

# Alabama Literary Review



# **Alabama Literary Review**

**2017**

**volume 26**

**number 1**

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Alabama Literary Review is a state literary medium representing local and national submissions, supported by Troy University and Troy University Foundation. Published once a year, Alabama Literary Review is a free service to all Alabama libraries and all Alabama two- and four-year institutions of higher learning. Subscription rates are \$10 per year, \$5 for back copies. Rates are subject to change without notice.

Alabama Literary Review publishes fiction, poetry, and essays. Pays in copies. Pays honorarium when available. First Serial Rights returned to author upon publication. Manuscripts and editorial or business correspondence should be addressed to Alabama Literary Review, 254 Smith Hall, Troy University, Troy, Alabama 36082. Submissions will not be returned nor queries answered unless accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope. Please allow two or three months for our response.

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**Victor Altshul**

## **Deserted by Metaphor**

### I. Inspiration

What is it like not to write a poem?  
It is to live where things are things—  
that is just what grayness is.

Color is what I mean. It just came to me.  
So many things are without color.  
Like when you call a spade a shovel,

you gain nothing in translation.  
That is where I am right now,  
in bric-a-brac really, so much clutter

I haven't found my way to the door.  
I will, though. Just relax. Even now  
I think I hear a wood thrush singing.

### II. Expiration

I swing open the screen door  
and step into the light and heat.  
The call of the wood thrush  
is still faint,

and for that I am thankful.  
What had I thought it could offer me?  
Inspiration through cacophony?  
Listen to its song for a while—  
Schoenberg blasted through a piccolo.

## Too Full for Words

I know a man who lost his daughter –  
a part-time farmer, a reticent sort of fellow,  
not a careless man who loses things easily.  
Two years it took him to lose her,  
as she badly wanted not to be lost  
by him and by so many other  
into whom she'd breathed their lives.

Other losses seemed to follow.  
His chest began to hollow out –  
there was little breathing, doctors said,  
and only the faintest beating.  
Lungs and heart were shriveling  
to make room for a harvest of sorrow.  
His voice grew softer, as you'd expect.  
Maybe he didn't want to let on  
that all that shrinking was happening  
inside his once full chest.  
A reticent sort of fellow – – –  
You'll never get the story from him.

I know he knows it, though –  
I know he has the words for it.  
Maybe he's storing them right there,  
right inside that hollowed-out cavity.  
Maybe he'll breathe them out some day  
when he can hold them in no longer.  
I don't know what will be left of him then.



***Neil Arditi***

## **Status Update**

*for Mohini*

Why should we advertise  
our affinities,  
or require  
that other people like  
the things we like  
to do? Friends  
post pictures of themselves  
in Hawaii  
at Christmas.  
They send their love.  
Their babies  
are not as cute as ours  
but we like them anyway.  
We like so many things!  
When summer trumpets itself  
in magnificent blue  
and purple irises,  
you will like  
the pictures I take of them  
and I will like yours.  
Is it bad manners  
to wash clean linen in public?  
To tidy up the story of our lives  
for digital display,  
day after day after day?  
No doubt.  
Now smile  
while I snap  
this image  
for my timeline.  
Never mind the comments.  
I want to be alone with you.

## At Carlton's Place

*for Jud*

Which is owned by Chance,  
one of four sons,  
from two marriages  
(who is selling it, alas,  
to a professor couple at NYU),  
you can wash the city off  
in a cold spring pond,  
or float  
on retired tire tubes  
down a river  
no wider than a road.  
Carleton calls it  
a Zen meditation,  
and flaunts the many  
advantages of the location  
and of socialism.  
But take your pick:  
it all must go.  
The wooden propeller of an airplane,  
an apothecary's counter,  
carriage-jacks,  
a massive collection  
of iron irons and antique  
ironing boards,  
three great scythes,  
a fine array  
of *Coca-Cola* clocks  
from diner heaven.  
The perfect sliver  
of a coffee table  
with cabriole legs  
and a nice patina,  
hung upside down  
on finishing nails,  
looks like  
an unstrung lyre.  
(I place it in my trunk.)  
So much for BARNES ARE NOBLE.

Neil Arditi

Carleton, at seventy-eight,  
is scaling down.  
He has “an opportunity”  
with a lady friend:  
a nurse he met in Rehab  
 (“a total mess”).  
With his refined eye for real estate,  
he’s picked her out  
a perfect house in town,  
where they can pool their strengths:  
her money, his fearlessness.  
Hypocrisy and Propaganda,  
his beloved Labradors,  
are gone, alas.  
Of course, he’s sad to leave,  
but it was only a matter of time.  
“How often can you purchase charm?”  
Location, location, location.  
The professors stayed for three hours  
and were sold.  
Good thing we got here first.

**Winter Song**

Go walking in the chill and brittle wind,  
Pour darkness from the pupils of your eyes,  
And gather in the scarcity of light  
No meaning. When the stars ignite the sky  
And, sliver-thin, the moon rides overhead,  
Go walking in the playground of the dead  
Season. For there is nothing like a night  
Of total paucity to resurrect  
A self as old as time that has no end.  
Go walking through the leafless trees and send  
Your breath, ghost-white, to dust their barrenness.  
Now Autumn's past. With nothing left to say,  
Go walking where the winter winds caress  
And careless air will wash your name away.

