the stage
and cut a jig
he said "the Turkey,
Texas Negroes
invented" moving nimble
through the cotton rows,
but some figured his noise
was whisky-born, or the smoke
from that stogie forever
gripped between his lips.

Bliss gave him imp energy,
not sacred, just play,
and he launched his act
at ranch dances and unruly
medicine shows
joking in blackface
or playing the silly fiddle
as he skipped along,
cutting the fool,
but bowing those five strings
to rival lark or river.

Not much knack for
clinging to his profits,
but he could swing it
and swore on a testament
he rode fifty miles
on horseback to hear Miss
Bessie Smith's Rowdy City
blues. He'd chuckle
and sing out yi-ha
like a muleskinner,
salty but frisky.
He galloped in Hollywood
beside Tex Ritter
and made nineteen
horse operas
for the silver screen,
but what he craved was radio,

then ballroom, live bodies
 light-footing. A third
 generation first fiddle,
 he loved the harmony
 and happy chords—"One Star
 Rag" and "Rat Cheese,"
 and everybody remembers "Ida
 Red," "San Antonio Rose."
 Snazzy in Stetson and matador
 sequins, he made jubilation
 his duty. Even in lean
 times, he'd peacock
 over to the drum kit or
 slap the bass and say, "Make em
 wiggle," hoot, "Tremble
 the cymbal, buddy, let's
 boogie." Twin fiddles
 and two-step, no self-pity, no
 regret. Five wives—he kept
 busy and was ample pretty.
 Even in the "Hayride" studio
 he put on a wildcat show,
 but the Texas Playboys
 found money slippery,
 loath to come as fast as go.

They hit it big with, "Smoke
 on the Water" or the brassy
 standards: "Swing
 that gal, shake the stage."
 He'd preached the Word early
 and liked to barber, gossip
 and politics, inventing
 on the wing. His body
 turned on him early,
 heart incidents, strokes.
 On the stage he hollered
 and told the press, "It just
 makes me feel gospel good."

Generous, jovial, not
 a mean bone.
 In the end he led the band

from a silvery wheelchair
till the last stroke left him
in a coma, jilted
at last. Two years out
cold, then the big sleep.

So what's his real story,
panhandle to the grave?
Could it be this simple:
in mockingbird moonlight
his tombstone's marble
sings, "Deep within my heart
lies a melody"? A man
could settle for worse.
Bob was drawing water
from the deepest well.
Miss Bessie's voice,
his father's licks or
a sturdy stolen horse?
Whatever muse he touched,
his fiddle witnessed:
he'd found the source,
wouldn't settle for less.
Now, my darling,
let's dance and pitch woo
to honor the best.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Tammy

1.

Born Virginia Wynette Pugh
to cotton croppers near Itawamba,
she came out weeping and warbling,
according to the midwife, a Bible
thumper who swore chords of hymns
shook the room. Stooping through
childhood, she wrested bolls
from the stalks, counting “one
Mississippi, two Mississippi, a few,”
her fingers slowly crippling
as she twisted the stems. Scrappy,
unsoothed, she saw past each row,
field floods, the useless suitors
with their Friday night hoops,
and prom perms—all crude.
Soon she was swaying to honky
tonk sorrow, cooing gossip
and news, as she basked
under the ceiling vanes cooling
Tupelo’s priciest beauty school.
Rinsing, wishing, pushing the broom,
she dreamed a thrilling future
and bit her lip to stop any sobbing.
“One Mississippi, two....”

2.

Barmaid, cobbler, she had music,
both rosy and blue, by blood
from her daddy, on her tongue,
her guitar fingers and dancing shoes,
but an appetite for sacrifice
from who knows who? “Smile,”
she whispered, on cue. “Love
will save you.” She told VOWED TO Euple
Byrd, “I do” and suffered, “three
Mississippi, four and five,”

but surfaced in Nashville, dearly
 bruised, ailing babes in tow, alive
 still, with a beautician's shingle
 she each year of her life renewed.
 ("You can never trust luck.") Her new
 name: Tammy, "six Mississippi,"
 after Miss Reynolds in the sappy movie.
 George Jones her idol, she sighed,
 "ten Mississippi." She aimed true.

3.

Born to wallow in misery? Never
 mind the splees. Pursue, persuade,
 pursue. "I Don't Wanna Play House,"
 "D-I-V-O-R-C-E"—the duo
 were all piety, glitter and public pain,
 break-up, make-up, brewing
 heartstorm and pity, the same. She flew
 to his arms when Jones begged
 pardon—regret, renew, the cherry-red
 pedal steel keening to every melody.
 Before a pew in Ringgold,
 Georgia, the view was all roses,
 "four Mississippi, three Mississippi,
 two." She knew the town's name
 must be true magic. It didn't do.
 He cheated and binged, blew cash
 on hard whisky, chippies. A crew
 of repossession movers hefted the red
 loveseat into a van. Tears flowed.
 Where'd it all go, the devotion?
 The Opry crowds swooned,
 saw in their whole dance every
 me, any you, "Mississippi, one, two."
 Just give him up. She refused.

4.

Housewives lost all sympathy,
 turned away angry, scared, rude,

when she crooned “Stand by
Your Man,” which still rules,
sells like a gas fire, biggest single
in the history of country,
anthem of endless forgiveness,
midnight vigils, hot vittles, “please.”
It touched millions of needs.
They still tell this story; so tell it,
“fifty Mississippi, sixty”—George
got so bad to get stewed Tammy’d bury
the Caddie keys in the flour
bin, but one night she woke
to an engine’s purr and peered
outside on cue to spy the riding mower
rattling toward town, her grinning spouse
gunning that two-stroke—“Mississippi,
Mississippi,” for better or worse.

5.

In the end, the glitter collapsed,
twenty-six surgeries, morphine drip,
tears by the bucket, by the ocean,
bankrupt. The Queen of Country
amid canaries and stray cats
kept a crystal bowl of high luster
cotton in her parlor always on view
with hair dresser snips ready
to shear away whatever might bruise
her blue. “Another Mississippi,
or two.” May she rest beside still
waters, weary, gripping her dignity,
still scrappy and true, Virginia
Wynette Jones, born in misery’s
Mississippi, relentless. Who? A star
a martyr, a hardscrabble Pugh.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Curiosity About Words on the Tongue, On the Page, In the Mind: An Interview with R. T. Smith

LA: You've had a career that encompasses a multitude of titles (Professor, Editor, Poet, and Writer), and places (Appalachian State University, Auburn University, Washington and Lee University, and Converse College) at which you've worked. Let's please go back to the beginning: What was it like when you founded *Cold Mountain Review*? Starting a literary journal is an arduous undertaking—why do it? Was it difficult then leaving something you had helped create?

RTS: I had Socrates as a model because I knew that I knew nothing. I had enthusiasm and curiosity about words on the tongue, on the page, in the mind. Meager resources and no skills as a publisher, a poet or a scholar—a fledgling at best. I'll never forget Don Secreast saying, about my idea to create a literary magazine for Appalachian, Ex nihil, nihil fit. I responded that many folks don't know that or believe it, so I'd start with that audience. We never had trouble finding people who wanted to have work in *Cold Mountain Review*, and writers who got on board early included Ann Deagon, Betty Adcock, Fred Chappell. Poets were more susceptible to my invitations, for some reason, but "the creature," as I often called *Cold Mountain Review*, also required handwork. It had to be typed up and laid out, prepared for photographic reproduction. Help came from Don and Chuck Frazier, and a fair number of wonderful faculty members were willing to pretend to believe in the mission. We got a little money from the Appalachian Consortium, a little from the English Department, and a lot of time from this elf and that one. It would never have materialized without JoAnn Eskridge Sprunt, the best student writer among us and a vibrant center of energy, always ready to challenge me or shame me. She was killed in a car crash in Blowing Rock in the summer of '74, I think, only a little more than a year into the enterprise. Though veteran editor T. R. Hummer (*Georgia Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *New England Review*) has suggested that there is no editor's muse, Jo became mine and continued to whisper directions even as some wanted to make *Cold Mountain Review* (CMR) primarily an undergraduate publication. Whatever CMR is, it has hard bark on it, and even now, online, it is provocative and artful, just recently re-born with a new emphasis on social justice issues to join its literary and ecological orientation. It has endured, in some ways fared better than the once-famous *Shenandoah*. Maybe because CMR's home in Boone meshes with Blake: "Great things are done when men and mountains meet; / This is not done by jostling in the street." I don't know; maybe Lexington's topography has altered over the decades with changes in administration. It was once the

signature of the school, and we can hope that another tectonic shift will restore it.

LA: As you progressed on to Alabama and *Southern Humanities Review*, what changes did you see in the literary world, and how did you personally change as an editor and poet/writer during the same period?

RTS: What showed up as an instructor at Auburn was a kind of featureless golem with a little knowledge and a little more gumption. They say a fox knows many things and a hedgehog only one. I was half of each, and I certainly, after those three years of the extemporaneous, the jury-rigged and the sleight of hand, had to learn how a publication really has to be conducted responsibly in harmony with the other elements of the institution it depends upon and serves, in part. But it must not be a minion. I worked up the ladder—poetry reader, assistant editor, poetry editor, associate and then co-editor. No PhD, no significant reputation, I offered to be a hod carrier and just kept heaving. Every step was perilous, and involved wheedling for authority but not labor, of which there was plenty. I had a “say” but not a vote. It seemed to me then that the prestigious professors who ran that literary/academic hybrid preferred the most rational and safe paths and never guessed that the road to wisdom might lead through the gates of excess. But I shortchange them. They were talented and trained and believed in the PhD, while I trusted the RFD more. My struggle to get heard bordered on the crazed, but later I found something Twain wrote. “When we remember we are all mad the mysteries disappear and life stands explained.” That helped me regain my balance. I feel a little better now. My years at Auburn and *Southern Humanities Review* taught me that, if I paid my dues, I might earn more autonomy. “Sweat equity,” you know, if the beautiful work of reading and assessing submitted poems and stories is sweaty. It involves the mind, yes, but the body and the spirit, too, and the exhilaration of feeling wholly alive when you find and are able to publish a poem by Robert Morgan or a story by Cary Halladay that you found in the files and piles of unsolicited submissions.

Of course, there’s life outside of editorship. My growth as a poet was and is still a mystery to me. I seem to have more voices and impulses than a scent hound. In Boone I was often a rooming house denizen but went to the woods for fun and spirit—Winkler’s Creek, Grandfather Mountain, Panther Lake, Linville Falls. In Alabama I sort of went “home,” moved out to the country, kept dogs, fished and hunted, raised vegetables, all in a half-hearted way, but I lowered my threshold of attention on the one hand while embracing the dramatic on the other. I was learning from Dickey and younger Southerners, but I was also reading Snyder and Buddha-mind Beats. It was a time of wild book-mingling—Marquez and Ring Lardner,

O'Connor and *The Georgics*. And the syllabus—Renaissance poets, Melville, Aunt Emily, Hardy, Spear and Faulkner. Two important lightning bolts I remember pretty vividly. I had to accept that I was a cracker, no matter how worldly my hairdresser mama and cop father wanted to pretend. And I had an ear for a peculiar kind of music that isn't metric or otherwise measurable. Call it cadence, sibling to the vernacular. Robert Penn Warren had written about the "tangled glitter of syllables" in poetry, and I took that to mean less true rhyme, less predictable pattern than a snarl of echoing sounds that threatened to break into harmony at every turn but seldom did. I had met Warren in Boone and spent some time with him. Amid all the erudition he brought and offered, I remember the following exchange. Me: "Mr. Warren, what specific things interest you, absorb you as a poet?" RPW: "Why, Rod, only those things which interest me as a man." Sounds simple, but it cut through a lot of BS for me. I had to quit trying to find a voice and just sang more. Two other influences: I had been reading Merwin all along, conversed with him a few times, kept following his shape-shifting ways. I also, thanks to Kay Byer, who's with the angels now if angels there be, went through that door into the dark that is Heaney and leads right past Yeats, whom I admired but knew was no kindred cracker (no "culchie"), right into the whole pantheon of post-WWII Irish poets. Now if this sounds like I was traveling first class, let me interrupt the narrative here to correct that. I once enlisted in a creative writing class at a community college before I went to grad school. I went about half of the time and learned less than I slept. Then I went to Santa Fe for a workshop that lasted the whole summer after my first year of grad school. Again, bad attendance record, but I read through the poetry section of the Santa Fe library, listened to a lot of jazz, traveled around to visit the pueblos, drank a lot with the fiction instructor Bob Brunn and had my first immersion in a community that was art-wild. I wish I could go back, maybe for just a week, but it's gone. Santa Fe today isn't the counter-culture village it was in the 70s, and I'm not the same cub. But I've never had a formal workshop in creative writing and have been more at ease with poultry than poetry. I'm pretty much homemade and weirdly-informed, though less prideful of that than I used to be. The right teachers and peers at the right time might have saved me years. Not much tutored or groomed, though John Foster West at ASU egged on my wildness.

LA: The *Shenandoah* epoch has been a mighty one for you, with many considering you the venerable head of a massive literary journal-editing legacy. *Shenandoah* has long been, and remains, at the top of the "best literary journals" lists, the upper echelon. Do you have any regrets, though; are there things you would do differently given your present perspective? What about joys or some sense of triumph during your two decades plus there? Whether positive or negative, now in retirement and reflecting back on that

pivotal facet of your career and life, what are the most salient memories from your time editing *Shenandoah*?

RTS: I'm glad to get to this question so I can leave the swamps of youth and try to be less foggy. Less will be more on this subject, but it still rankles me and loosens my tongue, not in a good way. Who knows what I'd do differently. My job at WLU has often been, de facto, organizing the resistance against those who would like to erase *Shenandoah* or diminish it or change it to from a journal to an editing lab. The Philistines wanted the magazine to fit neatly into WLU's recently-minted institutional mission statement. I wanted it to display a love of formal accomplishment and serious mischief, the latter more emphatically. In that struggle, I wish I had been shrewder, more courageous, and regret the lack of connections that accumulate about one who had been involved in writing programs. I've often felt, except for my wife, almost alone in this town. At the end of "The Oven Bird," Frost's narrator muses about the bird: "he knows in singing not to sing. / The question that he frames in all but words / Is what to make of a diminished thing." My budget was halved just under a decade ago, my managing editor dismissed, my offices relocated four times. I've been admonished and threatened by some administrators (now all pretty much absconded). I've had a challenging relationship with an English department that had no hand in hiring me (my designated category was not faculty, but staff), many of them erstwhile writers who appear to believe that any writer's magnum opus is his/her/? vita. The central question for me has been what to make of a diminishing thing. My position has become so much a political and managerial exercise that my sorrows here have mostly involved reception of bad budgetary news and the understanding that the school was leaning away from the liberal arts and toward commerce and marketing, my "triumphs" have been successful escapes and help from occasional friendly administrators. I have had allies and "leakers," but the magazine's administrative separateness from the English department (the editor "serves at the pleasure of the Dean") and my lack of official credentials have fed the fires of disdain. Of course, I haven't been overjoyed at not having a hand in hiring creative writing faculty members, as well. In other words, shitty academic politics and personality clashes have been more numerous than necessary.

Now that I'm ailing and retiring, those problems seem to have diminished, so enough on those bad times. Things I've loved? Contact with astute, witty, devoted and refreshing students, including National Book Award finalist Rebecca Makkai, novelist Matt Null, poet Andrea Null—but not just those who have become writers. Every time I found a student who put his or her heart to the work of *Shenandoah*—a Jane Beal, a Lilly Wimberly, a Sophie Xiong—it's lifted mine. And we had some great special issues devoted to

Flannery O'Connor but featuring also Claudia Emerson and Joyce Carol Oates, contemporary Southern poetry (published as a book by the UVA Press as *Common Wealth*), a Native American issue, a traditional music issue with an interview with Mike Seeger, a feature of contemporary poems about the Civil War (a wondrous one by Charles Wright) which still passes muster as true-hearted and artful, despite the shifting historical/political views that leave us all either straddling fences or shouting. For almost five years we had a wonderful suite of offices in an antique building near the old Lexington jail—high windows, spacious meeting rooms, bushels and barrels and bales of light. What Halloween décor we had, what raucous classes! We were a little community, and we made some great issues (with covers by the likes of Bill Dunlap, Larry Stene, Suzanne Stryk, Walter Anderson).

I should add that I've enjoyed teaching the courses on western American lit horse operas (if *The Ox-Bow Incident* and *Lonesome Dove* are such), the Civil War in American lit, Frost, Dickinson, O'Connor, flash fiction, Appalachian literature, fiction writing workshops, the history of the short story. On the teaching front, I'll admit that I long loved teaching the editing intern class, but I got burned out on it somewhere along the path of 46 sections in 23 years. I also regret not getting to teach poetry writing at WLU till my final year (and then a class of three advanced students and three beginners), and any explanation of that strand of history would have to come from the English Department's official poets and the passing adjuncts who shared that duty. I shouldn't, on the other hand, neglect to say how much I enjoyed spending time with visiting writers (John Barth, Brendan Galvin, Claudia Emerson, Henry Taylor, Eavan Boland, John Montague, Charles Wright, Rita Dove, Reynolds Price... the complete list could almost match the roster of children the Trump administration has mislaid). Let me make an aside here. The most valuable assistance and guidance I've had in these two decades at *Shenandoah* has come from my friend Brendan Galvin and my wife (also friend) Sarah Kennedy. Sarah used to write remarkable, stirring and necessary poems but has now turned to making poignant novels, mostly historical. But for *Shenandoah* she has written reviews (often on short notice), conducted interviews and shaped my thinking, especially in the shaping and polishing of the editor's notes, which I have relished). Her advice and support have been necessary on a daily basis. Brendan I admired as a poet long before I came to Washington and Lee. His historical narratives and immersions in nature, as well as his deft approaches to his Irish heritage and the astonishing melding of precise and moving language in his work (especially accessible in a selected called *Habitats*) have helped establish the standards for *Shenandoah* poetry. He's no slouch with reviews, either, and can be delightfully prickly or adroitly appreciative.

Perhaps the most important things I can say about my experience as an editor is that the work of manuscript triage—dividing submissions into the categories of clearly not accomplished work, skillful but not exciting work and that rare bird, the story, essay or poem that engages and haunts and invites a second reading—has been a lonely job. Anyone who thinks there’s glamor in it had better adjust their lenses. It is 80% of the work, and it’s mostly a series of disappointments. Here’s a little scripture I keep circling back to: “Butter and honey shall he eat that he may refuse the evil and choose the good.” Let’s say “routine” instead of “evil,” “artful” instead of “good.” Butter and honey—you can’t survive on bread alone, so I’ve aimed to feed on what might sweeten my own nature and humanize my judgement.

As an editor, you do a lot of tasting, sampling and then moving on. The delights of the task surface and nourish if you learn to do it with speed (but not haste) and ruthlessness (but not smugness nor relish). It’s mining in the dark, and you learn to dance and sing with displays of skill and conviction, characters who will not fade, images that pulse like stars. When I say fast and ruthless, it sounds heartless, so let me invoke Flannery O’Connor, who said that, given the question of time, she could sample a few lines of a poem, several paragraphs of a story or a few pages of a novel. She would cease reading as soon as she came to a point that she could stop without experiencing a sense of loss. That’s a high standard, but submissions come not as single spies but as battalions. Patiently (and impatiently) you sift and arrange, rank and re-rank, seek the indelible and ineffable and fiercely imagined. Read a sentence aloud. Show a stanza to an intern or a friend. Somehow, lo and behold, an issue begins to take shape, a worthwhile enterprise surfaces, and all the squabbles and budget frustrations, the absence of engagement from faculty and the non-intern students just dissolves itself into a dew, and you fall in love for a spell with the issue of the magazine that will be your next offering to readers. Did I know when I signed up for *Editing 101: A Self-Inflicted and Self-Taught Trial-and-Error Circus* that this awareness might be the endgame? Hell no.