*Judith Askew*

## **Hurry-Up Wedding**

My friend's daughter stood beneath the wedding arbor  
with her poof belly, full moon behind her over the lake;  
the guests patted it and told it we hoped  
it was enjoying the wedding as much as we were.

The unborn child was welcome and part of the ceremony  
whereas we think the bride's mother had been sent away  
during high school. We were never sure.  
She visited an aunt and uncle who took her to Europe  
so she couldn't start school on opening day.

Back in the day, my mother made it very clear  
what the neighbors thought was important.  
She should know. Her brother had a hurry-up wedding.  
But maybe it wasn't a scandal for a man.

Such a perfect Christian family--imagine my grandmother  
dealing with that. Not that she was a Bible-quoting granny,  
but the church and its social activities were important.

And so was the minister. Did the minister keep  
young girls and young boys in line?  
How did the minister instruct the adolescent boys  
on their annual spring week in the country?

My mother never told me exactly how to handle  
the hot stuff, the car parking, the moon on the water.  
Just that my reputation was important.  
She made that very clear.

**Mark Belair**

## **Shit Happening**

A muscled young man  
in a strap T-shirt  
storms up the sidewalk  
and overtakes me, hissing  
to himself, as he does,  
“I was looking *forward* to that shit,”  
then we hear  
the young woman who (wisely, I think)  
just blew off their date  
giggle (unwisely, I think)  
in relief with her attending girlfriend,  
a laugh the young man reads, given  
his furious stop-and-spin-around,  
as mockery, though  
he doesn’t stalk back (thankfully)  
but presses on with stoked rage (unfortunately)  
toward some guy in a bar  
watching a game  
by an open door; a skinny guy,  
laughing.

*Jay Carson*

## **Bloomfield, Pittsburgh**

Not much is really blooming  
except on the one flower bed  
under the signature sign  
just over the bridge. And the fields  
are mostly on the TV screens  
neck-stretching above bars where sports  
hypnotize their Pittsburgh lovers.

Everybody who moves to preppy Shadyside  
eventually ends up happier in bluer collar Bloomfield. My con-  
version  
came through my son and his rock band, The Little Wretches,  
who asked me to open with my poetry  
for their Bloomfield Bridge Tavern gig.

What a place! Tiny and smoky in those days  
as if to say this is a corner off the mill floor  
where the iron-bending world-builders  
can rest with their own.  
The food: big, bold commas of Kielbasa  
and a standing bet-you-can't-finish this perogi and haluski serving.  
How delicious, opening for my son's rock band.

They were all so cool in their unbelievable twenties  
and I wasn't—but I invited all my friends,  
not sure I'd have another chance,  
foolishly remembering that Elvis  
used to open for the Louvin Brothers  
and Bloomfield is all about trying.

I did OK; my son's band brought down the house:  
And we bridged to my friends. But my memory  
was stolen by a childhood woman friend with MS  
who made me understand Bloomfield, even Pittsburgh,  
as on that miserably cold night  
she negotiated her motorized wheelchair through  
a slog of snow and ice—I nearly hit her when parking.

She was dead a year later,  
but not to her friends, not to me.



**Catherine Chandler**

**Ending**

Nothing to reproach or to forgive.  
Nothing to unwind or to unweave.  
No arguments to prove or to disprove.  
No wrongs to right. No rights to claim or waive.  
In retrospect, it's all so relative —  
seasons, space-time, truth and make-believe.  
I've left the northern hemisphere, but you've  
a motto: *plus ça change* . . . I hear you;

save

that here the jasmine is in bloom. Above,  
Crux reappears to complement a mauve  
and apricot tableau. The men arrive,  
back from the long November cattle drive,  
while in a nearby eucalyptus grove  
a golden-eared paloma coos his love.

## **My Father's Shirts**

I've dusted, vacuumed, mopped the kitchen floor,  
hung out the wash, swatted every fly —  
it's Saturday, and yet there's one more chore.

The eldest child of seven, it is I  
who've been entrusted with his shirts. Last night  
I sprinkle-dampened them, then rolled them tight.  
Today, from collar, yoke and cuffs, to sleeves,  
to pocket, placket, front and back, the dry,  
hot iron makes the cotton steam. Nearby,  
my mother checks for creases. As she leaves,  
a side-glance at the gussets and the pleat.

I bristle, being too young to know that she  
just hopes and prays I'll learn to take the heat,  
and maybe live a good life, wrinkle-free.

Catherine Chandler

## Nines

“The metric system did not really catch on in the States, unless you count the increasing popularity of the nine-millimeter bullet.”

— Dave Barry

When I was in first grade

— *Catherine* —

we had regular fire drills, just like now,  
orderly evacuations onto the schoolyard,  
usually on a fine fall or spring day.

The teachers did a roll call  
as we shuffled back to class

— *Allison, Avielle, Caroline, Charlotte, Chase,  
Dylan, Emilie, Jack, Jessica, Josephine, Kyle, Olivia* —

Later, when I was a little older

— *Cassie, Corey* —

there were duck-and-cover civil defense drills.  
We’d practice hiding under our desks

— *Kelly, Kyle* —

in case of a nuclear fireball from an atomic bomb.

Maybe your grandparents  
told you stories about those times

— *Lauren, Lena, Steven* —

Now they have lockdown drills

— *Ana, Anna, Daniel, Daniel, Daniel* —

color-codes, metal detectors

— *Madeleine, Marian, Mary, Matthew, James, John* —

designated hiding-places

closets, corners

where active shooters

can never, ever, find you

— *Noah, Rachel, Benjamin, Jesse, Naomi, Isaiah,*

*Grace* —

*Note: The names in this poem are the first names of the thirty-seven children murdered at Columbine High School, West Nickel Mines School, and Sandy Hook Elementary School by hostile intruders with 9 mm weapons. Nine millimeters is equal to slightly less than three-eighths of an inch.*

**Alfred Corn**

**Seventh Elegy**

(translated from Rainer Maria Rilke's *Duino Elegies*)

PANDERING: no more of that, Voice. An approach you've now  
outgrown  
shouldn't prompt your song, even if you cried out cleanly as a bird  
when the season in its ascent thrusts him aloft and almost forgets  
that he's wildlife, anxious, and not just a heart singled out  
to be flung into the brighter skies of an inward Heaven. Like him,  
you'd still be courting some beloved not yet in sight,  
so that she'd take note of you, this silent person in whom a response  
slowly awakens, warmed by the act of listening, —  
to your enkindled feelings a responder ardent and heartfelt.

Oh, and springtime would join in too—, for there is no place  
that wouldn't resound with annunciation. First, those small,  
inquiring grace-notes, which pure, affirmative daylight  
enfolds far and wide in heightening silence.  
To scale a flight of birdcall stairs, up to the dreamt-of  
Temple of the Future—; then on to the trill, a fountain  
whose upward-striving brilliance embraces its own falling  
in playful anticipation. . . . With summer soon to come.

Not just all the summer dawns—, not just  
how they mutate into day and glow with inception.  
Not just the days, which, tenderly lighting the flowers, up above  
grow vast and mighty among full-grown treetops.  
Not just the devotion of these developing powers,  
not just the pathways, the evening meadows, not just  
the breathing clarity that follows late afternoon thunderstorms,  
not just approaching sleep and a sunset premonition. . .  
but instead, the nights! Instead, summer's exalted  
nights, instead, stars, our earth's own stars.  
Oh, to have died at last, to know them forever, all the stars,  
for how, tell me, how can one forget them!

So, you see, I called to my beloved. But not only that one person  
came. Out of weakening graves, other young women  
would come and foregather. . . For, the call once sent forth,

Alfred Corn

how could I restrict its reach? Those who've foundered and are sinking always try to get back to land. — Children, hear me: one solid thing, when it's firmly grasped, will amount to many others. Do not value Fate more than the richness of childhood. For how often you outdistanced your beloved, panting, panting after the blissful sprint, towards nothingness, into the clear.

Just being here is glorious. Even you knew that, young girls who must have suffered want, and went under — in the sordid back-alleys of the city, festering or filling up with debris others had tossed away. You each got an hour, perhaps not even a full hour, between two sessions, a timespan barely measurable at all, when you could live and simply be there. All of it. Your arteries pulsing with existence. Only, we soon dismiss what we have if our mocking neighbor neither notices or covets it. We seem bent on holding it up to view, but not even joy at its most manifest lets itself be known until we've transfigured it with inwardness.

Nowhere, love, will the world abide save in inwardness. Our life moves onward in transfiguration. And steadily smaller shrinks the ambit of the merely external. Where once an enduring house was, an image passes before the mind's eye, fully domesticated to consciousness as though it had always dwelt in the brain. The spirit of the times builds up immense reserves of power, abstract as the driving force it captures from all that is. Temples no longer matter to it. These extravagances our hearts once paid for, we're spared from, in private. Yes, wherever one still remains, a Something once prayed to, waited on, knelt before—, that object hands itself over, just as it is, to the invisible. Many no longer notice it, indeed, don't see the advantage gained by building it *inwardly*, with columns and statues, grander!

With each stale turn of the world, the disinherited increase, those who possess neither what once was nor what will come next. For even the next moment is far beyond humans. To us it shouldn't be a quandary; let it grow stronger as we protect a plan we still recognize. — This once stood firm among us, stood at the core of annihilating fate; in the midst of our motion towards we don't know what, it stood, almost real, and bent stars down to it out of their fixed heaven. Angel, to you I still point it out: *there it is!* In your gaze

let it stand at last redeemed, now finally upright.  
Pillars, pylons, the Sphinx, and the cathedral's aspiring  
gray upthrust marked out against a fading or foreign city.

Wasn't it miraculous, Angel? Wonder at us and what we are,  
O elevated being, say how we achieved so much, my breath  
falls short when I try to praise it. So we have not after all  
let these spaces go to waste, these generous spaces, which are  
*our own*. How fearfully huge they must be if after thousands  
of years our feelings haven't filled them to overflowing.  
But surely one spire was tall, may we not say? O Angel, it *was* that, —  
tall, even set beside you. Chartres was great, — and music  
reached up still higher and surpassed us. Yet even a woman  
in love —, oh, sitting alone by night at her window. . . .  
did she not come up as high as your knee —?

Don't regard this as courtship,  
Angel, even if it were, you would not come. For my  
summons is a complete holding at bay; you can't, against such  
a strong current, make headway. An outstretched arm:  
that's what my calling is. And its upturned hand,  
opened to grip yours, remains there before you,  
open, warding off and warning  
You, who can never be grasped. Wide open.