I believe that I should, for my own mental stability, omit detailed enumeration of my disappointments during the *Shenandoah* captivity. All but one. Even now, people ask me why *Shenandoah* converted from a prestigious print journal to a much more modest on-line production, slipping from four annual issues to three and then to a pair. From one perspective, it was financial. The university cut our budget in half, eliminating funding for printing costs and a managing editor. But that can’t be the heart of the matter, as WLU has a remarkable endowment; it does not lack for funds. For whatever reason, the administration evidently came to see literature as

frillery better quarantined to the English Department than broadcast to the larger community. That axe came suddenly and seemed the culmination of a campaign to reduce the journal's profile. From the day that Tom Burish (there's an anagram in there somewhere) walked onto campus, he seemed to hold the magazine in contempt. The school had no creative writing major (or even a minor then), no graduate students, no practical reason to house a literary journal, and, as he pointed out repeatedly, we were giving money to writers! When a reporter from *The Chronicle of Higher Education* asked then-provost Tom Williams why WLU was considering scuttling *Shenandoah*, he said that the school had no more business running a little publication venture than operating a hardware store. Well, that brought the debate out of the shadows, and the bitter campaigns that followed raised much rancor and ended in something of a draw.

Eventually I was stripped of sufficient money to maintain a professional staff (of two, including me) or a print edition. We had to go online, which was neither my native ground nor a place I wanted to reside. I do think online journals are a fine idea, though not nearly so fine as print journals with strong on-line components. Screens are damned useful, but nine times out of ten, give me a book—a self-sustaining technology that can be kicked and abused but still operate, can be cheaply replaced, that has three dimensions and heft and requires a particular (and pleasing to me) vertical and sequential ceremony. It is a self-contained, durable, economical, tangible technology. Not to mention magical. A book catches the sunlight and shadow just so. It was all very fine to carve the Commandments on tablets, but the book has proved sturdier. Also, I'm lazy, willing to try new protocols and formats but addicted to much of what I know by hand and eye and heart. Raised with horses, I may find zebras intriguing, but I am bound to the horses in inexplicable ways and easy ones—I like the way they ride. When *Shenandoah* went into the virtual world, I started marking time but still kept my eye open for characters who sang and words that flew, keeping the magazine itself in a ghostly way. The new dimension in my life—WordPress with all its coding and digital protocols—seemed like an assault on my essential nature. Yet I tried to make *Shenandoah* a screen version of what we'd had in print, and I do admire some other online journals—*Cold Mountain Review*, *Terrain*, *Cortland Review*—though I like being in front of them more than on the technical/administrative side. I'm looking forward to reading, instead of proofreading, the issues that my successor Beth Staples will make. I'm eager to see what they'll be like.

LA: There are now many more fine poets and writers than legitimate journals able to publish them. Most publications have a less than one percent acceptance rate. That has, along with the lower expense of the digital

format, been the catalyst for several universities and independent groups starting new online literary magazines. Based on your personal experiences, what would you advise any new editors of online publications?

RTS: Hard to answer. If starting a new magazine is meant to be a shortcut to anything, I recommend horseshoes, but if you love building sites as much as I loved making books, then prepare for the disappointments and commit to amplifying the satisfactions. It's possible that, once my generation has passed, no writers will feel strong investment in the old formats, and the online journal will be the norm. When we decided to convert *Shenandoah* to a digital journal instead of holding a wake, we operated under the assumption that many major journals would soon follow our lead. *Tri-Quarterly* had gone that way already, to much public dismay. The times they were a-changing? But that was off the mark. My favorite large literary journals (reviews from Missouri, Georgia, Gettysburg, Asheville, Charlottesville, LSU, 5 Points and others) have stayed in print, adding extensive online features while also fortifying the physical manifestation. I'm no expert on these matters, as I've spent the majority of my reading time in the past twenty years considering submissions. I can say definitively now that I'd rather read manuscripts on paper than on a screen. If there's anything else practical that I've learned it's that making a journal of any sort and hoping for funding to come along is a bad bet. And it's a matter of self-preservation to have partners in crime unless you are committed to a small-scale operation. I once thought that, retired, I would want to make a little journal, probably online (\$ question!), only poetry and reviews of poetry, appearing three or four times a year. But I quickly found myself thinking about how to pay the poets, how to secure copyrights, how to avoid the torrent of submissions I've come to dread. And then there's the matter of construction and technical assistance. I concluded, even though I was offered financial help from a generous friend, that this was a job for three people, probably none of them me. My Parkinson's diagnosis was probably the last card played in that hand, but I enjoy the notion—independence, a small voice crying in the wilderness, *The Timber Ridge Review*.

Maybe this is a useful morsel. I do believe there are about the appropriate number of prestige journals to accommodate the really accomplished stories, poems and creative essays writers are producing, and the same goes for obscure magazines and less seasoned, original, finished work. I'd guess that a 1% acceptance rate is not far away from the percentage of really good new creations out there; that's probably been so for ages. A writer just has to persist, finding the right journal/editor/audience for any piece you want published. And sometimes you find a flaccid piece of writing in *Shenandoah* (everybody has a bad day), a luminous one in the short-lived *Lonzie's Fried Chicken*. You just have to study them all, read

them omnivorously and become an informed consumer, learning how, say, a stinker by someone who later won a Pulitzer made its way into *The Nyawker* and a bright shining star found a home in a now-defunct annual web journal. It's a great challenge, but reading voraciously in one's chosen genre is necessary (sometimes a pleasure, sometimes cruel and unusual...), so why not force a little method into the madness?

LA: As you've helmed multiple journals, you've also concurrently taught at the same institutions. Does the teaching augment or detract from the editing?

RTS: I don't know. Lately I've taught less, edited more, but my life seems no different. Seems the task, whatever it is, takes up all the oxygen. If you have student help, editing is teaching, and if not, it's a correspondence course you're giving yourself. I can say that editing has sharpened my hunger to teach very focused literature classes and dulled my appetite for workshops. But this is just my eccentricity, no larger lesson to be learned, I expect.

LA: What about with your own writing—do the teaching and editing enhance or detract from it?

RTS: I think I'm the person least qualified to say. My sense is that the answer is as unstable and inexplicable as the mind that has to find ways to get work done. It's even more complicated because I used to write both poems and stories, so the writing was in itself like two vocations. I'm sure I'm a better writer for having been an editor and vice versa, but when the law of diminishing returns cut in with this multi-tasking, who can say? I can testify that the loss of my managing editor at *Shenandoah* plus the administration's steady chant that I should teach more—well, let's just say that I've never felt like more than a part-time writer since. Once I was working on a novel about a manhunt in early 20th century Appalachia. Financial and technical issues coming from above re-directed my attention. I was 300 pages into a well-polished draft of a book that I was never able to re-open when the "professional" fray had died down. Next time I had a full and promising draft on a novella (same protagonist as the novel) about a buffalo hunt. Same problem: administrative clamor, increased teaching, coffin nailed shut. I know I'm not engineered for marathons, but I had to try. I've almost decided that the fault was not in my stars but in me. Sad ending, though. Bitter taste on the tongue. Suffice it to say: staff members do not get sabbaticals.

LA: Do you remember a time when it was particularly difficult or shockingly easy juggling all of your job titles and the work aligned with each, and why? How did you resolve any of the more difficult parts?

RTS: Shortstop's gotta field, hit, run the bases, make the long throw to home. He varies his drills but builds habits, tries to get it out of his mind and into his wrists, knees and so on. I wish I could describe how one becomes reflective without becoming self-conscious, how one chooses what goes on the back burner and half-forgets that dish while stirring the sauces and kneading the bread. How to juggle peaches, knives, student essays, a sheaf of manuscripts and the search for a two-syllable noun that will rhyme with orange? It's one of the big important mysteries. I've cut corners and damaged friendships and my health (all of which I'm ultimately responsible for) to steal time and energy, which is taxing for one who, as my father rightly said, was "born lazy." I've had to pretend to be the worker bee, but when you're working with honeyed words some of the time, the masquerade can be rewarding. And then there's Socrates again: "A man's mask is apt to become his face."

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)



R. T. Smith

Breath

What is death,
but a letting go
of breath?

One of the last
things he did
was to blow up

the children's balloons
for the birthday party,
joking and mock-cursing

as he struggled
to tie all
those futtery teats.

Then he flicked them
into the air
for the children

to fight over.
Some of them
survived the party,

and were still there
after the funeral,
in every room of the house,

bobbing around
mockingly
in the least draft.

She thought about
murdering them
with her sharpest knife,

each loud pop
an angry bullet
from her heart.

BREATH

Instead, in the quietness
that followed her
children's sleep,

she patiently gathered
them all up,
slowly undoing

each raggedy nipple,
and, one by one, she took his
last breaths into her mouth.

What is life,
but a drawing in
of breath?

(Vol. 21. No. 1, 2014)

Welsh Landscape

To live in Wales is to be conscious
At dusk of the spilled blood
That went to the making of the wild sky,
Dyeing the immaculate rivers
In all their courses.
It is to be aware,
Above the noisy tractor
And hum of the machine
Of strife in the strung woods,
Vibrant with sped arrows.
You cannot live in the present,
At least not in Wales.
There is the language for instance,
The soft consonants
Strange to the ear.
There are cries in the dark at night
As owls answer the moon,
And thick ambush of shadows,
Hushed at the fields' corners
There is no present in Wales,
And no future;
There is only the past.
Brittle with relics,
Wind-bitten towers and castles
With sham ghosts;
Mouldering quarries and mines;
And an impotent people,
Sick with inbreeding,
Worrying the carcass of an old song.

(Vol. 2, No. 2, 1995)

Murmurs

1

How to live and breathe
with mercy?
A quandary, a question.

How to walk lightly
without a cry in the dark,
or even a shadow,

and with each step
be aware of the child sleeping next door:
how we'd give the world, not to wake her.

Murmuring blessings
around the walls,
love in its foundation.

2

Wall-wall,
walls are sounds
of the old tongue. We understand 'shibboleth',
the 's' is clear on our lips;
the 'sh', 'sh', 'sh',
a warning that it's the language of silence.

3

Now the breeze whispers
over manoeuvres.
Can't you hear the heather—rasping?

And when an army officer on Epynt announces
that they always take off their shoes
in Afghanistan,
as a gesture of respect to the natives,

(after kicking the door down, that is,
 everyone is quiet as the grave.
 Far away, not a whisper from the grapevine.

4

*I urge you please notice when you're happy and exclaim
 or murmur or think at some point—if this isn't nice, I don't
 know what is...*

—Kurt Vonnegut

the murmur
 we voice,
 is a language

strange to others.
 We mouth apology
 when caught out

in soliloquy:
 a muttering
 on the lip...

...but are pleased too
 when
 we snatch a glimpse

of some other wise man
 walking the street
 or behind a wheel

telling tales,
 minding the hours
 with himself,
 a being containing 'multitudes'
 and all content.

*Although you may have an innocent murmur
throughout your life, you won't need treatment for it*
—National Heart, Lung & Blood Institute

Poets live with beats,
consistently irregular;
lubb-dupp, its melody
carries a pitch that flows
through all the heartaches
and meter of the blood.

(Vol. 25, No. 1, 2018)

Winter Fractals

The brass knocker,
loose on our door
like a solitary fractal.
Smoke swirls in a quarry
and the day's huffing bellow

opens a portal in the storm.
My window reveals the world
I have misplaced.
Stratified sky, blue and peach.
Spring branch, cruel-pruned

by March as the white buds
tantalize and the street graces
bustle by. Rain pummels
a distant river that meanders
back and misses

the deep-seeded sprouts.
Prayer only serves as a rumor
to hammer my sweet spot
and pound all rewards.
For once, make me the gale

against their pane. Let me
reorder my words into a
blunted grace, a turbulence
of black and broken edicts,
the ruined breath of bees

and geese and every flying
thing, peering down at
the cement angels, their
cracked wings rippling
in the sunlight's frenzy.

Springtime's divine drain
yields to ash and clouds
above these broken crowns.
The last gurgles of sap
bleed sweetly out.

(Vol. 26-27, No. 1, 2019-2020)

God of Air

The lungs look like two fishes docked
and nibbling the aorta,

or the wind socks
a rural airport hangs to gauge

your whims. You slip my noose,
escape me, loosed.

But that's a lie: you refuse
to leave, won't empty my lungs,

though you lunge in the oak,
dally along the fence

the irises and gladioli line,
fiddle the dogwood's flowers—

and bear that stellar jay, startle blue,
head crested, neck-ringed,

who flashes skyward, blue-
ward, from the woods,

and puts the lie
to tedium and numb.

Even the mountain lion
I saw last week, whose coat

mimics California's summer
hills, beige-gold,

the head still noble, eyes amber——
the grasses re-ember there——

still dreams of running, lungs
hungry, each step a leap.

Zooed, the musculature gone,
he's all bone,

memory his home and urn.
Our eyes ember grass-gold

too, or leaf or earth or sky.
Maybe your abiding

loves me: ovals, curls and arcs
of you shrine the little sacs,

commas of you, who can't quite quit
the pink lungs' hives:

Maybe the air of my first cry
under the birth-room's cyclops' eye,

my mother's birth howl,
the blooded scent,

still lines a few cells.
I know: I drew cigarettes' brown eyes

to magma red for years,
avoided stair-climbs, pool dives.

And I'll not come again to burn
or rapture, to syncopate

your whether or not,
your might just-be.

If you are, awe
is your only law.

I'll not curse or pray.
Breath is only the first ardor.

(Vol. 26-27, No. 1, 2019-2020)

The Diver

Imagine water. A mud-dense country river
whose surface shows nothing
of what lies above it. Yet a man parks here,
steps out of his truck and into the gear—
black suit tight as the skin of a drum,
thick-lensed mask, tanks heavy with air—
that will let him glide
those clay-blind depths, shedding
earthly weight to float near the bottom,
as close as this life will bring him
to flying. He knows that miles west
fire blusters and dances, black smoke
an inky omen across the horizon.
But when a current, more fierce
than any this river has known, draws him
from the river's weedy bottom,
from his reverie of coral-veined water
and dazzle-bright fish, he is long minutes
realizing he has been pulled,
a thrashing Jonah, into the belly
of one of the planes dispatched
to gather the water needed
to bomb the flames silent.
Unable to surface in a coffin of water,
he thinks of fish he has kept
since boyhood in tanks of varying size
and how they seemed finally to spend
most of their time motionless,
fins barely wavering in water
that is endless and without tides.
But he believes motion can keep him
until the plane lands, until enough water
is pumped from the tank to let him call
his presence aloud and stand once more
on sturdy ground. Turning unceasing,
uncounted laps, he almost believes
the story he can make of this
until a hatch opens
and a rushing sudden as birth
sets him swimming for one second

THE DIVER

in air, before masked eyes close
on the final dive into fire.

(Vol. 9, No. 1, 2002)

We Fall Into Shapes and Breathe Deeply*after Milt Hinton*

A young musician asleep on a train,
already famous, or soon will be.
You strain to see, don't want to be rude.
Face open, innocent, he sleeps
like a boy, full weight on his elbows;
and though there is no way
to know this, you are sure
he has no change in his pockets—
old bandmates or devotees
picking him up at the station
to deliver him to his next meal.
You should keep moving,
not block the aisle, but you want
the light to fall like this always
in the dark rooms of trains.
To slant across the expanse
of his face, eyes closed as if
by tender fingers, mouth
slightly open. You want to place
a coin on his lips in homage
to all the music that will blossom there.

(Vol. 12, No. 1, 2005)

Epistrophy

Neither drunkenness nor chance nor the hammer
of the hand. Not the search for notes between the notes,

the lost between the ivories like a fallen pair of keys.
Not the demolition of a system. The need to dig, to make

earth worth digging and therefore digging toward.
What you hear is its own argument for being. The laying

down of explanation's burden in the bricks of e-flat minor.
And if the clash is one more stone through the window,

if the major seven tonic comes crowned in shattered fragments,
it is—in spite of shock or rhetoric of ruin—a fortunate thing.

What you hear when notes get close is a waver not a wave.
Its pitches converse, unconverted, in ways the O's of ancient

choirs suppress. Thus the pathos of the not yet as it passes,
the stained glass of the sun come crashing through the saint.

It comforts. It casts. It confuses. It spins the sharp
and brightly-cornered style of the cue ball or the joke.

The hand that strikes is stricken. It needs a plume of dust
the way strings needs tension, or the body a difficult night

to open what it must. I want to say the pain is in there,
and no sooner the black lid gapes. The harp beneath it rises.

The license board fires you again, for no good reason.
The accentual surprise that shivers our drinks has never been

this serious, this generous with the promise it hands to us
in pieces. Because it understands. We are far too broken,

too close, and never close enough. If another's music thumps
the wall, understand: there is a world in there, asleep in a chair.

A lone cigarette sits burning in a dish. The crack in the wall,
it is never coming out. Not as the lovely evidence it was.

The whole scene tells you to give in. Be patient as the plaster.
The air that takes and takes whatever blow the air imagines.

(Vol. 23, No. 1, 2016)

Studebaker

Try a small black radio from any year
and listen to the voices you get, they were
much faster then, they raced ahead of us
and rushed the music; love was in a rocking chair,
the floor was crooked, the moon was already in
the sky, though it was daylight still; or love
was in a Studebaker, we were driving east
and we had no idea how long the corporation
would last, or if there was a corporation, how could we?
And did it have its headquarters in Delaware
for taxes and connections, though the doors
were heavy and solid, what was the year? '55?
The Lark appeared in 1958 or
'59—it was their last attempt,
though I remember the Wagoneer, it was 19-
66 and something called the Cruiser, we had
Nat King Cole on the radio though static
was bad in Pennsylvania, given the mountains,
and there was a lever you pushed to make a bed—
I hope I'm getting it right—the leaves on the windshield
were large and wet, the song was Unforgettable,
the tree was either a swamp maple or a sycamore.

(Vol. 13, No.1, 2006)

Dragons in Their Pleasant Palaces

Dragons enchant my son: Marbled armor
And plumes of flame, their cloudy homes up high,
Always at a misty distance from where

We stand hoping we might see them soar.
He wants to know: Do they “resist” today?
He means exist. They always will if you

Imagine them. Dissatisfied by this,
He wants to know if they’re “in the Jurassic,”
A place on the globe we could visit

(Like Conan-Doyle’s pterodactyl-flocked
Plateau unchanged outside of time).
Do dragons die? It’s hard to say, I say.

But I wind up crying every goddamned time
I read him Puff the Magic Dragon.
He knows I will and asks me anyway.

He’s captivated by my harmless sorrow.
I read the story and hear the corny song,
My voice brittle as old glassine, stifling a sob.

Our hearts are dangerous rainbows, dispelled
In the common light of all our minor hours.
He wants to know what’s behind it all.

Why do I cry? Why does it happen every time?
Because little boys don’t last forever.
My melancholy leaves him unimpressed.

He’s bored by what he doesn’t understand.
He excavates another book from plush
Barrows of polar bears, narwhales, and tigers,

One with dogs that talk and drive fast cars. They race
Across the plains toward a magic tree,
Its stately canopy rising over the horizon

Ever higher as they speed with manic joy
To join their friends, cavorting on branches,
Lightheaded with happiness just to be alive.

Little Mag

Spend three hours
addressing envelopes.
Bic exhausted.
Towards the finish
the hand finds itself
totally unable to complete the
tight circle of a letter o.

The mags go out like ack-ack.

In exchange I get misprints
highlighted, protest, left topher
off his name, no comma, word missing,
poems, two renewals, one cancellation,
a shaky essay on the work
of someone I've never heard of,
a pair of sandals, a dead fish.

At the post office I have a
deal where they stick the stamps
on and I pay.
"Too much bad language,"
says the supervisor with a hat
speaking to me as
if I were a martian.
"We have women here."
I make a note.

In the pub I drink
to wash it all out of me
but the landlord's got
a new one can't wait.
It comes at me across the pump
handles like a singing telegram.
Crap can't tell him.
Have another pint I smile.
Pretty full I say.

Tomorrow the library
abuse in the bookstores
rain.
A bag of post like a
sack of kippers.

Dear Editor
I enclose 38 poems about love.
My friends say these
are better than anything
else they've read.
I would like to buy your
magazine please send a
free copy.
I will pay for one
when I'm in it.

I enclose
Here are
I am sending
Please find
I submit
Could you
Will you
Please
It is important that
I hope
I must
I have to
I'm the best

I don't bother usually
but these poems of mine are
so well put together that I
read them twice after
writing them.
You are the way
You are the path
You are the light
You are the last beacon
in this verbal wilderness

I have faith
Help me

But I cannot.
Poetry is short on miracles.
I send a rejection

Instead.