## *Joseph Eastburn*

### **The Flower Truck**

He was big and that was all that was required. A theater friend had asked Harlow to appear in a dance piece at a local auditorium. The characters were as follows: a man (himself) with cigar—implying age and janitorial status—pushing a large cardboard box back and forth on a stage behind a little girl roller-skating, and a slightly full-figured dancer doing elaborate, almost awkward, ballet movements—all to a languid Erik Satie nocturne.

Harlow saw the dancer walk in the door of the gymnasium wearing a floor-length, olive army coat. She was bubbly, her laugh infectious, but for some reason she seemed tense around Harlow, especially when she took her coat off and stood on the open stage in her dance costume. She wore a skintight, black leotard that vanished into green tights. But all shyness evaporated when she started to move to the music.

Her face was soft and plump. As she danced, her blue eyes jumped around the room, not alighting on anything. Thick, saffron hair—wild and uncombed—flew straight out from her body as she twirled, then floated down onto her shoulders when she stopped to breathe.

He remembered now her name was Lucinda. Lucy for short.

The second night's rehearsal Harlow tried to talk to Lucy on a break, standing beside a vending machine, gushing about the choreography and what good dancer she was, but she just acted shy and stared straight ahead as if she hadn't heard him. The rest of the rehearsal, he felt unmoored. When she was gathering up her gear, he again tried to engage her, describing the Satie music as haunting, even languorous, and then, as she started to walk away, searching for words, he said, half to himself, "anemic"—but was referring to something else. At the door she turned at a safe distance and really stared at him. She looked puzzled and a little frightened.

Then she walked away.

He watched her pull out in a flower truck, puzzling over a vision of the lonely room he was renting and decided to follow her. He didn't know why. He turned the radio on and pursued her taillights, turning the steering wheel in an aimless fashion with his wrist, letting only a corner of his mind focus on what he was actually doing—following a young woman he didn't know.

She drove over the mountain that loomed between Black River and the farming community of Welton. Once Harlow had ridden with his father on this twisting road as it worked its way around a vast floor of humus—miles of black dirt that stretched across the valley. It was like he was still sitting beside his father as the flower truck accelerated down the steep side of the mountain. Harlow saw moonlight hit needles of water spraying the crops at the edge of a field. He could never quite understand how his mind could be in one place, years ago, while his body was actually in the present, following Lucy, and driving too fast. All taking place under a pale glow of the moon. Her brake lights caused him to slow down.

Lucy pulled her truck off the county road in front of a long, flat series of barns and garages. He pulled the other way, across the road, into the driveway of a well-lit, large, white colonial house. He rolled down the window and smelled the black dirt. It was pungent. He reasoned that if he kept one part of his mind in the past, his brain would allow him to do whatever it was he was doing. The truth is, he didn't know what would happen next so he sat there looking at her across the road in his rearview mirror.

Out of the flower truck poked a leg draped in the army coat. Lucy unlocked a garage door, swaying her head idly. After hopping back in the truck, she gunned the engine and pulled the vehicle inside. In her headlights Harlow could see inner walls lined with mirrored cases of flowers arrangements, orchids, red and white roses, baskets of flowers stacked on tables for the next day: all of it double-reflected back through his rearview.

Her headlights died. The garage door slammed. Harlow thought he heard her voice singing: the sound jumped off the garage in the stillness. He could make out the crunch of her footsteps on the gravel. When she came out from under the eave, her outline bloomed green and she stood on the other side of the road, moonlight hitting her hair. To Harlow, even in the mirror, her hair seemed to emit its own light. She stopped and waited as a white car hurtled by. In that moment she saw him, or so he guessed when her frame stiffened. Lucy walked toward the car. A puzzled expression crossed her face.

He opened his car door and stood up without saying a word, just looking at her. The pace of her footsteps slowed, and she stopped in the middle of the road, frowning. Nothing was said for a few seconds. The surprise in her features turned to apprehension.



“What are you doing here?”

“I’m sorry,” Harlow said. “I...followed you.”

“Why?”

“No reason. It was something to do.” He shrugged. “I like the way you dance.”

“You like the way I dance.” Her tone sardonic.

“Yes.”

“Why didn’t you tell me that at rehearsal?”

“I tried to.”

“You drove over the mountain to sit here in the dark and watch me?” There was a steely resolve in the way she chose the words but mostly she seemed scared.

He shrugged again. “You want me to leave?”

Just then the sound of an approaching vehicle intensified: a wall of sound coming from all directions. The right side of Lucy’s body was suddenly side-lit by headlamps, her face drenched in a wall of light. She froze.

Harlow jumped out into the road, grabbed her arm, and yanked her toward the side of the road as a feed truck flew by, pelting them with dust and gravel. Lucy’s hair was swept up into the air. He didn’t realize that she was in his arms until he felt the bones of his forearms against her back.

He could still hear the feed truck rattling away from them on the road, moonlight spilling down as they both wiped sand out of their mouths, amazed at how dangerous it was just standing on a country road at night. She stepped away from him.

“You have to leave.”

He nodded. “I think you’re right.” He got in the driver’s seat without a word, started up the car, and carefully backed out into the road and drove back over the mountain.

\* \* \*

The next night, after rehearsal, he ended up following her over the mountain again. Through the rear windows of her truck, he saw the silhouette of Lucy’s hair glancing from the side mirror to the rearview, back and forth—one time she even turned around and stared. Again, as she pulled the flower truck into the garage, he pulled his own car into her driveway and waited. Again, watching her in the mirror.

When she crossed the road this time, no feed truck was bearing down on her. The night was still. He could hear a chorus of crickets ring in his ears. Again he stood out of his car without saying anything as she approached. The moon was behind a

cloud. She seemed to be lit from some other source. Her eyes held an eerie heat, but she wore a severe expression on her face. He could see the color of her eyes but her mouth was unsmiling. He looked up into the sky with despair.

“All right, I’ll leave.”

He got in the driver’s seat and started digging for the key. She walked alongside the car and stopped at his window. She stared at him a long time, her face blank. He thought she was trying to determine if he was dangerous or not. Still unsmiling, she leaned inside the car and placed her mouth against his. Her lips stayed there. She broke the kiss and placed her cheek against his. An eternity passed through that increment of time. She whispered, “Park across the road.”

She pushed away from him and took off running up the driveway toward the colonial house, her army coat flapping open like wings. She reached the top step of the porch and turned, heaving. He had the sensation her feet were not touching the wooden planks. He was still sitting there, stunned. She poked the night air with her finger, pointing to where he should park. He backed the car out and drove it across the road and parked against the garages. When he got out of the car, she was still standing there, still as a statue, looking in his direction. He crossed the road, now walking toward her. She ran into the house, slamming the door.

Her hair flew backwards as she rushed inside past a series of windows. He watched her run through the living room, past a maple piano, past a couch and chairs that he could see from a distance had brocade slipcovers. He started running. As he reached the porch, through the glass he saw a giant, brown and red braided rug in front of the hearth. She ran up the stairs and Harlow saw her body blink inside several stairway windows as she climbed.

He thought he heard her footsteps running down a second floor hallway. In the silence that followed, he imagined she had reached her room. He stepped back off the porch to look at the front of the house, and stood below what he thought might be her second floor windows. He flinched when she stepped in front of the glass. She threw off her officer’s coat, and began slowly taking her clothes off, hands appearing even slower now, almost in slow motion. Down on the grass, Harlow’s breath caught in his throat. He could vaguely see a white blouse float over her head. As he walked closer to the house, he tripped but immediately

jumped to his feet, astonished, watching as she undressed until she stood there naked in the darkness—staring out the window at him. Or so he thought. Was his fevered brain conjuring this? She pressed her naked body against the glass, white skin flattened against panes that he guessed must be ice-cold in the dark. He imagined the cold glass stinging her with such intensity that she might scream. He stared upward, shaking his head in a kind of wonder, trying to see her—when she moved away from the window.

His mind must have been playing tricks on him. She couldn't have taken off her clothes in the dark and pressed her body against the window. He started to climb a trellis nailed to a corner post that supported an arbor at the end of the porch, then the arbor itself because it was stronger. When he pulled himself up on top of the porch, the tin gutter clanged. His heart raced with excitement and dread. He had to inch his body up the angle of the asphalt shingles but the pitch was too steep. He grabbed the snow cleats for purchase; finally he reached the window frame. His fingernails rubbed the chipped paint along the sash, looking for an opening. The window was locked.

He tapped gently on the glass with a fingernail. The pane was thin and vibrated, the tap echoing inside and out. There was no answer. He began to think he might be tapping on her parents' window. Suddenly a white form blazed inside the window. He jumped. It was a ghostly, otherworldly image, a corporeal body separating—across the imperfections of old window glass—then converging to form a person, like a woman under water.

A hand pressed against the glass: a delicate hand. He pressed his own mirror hand-image onto the cold surface. Her arm was visible, the rest of her body disappearing into a pool of blackness inside her room. The hand slowly, breathlessly, ascended the glass and unlatched the window. She pried the window up slightly from the inside. From the outside, he got his fingers under the wood and yanked, but it was stuck—swollen from the rains. Now, he got both sets of fingers underneath, shifted his weight, and forced it up. The window jumped abruptly, a scraping sound that walloped the silence, echoing across the fields.

He climbed inside. He saw an outline melding into form, then swimming away. His eyes adjusted. The figure, sheathed in white, was standing on the bed, backed up against the wall. He knelt on the bed. It was an old, single frame bed, very soft, a fat, feather-tick blanket spread out on it. Lucy was standing against

the wall above her bed. She let her arms out to the side as the white sheet fell like a sheath of ice falling away. Her smell wafted toward him. He could hear her fast breathing.

He crept toward her. When he touched her ankle, her breath drew in sharply. As his palm began to climb her leg, her skin actually seemed to burn. She began to cry out, her voice ecstatic, shivering with emotion each time he touched her. They started giggling as he covered her mouth but she wouldn't stop. The same moon washed down. Her blue eyes seemed electrified. Her voice a musical instrument rising with each touch. Even her tiny chin climbed upward as her mouth opened. He wanted to look at her face as he moved above her then closed his eyes as she rolled over on top, straddling him.

Looming over him, she began to ride him like a horse, kneeling him hard in the ribs, posting up and down. At one point she grabbed something off the end table and shoved it in his mouth. He nearly choked before he realized it was a bridle. She was forcing a metal bit between his teeth.