(Vol. 2, No. 1, 1995)

CONTRIBUTORS

Ai (1947–2010), born Florence Anthony, was born in the town of Albany in North Texas and raised in Tucson, Arizona. The product of an affair between her mother and a Japanese man, she self-identified as Japanese, Black, Irish, and of Native American descent including Choctaw-Chickasaw, Southern Cheyenne, and Comanche backgrounds. Ai grew up in poverty, which influenced her later poetry's depiction of personal struggles. Ai attended the University of Arizona, majoring in English and Oriental studies with a concentration in Japanese and a minor in creative writing. By the end of college, she knew she wanted to become a poet. She earned her MFA from the University of California at Irvine, where she studied under poets such as Donald Justice and Charles Wright. Soon after completing the program, she changed her name to Pelorhankhe Ai L'Heah Ogawa and established the pen name "Ai," the Japanese word for "love." In 1973, Ai published *Cruelty* (Perseus), the first of eight books published over her career. Her second collection, *Killing Floor* (Houghton, 1979), won the 1978 Lamont Poetry Award winner from the Academy of American Poets. Subsequent works by Ai include *Sin* (W. W. Norton, 1986), winner of an American Book Award; *Fate* (1991); *Greed* (1993); *Vice: New and Selected Poems* (1999), winner of the National Book Award for Poetry; *Dread* (2003); and the posthumous *No Surrender* (2010). She frequently wrote in the form of dramatic monologues, taking on both narrators of her own invention and historical personalities from Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley to Jimmy Hoffa and John Wilkes Booth. Ai was the recipient of awards from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Bunting Fellowship Program at Radcliffe College. From 1999 onward, she was a professor and vice president of the Native American Faculty and Staff Association at Oklahoma State University. She worked there and lived in Stillwater, Oklahoma, until her death in 2010.

Paul Alexander is the author of *Bitter Crop: The Heartache and Triumph of Billie Holiday's Last Year*, published in 2024 by Alfred A. Knopf in the U.S. and Canongate in the U.K. Among his previous books are *Rough Magic*, a biography of Sylvia Plath, and *Salinger*, a biography of J.D. Salinger that was the basis of a feature documentary that appeared on American Masters, on PBS, Netflix, and HBO. He has written for several publications, including *The New York Times*, *New York*, *The Nation*, and *The Washington Post*, where he is a regular book critic. His poetry has appeared in *The New Republic*, *Poetry*, *The Sewanee Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Poem*, *Mississippi Review*, *The Black Warrior Review*, *Connecticut River Review*, *The Bennington Review*, and *The Gay and Lesbian Review*. He teaches at Hunter College.

Sherman Alexie is an award-winning Native American poet, novelist, short story writer, performer, and filmmaker. Alexie's poetry collections include *Face* (Hanging Loose Press, 2009), *One Stick Song* (Hanging Loose Press,

2000), and *The Man Who Loves Salmon* (Limberlost Press, 1998), among others. His novels include *Flight* (Grove Press, 2007); *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (Little, Brown and Company, 2007), which won the 2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature, among many other awards; *Indian Killer* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1996), named a *New York Times* Notable Book; and *Reservation Blues* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1995), which won a 1996 Before Columbus Foundation's American Book Award and a Murray Morgan Prize. His short story collections include *Blasphemy: New and Selected Stories* (Grove Press, 2012); *War Dances* (Grove Press, 2009), which won a 2010 PEN/Faulkner Award for fiction; *Ten Little Indians* (Grove Press, 2004); *The Toughest Indian in the World* (Grove Press, 2000); and *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993), which won a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award. *The Business of Fancysdancing: Stories and Poems* (Hanging Loose Press, 1992) was his debut book. Alexie's memoir, *You Don't Have to Say You Love Me* (Little, Brown and Company, 2017), was awarded the American Library Association's Carnegie Medal for Nonfiction in 2018. Alexie has been the recipient of numerous awards and grants, including the 2009 Mason Award, the 2008 Stranger Genius Award, a Pushcart Prize, a PEN/Malamud Award, and a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship, as well as numerous honorary degrees. Alexie was named one of Granta's Best Young American Novelists in 1996, and he won the 1991 Washington State Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship. In 1998, the all-Native-American film *Smoke Signals*, a collaboration between Alexie and Chris Eyre, a Cheyenne/Arapaho tribal member, was released at the Sundance Film Festival. Alexie grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington. He lives in Seattle, Washington.

A. R. Ammons (1926–2001) was born in rural North Carolina on February 18, 1926. His experiences growing up on a cotton and tobacco farm during the Great Depression inspired a great deal of his poetry. Ammons wrote his first poems while serving aboard a Navy destroyer during World War II. After the war, he earned a BA from Wake Forest University and an MA in English from the University of California at Berkeley. He taught at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York from 1964 to 1998. Ammons's many honors include two National Books Awards, a National Book Critics Circle Award, the Library of Congress's Rebekah Johnson Bobbitt National Prize for Poetry, and the Bollingen Prize for Poetry. He is the author of numerous poetry collections, including *Bosh and Flapdoodle* (2005), *Glare* (1997), *Garbage* (1993), *A Coast of Trees* (1981), *Sphere* (1974), *Collected Poems 1951-1971*, *Tape for the Turn of the Year* (1965), and *Ommateum: With Doxology* (1955). Ammons once told the *Winston-Salem Journal and Sentinel*, "I never dreamed of being a "Poet" poet. I think I always wanted to be an amateur poet." Long hailed as a major American poet, reviewers acknowledged Ammons's debt to other writers but found that

he had forged a style that was distinctly his own. David Kirby defended Ammons, writing in the *Times Literary Supplement* that “his short lines, his overall brevity, his avoidance of punctuation marks other than the occasional comma and that quick stop-and-go colon are hallmarks of his minimalism, his exquisitely unencumbered technique.” His *Collected Poems* won Ammons his first National Book Award in 1973. *A Coast of Trees: Poems* was nominated for the National Book Award and won the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1982. Harold Bloom wrote, “If Ammons is, as I think, the central poet of my generation, it is because he alone has made a heterocosm, a second nature in his poetry, I deprecate no other poet by this naming. ... He has emerged as an extraordinary master, comparable to the Stevens of *Ideas of Order* and *The Man with the Blue Guitar*.” Ammons’s concerns with the transcendental everyman coalesce in what may prove to be his finest effort: the National Book Award winner of 1993, *Garbage*. The title, suggested when Ammons drove by a Florida landfill, is characteristically flippant and yet perfectly serious. Ammons died on February 25, 2001, at the age of 75.

Lana K. W. Austin, born and raised in rural Kentucky, is a poet and writer whose work has been featured in *Mid-American Review*, *Sou’wester*, *The Chariton Review*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Columbia Journal*, *Zone 3*, *The Pinch*, and others. Her full-length poetry collection, *Blood Harmony*, is from Iris Press (2018). Austin, the winner in the poetry category of the 2018 Words and Music Writing Competition, has an MFA from George Mason University and is an adjunct English instructor at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

Sam Barbee’s most-recent collection is titled *Apertures of Voluptuous Force* (2022, Redhawk Publishing). He has published three previous poetry collections, including *That Rain We Needed* (2016, Press 53), a nominee for the Roanoke-Chowan Award as one of North Carolina’s best poetry collections of 2016. A two-time Pushcart nominee, his poems have recently appeared in *Salvation South*, *Verse Virtual*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Grand Little Things*; and on-line journals *Dead Mule School of Literature* and *Medusa’s Kitchen*.

Marvin Bell (1937–2020) was born in New York City into a Jewish family who had emigrated from the Ukraine, and frequently wrote about distance and reconciliation between people, often touching on his complex relationship to his heritage. A decorated teacher at the University of Iowa from 1965 to 2005, he won numerous honors for his work and was named Iowa’s first poet laureate in 2000. Bell was the author of over 20 volumes of poetry, including *Incarnate: The Collected Dead Man Poems* (2019), *Vertigo: The Living Dead Man Poems* (2011), *A Primer about the Flag* (2011), *Days, I Book* (2009), *Mars Being Red* (2007), and *Rampant* (2004). Bell’s second book, *A Probable Volume of Dreams* (1969) won the Lamont

Award from the Academy of American Poets. His volume of essays, *Old Snow Just Melting: Essays and Interviews*, is concerned with themes typical of the author's poetic works, particularly mutability and decay. The volume also presents valuable insights into the author's poetic process. Bell writes, "I'll tell you right now the secrets of writing poetry. ... First, one learns to write by reading. ... Number two, I believe that language, compared to the materials of other art forms, has only one thing going for it: the ability to be precise. ... And the third and most important secret is that, if you do anything seriously for a long time, you get better at it." Bell died at the age of 83 on December 14, 2020.

Mirande Bissell is a teacher and poet who lives in the Patapsco River Valley, west of Baltimore. Her first book of poems, *Stalin at the Opera*, was selected by Diane Seuss as winner of the Ghost Peach Press prize, and was published in 2021.

Patrick Bizzaro has published twelve books and chapbooks of poetry, two critical studies of Fred Chappell's poetry and fiction, a book on the pedagogy of academic creative writing, some textbooks, and a couple hundred poems in magazines. He is a frequent reviewer of his peers' work in magazines like *Asheville Poetry Review*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, and *Appalachian Journal*, among others. Bizzaro, first director of the University Writing Program at East Carolina University, is a UNC Board of Governor's Distinguished Professor for Teaching and ECU Scholar-Teacher Award winner. He was most recently a professor of English in Indiana University of Pennsylvania's doctoral program in Composition and TESOL, after retiring from ECU. During his last year on the ECU faculty, he received the Outstanding Professor award from the ECU Department of Disability Support Services, the ninth award for teaching he has received during his career. His articles on composition studies have appeared regularly in *College English* and *College Composition and Communication*, including his co-edited book on poet and pedagogue Wendy Bishop from Hampton Press. His latest book, *Fog at the Manassas Battlefield*, was published by Redhawk Publications.

Sheila Black is the author of five poetry collections and three chapbooks. Her latest *For the Loneliness of Walking Out* is from Lily Review Poetry Books (January 2025). Her poems and essays have appeared in *Blackbird*, *Poetry*, *The Nation*, *The New York Times*, and elsewhere. She lives in San Antonio, TX and Tempe, AZ where she is assistant director of the Virginia G. Piper Center for Creative Writing at Arizona State University (ASU).

Robert Bly (1926–2021) was the author of dozens of books of poetry and translations. He was born in western Minnesota and grew up in a community dominated by Norwegian immigrant farmers. After two years in

the Navy, he attended St. Olaf College in Minnesota before transferring to Harvard. In 1956, he traveled on a Fulbright grant to Norway, where he translated Norwegian poetry into English. Returning to Minnesota, he took up residence on a farm with his wife, the short story writer Carol Bly, and their children. Bly's first widely acclaimed collection was *Silence in the Snowy Fields* (1962), and his second book, *The Light Around the Body* (1967), won the National Book Award. Unlike the meditative "deep images" of nature that had filled his first book, *The Light Around the Body* included poems attacking US involvement in the Vietnam War. In 1966, Bly cofounded American Writers against the Vietnam War, led much of the opposition among writers to that war, and even contributed his National Book Award prize money to the antiwar effort. The 1970s were a prolific decade for him, in which he published 11 books of poetry, essays, and translations, including *Sleepers Joining Hands* (1973) and *This Tree Will Be Here for a Thousand Years* (1979). In 1979, Bly and Carol Bly divorced, an event which precipitated a serious crisis of the soul for the poet, and led him to begin, with James Hillman and Michael Meade, a series of seminars for men. In *Iron John: A Book about Men* (1990), Bly argues that modern men are greatly damaged by an absence of intergenerational male role models and initiation rituals. Bly revisited this concept with *The Maiden King: The Reunion of Masculine and Feminine* (1998), written in collaboration with psychotherapist Marion Woodman, using an ancient Russian myth as their origin story. In addition to the poets he introduced through his influential series of decade journals (The Fifties, Sixties and Seventies), Bly translated poets as various as Rainer Maria Rilke, Antonio Machado, Tomas Tranströmer, Francis Ponge, Rumi, Hafez, and Kabir. *The Winged Energy of Delight: Selected Translations* (2004) gathered together 22 of the poets translated by Bly over his 50-year career. Following the practice of his friend William Stafford, Bly wrote a poem every morning, which produced the collection *Morning Poems* (1998). His new and selected poems *Eating the Honey of Words* (1999) was also widely praised. His later collections include *The Urge to Travel Long Distances* (2005), the collection of ghazals *My Sentence was a Thousand Years of Joy* (2005), *Stealing Sugar from the Castle: Selected and New Poems, 1950–2013*, and *Collected Poems* (2018). Bly died at his home in Minneapolis on November 21, 2021, at the age of 94.

Eavan Boland (1944–2020) was born in Dublin, Ireland. Over the course of her long career, Eavan Boland emerged as one of the foremost female voices in Irish literature. Throughout her many collections of poetry, in her prose memoir *Object Lessons* (1995), and in her work as a noted anthropologist and teacher, Boland honed an appreciation for the ordinary in life. The daughter of a diplomat and a painter, Boland spent her girlhood in London and New York, returning to Ireland to attend secondary school

in Killiney and later university at Trinity College in Dublin. Though still a student when she published her first collection, *23 Poems* (1962), Boland's early work was informed by her experiences as a young wife and mother, and her growing awareness of the troubled role of women in Irish history and culture. Her fifth book, *In Her Own Image* (1980), brought Boland international recognition and acclaim. *In a Time of Violence* (1994), shortlisted for the prestigious T.S. Eliot Prize, contains poems that gesture toward private and political realities at once. Boland's *New Collected Poems* (2008) was published to glowing reviews. Incorporating numerous poems from her first books, as well as a previously unpublished verse play, the book demonstrates Boland's restless and incessant attempt to escape from, or at the very least complicate, the Irish lyric tradition she inherited. Boland's later books include the poetry collections *A Poet's Dublin* (2014) and *A Woman Without a Country* (2014). Her awards include a Lannan Foundation Award in Poetry and an American Ireland Fund Literary Award. She taught at Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin, Bowdoin College, and at Stanford University since 1996, where she was the Bella Mabury and Eloise Mabury Knapp Professor in the Humanities and Melvin and Bill Lane professor of English and director of the creative writing program. She divided her time between Palo Alto and Dublin, before her death in 2020.

Bruce Bond is the author of thirty-three books including, most recently, *Patmos* (Juniper Prize, UMass, 2021), *Behemoth* (New Criterion Prize, 2021), *Liberation of Dissonance* (Schaffner Award for Literature in Music, Schaffner, 2022), and *Invention of the Wilderness* (LSU, 2023), plus two books of criticism, *Immanent Distance* (U. of Michigan, 2015) and *Plurality and the Poetics of Self* (Palgrave, 2019). Other honors include the *Crab Orchard* Open Competition Book Prize, the Elixir Press Poetry Award, the L. E. Phillabaum Award, *Tampa Review* Book Prize, Richard Snyder Book Prize, the Allen Tate Award, the Lynda Hull Memorial Poetry Award, two Texas Institute of Letters Best Book of Poetry Prizes, the Meringoff Prize, the Richard Peterson Prize, the Meridian Editors' Award in Poetry, the New South Poetry Award, the Knightville Poetry Award, the Laurence Goldstein Award, the River Styx International Poetry Award, and fellowships from the NEA and the Texas Institute for the Arts. His work appears in numerous journals and anthologies including seven editions of *Best American Poetry*. Bond presently teaches part-time as a Regents Emeritus Professor of English at the University of North Texas and performs jazz and classical guitar in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

J. W. Bonner writes frequently for *The Asheville Poetry Review* and for *ARGO*, a Hellenic Studies journal published out of London. He calls Maine home.

Zoe Boyer was raised in Evanston, Illinois on the shore of Lake Michigan, and completed her MA in creative writing among the ponderosa pines in Prescott, Arizona. Her work has appeared in such publications as *The New York Times*, *Poetry South*, *Kelp Journal*, *Plainsongs*, *RockPaperPoem*, *About Place*, *West Trade Review*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *The Penn Review*, *Pleiades*, and has been nominated for Best of the Net.

Gaylord Brewer is the author of seventeen books of poetry, fiction, criticism, and cookery, including *Worship the Pig* (Red Hen, 2020), *Country of Ghost* (Red Hen, 2015) and *The Poet's Guide to Food, Drink, & Desire* (Stephen F. Austin, 2015). His poems have appeared in *Best American Poetry* and *The Bedford Introduction to Literature*. His many international residencies include Hawthornden Castle (Scotland) and the Global Arts Village (India), and he has taught in Russia, Kenya, England, and the Czech Republic. Brewer was awarded a Tennessee Arts Commission Fellowship in 2009. He is a native of Louisville, Kentucky, and has been a professor at Middle Tennessee State University since 1993, where he founded and edited the journal, *Poems and Plays*, which ran for 20 years.

John Brooks's poetry has been published by *The Cortland Review*, *Appalachian Review*, *Pilot Press*, *Good River Review*, *Assaracus*, *East by Northeast*, and *Plainsongs*. He has written for *BOMB*, *Strange Fire Collective*, *Ruckus Journal*, and *UnderMain*. Brooks's paintings and drawings have been featured in *The Yale Review*, *NYRB*, *Texte zur Kunst*, *Golf Digest*, *The New Yorker*, and have been exhibited at the North Carolina Museum of Art Winston-Salem (SECCA), NCMA Raleigh, and the Speed Museum. He lives in Los Angeles.

Kathryn Stripling Byer (1944–2017) grew up in southwest Georgia and graduated from Wesleyan College in Macon, Georgia. She received an MFA from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she studied with Allen Tate, Fred Chappell, and Robert Watson. In 2005, North Carolina Governor Mike Easley appointed Byer to be the state's fifth poet laureate. She was the first woman to hold the position. Her books of poetry include *The Vishnu Bird* (2015), *Descent* (2012), *Southern Fictions* (2011), *Catching Light* (Louisiana State University Press, 2002); *Black Shawl* (1998), *Wildwood Flower* (1992), which was the 1992 Lamont Poetry Selection of The Academy of American Poets; and *The Girl in the Midst of the Harvest* (1986), which was published in the Associated Writing Programs award series. Byer's poems have appeared in *Arts Journal*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Georgia Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Iowa Review*, *Nimrod*, *Poetry*, and *Southern Review*, as well as numerous anthologies. Her essays have appeared in *Bloodroot: Reflections on Place by Appalachian Women Writers* (edited by Joyce Dyer; University Press of Kentucky, 1998), *Dream Garden: The Poetic Vision of*

Fred Chappell (edited by Patrick Bizzaro; Louisiana State University Press, 1997), *The Boston Globe*, and *Shenandoah*. She received writing fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the North Carolina Arts Council. She was poet-in-residence at Western Carolina University in Cullowhee, North Carolina. She died June 5, 2017.

Hayden Carruth (1921–2008) was born on August 3, 1921, in Waterbury, Connecticut, and educated at both the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and the University of Chicago, where he earned a master's degree. His first collection of poems, *The Crow and the Heart*, was published in 1959. Since then, he published more than thirty books, including *Toward the Distant Islands: New and Selected Poems* (Copper Canyon Press, 2006) and *Doctor Jazz: Poems 1996–2000* (2001). Other poetry titles include *Scrambled Eggs & Whiskey: Poems, 1991–1995* (1996), which received the National Book Award for Poetry; *Collected Longer Poems* (1994); *Collected Shorter Poems, 1946–1991* (1992), which received the National Book Critics' Circle Award; *The Sleeping Beauty* (1990); and *Tell Me Again How the White Heron Rises and Flies Across Nacreous River at Twilight Toward the Distant Islands* (1989). Known also for his criticism, Carruth is the author of several prose collections, including *Selected Essays & Reviews* (Copper Canyon Press, 1996) and *Sitting In: Selected Writings on Jazz, Blues, and Related Topics* (1993), as well as nonfiction works, including *Beside the Shadblow Tree: A Memoir of James Laughlin* (Copper Canyon Press, 1999) and *Reluctantly: Autobiographical Essays* (1998). He taught at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania and at the Graduate Creative Writing Program at Syracuse University. Carruth lived in Vermont for many years before residing in Munnsville, New York, with his wife, the poet Joe-Anne McLaughlin Carruth. He died September 29, 2008.