\* \* \*

Harlow heard a gate slam in the distance. He opened one eye and noticed light pouring into Lucy's window. He looked up and saw their bodies entwined, covers twisted around them, her hair still wet from sweat and saliva. She looked like a drowned pup. He heard a car door slam. Something about the sound was familiar, which prompted him to crawl out of the warm covers naked and peer out her window. Across the road, a man with white hair was staring in the driver's window of his Chevy, which he'd parked against the garage to the flower shop. The man was wiping his brow. The sun had probably just nicked the horizon and it already looked hot outside, and yet Harlow was cold. He kept staring as he found his jeans on the floor and pulled them up over his bare butt. He studied the man checking his car's license plate. The man paused, thinking, then crossed the road and walked up the driveway to the house and up the steps. He disappeared under the front porch.

Harlow heard someone pull the screen door open when there was a sudden loud bang. A woman screamed. Harlow eased Lucy's bedroom door open and tip-toed down the hallway toward the top of the stairs where he could see down into the living room, but still be hidden in the shadows.

A woman was crying, both hands on the sleeve of a squat man's denim jacket as he dragged her across the room. The older

white-haired man appeared holding up both hands, trying to block his way. The younger man looked very strong, was balding, and had powerful arms and shoulders.

The white-haired man said, "Hold on now. What's up?"

The younger man's face was burning red. He stopped short in front of the older man, dazed, and violently shook his wife's hand off his sleeve. He strode around the older man, and Harlow heard determined steps across the porch and down the steps outside. The screen door slammed. The woman grabbed the older man's wrist.

"Lucy has a boy up in her room. They were at it all night like cats. Fred has just about gone out of his mind. He's going to get the ax."

"No shit."

"Do something, Willard. He's gonna' kill that boy."

"Maybe he'll just hobble him, the way he did that wolf. Kept 'em in a pen for about a year or so."

Harlow was not comprehending what he'd heard.

"Shut up, for God's sake, shut up!" the woman said. "I'm gonna' call the police." She rushed across the floor but ended up knocking the phone off the table. She got down on her knees and picked up the receiver with what looked like jittery fingers. She paused, breathing fast. "Should I call 911?"

The white-haired man scratched his head, turned, and headed up the stairs. Harlow ducked farther back in the hallway, heart racing. The man stopped on the first landing. "How did the boy get in?"

"I heard him climb up the trellis and across the roof of the porch."

"Must have been eager."

Harlow should have already been running, but his legs wouldn't move. His eyes were fixed on an expression of dread that crossed the woman's face as she stood up, both hands over her mouth, staring out the window. "Here he comes."

"Lock the door," Willard said. "And after that, lock the back door too."

"He'll skin us both alive!"

"If he doesn't have the sense to remember what he was like—then we'd better let him cool off."

The rest of what they said was garbled as Harlow ran down the hallway into Lucy's room and over to the window. Outside, the sun was farther up in the sky and he saw the stout man stride

away from a tool shed, gripping an ax horizontally in both hands.

Every sound was magnified. Harlow heard a deadbolt pushed through the front door jamb downstairs as the man with the ax must have clopped up on the porch. He shouted and started banging on the door.

He shook Lucy awake. "Your father has an ax."

She seemed frozen as she stared up into Harlow's eyes.

"What?"

"They locked the door, but he's pretty upset."

They could hear someone walking up the stairs. Harlow backed away from Lucy's bed. The white-haired man pushed open Lucy's door. He smiled and shook his head.

"Young man, I'm Willard Price, Lucy's grandfather."

"Hello."

"Hello, yourself. Normally I don't support this kind of thing, but we have an emergency. Lucy's daddy wants to kill you right about now. What do you say to that?"

"I'd rather not be killed."

"Very sensible."

"Maybe I could explain?"

"Fred's not in the listening mood, I'm afraid. Although, I am. What in the hell were you thinking?"

"I'm sorry, I-I didn't mean any harm, honestly. It just kinda happened."

"Well, it sure did."

They could all hear more intense banging on the front door.

"I strongly suggest you leave the same way you came in, and you better do it right quick."

Lucy started crying. Harlow tried to wrestle a shirt over a bare shoulder, but could only get one arm in as he lurched toward the window.

"Do it now?" he asked.

Willard stayed calm. "When I give Lucy the signal, you go out the window, you hear? I don't care if you have to break a bone. Just get to that car, boy." He reached down and yanked Lucy up by a shoulder, as she wrapped a sheet around herself.

"Oh, Grandpa..."

"Hush, Lucy. Don't start your blubbering. Now, stand here."

He stepped out in the hall and positioned her against the jamb of bedroom door. "Tell me when the boy's in the window."

Harlow could hear screams and a violent pounding at the back door now as he yanked the window up, waiting. From the

white haired man's steps, he placed him somewhere down the hallway, maybe at the head of the stairs. He heard a woman's tremulous voice from downstairs. "Willard, he's going to break down the door."

"Just a minute."

Harlow crouched up under the open window frame. The sun was now on its journey to the top of the sky. He was told by a psychic once that he had Venus at mid-heaven, so in theory, everyone should love him. He looked back into the room. Lucy trembled in the hallway, tears streaming down her face, looking very small and young. She mouthed the words, "Good-bye," and turned away. "He's in the window, Grandpa!"

Harlow heard the white-haired man's voice. "Tell him to start down the arbor, then go lock yourself in the bathroom, you hear? Don't come out 'til I tell you." Then he yelled downstairs, "Open the back door, Ann."