Catherine Carter's poetry collections with LSU Press include *Larvae of the Nearest Stars* (2019), *The Swamp Monster at Home* (2012), and *The Memory of Gills* (2006), with *By Stone and Needle* forthcoming in fall 2025. Jacar Press has also printed her two chapbooks, and her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *RHINO*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and *Best American Poetry 2009*, among others. She is a professor of English at Western Carolina University

Fred Chappell (1936–2024) was an author and poet. He was an English professor for 40 years (1964–2004) at the University of NC-Greensboro, and poet laureate of NC from 1997 to 2002. His 1968 novel *Dagon*, which was named the Best Foreign Book of the Year by the Académie française, is a recasting of a Cthulhu Mythos horror story as a psychologically realistic Southern Gothic. In novels like *It Is Time, Lord* (1963) and *The Inkling* (1965), Chappell explores madness, violence, and even horror. His

later cycle of interconnected short stories, *The Kirkman Tetralogy*, which included volumes such as *I Am One of You Forever* (1985) and *Farewell, I'm Bound to Leave You* (1996), focuses on personal experience, layering fiction with some of the facts and circumstances of Chappell's own life. Chappell's fiction has been widely praised, and he is frequently linked to a Southern tradition of writers. Writing in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*, Frank Levering stated, "Not since James Agee and Robert Penn Warren has a Southern writer displayed such masterful versatility. Together with only a handful of his American contemporaries, Chappell reminds us of the almost forgotten phrase 'man of letters.'" Though Chappell first gained critical attention for his prose, he has since become widely known as a poet. His first collection of poetry, *The World Between the Eyes* (1971), won the Roanoke-Chowan Poetry Cup. Of his shift from prose to poetry, Chappell told *Contemporary Authors*, "Now for the first time I could begin to think directly about the most important intellectual and artistic endeavor in the world: the composition of poetry." Other early collections of poetry include *The Man Twice Married to Fire* (1977) and *Awakening to Music* (1979). One of Chappell's most ambitious works is *Midquest* (1981), "a four-volume poetic," as the poet himself described it. Prior to its release as a single volume in 1981, the work was published in four separate volumes—*River*, *Bloodfire*, *Wind Mountain*, and *Earthsleep*—between the years 1975 and 1980. Chappell has published many collections of poetry since *Midquest*, including *Ever After* (2023), *As If It Were* (2019), *Shadowbox* (2009), *Backsass* (2004), *Family Gathering* (2000), and *Spring Garden: New and Selected Poems* (1995). His literary awards include the Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry, the Prix du Meilleur Livre Étranger, the Bollingen Prize, and the T. S. Eliot Award. Fred Chappell died in Greensboro, North Carolina on January 4, 2024, at the age of 87.

Kelly Cherry (1940–2022) was the daughter of violinists, and her early exposure to music had a profound affect on her work, which ranged in genre from poetry to novels to short fiction to memoir to criticism. She was born in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and grew up in Ithaca, New York, and Chesterfield County, Virginia. She was the author of more than 30 books and chapbooks of writing. Her collections of poetry include *Songs for a Soviet Composer* (1980), *God's Loud Hand* (1993), *Death and Transfiguration* (1997), *Rising Venus* (2002), *Hazard and Prospect: New and Selected Poems* (2007), *The Retreats of Thought: Poems* (2009), and *Quartet for J. Robert Oppenheimer: A Poem* (2017). Her works of fiction include *Sick and Full of Burning* (1974); *In the Wink of an Eye* (1983); *The Society of Friends* (1999), which won the Dictionary of Literary Biography Award for Short Fiction; *We Can Still Be Friends* (2003); and *The Woman Who* (2010). An accomplished writer of nonfiction, Cherry also published memoirs, including *The Exiled Heart* (1991), and essay collections, such

as *Girl in a Library: On Women Writers and the Writing Life* (2009). Her most recent titles were *A Kind of Dream* (interlinked stories), selected by *Library Journal* as a Best Indie book, and *The Life and Death of Poetry* (March 2013). Her fiction has appeared in *Best American Short Stories*, *Prize Stories: The O. Henry Awards*, *The Pushcart Prize*, and *New Stories from the South* and has won three PEN/Syndicated Fiction awards. The recipient of numerous honors and awards, Cherry was named the poet laureate of Virginia in 2010, and lived on a small farm in Virginia with her husband, the fiction writer Burke Davis III until her death in early 2022.

Suzanne Cleary's manuscript *The Odds* was chosen by Jan Beatty as winner of the 2024 Laura Boss Narrative Poetry Award, to be published in March 2025 by New York Quarterly Books. She teaches as Core Faculty in the MFA in Creative Writing Program of Converse University. Her website is suzanneclearypoet.com

Lucille Clifton (1936–2010) was born in Depew, New York, on June 27, 1936. Her first book of poems, *Good Times*, was rated one of the best books of the year by the *New York Times* in 1969. Clifton remained employed in state and federal government positions until 1971, when she became a writer in residence at Coppin State College in Baltimore, Maryland, where she completed two collections: *Good News About the Earth* (1972) and *An Ordinary Woman* (1974). She went on to write several other collections of poetry, including *Voices* (BOA Editions, 2008); *Mercy* (2004); *Blessing the Boats: New and Selected Poems 1988–2000* (2000), which won the National Book Award; *The Terrible Stories* (1995), which was nominated for the National Book Award; *The Book of Light* (1993); *Quilting: 1987–1990* (1991); *Next: New Poems* (1987). Her collection, *Good Woman: Poems and a Memoir 1969–1980* (1987) was nominated for the Pulitzer Prize; *Two-Headed Woman* (1980), also a Pulitzer Prize nominee, was the recipient of the University of Massachusetts Press Juniper Prize. She has also written *Generations: A Memoir* (1976) and more than sixteen books for children, written expressly for an African-American audience. Her honors include an Emmy Award from the American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences, a Lannan Literary Award, two fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Shelley Memorial Award, the YM-YWHA Poetry Center Discovery Award, and the 2007 Ruth Lilly Prize. In 1999, she was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. After a long battle with cancer, Lucille Clifton died on February 13, 2010.

Horace Coleman (1943–2017) was born in Dayton, Ohio in 1943. He served in the United States Air force from 1965-70 as an air traffic controller / intercept director—including service in Vietnam, 1967-68. He holds a BA

and MFA from Bowling Green University and taught at several universities. His two collections of poetry are *Between a Rock and a Hard Place* and *In the Grass*.

Billy Collins is the author of twelve collections of poetry including *Water, Water, Whale Day*, *The Rain in Portugal*, *Aimless Love*, *Horoscopes for the Dead*, *Ballistics*, *The Trouble with Poetry*, *Nine Horses*, *Sailing Alone Around the Room*, *Questions About Angels*, *The Art of Drowning*, and *Picnic, Lightning*. He is also the editor of *Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry*, *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day*, and *Bright Wings: An Illustrated Anthology of Poems About Birds*. A former Distinguished Professor at Lehman College of the City University of New York, Collins served as Poet Laureate of the United States from 2001 to 2003 and as New York State Poet from 2004 to 2006. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the New York Foundation for the Arts and has taught at Columbia University, Sarah Lawrence, and Lehman College, City University of New York, where he is a Distinguished Professor. He has also been a Senior Distinguished Fellow of the Winter Park Institute in Florida, and a faculty member at the State University of New York-Stonybrook. In 2016 he was inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He lives in Florida with his wife Suzannah.

Alfred Corn was born in Bainbridge, Georgia in 1943, and grew up in Valdosta. He earned a bachelor's degree from Emory University in 1965 and a master's in French literature from Columbia University in 1967. He is the author of several books of poetry, including *Unions* (2015) and two novels, the second titled *Miranda's Book*, which also appeared in 2015. His collections of essays are *The Metamorphoses of Metaphor* and *Atlas: Selected Essays, 1989-2007*. He has received the Guggenheim, the NEA, an Award in Literature from the Academy of Arts and Letters, and one from the Academy of American Poets. He has taught at Yale, Columbia, Connecticut College, The University of Cincinnati, and UCLA. In 2013 he was made a Life Fellow of Clare Hall, Cambridge. In 2015 he was guest speaker at the new museum in Wuzhen, China, dedicated to the work of the painter and writer Mu Xin. In the spring of 2016 Chamán Ediciones in Spain published *Rocinante*, a selection of his work translated in Spanish, the same translation appearing the following year in Mexico under the title *Antonio en el desierto*. A new collection of essays titled *Arks & Covenants* appeared in May of 2017. In October of 2016, *Roads Taken*, a celebration of the 40th anniversary of Alfred Corn's first book *All Roads at Once* was held at Poets' House in New York City, and in November 2017 he was inducted into the Georgia Writers' Hall of Fame. In 2023, W.W. Norton brought out his

translation of Rilke's *Duino Elegies*, and in 2024, a volume of selected poems appeared with Press 53 under the title *The Returns*.

Thomas Rain Crowe is an author, translator and publisher of New Native Press and the multi-award winning nonfiction nature memoir *Zoro's Field: My Life in the Appalachian Woods* (University of Georgia Press, 2005). He lives in Jackson County, NC.

Alana Dagenhart is a poet and artist from North Carolina. She is the author of a poetry collection, *Yellow Leaves* (Redhawk Publications, 2022), and a chapbook, *Blood* (Finishing Line Press, 2016). Her poems have appeared in various journals including *Tar River*, *Kakalak*, *Pinesong*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Emrys*, and she was awarded a Fulbright-Queens University Belfast Scholar Award in Irish Literature for 2024-2025.

Jim Daniels' latest fiction book, *The Luck of the Fall*, was published by Michigan State University Press. His most recent poetry collections include *The Human Engine at Dawn* (Wolfson Press), *Gun/Shy* (Wayne State University Press), and *Comment Card* (Carnegie Mellon University Press). His first book of nonfiction, *An Ignorance of Trees*, is forthcoming from Cornerstone Press in 2025. A native of Detroit, he currently lives in Pittsburgh and teaches in the Alma College low-residency MFA program.

Cornelius Eady is the author of several books of poetry, including *Hard-headed Weather: New and Selected Poems* (Putnam, April 2008). His second book, *Victims of the Latest Dance Craze*, won the Lamont Prize from the Academy of American Poets in 1985; in 2001 *Brutal Imagination* was a finalist for the National Book Award. His work in theater includes the libretto for an opera, "Running Man," which was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in Drama in 1999. His play, "Brutal Imagination," won Newsday's Openheimer award in 2002. He has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund. In 1996 Eady co-founded, with writer Toi Derricotte, the Cave Canem summer workshop/retreat for African American poets. More than a decade later, Cave Canem is a thriving national network of black poets, as well as an institution offering regional workshops, readings, a first book prize, and the summer retreat. Eady has been a teacher for more than twenty years, and a professor at SUNY-Stony Brook, The University of Missouri-Columbia, Notre Dame University, and The University of Tennessee-Knoxville.

Menna Elfyn is an award-winning poet and playwright from Wales who writes in Welsh but whose work has been translated into over eighteen

languages. She has published fourteen collections of poetry, children's novels, libretti for UK and US composers as well as plays for television and radio. Her most recent bilingual collections are: *Bondo 2017* and *Murmur 2012*, published by Bloodaxe Books, the latter was selected by Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation in autumn 2012, the first book of Welsh poetry in English translation ever to be chosen. Her most recent book of poetry in Welsh *Merch Perygl* (Danger's Daughter) appeared in 2011. She received the Anima Intranza International Foreign Poetry Prize in 2009 and has also been nominated for the Evelyn Encelot prize for women poets. She has won a number of awards such as Book of the Year for *Aderyn Bach* mewn Llaw (Bird in Hand), in 1990, also short-listed for the same prize *Blind Man's Kiss* (Cusan Dyn Dall) 2001 and the anthology she co-edited with John Rowlands was selected as Poetry Book Society Recommended Translation in 2003. She was also awarded a Creative Arts award from the Arts Council of Wales to write a book on 'Sleep' and *Cwsg*, was published in 2019. Her biography of Eluned Phillips a renowned Welsh woman poet, *Optimist Absoliwt*, 2016 was shortlisted for Book of the Year in 2017, and published in English with Honno Press in 2018. In 2021, she edited an unpublished novel in Welsh by Eluned Phillips, *Cyfrinachau*, (Honno Press, 2021). She has been a columnist with the national newspaper of Wales, The Western Mail, since 1995. During the seventies and eighties she campaigned as a member of Cymdeithas yr Iaith (the Welsh Language society) and was imprisoned twice for non-violent offences in acts of civil disobedience. She is a Fellow of The Royal Society of Literature, Royal Literary Fund, Aberystwyth University, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, The Learned Society of Wales. She is also Professor Emerita of the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and the President of Wales PEN Cymru.

Claudia Emerson (1957–2014) was born and raised in Chatham, Virginia, and studied writing at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro. Her poetry, steeped in the Southern Narrative tradition, was published by LSU Press in their Southern Messenger Series and includes the collections *Pharaoh*, *Pharaoh* (1997); *Pinion: An Elegy* (2002); *Late Wife* (2005), which won the Pulitzer Prize; *Figure Studies* (2008); and *Secure the Shadow* (2012). Her honors include two additional Pulitzer Prize nominations as well as fellowships from the Library of Congress, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, and the National Endowment for the Arts. In 2008 she was appointed poet laureate of Virginia, a two-year role. Emerson was poetry editor for the *Greensboro Review* and a contributing editor for *Shenandoah*. She taught at Washington and Lee University, Randolph-Macon Women's College, the University of Mary Washington, and Virginia Commonwealth University. Her latest collection from LSU Press, *Ungrafted: New and Selected Poems*, was published in December, 2024. She died of cancer in 2014.

Thomas P. Feeny (1937–2024) was a poet, translator, scholar, and Professor in the Dept. of World Languages and Culture at NC State University for 53 years. His two collections of poetry were entitled *Night Into Day* (1993) and *Breathing in Technicolor* (2015). An acclaimed translator of Spanish Literature, his poems, essays, and translations were included in a wide variety of journals, including *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Georgetown Review*, *Oasis*, *Blue Unicorn*, *Kentucky Poetry Review*, *Puerto Del Sol*, and he was a frequent contributor to *The Asheville Poetry Review*. He died in September, 2024.

Poet, playwright, publisher, and activist **Lawrence Ferlinghetti** (1919–2021) was born Lawrence Monsanto Ferling on March 24, 1919 in Yonkers, New York. His father, an Italian immigrant, had shortened the family name upon arrival in America. When Ferlinghetti discovered the lengthier name as an adult, he took it as his own. Upon graduating from the University of North Carolina, he joined the US Navy. After his discharge, Ferlinghetti took advantage of the G.I. Bill and earned his MA from Columbia University in 1948 and completed his PhD at the University of Paris in 1951. He then moved to San Francisco, California, where played a key role in sparking the San Francisco literary renaissance of the 1950s and was essential to the establishment of the subsequent Beat movement. In 1998, he was named the first poet laureate of San Francisco. Ferlinghetti's most famous collection, *A Coney Island of the Mind* (1958), has sold well over one million copies in America and abroad. He was the author of over 30 other collections of poetry, including *Time of Useful Consciousness* (2012), *Poetry as Insurgent Art* (2005), *San Francisco Poems* (2001), *How to Paint Sunlight: Lyric Poems and Others, 1997–2000*, *A Far Rockaway of the Heart* (1997), *These Are My Rivers: New and Selected Poems, 1955–1993*, and *Endless Life: Selected Poems* (1981). Ferlinghetti's numerous awards and honors included the National Book Critics Circle's Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award, the Robert Frost Memorial Medal, and the National Book Foundation's Literarian Award, among others. In 1953, two years after his arrival in San Francisco, Ferlinghetti partnered with Peter D. Martin to publish a magazine, *City Lights*. In order to subsidize the publication, Martin and Ferlinghetti opened the *City Lights* Pocket Book Shop in a neighborhood on the edge of Chinatown. It became a popular gathering place for San Francisco's avant-garde writers, poets, and painters. The bookstore's publishing arm, the *City Lights* Pocket Poets series, offered a forum for Beat writers. Ferlinghetti's slim volume *Pictures of the Gone World* (1955) was the first publication in the series. Ferlinghetti was in the audience at the watershed 1955 poetry reading "Six Poets at the Six Gallery," at which Ginsberg unveiled his poem "Howl." Ferlinghetti immediately recognized it as a classic, and in 1956, he published the first edition of *Howl and Other Poems* in the *Pocket Poets* series. The collection sold out

quickly, and the second shipment of the book—seized by US customs, then released—occasioned the infamous Howl trial. The San Francisco Police Department arrested Ferlinghetti on charges of printing and selling lewd and indecent material. Ferlinghetti engaged the American Civil Liberties Union for his defense and welcomed his court case as a test of freedom of speech. He won the suit on October 3, 1957. The publicity generated by the case energized the San Francisco renaissance and Beat cause. Ferlinghetti also published acclaimed fiction. His widely celebrated novel *Love in the Days of Rage* (1988) takes place in Paris in 1968, during the student revolution; it chronicles a love affair between an expatriate American painter and a Portuguese banker and anarchist. Ferlinghetti's often short, surrealist plays have been performed in theaters in San Francisco, and he exhibited paintings and drawings in numerous galleries. He died in early 2021, at the age of 101. He lived in San Francisco, where a street is named in his honor.

Peter Finch was born in Cardiff, Wales in 1947. In the 1960s and 1970s he edited the literary magazine, *Second Aeon*, exhibited visual poetry internationally and toured with sound poet Bob Cobbing. From the early seventies until the late nineties he was treasurer of ALP, the Association of Little Presses. Between 1975 and 1998 he ran the Arts Council of Wales, and managed the Oriel Bookshop in Cardiff. From 1998 he was Chief Executive of The Welsh Academy — the Welsh National Literature Promotion Agency and Society for Writers. Finch has also established a reputation as a prolific writer, editor, and critic as well as one of Britain's best performance poets. Finch has published more than 40 books, pamphlets and recordings of poetry. His most recent full collection is *The Machineries of Joy*, (Seren Books, 2020). His other titles include *Zen Cymru*, *Poems For Ghosts* (Seren) and *Antibodies* (Stride). His *Selected Later Poems* was published by Seren in 2007. His prose works include a number of critical guides including *How To Publish Your Poetry* and *How To Publish Yourself* (Allison & Busby), as well as his famous alternative handbooks, guides and literary rambles, *Real Cardiff*, published in three volumes, and *Real Cardiff: The Flourishing City* (Seren). With Grahame Davies, he edited the anthology *The Big Book of Cardiff* (Seren). He is currently editing titles for Seren's *Real Wales* series, several volumes that take in the history and geography of the entire country. His book, *The Roots Of Rock From Cardiff To Mississippi And Back* appeared in 2015. His *Walking Cardiff* (with John Briggs) was published in 2019. *Edging The City* and *Walking The Valleys* (with John Briggs) appeared in 2022.

Keith Flynn (www.keithflynn.net) is the award-winning author of eight books, including six collections of poetry: most recently *Colony Collapse Disorder* (Wings Press, 2013) and *The Skin of Meaning* (Red Hen Press, 2020), and two collections of essays, entitled *The Rhythm Method*,

Razzmatazz and Memory: How To Make Your Poetry Swing (Writer's Digest Books, 2007), and *Prosperity Gospel: Portraits of the Great Recession* (RedHawk Publications, 2021). From 1984-1999, he was lyricist and lead singer for the nationally acclaimed rock band, The Crystal Zoo, which produced three albums: *Swimming Through Lake Eerie* (1992), *Pouch* (1996), and the spoken-word and music compilation, *Nervous Splendor* (2003). His latest album is Keith Flynn & The Holy Men, *LIVE at Diana Wortham Theatre* (2011). He is the Executive Director and producer of the TV and radio show, "LIVE at White Rock Hall," (www.liveatwhiterockhall.com) and Animal Sounds Productions, both which create collaborations between writers and musicians in video and audio formats. His award-winning poetry and essays have appeared in many journals and anthologies around the world and have been translated into a dozen languages. He has been awarded the Sandburg Prize for poetry, a 2013 NC Literary Fellowship, the ASCAP Emerging Songwriter Prize, the Paumanok Poetry Award and was twice named the Gilbert-Chappell Distinguished Poet for NC. Flynn is founder and managing editor of *The Asheville Poetry Review*, which began publishing in 1994.

Vieve Francis was born in West Texas. She earned an MFA from the University of Michigan in 2009, and she received a Rona Jaffe Award the same year. Francis is the author of *The Shared World* (Northwestern University Press, 2023); *Forest Primeval* (TriQuarterly Books, 2015), winner of the 2017 Kingsley Tufts Award and the Hurston Wright Legacy Award; *Horse in the Dark* (Northwestern University Press, 2012), winner of the Cave Canem Northwestern University Press Poetry Prize; and *Blue-Tail Fly* (Wayne State University Press, 2006). Francis's honors include the 2021 Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry. The recipient of fellowships from Cave Canem, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the Kresge Foundation, her work has appeared in numerous publications, including: *Poetry*, *Best American Poetry 2010, 2014, 2017*, and *Angles of Ascent: A Norton Anthology of Contemporary African American Poetry*. She serves as an associate editor for *Callaloo* and is an associate professor of English and Creative Writing at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH.

Joshua Gottlieb-Miller is the author of *Dybbuk Americana* (Wesleyan University Press, 2024) and *The Art of Bagging* (Conduit, 2023) and serves on the faculty at San Jacinto College. He received his PhD and MFA in Poetry from the University of Houston, where he was the Digital Nonfiction Editor and Print Poetry Editor for *Gulf Coast*. He has been awarded fellowships from MacDowell, the Yiddish Book Center, Yetzirah, and elsewhere, and from 2018-2019 he served as an inaugural Post-Harvey Think Tank Fellow at Rice University's Humanities Research Center, representing folklore.

Katherine Graham was a painter, gardener and avid martial arts enthusiast who was born on November 13, 1957, in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She studied literature and philosophy at UNC-Asheville, and published a play entitled *The Saga of Sweet Jesus and The Stormtrooper*.

A prolific poet, essayist, critic, and translator, **Rachel Hadas** is the author most recently of the collections *Ghost Guest* and *Pandemic Almanac*. *Forty-four Pastorals* will be published early in 2025. Rachel taught English for many years at the Newark campus of Rutgers University and is currently teaching writing at 92nd Street Y, New York City. With her husband, filmmaker Shalom Gorewitz, with whom she collaborates on poetry and video, she lives in New York City and in Danville, Vermont. For more information, visit www.rachelhadas.net.

Joy Harjo is an internationally renowned performer and writer of the Muscogee Nation. She served three terms as the 23rd Poet Laureate of the United States from 2019-2022 and is winner of the Poetry Society of America's 2024 Frost Medal, Yale's 2023 Bollingen Prize for American Poetry, and was recently honored with a National Humanities Medal. The author of ten books of poetry, including the highly acclaimed, *Weaving Sundown in a Scarlet Light: Fifty Poems for Fifty Years*, several plays, children's books, and non-fiction works, and two memoirs, *Crazy Brave* and *Poet Warrior*. Her many honors include the National Book Critics Circle Ivan Sandrof Lifetime Achievement Award, the Ruth Lily Prize for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Foundation, the Academy of American Poets Wallace Stevens Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. Harjo delivered the 2021 Windham-Campbell Lecture at Yale, part of the virtual Windham-Campbell Prize Festival that year. That lecture was the basis for *Catching the Light*, published in 2022 by Yale University Press in the Why I Write series. Her beloved poem, *Remember*, was illustrated as a children's book by Michaela Goade and received a 2024 American Indian Youth Literature Honor Award by the American Indian Library Association. As a musician and performer, Harjo has produced seven award-winning music albums including her newest, *I Pray for My Enemies*. She has edited three anthologies of Native literature, including *When the Light of the World was Subdued, Our Songs Came Through—A Norton Anthology of Native Nations Poetry*, *Reinventing the Enemy's Language*, and *Living Nations, Living Words: An Anthology of First Peoples Poetry*, the companion anthology to her signature Poet Laureate project. She served as a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets and Board of Directors Chair of the Native Arts & Cultures Foundation and is the first Artist-in-Residence for Tulsa's Bob Dylan Center. She lives on the Muscogee Nation Reservation in Oklahoma.

Michael Harper (1938–2016) was born in Brooklyn, New York, on March 18, 1938. He earned a BA and MA from what is now known as California State University, and an MFA from the University of Iowa. Harper published more than ten books of poetry, including his debut collection, *Dear John, Dear Coltrane* (University of Illinois Press, 1970), which was nominated for the National Book Award. His other collections include *Images of Kin* (University of Illinois Press, 1977), which won the Melville-Cane Award from the Poetry Society of America and was nominated for the National Book Award; *History Is Your Heartbeat* (University of Illinois Press, 1971), which won the Black Academy of Arts & Letters Award for poetry; and *Songlines in Michael-tree: New and Collected Poems* (University of Illinois Press, 2000). Harper edited the *Collected Poems of Sterling A. Brown* (Triquarterly, 1980). He was coeditor with Anthony Walton of *The Vintage Book of African American Poetry* (Vintage Books, 2000) and *Every Shut Eye Ain't Asleep: An Anthology of Poetry by African Americans Since 1945* (Back Bay Books, 1994), and with Robert B. Stepto of *Chant of Saints: A Gathering of Afro-American Literature, Art, and Scholarship* (University of Illinois Press, 1979). Harper was the first poet laureate of the state of Rhode Island (1988–93) and received many other honors, including fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts. Harper was a professor of English at Brown University, where he taught from 1970 to 2013. He lived in Barrington, Rhode Island, until his death on May 7, 2016.

Stephen Haven's fourth collection of poems, *The Flight from Meaning*, was a finalist for England's International Beverly Prize for Literature and is forthcoming in 2024 from Slant Books. Haven's three earlier collections are: *The Last Sacred Place in North America*, selected by T.R. Hummer as winner of the New American Poetry Prize; *Dust and Bread*, winner of the Ohio Poet of the Year prize; and *The Long Silence of the Mohawk Carpet Smokestacks*, runner-up for the Philip Levine Prize in a year Levine served as judge. Haven's Ph.D. is from NYU, where he wrote his dissertation under the direction of Harold Bloom, and his MFA in Poetry from the University of Iowa. He was the founding director of the low-residency MFA Program at Ashland University, in Ashland, Ohio, where he led the program for ten years. He later directed the low-residency MFA Program at Lesley University. In 2021, together with Jin Zhong, Wang Shouyi, and Li Yongyi, he published the 300-page, dual language (Mandarin and English) collaborative translation anthology, *Trees Grow Lively on Snowy Fields: Poems from Contemporary China* (Twelve Winters Press). Twice a year-long Fulbright Lecturer at universities in Beijing, he has received fellowships from Yaddo, MacDowell, the Provincetown Fine Arts Work Center, and the Djerassi Foundation, as well as five Individual Excellence

Awards in Poetry from the Ohio Arts Council. His work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *Parnassus*, *Literary Imagination*, *Crazyhorse*, *Guernica*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Salmagundi*, *The American Journal of Poetry*, *Arts & Letters*, *The Common*, *Blackbird*, *The European Journal of International Law*, *The Missouri Review*, *North American Review*, *Northwest Review*, *Image*, *Western Humanities Review*, *World Literature Today*, and in many other journals. He is a Core Professor of Literature and Creative Writing at Lesley University in Cambridge, MA. See stephenhaven.com for more information.

Irmgard Hierdeis completed her studies of Philosophy, Education, and Romance Literature at the Universities in Munich, Freiburg, and Innsbruck, achieving a doctorate in 1999. She has taught in German and Austrian Gymnasiums and edited Innsbruck's literary journal, *INN*, for five years. Along with her scholarly works she has published volumes of poetry, short stories and novels. Among her many awards she counts The Würth Prize for European Literature. These poems are from her recent collection, *Wären Wir Engel*. She lives in rural beauty by the Ammersee in Upper Bavaria.

Ernest Hilbert is the author of the poetry collections *Sixty Sonnets*, *All of You on the Good Earth*, *Caligulan*—selected as winner of the 2017 Poets' Prize—and *Last One Out*. His fifth book, *Storm Swimmer*, was selected by Rowan Ricardo Phillips as the winner of the 2022 Vassar Miller Prize and appeared in 2023. He lives in Philadelphia where he works as a rare book dealer and book critic for *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *Fine Books and Collections*. His poem "Mars Ultor" was included in *Best American Poetry*, and his poems appear in *Yale Review*, *American Poetry Review*, *BOMB*, *Harvard Review*, *Parnassus*, *Sewanee Review*, *Hudson Review*, *Boston Review*, *The New Republic*, *American Scholar*, and the *London Review*. In 2023, he was awarded the Meringoff Writing Award for Poetry from the Association of Literary Scholars, Critics, and Writers. Visit him at www.ernesthilbert.com.

David Brendan Hopes, born in Akron, Ohio, is an American author, playwright, and poet. He is a former professor of literature at the University of NC-Asheville whose creative output contains works in poetry, including *The Glacier's Daughters* (U of Mass Press) which won the Juniper and the Saxifrage Prizes; *The Basswood Tree* (Franciscan Press) *Blood Rose* (Urt-hona Press), *A Dream of Adonis* (Pecan Grove) and *Peniel* (St. Julian Press). Milkweed Editions published two collections of nature essays, *A Sense of the Morning* and *Bird Songs of the Mesozoic*. His memoir of becoming a poet, *A Childhood in the Milky Way*, was published by Akron University Press. As a playwright, his works include *Abbott's Dance*, *7 Reece Mews*,

Edward the King, and *The Loves of Mr Lincoln* (all staged in New York). Other dramatic works, *St Patrick's Well*, *Bronzino's Gaze*, *Uranium 235*, *Washington Place* and *Night Music* have been staged at regional venues. *Night Music* won the 2016 North Carolina Playwrights Prize. His novel *The Falls of the Wyona* won Red Hen Press's 2017 Quill Prose Award for Queer Fiction.

Colette Inez (1931–2018) was the author of ten books of poetry. Her earliest collection, *The Woman Who Loved Worms* (1972), won the Great Lakes Colleges Association National First Book Award and was reissued by Carnegie Mellon's Classic Contemporary series in 1991. Other titles include *Family Life* (1988); *Getting Under Way: New & Selected Poetry* (1993); *Clemency* (1998); and *Spinoza Doesn't Come Here Anymore* (2004). Recent collections include *Horseplay* (2011) and *The Luba Poems* (2014). She is the author of the memoir *The Secret of M. Dulong* (2005), as well as the libretto for Mira J. Spektor's opera *Mary Shelley* (renamed *Villa Diodati*), which premiered in 2003. Inez's song cycle *Miz Inez Sez*, composed by Pulitzer Prize winning David del Tredici, was produced as the album *Secret Music* (2002). *The New Yorker* described the work as "may be the best new-music album of the year." Her honors include fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, two awards from the National Endowment for the Arts, two Pushcart Prizes, and several other awards from the Poetry Society of America, where she served on the governing board 1979-80. Known as an essayist, poetry reviewer, and contest judge, Inez is also a noted teacher of writing. A former faculty member at Columbia University's Writing Program, she has also taught at Ohio, Cornell, Bucknell, Colgate, The New School and Denison Universities, and at Hunter and Kalamazoo Colleges. She lived in New York until her death in early 2018.

Richard Jackson is the author of 17 books of poetry including *The Heart as Framed: New and Select Poems* (2022, Press 53), *Dispatches*, *Where The Wind Comes From* and *Broken Horizons*, and 12 books of essays, interviews, translations, editions and anthologies. *Footprints* is forthcoming in 2025. Winner of Guggenheim, Fulbright, NEA, NEH and Witter Bynner Fellowships and the order of Freedom from the President of Slovenia for his literary and humanitarian work during the Balkan wars, he has also edited 32 chapbooks from eastern European poets. His poems have been translated into 18 languages and his books have won the U of Alabama Book Award, Cleveland State Book Prize, U Mass Juniper Prize, Ashland Poetry Press Award, Eric Hofer Award, Maxine Kumin Award, and Ben Franklin Award. His poems have appeared in numerous anthologies such as *Best American Poetry*, *Best of Georgia Review*, *Best of Crazy Horse*, *Prairie*

Schooner Anthology and he has been published 5 times in *The Pushcart Anthology*. He has given readings and lectures at dozens of universities and libraries as well as in Slovenia, Bosnia, Croatia, Macedonia, Spain, India, Israel, Hong Kong, Canada, England, Wales, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, Switzerland, Hungary and Romania. Over 52 of his former UT-Chattanooga undergrads have gone on to publish nearly 130 books. He is Distinguished Emeritus Professor at UTC and founder of the Meacham Writers' Workshops at at-Chattanooga.

Marilyn Kallet recently served two terms as Knoxville Poet Laureate, June 27, 2018-July 2020. She is the author of 19 books, including *Even When We Sleep*, 2022 and *How Our Bodies Learned*, 2018, poetry from Black Widow Press. She has translated Paul Eluard's *Last Love Poems* and Benjamin Péret's *The Big Game*, among others. Dr. Kallet is Professor Emerita at the University of Tennessee, where she taught for 37 years. She also hosted poetry workshops and residencies for the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, in Auvillar, France, from 2009-2018. She has performed her poems across the United States as well as in France and Poland, as a guest of the U.S. Embassy's "America Presents" program. Her poetry appeared recently in *Still: The Journal of Appalachia*, *Plume* and *101 Jewish Poems for the Third Millennium*, among others. She is the author of two children's books, *Jack the Healing Cat* and *One For Each Night: Chanukah Tales and Recipes*, Celtic Cat Publishing.

Bob Kaufman (1925–1986) was born in New Orleans on April 18, 1925 of mixed Black and Jewish parentage, one of fourteen children. During twenty years in the Merchant Marine he cultivated an intense interest in literature and began to write on his long sea voyages. Settling in California in the 1950's he became active in the burgeoning West Coast literary scene. One of the original Beat poets, (he coined the term beatnik), Kaufman's work has always been largely improvisational, often done to jazz accompaniment. His technique, akin to Surrealist automatic writing, produced a body of work ranging from a visionary lyricism, infused with satirical elements, to a prophetic poetry of political and social protest. Disappointment, drugs and imprisonment led him to take a ten-year vow of complete silence that lasted until 1973. Seven collections of his work have appeared, including *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*, *Golden Sardine*, *The Ancient Rain: Poems 1956–1978*, and *Cranial Guitar* (Coffee House Press, 1996). *The Collected Poems of Bob Kaufman* was published by City Lights Books in 2019.

David Kirby is the author of more than two dozen volumes of criticism, essays, children's literature, pedagogy, and poetry. His numerous books of poetry include his most recent collection, *The Winter Dance Party: Poems*

1983-2023 (LSU Press, 2024), as well as *The Ha-Ha* (2003), short-listed for the Griffin Poetry Prize, and *The House on Boulevard Street: New and Selected Poems* (2007), a finalist for the National Book Award and winner of the Florida Book Award and the Southern Independent Booksellers Alliance Award. Kirby has also written biographies of Little Richard and Herman Melville, and four books of essays, including the titles *Ultra-Talk: Johnny Cash, The Mafia, Shakespeare, Drum Music, St. Teresa of Avila, and 17 Other Colossal Topics of Conversation* (2007), and *What is a Book?* (2002), both from University of Georgia Press. Kirby has also won several Pushcart Prizes, the Guy Owen Prize, the Kay Deeter Award, the James Dickey Prize, the Brittingham Prize, and the Millennium Cultural Recognition Award. He has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Florida Arts Council. His poetry has been featured in numerous anthologies, including several issues of *Best American Poetry*. Kirby is a member of the National Book Critics Circle. Since 1969 he has taught at Florida State University, where he has received several teaching awards. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida, with his wife, poet Barbara Hamby.

Yusef Komunyakaa was born on April 29, 1947, in Bogalusa, Louisiana, where he was raised during the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. He served in the United States Army from 1969 to 1970 as a correspondent, then as managing editor of the *Southern Cross* during the Vietnam war, which earned him a Bronze Star. Komunyakaa began writing poetry in 1973, and his first book of poems, *Dedications & Other Darkhorses* (R. M. C. A. J. Books), was published in 1977, followed by *Lost in the Bonewheel Factory* (Lynx House Press) in 1979. During this time, he earned his MA and MFA in creative writing from Colorado State University and the University of California, Irvine, respectively. Komunyakaa first received wide recognition following the 1984 publication of *Copacetic* (Wesleyan University Press), a collection of poems built from colloquial speech which demonstrated his incorporation of jazz influences. He followed the book with two others: *I Apologize for the Eyes in My Head* (Wesleyan University Press, 1986), winner of the San Francisco Poetry Center Award; and *Dien Cai Dau* (Wesleyan University Press, 1988), which won The Dark Room Poetry Prize and has been cited by many critics as being among the best writing on the war in Vietnam. Since then, Komunyakaa has published several books of poems, including *Everyday Mojo Songs of the Earth: New and Selected Poems* (2021). *The Emperor of Water Clocks* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015); *Thieves of Paradise* (Wesleyan University Press, 1998), which was a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award; *Neon Vernacular: New & Selected Poems 1977-1989* (Wesleyan University Press, 1994), for which he received the Pulitzer Prize and the Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award; and *Magic City* (Wesleyan University Press, 1992). Komunyakaa's prose is collected in *Blues Notes: Essays, Interviews &*

Commentaries (University of Michigan Press, 2000). He also coedited *The Jazz Poetry Anthology* (1991), co-translated *The Insomnia of Fire* by Nguyen Quang Thieu (with Martha Collins, 1995), and served as guest editor for *The Best of American Poetry*, 2003. He has also written dramatic works, including *Gilgamesh: A Verse Play* (Wesleyan University Press, 2006), and *Slip Knot*, a libretto in collaboration with Composer T. J. Anderson, commissioned by Northwestern University. Komunyakaa's other honors include the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, The Griffin Poetry Prize Lifetime Recognition Award, the William Faulkner Prize from the Université de Rennes, the Thomas Forcade Award, the Hanes Poetry Prize, fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the Louisiana Arts Council, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Komunyakaa was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 1999. He has taught at the University of New Orleans, Indiana University, and Princeton University. He lives in New York City where he is currently distinguished senior poet in New York University's graduate creative writing program.

Dorianne Laux was born in 1952, and is the author of six collections of poetry, including *Only As the Day is Long: New and Selected Poems* which was named a finalist for the 2020 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, *The Book of Men*, awarded The Paterson Prize, and *Facts About the Moon*, which won The Oregon Book Award and was short-listed for the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize. Laux is also the author of *Awake; What We Carry*, a finalist for the National Book Critic's Circle Award; *Smoke*; as well as a fine small press edition, *The Book of Women*. She is the co-author of the celebrated text *The Poet's Companion: A Guide to the Pleasures of Writing Poetry*. Her latest collection of poetry is *Life On Earth* and was released in 2024. *Finger Exercises for Poets*, a book of concise craft essays and exercises for poets was also released in 2024. She has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts and has been a Pushcart Prize winner. Laux has taught creative writing at the University of Oregon, Pacific University, and North Carolina State University; she has also led summer workshops at Esalen in Big Sur. In 2020, Laux was elected a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets. She lives with her husband, poet Joseph Millar, in Raleigh, North Carolina, where she taught in the MFA program at North Carolina State University until her retirement in 2022.

Daniel Lawless is the author of *The Gun My Sister Killed Herself With*; his current book, *I Tell You This Now* was released in March, 2024. Recent poems appear in *FIELD*, *Barrow Street*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry International*, *Los Angeles Review*, *upsteet*, *SOLSTICE*, *Manhattan Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *JAMA*, and *Dreaming Awake: New Prose Poetry*

from the U.S., Australia, and the U.K., among others. A recipient of a continuing Shifting Foundation grant, he is the founder and editor of *Plume: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry*, *Plume Editions*, and the annual *Plume Poetry* anthologies.