Harlow climbed out the window, grabbed hold of the snow cleats, scraping his ankles as he slid down the asphalt shingles. He wrapped his feet around the arbor and the weight of his upper body nearly pulled the gutter off the porch roof. He climbed down the thick branch twisted around the post. He heard someone run down the upstairs hallway. He pictured Lucy hiding in the bathroom, and almost didn't look up, but he heard, "Pssst!" He looked up and she was crouching, wrapped in the sheet, terrified, staring down at him. He whispered, "Come with me."

As Lucy crawled out of the window, a shape loomed behind her. Harlow gasped as the muscular man grabbed for her but just missed seizing her hair.

Harlow stood barefoot in the grass, his arms raised in supplication. Lucy's body fell out of the sky into his arms and knocked him clean onto his back. His pant legs flew up into the air as they toppled over one another. The front door slammed open, and he saw the woman race out onto the porch, with the white haired man close behind her.

"He'll disinherit her!" she yelled.

"It's still my farm," muttered Willard.

Lucy was wrapped in the sheet, wearing nothing else. Harlow grabbed her arm and they ran down the driveway, the white sheet trailing behind her, flying back wildly like the robes of some goddess.

Harlow heard the man's boots clomping awkwardly on the pitched roof above the porch. He was cursing. The woman screamed for Lucy to come back. There was a loud grunt. Har-

low turned and saw the man heave the ax into the air where it whipped end-over-end high over the front lawn, cutting the air with a terrible sound. He was sure it was going to find the center of his back. It landed behind them and dug a square hunk of grass and flung it up in the air as Harlow and Lucy reached the road and ran toward the car.

Harlow looked back and saw the man sail off the roof of the porch. He landed at a bad angle and startled wailing. It looked like he'd broken his leg. Lucy slammed the passenger door and sat panting beside him. Harlow started the Chevy, but couldn't take his eyes off her face. Lucy looked twenty years older, as if this rupture with her family had aged her before his eyes. She sat Sphinx-like, staring straight ahead at the fields of black dirt. He froze for an instant, realizing he didn't know her, and there might not be a way to reach her, ever. Out of panic, he backed up and careened down the road, shooting gravel against the garages.

He could hear Lucy's white sheet dragging on the pavement.



**Rhina P. Espaillet**

## **The Frangible Hour, by Catherine Chandler**

(University of Evansville Press, 2016)

As a long-time reader and admirer of the work of Catherine Chandler, I expected great pleasure from *The Frangible Hour*, and have been, in fact, delighted to find that all the familiar virtues are present: the effortless mastery of form, the lyricism, the fresh use of nature imagery that appeals to all five senses, the capacity for communication on many levels, they're all beautifully here. But I was wrong not to prepare for surprises, and it was the title itself—that exotic “frangible” applied to a measure of time—that immediately put me on my guard. How can time “break,” after all? And if it can, does the speaker say so gladly, or indifferently, or with regret? What do the poems propose we do, or ask us to feel, about hours—or days, or lives—that fracture while we live them?

Like the title, the book's organization is a surprise, and a clue to its intent. Unlike the work in *Lines of Flight*—Chandler's first book, published in 2011—the great majority of these poems are serial, strongly narrative, with characters and details that would be at home in short stories, and a tendency to pull incidents together and shape them to thought of some kind, as an essay may do. In “Four Songs of Parting,” for instance, the departed mother shifts, in memory, from the strong, matter-of-fact woman brushing her daughter's hair without any compliments, through the mourned loved one who will never return to say those longed-for words, to the ordinary woman capable of foolishness and disappointment, to the saver of trinkets, baby teeth, locks of hair that prove, finally, “that I was once the apple of your eye.” The short story buried in those four separate poems is all the more effective for being composed of fragments, the bits of a relationship recalled too late to constitute a living whole.

Two poems —“Resonance” and “Threnody: On the Razing of Sandy Hook Elementary School”— deal with people lost who left unfinished realities behind in the lives of survivors. The poems work themselves, this time, not into a story but a buried essay, a meditation on loss and the impassable tracts it leaves behind in our consciousness.

One of the most elegant and haunting series in the book, “Days of Grass,” uses the familiar passage from Psalm 103:15-16—“As for man, his days are like grass...”—to depict the end of seven lives by means of seven types of grass. The effect is biblical, but also ironic, because the very device that highlights the ephemeral nature of life is used to link seven unrelated deaths, human and animal, into one memorable—and universal—view of that final experience. Whatever the Psalm says is scattered and irretrievable the poet has nevertheless gathered, briefly but persuasively.

“Almost,” a five-part series commemorating the near-death of the poet’s daughter, again employs horticultural imagery: cinquefoil, a plant whose leaves fold over to protect the flower, as a mother might seek to shield a beloved daughter. This time the series begins with an alarming telephone call in the dead of night, continues with the hospital vigil, pauses with Lorca’s “black horses” of unimaginable grief, and closes with “the little notebook” the daughter will never see, but which marks how “the mundane and blessed act of writing” has kept the mother sane. All of us who write discover that inexplicable power of the word at some point, and wonder how and why it works.