Kurt Luchs (kurtluchs.com and <https://www.facebook.com/kurt.luchs/>) won a 2022 Pushcart Prize, a 2021 James Tate Poetry Prize, the 2021 Eyelands Book Award for Short Stories, and the 2019 *Atlanta Review* International Poetry Contest. He is a Contributing Editor of *Exacting Clam*. His humor collection, *It's Funny Until Someone Loses an Eye (Then It's Really Funny)* (2017), and his poetry collection, *Falling in the Direction of Up* (2021), are published by Sagging Meniscus Press, along with his latest full-length poetry collection, *Death Row Row Row Your Boat* (2024). He lives in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Antonio Machado (1875-1939) was an outstanding Spanish poet and playwright of Spain's Generation of '98. Machado received a doctoral degree in literature in Madrid, attended the Sorbonne, and became a secondary school French teacher. He rejected the modernism of his contemporaries and adopted what he called "eternal poetry," which was informed more by intuition than by intellect. Three stages can be distinguished in his artistic evolution. The first, typified by the poems in *Soledades* (1903; "Solitudes") and *Soledades, galerías, y otros poemas* (1907; "Solitudes, Galleries, and Other Poems"), established his links with romanticism. These poems are concerned largely with evoking memories and dreams and with the subjective identification of the poet with natural phenomena, especially the sunset. In his second stage Machado turned away from pure introspection, and in *Campos de Castilla* (1912; "Plains of Castile") he sought to capture the stark landscape and spirit of Castile in a severely denuded and sombre style. His later works, *Nuevas canciones* (1924; "New Songs") and *Poesías completas* (1928; "Complete Poems"), express profound Existential views and reflect on the solitude of the poet. He also wrote plays in collaboration with his brother Manuel and a collection of philosophical reflections with strong Existentialist overtones, *Juan de Mairena* (1936). Because he was a strong supporter of the Spanish Republic, when Spain erupted in civil war in 1936, Machado initially remained in Madrid. But in 1939, as the country further degenerated into violence, Machado fled with his mother to Paris. During the journey, however, he developed pneumonia, and he died in Collioure, a fishing village on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Two excellent volumes of Machado's poetry in English include *Times Alone: Selected Poems of Antonio Machado*, translated by Robert Bly (Wesleyan University Press, 1982), and *Border of a Dream: Selected Poems*, translated by Willis Barnstone (Copper Canyon Press, 2003).

Al Maginnes was born in Quincy, Massachusetts and taught for many years at Wake Tech Community College in Raleigh, NC. His poems have appeared in many journals and magazines, including *Poetry*, *The New England Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Shenandoah* and *Quarterly West*. He has been the recipient of a Writer's Fellowship from the NC Arts Council and is the author of ten full-length collections and four chapbooks of poetry, most recently *Fellow Survivors: New and Selected Poems* (Redhawk Publications, 2023). Other books include *Sleeping Through the Graveyard Shift* (Redhawk Publications, 2020), *Music from Small Towns*, winner of the Jacar Press Book Award (2014), *Inventing Constellations* (Cherry Grove Editions, 2012), *Film History* (WordTech Editions, 2005), *Taking Up Our Daily Tools* (St. Andrews Press, 1997) and *The Light in Our Houses* (Pleiades Press, 2000), which won Lena-Miles Wever Todd Poetry Prize. He lives with his family in Raleigh, NC.

Amit Majmudar is a poet, novelist, essayist, translator, and the former first Poet Laureate of Ohio. He works as a diagnostic and nuclear radiologist and lives in Westerville, Ohio, with his wife and three children. He is the author of twenty books, whose poetry collections include *0', 0'* (Northwestern, 2009), shortlisted for the Norma Faber First Book Award, and *Heaven and Earth* (2011, Storyline Press), which won the Donald Justice Prize, *Dothead* (Knopf, 2016) and *What He Did in Solitary* (Knopf, 2020). His poems have won the Pushcart Prize and have appeared in the *Norton Introduction to Literature*, *The New Yorker*, and numerous *Best American Poetry* anthologies as well as journals and magazines across the United States, UK, India, and Australia. Majmudar's essays have appeared in *The Best American Essays 2018*, the *New York Times*, and the *Times of India*, among several other publications. His forthcoming collection of literary essays is entitled *The Great Game* (Acre Books, 2024). His novels include two works of historical fiction centered around the 1947 Partition of India, and he has also penned a tragicomic, magical realist fable of Indian soldiers during World War I, *Soar* (Penguin India, 2020). *The Abundance* (Holt/Metropolitan, 2013), by contrast, is a work of contemporary realism exploring Indian-American life. Forthcoming books include the hybrid work *Three Metamorphoses* (Orison Books, 2025) and a new poetry collection, *Things my Grandmother Said* (Knopf, 2026).

Mary Makofske's latest books are *No Angels* (Kelsay, 2023), *The Gambler's Daughter* (The Orchard Street Press, 2022); *World Enough, and Time* (Kelsay, 2017); and *Traction* (Ashland, 2011), winner of the Richard Snyder Prize. Her poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies, including *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *American Journal of Poetry*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Comstock Review*, and *Valparaiso Poetry Review*. She has received the Hudson-Fowler Prize from *Slant* and

first prizes in poetry from *Atlanta Review*, *New Millennium Writings*, and Littoral Press Broadside Contest. www.marymakofske.com

Sebastian Matthews is the author of a memoir, two books of poetry, the collage novel *The Life & Times of American Crow*, the hybrid collection *Beginner's Guide to a Head-on Collision*, and a book of creative nonfiction, *Beyond Repair: Living in a Fractured State*. His *The Patient Body: A Personal Narrative in Pieces* comes out from Red Hen Press spring of 2025. Matthews lives with his family in Asheville, North Carolina, where he serves on faculty of the Great Smokies Writing Program and on the advisory boards of Story Parlor and Orison Books. His jazz and talk show, *Jazz Hybrid*, airs weekly on WPVM103.7 FM, live-streaming at wvpmfm.org Tuesdays and Sundays at 3:00-5:00 EST. He also hosts a Substack podcast, *Cut for the Dog: The Art & Craft of Personal Narrative*.

William Matthews (1942–1996) was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, on November 11, 1942. He earned a B.A. from Yale and an M.A. from the University of North Carolina. During his lifetime he published eleven books of poetry, including *Time & Money* (1996), which won the National Book Critics Circle Award and was a finalist for the Lenore Marshall Poetry Prize; *Selected Poems and Translations 1969–1991* (1992); *Blues If You Want* (1989); *A Happy Childhood* (1984); *Rising and Falling* (1979); *Sticks and Stones* (1975); and *Ruining the New Road* (1970). Collections published posthumously include *Search Party: Collected Poems*, edited by his son Sebastian Matthews and Stanley Plumly (Houghton Mifflin, 2004) and *After All: Last Poems* (1998). He was also the author of a book of essays entitled *Curiosities* (1989).

Lynn McGee's forthcoming poetry collection is *SCIENCE SAYS YES* (Broadstone Books) and she is the author of *Tracks* (Broadstone Books), *Sober Cooking* (Spuyten Duyvil) and two prize-winning chapbooks: *Heirloom Bulldog* (Bright Hill Press) and *Bonanza* (Slapering Hol Press). Lynn McGee and José Pelauz are co-authors of the children's book *Starting Over in Sunset Park* (Tilbury House Press). Her poetry has appeared this year in *The Westchester Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *San Pedro River River*, *Slant*, *Oberon Review*, and the anthology, *Braving the Body*. Lynn founded the series *West-East Poets of the Pandemic and Beyond*, that has featured hundreds of poets in the last few years. For more information, visit www.lynnmcgee.com

Philip Memmer is the author of six books of poems, including *Cairns* (Lost Horse Press, 2022), *Pantheon* (Lost Horse Press, 2019), *The Storehouses of the Snow* (Lost Horse Press, 2012), *Lucifer: A Hagiography* (winner of the 2008 Idaho Prize for Poetry from Lost Horse Press), *Threat of Pleasure*

(Word Press, 2008; winner of the 2009 Adirondack Literary Award for Poetry), and *Sweetheart, Baby, Darling* (Word Press, 2004), as well as three chapbooks. Memmer's poems have appeared in many journals, including *Poetry*, *Poetry London*, *Poetry Northwest*, *Tar River Poetry*, and *Mid-American Review*; in such anthologies as *180 More: Extraordinary Poems for Every Day* (ed. Billy Collins) and *Don't Leave Hungry: Fifty Years of Southern Poetry Review*; in the Library of Congress's *Poetry 180* website; and in the *American Life in Poetry* syndicated column. His many awards and honors include two Hawthornden Fellowships, and a 2023 Individual Artist Grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. Since 2000, Memmer has served as Executive Director of the Arts Branch of the YMCA of Central New York in Syracuse, where he founded the YMCA's Downtown Writers Center in 2001. He also is Publisher at Tiger Bark Press and occasionally teaches creative writing at Hamilton College.

Gabriela Mistral (1889–1957) was born in Vicuña, Chile. Her real name was Lucila Godoy y Alcayaga and she began to write poetry as a village schoolteacher after a passionate romance with a railway employee who committed suicide. She taught elementary and secondary school for many years until her poetry made her famous. She played an important role in the educational systems of Mexico and Chile, was active in cultural committee of the League of Nations, and was Chilean consul in Naples, Madrid, and Lisbon. She taught Spanish literature in the United States at Columbia University, Middlebury College, Vassar College, and at the University of Puerto Rico. The love poems in memory of the dead, *Sonetos de la muerte* (1914), made her known throughout Latin America, but her first great collection of poems, *Desolación* (Despair), was not published until 1922. Other well-known volumes included *Ternura* (1924) and *Tala* (1938). In 1945 she was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature.

Mary B. Moore's published books include *Dear If*, Orison Books (2021); *Flicker*, Dogfish Head Award (2016); *The Book of Snow*, Cleveland State U Poetry Center, (1998); and the prize-winning chapbooks *Amanda and the Man Soul* and *Eating the Light*. Poems appear lately in *Birmingham Poetry Review*, *POETRY*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *NELLE*, *Terrain*, *Calyx*, *Still: The Journal*, *Crosswinds*, and more. She has won *NELLE's* Three Sisters Prize, *Birmingham Poetry Review's* Collins Prize, and the second-place award in *Nimrod's* 2017 Pablo Neruda Prize. Her latest collection is entitled *Amanda Chimera* (2023), winner of the Madville Publishing Arthur Smith Prize. She is a native Californian and was a professor at Marshall University in Huntington, West Virginia, where she now lives.

William Rieppe Moore is from Richland County, South Carolina and moved to Unicoi County, Tennessee with his wife. He started teaching high school English after earning an MA in English from East Tennessee State University. Moore's poetry received a Pushcart Prize nomination from American Diversity Report, finalist honors in *Driftwood's* In-House Poem Contest, and appears in *Blue Earth Review*, *Appalachian Places*, *James Dickey Review*, *Still: The Journal*, *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*, *Noctua Review*, *Terrain*, and *Grist: A Journal of the Literary Arts*.

Robert Morgan was born October 3, 1944, in Hendersonville, North Carolina and grew up on a family farm in the Green River Valley of the Blue Ridge Mountains. His earlier books of poetry include *Land Diving*, *Trunk & Thicket*, *Groundwork*, *At the Edge of the Orchard Country*, *Sigodlin*, *Green River: New and Selected Poems*, and *Topsoil Road*. He has written short stories, essays, historical non-fiction, and several novels, including *The Mountains Won't Remember Us*, *Good Measure*, *The Hinterlands*, *The Truest Pleasure*, which was listed by Publisher's Weekly as one of the notable books of 1995, and *Gap Creek*, which was awarded the Southern Book Critics Circle Award for Fiction in 2000, and was the Appalachian Writer's Association Book of the Year. It was also a selection of the Oprah Book Club and a New York Times bestseller. Morgan received NEA grants in 1974, 1981, and 1987. In 1988, he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship and a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship, and in 1991 he was given the James G. Hanes Poetry Prize by the Fellowship of Southern Writers, and the North Carolina Literature Award. In 2007, he was presented with the Academy Award in Literature from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. A very diverse and prolific author, Morgan has also written *October Crossing* (Broadstone Books, 2009), *The Strange Attractor: New and Selected Poems*, *Boone: A Biography*, which was published by Algonquin Books in 2007, became a national bestseller, winner of the Kentucky Book Award, finalist for the Los Angeles Times Book Award for Biography, and was followed in 2011 by *Lions of the West: Heroes and Villains of the Westward Expansion*, also from Algonquin Books, which won the Southern Book Award in Nonfiction, *The Road from Gap Creek*, *Dark Energy: New Poems*, *Chasing the North Star*, and *As Rain Turns to Snow: New Stories* came out from Broadstone Media in 2017. Most recently *The Oratorio That Was Time: Fourteen Poems and Three Stories* was brought out by Audubon Terrace Press in 2022, and *In the Snowbird Mountains and Other Stories* was published by Press 53 in 2023. Also, in 2023, *Fallen Angel: The Life of Edgar Allan Poe* was published by LSU Press. He taught at Cornell University from 1971-2022, and splits his time between Ithaca, New York and Zirconia, North Carolina.

Lisa Morpew is a writer and visual artist living in Asheville, NC. Her poetry has been published in *The Orange County Review*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Goddard Review*, *Common Lives*, *Lesbian Lives*, *Halcyone*, *The Wild Good* and others. Her visual work is included in the collections of The Asheville Art Museum, Doris Betts, The Tropical Fruit and Nuts Collection, The collection of G. Gordon Hanes, and numerous private collections. She has received a NC Fellowship in Poetry (1989) and a North Carolina Fellowship in Photography (1987).

Lauren Moseley is the author of the poetry collection *Big Windows* (Carnegie Mellon University Press). Her poems have appeared in *Orion* magazine, *Poets.org*, *Electric Literature*, *The Iowa Review*, *Copper Nickel*, *Pleiades*, and elsewhere. Lauren has received fellowships from Yaddo, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Hewnoaks, and the Barbara Deming Memorial Fund. She lives in Durham, North Carolina, and her website is laurenjmoseley.com.

Pablo Neruda (1904–1973) was born Ricardo Eliecer Neftalí Reyes Basoalto in southern Chile on July 12, 1904. In 1923 he sold all of his possessions to finance the publication of his first book, *Crepusculario* (“Twilight”). He published the volume under the pseudonym “Pablo Neruda” to avoid conflict with his family, who disapproved of his occupation. The following year, he found a publisher for *Veinte poemas de amor y una canción desesperada* (“Twenty Love Poems and a Song of Despair”) which would become one of the best-selling volumes of poetry in history. The book made a celebrity of Neruda, who gave up his studies at the age of twenty to devote himself to his craft. In 1927, Neruda began his long career of diplomatic assignments. After serving as honorary consul in Burma, Neruda was named Chilean consul in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1933. While there, he began a friendship with the visiting Spanish poet Federico García Lorca. Together the two men founded a literary review called *Caballo verde para la poesía* in 1935. After the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, he chronicled the horrendous events that ensued, including the execution of García Lorca in *España en el corazón* (1937). Neruda’s outspoken sympathy for the loyalist cause during the Spanish Civil War led to his recall from Madrid in 1937. Named Chilean Consul to Mexico in 1939, Neruda left Chile again for four years. Upon his return in 1943, he was elected to the Senate and joined the Communist Party. When the Chilean government moved to the right, they declared communism illegal and expelled Neruda from the Senate, and he was forced into hiding. During those years he wrote and published *Canto general* (1950). In 1952, the government withdrew the order to arrest leftist writers and political figures, and Neruda returned to Chile and for the next twenty-one years, received numerous prestigious awards, including the International Peace Prize in 1950, the Lenin Peace

Prize and the Stalin Peace Prize in 1953, and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1971. Diagnosed with cancer while serving as ambassador to France, Neruda resigned his position and on September 23, 1973, just twelve days after the defeat of Chile's democratic regime, the man widely regarded as the greatest Latin-American poet since Darío, died of leukemia in Santiago.

Lorine Niedecker (1903–1970) was born in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, and lived most of her life on Blackhawk Island, along the banks of the Rock River near Lake Koshkronong in Wisconsin. She worked as a library assistant from 1928–1930, as a writer of the Wisconsin Guide in the Federal Writers' Project from 1938–1942, as stenographer and proofreader for Hoard's Dairyman, and as a cleaning woman at Fort Atkinson Memorial Hospital from 1957–62. Her isolation from other writers and the austere beauty of her natural surroundings had a notable impact on her work. Niedecker chose to write in seclusion, and many of her closest relatives and neighbors were unaware that she was a poet. In 1931 she read the February issue of *Poetry*, guest-edited by the New York poet Louis Zukofsky, who argued for Objectivism in poetry — focusing on an object rather than one's feelings and conveying its essence along a musical line. Deciding that here was the center of literature, Lorine wrote Zukofsky; after corresponding two years, she went to New York to meet him. They became lovers and he persuaded her to abort after she became pregnant. More importantly, they remained intellectual friends for decades. Her first book, *New Goose* (1946), was privately printed, and her second, *My Friend Tree*, which did not appear until 1962, was published in England. She attracted significant critical attention with *North Central* (1968), a volume which collects several of her best-known poems, including the long sequences “Wintergreen Ridge” and “Paeon to Place.” Four volumes of Niedecker's poetry have been published since her death: *Blue Chicory* (1976), *From This Condensery: The Complete Writings of Lorine Niedecker* (1985), *The Granite Pail: The Selected Poems of Lorine Niedecker* (1985), and *Lorine Niedecker: Collected Works* (2002), which collects all of Niedecker's poems as well as reviews and other prose.

George Oppen (1908–1984) was born in New Rochelle, New York, to Elsie Rothfeld and George Oppenheimer (the family changed their name to Oppen in 1927). His father was a diamond merchant, and the family lived a comfortable, affluent lifestyle, which included servants and sailing lessons, a fact which conflicted with the strong identification with the working class that Oppen developed later in life. In 1926 he began attending Oregon State Agricultural College (now Oregon State University), where he met Mary Colby. After spending the night together away from campus, she was expelled and he was suspended. The two left Oregon, got married, and began a sailing and hitchhiking trip from the West Coast to New York City. Once they arrived in New York, Oppen met poet Louis Zukofsky and soon

became a central member of the Objectivist poets that flourished in the 1930s. In 1929, Oppen inherited a small sum of money which allowed the couple to start a small publishing venture. To Publishers, with Zukofsky as editor, published work by William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound, but the magazine was short-lived. The famous Objectivist Anthology which contained writing by Williams, Pound, Marianne Moore, Charles Reznikoff, and Kenneth Rexroth was published by the Oppens in Toulon, France, in 1932. After traveling to California and living in France, the Oppens returned to New York where, along with Zukofsky, Williams, and Reznikoff, they began the Objectivist Press. Oppen's first book of poetry, *Discrete Series*, was published, with a preface by Ezra Pound, in 1934. That same year, the press published Williams's *Collected Poems, 1921–1931*. Oppen served in World War II, during which he was badly wounded and awarded the Purple Heart. In 1950 Oppen came under investigation by the Un-American Activities Committee for his communist beliefs. Rather than betray friends or serve a prison term, Oppen moved to Mexico City. For the next eight years he worked in Mexico as a furniture maker. Only in 1958 did Oppen return to America, after the death of Senator Joe McCarthy. Shortly after returning to the United States, Oppen began to write poetry again and continued to write and publish thereafter. Among his books of poetry are *The Materials*, *This Is Which*, *Of Being Numerous*, which won the Pulitzer Prize, *Seascape: Needle's Eye*, and *New Collected Poems* (New Directions, 2002). In the late 1960s, Oppen moved to San Francisco where he became stricken with Alzheimer's disease. He was able to complete his final work, *Primitive*, only with his wife Mary's assistance. He lived in California until his death, from pneumonia and complications from Alzheimer's, in 1984.

Frank Paino holds a BA in English from Baldwin Wallace University and an MFA in Creative Writing from the Vermont College low-residency writing program. His volumes of poetry are: *Dark Octaves* (2025), winner of the Longleaf Press Book Prize, *Pietà* (chapbook, Jacar Press, 2023), *Obscura* (Orison Books, 2020), *Out of Eden* (Cleveland State University Press, 1997), *The Rapture of Matter* (Cleveland State University Press, 1991). He has received a number of awards for his work, including a 2016 Individual Excellence Award from The Ohio Arts Council, a Pushcart Prize and The Cleveland Arts Prize in Literature.

Kenneth Patchen (1911–1972) was born in Niles, Ohio, in 1911. From the age of twelve, he kept a diary and read Dante, Homer, Burns, Shakespeare, and Melville. He attended Alexander Meiklejohn's Experimental College for one year and then the University of Wisconsin. He was employed in a variety of jobs as a migrant worker in the United States and Canada. "Permanence," a sonnet, was published in *The New York Times* on April 10, 1932. He wrote more than forty books of poetry, prose and drama,

including *Hallelujah Anyway* (1966), *The Love Poems of Kenneth Patchen* (1960), *The Famous Boating Party* (1954), *Before the Brave* (1936), *First Will and Testament* (1939) and *Journal of Albion Moonlight* (1941), a prose work. In 1942, he published *The Dark Kingdom* in a limited edition of seventy-five copies and painted each cover individually in watercolor. For more than thirty years, Patchen lived with a severe spinal ailment that caused him almost constant physical pain. The weight of this personal battle was compounded by his sensitivity to greater issues of humanity, and his poetry paid special attention to the horrors of war and the American worker's rights. Patchen was also one of the first poets to explore the combination of spoken-word performance with jazz accompaniment. His *Collected Poems* were published by New Directions in 1968. Kenneth Patchen died in 1972.

Tim Peeler is a retired educator from Western North Carolina who has written twenty-two books of poetry, short stories, and regional history. He has twice been a finalist for the Casey Award for baseball book of the year, and five of his books are housed in the library at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. His books include *L2*, a poetry novel, *Wild in the Strike Zone*, baseball poems, and *Checking Out*, a book of poems about his time in the hotel business. More recently, he collaborated with Clayton Joe Young on a series of illustrated poetry narratives that include *West of Mercy* and *The Bird House*. His most recent books are entitled, *The Life and Times of Jaysus Christopher Duende and Darrell Cobb Runkle* (Redhawk Publications, 2021) and *Trap Game: A Trilogy of Prose Poems* (Redhawk Publications, 2024).

Benjamin Peret (1899-1959) was born in France on 4 July 1899. He, as a child, acquired little education due to his dislike of school and he instead attended the Local Art School in 1912. In 1913, he resigned due to his lack of study and willingness to do so. During World War I, Péret enlisted the French army's Cuirassiers, to avoid being jailed for defacing a local statue with paint. He saw action in the Balkans, before being deployed to Greece. During a routine movement of his unit via train, he discovered a copy of the avant-garde magazine *SIC: Sons Idées Couleurs, Formes*, founded in January 1916, sitting upon a bench on the station platform. It contained poetry by Apollinaire and sparked Péret's love for experimental poetry. *SIC* was the second Parisian magazine, after *Nord-Sud*, to distribute the texts of the Zurich Dadaists, namely those of Tristan Tzara. After the end of the war, he joined the Dada movement and soon after, in 1921, he published *Le Passager du transtlantique*—his first book of poetry before he abandoned the Dada movement to follow Andre Breton and the emerging Surrealist movement, working alongside and influencing the Mexican writer Octavia Paz. In the fall of 1924, he was the co-editor of the journal *La Revolution*

surrealiste, becoming chief editor in 1925. And in 1928, before emigrating to Brazil in 1929 with his wife Elsie Houston, he published *Le Grand Jeu*. Two years later in 1931, a mere few months after the birth of his first son, Geyser, whilst living in Rio de Janeiro, he was arrested and expelled from Brazil on grounds of being a “Communist Agitator” having formed, with his brother-in-law Mario Pedrosa, the Brazilian Communist League which was based upon the ideas of Trotsky. Back in France, in 1940, he was imprisoned for his political activities. Upon his release, he sailed for Mexico and became involved with the European intellectual community around the Austrian painter and surrealist Wolfgang Paalen, living there in exile. He was particularly inspired by Paalen’s huge collection and knowledge about the “Totem Art” of the Northwest Coast of British Columbia. In 1943 he finished a long essay on the necessity of poetic myths, exemplified with the mythology and art of the Northwest Coast, which was then published in New York by André Breton in *VVV*. He remained in Mexico until the end of 1947, before returning to Paris, where he died on September 18, 1959. The author of 15 books in French, Peret’s work has been translated into several languages and 8 translations in English, including most recently *A Menagerie in Revolt! Selected Writings*. (Black Swan Press, 2009), *The Leg of Lamb: Its Life and Works* (Wakefield Press, 2011), and *The Big Game*, translated by Marily Kallet (Black Widow Press, 2011).

Carl Phillips is the author of 17 books of poetry, most recently *Scattered Snows, to the North* (2024) and *Then the War: And Selected Poems 2007-2020*, which won the 2023 Pulitzer Prize. His other honors include the 2021 Jackson Prize, the Aiken Taylor Award for Modern American Poetry, the Kingsley Tufts Award, a Lambda Literary Award, the PEN/USA Award for Poetry, and fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation, the Library of Congress, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, and the Academy of American Poets. Phillips has also written three prose books, most recently *My Trade is Mystery: Seven Meditations from a Life in Writing* (Yale University Press, 2022); and he has translated the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles (Oxford University Press, 2004). He is Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis, where he also teaches creative writing. Phillips was elected a chancellor of the Academy of American Poets in 2006, and since 2011 he has served as the judge for the Yale Series of Younger Poets. He lives on Cape Cod, in Massachusetts.

Christy Prah is an Illinois Arts Council grant recipient and the author of the poetry collections *We Are Reckless* (Cornerstone Press, 2023) and *Catalog of Labors* (Unsolicited Press, forthcoming 2026). A Best of the Net and three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, her past and future publications include *Poetry Daily*, *CALYX*, *the Louisville Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Tar River Poetry*, and others. She has held residencies

at Ragdale and the Writers' Colony at Dairy Hollow and splits her time between Chicago and rural Michigan. More at <https://christyprahl.wixsite.com/christy-prahl>.

Ron Rash is a novelist, poet, and short story writer, and the author of the PEN/Faulkner finalist and *New York Times* bestselling novel *Serena*, in addition to the critically acclaimed novels *The Risen*, *Above the Waterfall*, *The Cove*, *One Foot in Eden*, *Saints at the River*, and *The World Made Straight*; five collections of poems; and seven collections of stories, among them *Burning Bright*, which won the 2010 Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award, *Nothing Gold Can Stay*, a *New York Times* bestseller, *Chemistry and Other Stories*, which was a finalist for the 2007 PEN/Faulkner Award, and *In the Valley*. Three times the recipient of the O. Henry Prize, his books have been translated into seventeen languages. His most recent novel is *The Caretaker* (2024). He teaches at Western Carolina University and is a 2024 inductee into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame.

Donald Revell is the author of fifteen collections of poetry, including most recently *Canandaigua* (2024), *White Champion* (2021) and *The English Boat* (2018), all from Alice James Books. Revell has also published six volumes of translations from the French, including Apollinaire's *Alcools*, Rimbaud's *A Season in Hell*, Laforgue's *Last Verses*, and Verlaine's *Songs without Words*. His critical writings have been collected as: *Essay: A Critical Memoir*; *The Art of Attention*; and *Invisible Green: Selected Prose*. Winner of the PEN USA Translation Award and two-time winner of the PEN USA Award for Poetry, he has also won the Academy of American Poets' Lenore Marshall Prize and is a former Fellow of the Ingram Merrill and Guggenheim Foundations. Additionally, he has twice been awarded Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts. After editing the *Denver Quarterly* from 1988 to 1994, Revell joined the *Colorado Review* as poetry editor in 1995. Having previously taught at the Universities of Alabama, Denver, Iowa, Missouri, Tennessee, and Utah, Donald Revell is currently a Professor of English at UNLV and faculty affiliate of the Black Mountain Institute. He lives in Las Vegas, NV with his wife, poet Claudia Keelan.

Adrian Rice is from Belfast, Northern Ireland. He graduated from the University of Ulster with a BA in English & Politics, and an MPhil in Anglo-Irish Literature, and holds an EdD from Appalachian State University. He has delivered writing workshops, readings, and lectures throughout Europe and the United States. He is the author of numerous poetry collections, including *The Mason's Tongue*, which was shortlisted for the Christopher Ewart-Biggs Memorial Literary Prize, and nominated for the Irish Times Prize for Poetry. Recent collections from Press 53 in the United States, include *The Chances of Harm: Poems*, *The Strange Estate: New and Selected*

Poems 1986-2017, *Hickory Station*, and *The Clock Flower*. Adrian now lives with his wife and youngest son in Hickory, North Carolina. He is a Senior Lecturer in University College at App State, Boone.

Matthew Rice was born in Belfast. He holds an MA in Poetry from Queen's University, Belfast, and is currently undertaking a PhD at The Seamus Heaney Centre at Queen's. His debut collection, *The Last Weather Observer*, was published in 2021 to critical acclaim, was Highly Commended for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection and was included on the Arts Council of Northern Ireland's top ten books of the year. His next book of poetry is forthcoming from Fitzcarraldo Editions (UK) and Soft Skull Press (US).

William Pitt Root is at home wandering Mt. Lemmon, Madeira Canyon, the San Juan and Weminuche Wilderness with his wolfdog Mojo Buffalo Buddy. His 15 collections reflect a life active within and far from academia. His work appears in *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic*, *Poetry*, and many others. Recipient of fellowships from the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, NEA, Stanford University, and US/UK Exchange Artists Program, Root's recent books are *Strange Angels* and *Sublime Blue, Translations of the Odes of Pablo Neruda*. He is poetry editor at *Cutthroat*, a *Journal of the Arts*.

George Scarbrough (1915–2008) was born in a clapboard cabin in Patty, Tennessee in 1915. He was the third of seven children in a family of sharecroppers that moved frequently during his early years. Strongly influenced by his literate mother, he became an avid reader from a young age and attended the University of Tennessee in 1935–36, the University of the South in Sewanee during WWII, and received his master's degree from UT in 1954. In 1968, he returned to Oak Ridge, TN to be with his ailing mother until her death in 1983. He remained in Oak Ridge, teaching and writing his unique and lyrical brand of Southern verse. His poetry appeared in scores of literary journals, and his papers are collected at the George Scarbrough Center at Reinhardt University. He published one novel and five major books of his poetry, including *Tellico Blue*, *The Course is Upward*, *Summer So-Called*, and *Invitation to Kim*, all available from Iris Press at www.irisbooks.com.

Patricia Smith is the 2021 recipient of the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize for Lifetime Achievement, presented by the Poetry Foundation, and a 2022 inductee of the American Academy of Arts & Sciences. She is the author of nine books of poetry, including *Unshuttered* (2023); *Incendiary Art*, winner of the 2018 Kingsley Tufts Poetry Award, the 2017 Los Angeles

Times Book Prize and the 2018 NAACP Image Award, and finalist for the 2018 Pulitzer Prize; *Shoulda Been Jimi Savannah*, winner of the Lenore Marshall Prize from the Academy of American Poets; *Blood Dazzler*, a National Book Award finalist; and *Gotta Go, Gotta Flow*, a collaboration with award-winning Chicago photographer Michael Abramson. Her other books include the poetry volumes *Teahouse of the Almighty*, *Close to Death*, *Big Towns Big Talk*, *Life According to Motown*; the children's book *Janna and the Kings* and the history *Africans in America*, a companion book to the award-winning PBS series. Her work has appeared in *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *The Baffler*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Tin House* and in *Best American Poetry*, *Best American Essays* and *Best American Mystery Stories*. She co-edited *The Golden Shovel Anthology—New Poems Honoring Gwendolyn Brooks* and edited the crime fiction anthology *Staten Island Noir*. She is a Guggenheim fellow, a National Endowment for the Arts grant recipient, a finalist for the Neustadt Prize, a two-time winner of the Pushcart Prize, a former fellow at both Yaddo and the MacDowell Colony, and a four-time individual champion of the National Poetry Slam, the most successful poet in the competition's history. Patricia is a Distinguished Professor for the City University of New York, a visiting professor in creative writing at Princeton University, and a faculty member in the Vermont College of Fine Arts Post-Graduate Residency Program.

R. T. Smith (1947–2024) was the author of twelve poetry collections and a collection of short fiction. Smith served as editor of *Shenandoah* for more than two decades. His poetry and stories have been published in magazines and literary journals such as *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Poetry*, *Southern Humanities Review*, and *The Kenyon Review*, and included in *Best American Poetry*, *Best American Short Stories*, and other anthologies. Smith was born in Washington, DC and his father was an FBI agent and arson investigator. He attended three universities before joining the Marine Corps and fighting in the Vietnam War where he was infected during a field surgery and came home to graduate from UNC-Charlotte with a degree in philosophy, then received his masters from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC. While at ASU, Smith founded the *Cold Mountain Review*, then taught 19 years at Auburn University and co-edited *Southern Humanities Review*. His award-winning books include *Split the Lark: Selected Poems* (1999), *Messenger* (2001), *Brightwood* (2003), *The Hollow Log Lounge* (2003), *Outlaw Style: Poems* (2008), *In the Night Orchard: New and Selected Poems* (Texas Review Press, 2014), *The Calaboose Epistles: Stories* (2019), and *Summoning Shades* (2019). Smith died peacefully at his home in Lexington, Virginia on December 24, 2024.

Katherine Soniat's latest collections of poetry are *Polishing the Glass Storm* (LSU Press, 2022), *Starfish Wash-up* (Etruscan Press, 2023), and *Bright Stranger* (LSU Press, 2016). Previous award-winning books include *The Goodbye Animals*, awarded the Turtle Island Chapbook Prize in 2014, *A Shared Life*, which won the University of Iowa Poetry Prize and *The Swing Girl*, selected as Best Collection of Year by the North Carolina Poetry Council. *Notes of Departure* was selected for The Camden Poetry Prize by the Walt Whitman Center for the Arts & Humanities in 1984. *Selected Arrangements: BlueTopaz (Poetry 1985-2023)* was recently completed, and her eleventh collection, *Authority*, will be finished for Fall, 2024.

Bruce Spang, former Poet Laureate of Portland, is the author of two novels, *The River Crossed* (2024), *The Deception of the Thrush*, and a memoir, *Those Close Beside Me: A Young Man's Search for Home* (2025). He has published five books of poems, including *Twist* (2025), *All You'll Derive: A Caregiver's Journey*, *To the Promised Land Grocery*, *Boy at the Screen Door* (Moon Pie Press) and *The Knot*, along with several anthologies and chapbooks. He is the poetry and fiction editor of the *Smoky Blue Literary and Arts Magazine*. His poems have been published in *Connecticut River Review*, *Puckerbrush Review*, *Red Rover Magazine*, *Great Smokies Review*, *Kalopsia Literary Journal*, *Café Review* and other journals across the United States. He teaches courses in fiction and poetry at Great Smokies Writing Program at University of North Carolina in Asheville and lives in Candler, NC with his husband, Myles Rightmire, and their three dogs, five fish, and eighteen birds.

Jack Spicer (1925–1965) was born John Lester Spicer on January 30, 1925, in Hollywood, California, where his parents managed a small hotel. Migrating north in 1945, he arrived on the campus of the University of California, Berkeley where he formed enduring connections with two other students, the poets Robin Blaser and Robert Duncan, and studied Old Norse, Anglo-Saxon, and German to prepare for a career in linguistics. This putative career was blighted by Spicer's refusal to sign the "Loyalty Oath," a provision of the Sloan-Levering Act that required all California state employees (including graduate teaching assistants at Berkeley) to swear loyalty to the United States. He left the university and embarked on a number of low-paying, short-lived jobs in Minnesota, New York, and Boston. In 1957, he returned to San Francisco and began his mature career as a poet with the "dictated" poems of *After Lorca* (1957) and the eleven books that followed. Although writing and living in the middle of the Beat movement, Spicer and Duncan stood oddly set apart from it, maintaining an approach to poetry and art that wedded aesthetics to intellect. Indeed, Spicer quarreled with almost everyone he knew, and as

he reached his thirties, his incipient alcoholism became widely known and feared. In 1965, Spicer decided to leave San Francisco and emigrate to Vancouver, British Columbia. But before he could leave, he collapsed into a prehepatic coma in his building elevator and died several weeks later in the poverty ward of San Francisco General Hospital on August 17. A brilliantly original gay writer, Jack Spicer wrote poetry noted for its lyric beauty, intellectual power, and formal invention and his books include *Homage to Creeley*, *Billy the Kid*, *The Heads of the Town Up to the Aether*, *Lament for the Makers*, and *Language*. In 1975, *The Collected Books of Jack Spicer* was published by Black Sparrow Press. *The House That Jack Built: The Collected Lectures of Jack Spicer* was published in 1998. (Univ. Press of New England).

A.E. Stallings is an American poet who studied Classics at the University of Georgia and Oxford. She has published four collections of poetry, *Archaic Smile*, *Hapax*, and *Olives*, and most recently, *Like*, a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize. She has published three verse translations, Lucretius's *The Nature of Things* (in rhyming fourteeners!), Hesiod's *Works and Days*, and an illustrated *The Battle Between the Frogs and the Mice*. A Selected Poems, *This Afterlife*, is just out from FSG in the US and Carcanet in the UK. She has received a translation grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, and fellowships from United States Artists, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. She is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She speaks and lectures widely on a variety of topics and has been a faculty member at conferences such as The Sewanee Summer Writers' Conference and Breadloaf. Having studied in Athens, Georgia, she now lives in Athens, Greece, with her husband, the journalist, John Psaropoulos.

Frank Stanford (1948–1978) was born August 1, 1948, in southeast Mississippi. He was adopted by Dorothy Gilbert Alter, a widow and Firestone's first female manager. In 1952, she married Albert Franklin Stanford, a successful Memphis contractor. Frank Stanford grew up in Memphis, spending summers in the camps on the levees his father built and repaired. He gained his education at Subiaco Academy, a Benedictine school and monastery in the Ouchita Mountains. In 1967 he went to the University of Arkansas and soon became a major force in the growing Fayetteville literary community. After leaving the university in 1971, he married, divorced and traveled across the country. In 1973 he settled in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, worked as a land surveyor, married the painter Ginny Crouch, and established Lost Roads Press with the poet C. D. Wright. Between 1972, when he published his first book, *The Singing Knives*, and 1978, Stanford published seven volumes of poetry. Shortly before his thirtieth birthday,

on June 3, 1978, Stanford died of self-inflicted gunshot wounds. Among his highly original and distinctly Southern collections of poetry are: *Shade* (1973), *Ladies From Hell* (1974), *Constant Stranger* (1976), *The Battlefield Where the Moon Says I Love You* (1977), *Crib Death* (1978), and *You* (1979). *The Light the Dead See: The Selected Poems of Frank Stanford* was published by the The University of Arkansas Press in 1991.

Gerald Stern (1925–2022) has been called an “American original,” “a sometimes comic, sometimes tragic visionary,” and, by his friend Stanley Kunitz, “the wilderness in American poetry.” Over dozens of books, and decades of teaching and activism, Stern was considered as one of America’s most celebrated and irascible poets. Stern was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1925. The son of Eastern European immigrants, Stern’s poetry frequently references his all-American, working-class upbringing as well as his Jewish and Eastern European heritage. His second poetry collection, *Lucky Life* (1977), was the Lamont Poetry Selection of the Academy of American Poets and nominated for a National Book Award. His next, *The Red Coal* (1981), received the Melville Caine Award from the Poetry Society of American. Subsequent collections include *Leaving Another Kingdom: Selected Poems* (1990); *Bread Without Sugar* (1992), winner of the Paterson Prize; *This Time: New and Selected Poems* (1998), which won the National Book Award; *Last Blue* (2002); *American Sonnets* (2002); *Everything is Burning* (2005); *Save the Last Dance* (2008); *Early Collected Poems: 1965–1992* (2010), a volume collecting six of Stern’s earliest books; *Galaxy Love* (2017); and *Blessed As We Were: Late Selected & New* (2020). Stern has also written two collections of essays, including the autobiographical *What I Can’t Bear Losing: Notes from a Life* (2004; 2009). Stern taught for many years at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop. He has also held positions at Temple University, New England College—where he co-founded the Masters of Fine Arts in Poetry—and Drew University. Stern’s many awards and honors include the Wallace Stevens Award, the Bess Hokin Award, the Ruth Lilly Prize, the Bernard F. Connors Award from *The Paris Review*, and the Pennsylvania Governor’s Award for Excellence in the Arts. He has received fellowships from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the Guggenheim Foundation. He was Poet Laureate of New Jersey from 2000–2002.

Mary Ellen Talley’s poems have been widely published in publications including *Raven Chronicles*, *Ekphrastic Review*, *Hummingbird*, and *Banshee*, as well as in several poetry anthologies such as *Ice Cream Poems* and *When Home is Not Safe*. Her poems have received three Pushcart nominations. A chapbook, *Postcards from the Lilac City*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2020. Book reviews by Talley have been published in *Compulsive Reader*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Empty Mirror*, *Sugar House Review* and *The*

Poetry Cafe. She worked with words and youth in the public schools of Washington State as a former speech-language pathologist (SLP). Her latest chapbooks are *Taking Leave* (Kelsay Books, 2024), and *Infusion* (Red Wolf Editions, 2024).

R. S. Thomas (1913–2000) is often ranked among the most important Welsh poets of this century. The son of a sailor, Thomas spent much of his childhood in British port towns where he and his mother would live while his father was away at sea. In 1936, Thomas was ordained a deacon in the Anglican Church and was assigned to work as a curate in the Welsh mining village of Chirk. In 1937 he became an Anglican priest. The post in Chirk was the first of a series of positions he was to hold in the rural communities of Wales. Between 1936 and 1978, Thomas served in churches located in six different Welsh towns. Although he had already published three books of poetry, Thomas did not gain widespread recognition as a poet until the appearance of *Song at the Year's Turning: Poems, 1942–1954*. This volume, brought out by a major publisher and with an introduction by poet John Betjeman, introduced Thomas to a national audience. He has written many books of poetry, prose, and criticism, most recently *Poems of R. S. Thomas* (University of Arkansas Press, 1985), *Experimenting with an Amen*, (Macmillan, London, 1986), *Welsh Airs* (Poetry Wales Press, 1987), *The Echoes Return Slow*, (Macmillan, 1988), *Counterpoint* (Dufour, 1990), *Cymru or Wales?* (Gomer, 1992), *Mass for Hard Times* (Bloodaxe Books, 1992), *Collected Poems, 1945–1990* (Dent, 1993), *No Truce with the Furies* (Bloodaxe, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 1995), and *Selected Poems 1946–1968*. He was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature for 1996 and was awarded the Lannan Lifetime Achievement Award for Literature.

Quincy Troupe was born in St. Louis, Missouri in 1939, and is the award-winning author of 21 books, including 12 volumes of poetry and three children's books. His writings have been translated into over 30 languages. Among his many distinguished achievements are the Paterson Award for Sustained Literary Achievement, the Milt Kessler Poetry Award, three American Book Awards, the 2014 Gwendolyn Brooks Poetry Award, a 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award from Furious Flower, and the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History Award, January 25, 2018, in Detroit Michigan. Among Troupe's best-selling works are *Miles: The Autobiography of Miles Davis* and his memoir, *Miles & Me*, soon to become a major motion picture. Other notable works are: *The Pursuit of Happiness*, an autobiography written with Chris Gardner that was a New York Times bestseller for over 40 weeks and a major motion picture starring Will Smith; *The Architecture of Language* (poems), that won the 2007 Paterson Award for Sustained Literary Achievement; and *Transcircularities: New and Selected Poems*, selected by Publishers Weekly as one of the ten

best books of poetry in 2002 and winner of the 2003 Milt Kessler Poetry Award. The newest collection of Quincy Troupe's poetry, entitled *Duende Poems, 1966–Now*, was published by Seven Stories Press in 2022, and was a finalist for the National Book Award.

Susan O'Dell Underwood recently retired from thirty-five years in the college classroom, where she taught creative writing and many literature courses, including Appalachian and Native American lit, and various courses in poetry. Besides two chapbooks of poetry, she has published two full-length collections, *The Book of Awe* (Iris Press) and *Splinter* (Madville Publishing). Her novel, *Genesis Road*, won a Tennessee Arts Commission Grant. Her poetry is published and forthcoming in a variety of journals and anthologies, including *A Literary Guide to Southern Appalachia* and the second edition of *The Ecopoetry Anthology* (Trinity University Press).

Pamela Uschuk's eight books of poetry include *Crazy Love*, winner of an American Book Award and *Refugee*, Red Hen Press, 2022 (Named by *Orión* as one of their top 14 books of poems 2022 and by *Kirkus Review* as one of their ten top books for 2023). Translated into more than a dozen languages, her work appears worldwide, including *Poetry*, *Ploughshares*, *Agni Review*, *terrain.org* etc. Her awards include Best of the Web, 2024 Pearl S. Buck Writer-In-Residence, Randolph College, the Struga International Poetry Prize, Dorothy Daniels Writing Award from the National League of American PEN Women, and prizes from *Ascent* and Amnesty International. Editor-In-Chief of *CUTTHROAT, A JOURNAL OF THE ARTS*, and Black Earth Institute Fellow and Board Member, Uschuk edited the anthologies, *Truth To Power: Writers Respond To The Rhetoric Of Hate And Fear*, 2017, *Puro Chicax Writers of the 21st Century*, 2020, and *Through the Ash, New Leaves*, 2022, *The Nature of Nature and Human Nature*, 2023. She's finishing work on a multi-genre medical memoir titled *Hope's Crazy Angels: An Odyssey Through The Whispering Disease*.

Jeanne Wagner is the author of four chapbooks and three full-length collections, her most recent, *Everything Turns Into Something Else*, was published in 2020 as runner-up for the Grayson Book Prize. She is the winner of the 2021 Joy Harjo Award and the 2022 Cloudbank Poetry Prize. Her work has appeared recently in *The Southern Review*, *BODY*, *Catamaran Literary Review* and *Valparaiso Review*.

David Wagoner (1926–2021) born in Massillon, Ohio, was the author of numerous poetry collections, including *Good Morning and Good Night* (University of Illinois Press, 2005); *The House of Song* (University of Illinois Press, 2002); *Traveling Light: Collected and New Poems* (University of Illinois Press, 1999); *Walt Whitman Bathing* (University of Illinois Press,

1996); *Through the Forest: New and Selected Poems* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987); *First Light* (Little, Brown and Co., 1983); *Landfall* (Little, Brown and Co., 1981); and *In Broken Country* (Little, Brown and Co., 1979). Wagoner's *Collected Poems, 1956–1976* (Indiana University Press, 1976) was nominated for the National Book Award in 1977. His collection *Who Shall Be the Sun?* (Indiana University Press, 1978) is based on the folklore, legends, and myths of Indigenous peoples from the Pacific Northwest and Plateau regions. Wagoner was also the author of ten novels, including *The Escape Artist* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), which was adapted into a movie by Francis Ford Coppola. Wagoner edited *Straw for the Fire: From the Notebooks of Theodore Roethke, 1943–63* (Doubleday, 1972), which was later rereleased by Copper Canyon Press in 2006. Wagoner received an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, the Sherwood Anderson Award, the Fels Prize, the Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the Eunice Tjetjens Memorial Award, and English-Speaking Union prizes as well as fellowships from the Ford Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. A former Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets, Wagoner was the editor of *Poetry Northwest* from 1966 until its last issue in 2002. He died on December 18, 2021, in Edmonds, Washington.

Brit Washburn is the author of the essay collection *Homing In: Attempts on a Life of Poetry and Purpose* (Alexandria Quarterly Press, 2023), and the poetry collections *Notwithstanding* (Wet Cement Press, 2019) and *What Is Given* (forthcoming from Wet Cement, spring 2025). She is a graduate of the Creative Writing Program at Interlochen Arts Academy in Northern Michigan, where she was born and raised, and of the soon-to-be late, great Goddard College in Vermont. Brit has been awarded an artist's grant by the Vermont Studio Center and for many years served on the boards of the Poetry Society of South Carolina and the Low Country Initiative on the Literary Arts (LILA). She co-directed the salon Poets House South and has worked as a freelance writer, editor, indexer, Montessori teacher, and instructor in the Great Smokies Writing Program at University of North Carolina Asheville. She is the mother of four and a student in the MFA program at Virginia Tech. Her work can be found in print and online at www.britwashburn.com.

Nan Watkins holds degrees in German literature from Oberlin College and Johns Hopkins University with additional study at the University of Munich and the Academy of Music in Vienna. She has published translations of short works by Christine Brückner, Karin Struck, Klaus Reichert, Erwin Eisch, and others. Her translation of Claire Goll's poems in *10,000 Dawns: The Love Poems of Yvan & Claire Goll*, appeared with White Pine Press, and Yvan Goll's last poems, *Traumkraut* were published as *Dreamweed* with Black Lawrence Press. Her travel writings have appeared with Seal

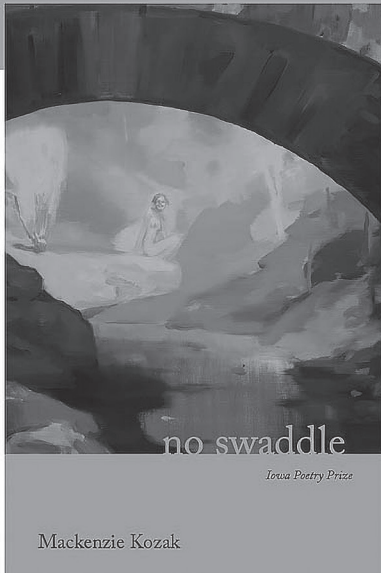
Press, including her memoir *East Toward Dawn: A Woman's Solo Journey Around the World*.

Sean Webb has received many honors for his work, including fellowships from The Arizona Commission on the Arts and the Utah Arts Council. Most recently, he won the Tucson Festival of Books Literature Prize for Poetry, the *Asheville Poetry Review* William Matthews Poetry Prize, the *Gemini Magazine* Poetry Open, and the *Passages North* Neutrino Prize. He received an MFA from the Iowa Writers Workshop and was selected by Grace Paley to serve as Poet Laureate of Montgomery County, Pennsylvania in 2005. His work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies including *december magazine*, *The North American Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Quarterly*, *Nimrod*, *The Greensboro Review*, *The Seattle Review*, *Philadelphia Stories*, and *Schuylkill Valley Journal*. His chapbook "The Constant Parades" was selected by Afaa Weaver as a runner up in the Moonstone Arts Chapbook contest and his chapbook "What Cannot Stay Small Forever" was a runner up in the Finishing Line Press chapbook competition. Sean also has extensive experience as a writer and editor working in medical and scientific fields for universities, research organizations, and medical publishers. He currently lives in Wilkes-Barre and works as the managing editor and chief lexicographer for a line of medical dictionary products.

Robert M. West's reviews and poems have recently appeared in *Appalachian Journal*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, *Eunoia Review*, *Snakeskin*, and *North Carolina Literary Review*. The editor of both volumes of *The Complete Poems of A. R. Ammons* (W. W. Norton, 2017), co-editor with Jesse Graves of *Robert Morgan: Essays on the Life and Work* (McFarland, 2022), and associate editor of *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures*, he is a professor of English and the head of the Department of Classical & Modern Languages and Literatures at Mississippi State University.

Chelsea Woodard's third collection, *At the Lepidopterist's House*, won the 2022 Michael Waters Poetry Prize and was published by Southern Indiana Review Press in October, 2023. It was also awarded the Poetry by the Sea Book Prize this spring. Chelsea is also the author of the collections *Solitary Bee* (Measure Press, 2016) and *Vellum* (Able Muse Press, 2014). Her work has appeared in *The Threepenny Review*, *Blackbird*, *32 Poems*, *River Styx*, and other journals, and is included in the anthology, *In the Tempered Dark: Contemporary Poets Transcending Elegy* (Black Lawrence Press, 2024). She is the recipient of the Peter Heinegg Literary Award, a Walter E. Dakin Fellowship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and a residency at Vermont Studio Center. She teaches at Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire.

Yevgeny Yevtushenko (1933–2017) was born in Siberia and published his first poem at age 16. A prolific and versatile poet, novelist, actor, and director, he wrote more than 42 books of poetry, 3 novels, 3 political-literary essay books, 2 books of photography, and produced and directed several films. His works have been translated into 72 languages. His first novel, *Wild Berries*, was a finalist for the 1985 Ritz Paris Hemingway Prize. He was the first voice against Stalinism, which *Time* magazine noted in 1961, when it put him on the cover. Yevtushenko rose to prominence following the publication of his long poem *Babiyy Yar*, a work about the Nazi massacre of Jewish citizens in Kiev and the Soviet Union's refusal to acknowledge it. He was involved in Russian politics for many years, including serving as a Member of the Soviet Parliament. He was vice president of the Russian PEN Center, and a member of the European Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Academy of Arts. In 1994, he refused Russia's highest honor, the Order of Friendship Between Peoples, because of the war in Chechnya. As with several other poets of his generation, Yevtushenko had the odd distinction of being a celebrated dissident during a fairly repressive time. This notoriety brought him much acclaim, leading to performances in packed stadiums and frequent reading tours abroad, but also left him open to criticism from both the Soviet government and those that felt his criticisms didn't go far enough. Yevtushenko lived in both Russia and the United States before his death in 2017. He taught English and Russian poetry at the University of Tulsa and at Queens College, CUNY.



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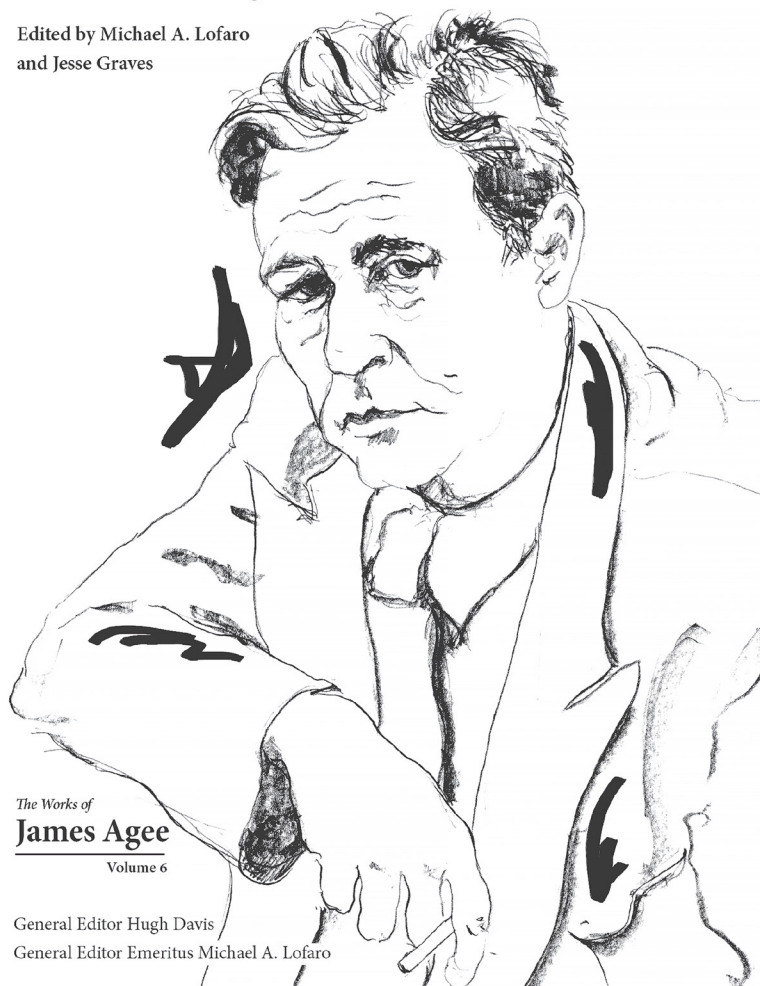
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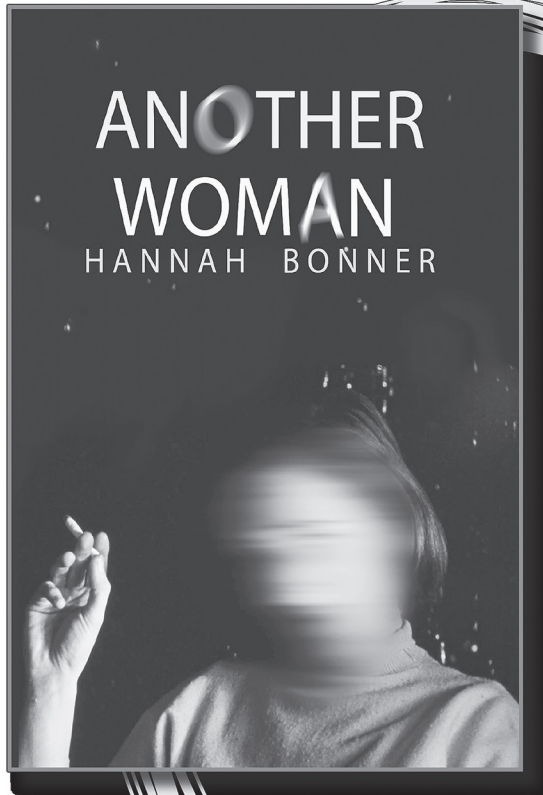


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leave you breathless,
'close to breaking'**
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poems of searing
beauty, stellar power,
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in the quiet**
—Lynn Melnick

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never made such a
startling garden**
—Elizabeth Metzger

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one can't help but
tremble, open-mouthed
like prey, before it**
—Spencer Williams

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Ted Olson's poems find a way between menace and mystery, acknowledging the impact of the past on the present, and gifts of recognition in the lifelong search for a home. The poems celebrate discoveries of the extraordinary in unlikely places and moments, which are the heart of poetry.

—Robert Morgan,
Author of Dark Energy and Gap Creek

Ted Olson has accomplished so much in so many fields, not only in literary scholarship but also film and music, that we sometimes forget he is, as this new collection makes clear, an excellent poet. I particularly admire the musicality in these poems and the manner in which external events and objects become correlatives of emotional states. These poems have a surface clarity, but beneath that clarity are depths.

—Ron Rash,
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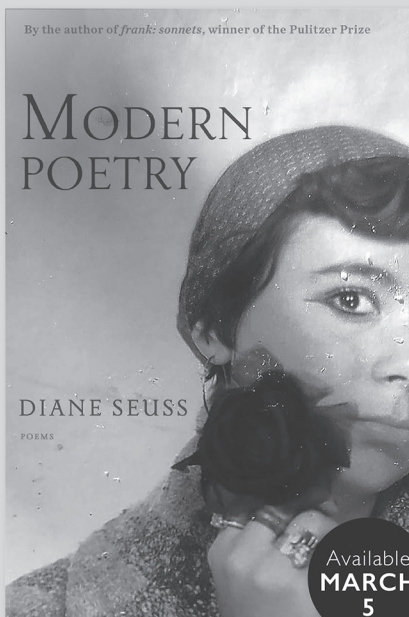
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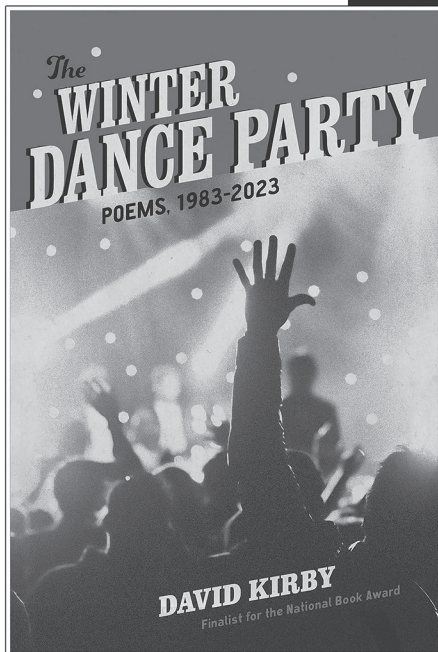
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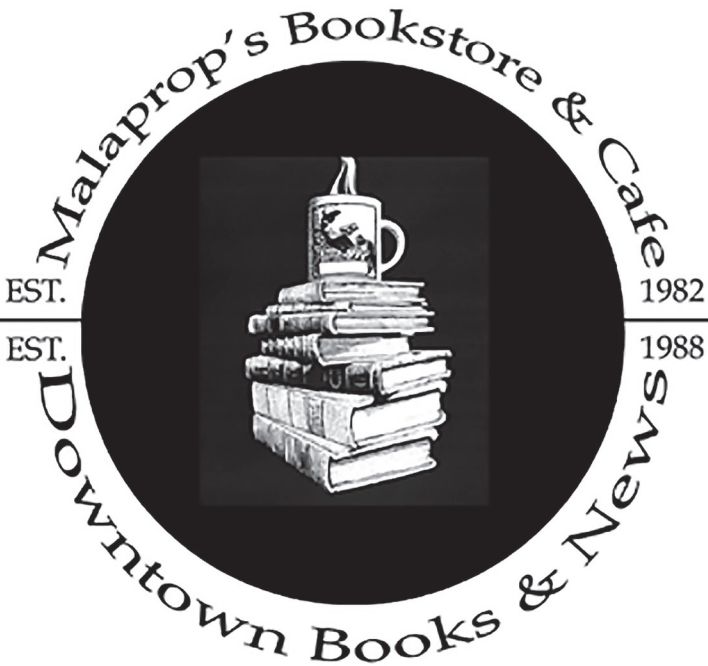
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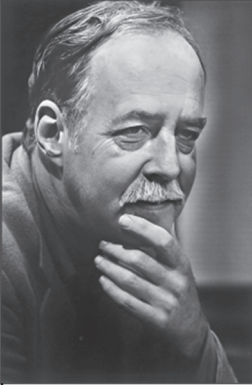
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