In “One-way Street,” four gorgeous sonnets that are halfway to becoming short stories present the inhabitants—again, both human and animal—of a community I’m tempted to identify as the world and its misfits. Each one leaves the reader wishing for the rest of the narrative, again creating the sense of something broken that is being pulled together, but only temporarily. And that series is followed by another, “Composure: An Elegy,” for a father who is described as “a model of total equanimity” by a daughter struggling to achieve the composure of acceptance. This series, though, unlike the one it follows, is a prosodic sampler: two highly distinctive sonnets, then what I failed at first to recognize as a curtal sonnet, then a sonnet in enjambed couplets, and then—the formal surprise I least expected—a ghazal on the phrase, “a song of praise.”

What will Catherine Chandler’s next book be like? Will it be fiction, as parts of this book make me suspect, or even contemplative prose poems, or formal work taking a different tack? Whatever it consists of, I know enough now to expect surprises, and am looking forward to those, in whatever form this unpredictable and always rewarding poet presents them!

## **D. Ferrara**

### **A Moment**

She knew how she was when she traveled.

She called it her Zen mode, but no Zen master ever dragged a roller bag with such grim concentration.

*Damn. Damn. Damn.*

Her flight to Denver was late. Again. *What is the point of having a goddamned departure time if they don't depart?*

*Calm. Calm. Calm.* She breathed deeply, forcing air down her chest. *Okay, think it back. The meet and greet is at six. If I get in at four, find a cab right away—like that ever happens, dump the bags, take a shower—if there's time. Damn.*

"Dolores? Is that you?"

She blinked. A willowy blonde touched her arm.

"How wonderful to see you! What has it been? Fifteen years?"

*That means grad school. Who IS she?*

*Time flies*, she muttered. Blondie grinned a full headlight blast, all perfect teeth and doe eyes.

"What have you been doing with yourself? You look terrific!"

She fumbled for her card case. Blondie beamed.

"I've been busy myself. I got married, moved to Ashville. He's great—a podiatrist."

She found the card case, slipping out a bent one.

Blondie smiled over the card. "I wondered what happened to you."

Faking a laugh, she hoped Blondie wouldn't notice her inability to conjure a name.

Blondie continued, "When I met him, I thought, a foot doctor?"

She nodded and muttered, *that's great and children?*

Blondie's headlights dimmed.

*Damn. Is she going to cry?*

Blondie plunged on: "We tried." Back to high beams. "We have high hopes for adopting."

There was more. Blondie burred about American women not giving up babies for adoption, going to agencies, women who thought they wanted to give up babies, then changed their minds.

*I might punch that mug if it doesn't shut up.*

Luckily for Blondie, the airport voice intervened with her flight.

“Oh.” Disappointment crumpled Blondie’s face. “Is there an email on your card?”

*Damn. Of course there is.*

Blondie squeezed her arm. “I worried about you.”

*Oh my God.*

In the space between breaths, she remembered: the night Phil locked her out of the apartment, tossing clothes, books, and toiletries (he kept her CDs and liquor). She had wailed for—*hours?*—until a blonde stranger took her in.

The apartment was no great shakes—a studio, with a futon, and two cats—but it was Heaven. The blonde—an angel.

She had only stayed the night, weeping out her story. In the morning, there was tea and lemon-something bread laminated with a sticky substance, along with a laundry bag for all the things Phil had tossed out. Twenty dollars pinned to it. The blonde had gone to work. Embarrassed, she had slunk away.

*Did I even leave a note? Damn.*

Blondie’s hand rested a second longer. “I have to go, too.”

Impulsively, Blondie—whose name she still could not remember—kissed her cheek and walked away.

*Write me!* Dolores shouted, hoping Blondie could hear.

**John Foy**

## **Gollum**

You poor son of a bitch,  
corroded and ruined in the dark  
down there in the deep mines.  
You creep out of the caves now  
to limp and lurk around the fens  
and grab out fish to eat  
or lay hold of a few rats.  
Big-eyed and blasphemous,  
closer now to the amphibian,  
you make a mockery of those  
who pity you, and letting go  
was not a choice you ever had,  
your sad story only about  
the earth and what was in the earth.  
It wasn't peace of mind you sought  
or any equilibrium,  
and what did comfort mean to you,  
who spent five hundred years or more  
ruminating underground  
on what you did and didn't have?  
Who else but you could know so much  
about deformity and pain  
and what it means to be alone?

## Going Mad

I'm cleaning out the crack-house of my mind.  
The first to go is "O I love my life,"  
since now I only hear a bluto bag  
wheezing in the infundibulum,  
as though I weren't a citizen at all.  
It took a little while, but now I know  
it is the planet Pluto that I am,  
a dwarf in orbit in the Kuiper Belt,  
a coney in the deepest cold and dark.  
It's not so bad, although it isn't great,  
to be a ball of frozen nitrogen  
– I miss my shitty, broken clarinet.  
There's nothing left to say except that once  
I went about with wits in Witchita.

John Foy

## **The Stinker**

Although it's all the rage to question now  
a common human nature, let's concede  
at least a brotherhood that's based on how  
each one conforms—and does the daily deed.  
Like everyone, the Democratic Man  
assumes that very fundamental pose  
ennobled by Rodin, whose Thinking Man  
conflates the art of thought and the repose  
of one attending nature's dividends.  
Hobbled by urges rude and execrable,  
the body in allegiance has to bend  
but won't forsake the form of the ideal,  
a posture of the highest in the base,  
that man might lose his load but not his face.

***Andrew Frisardi***

**Aeolian**

The wind had words for me that day,  
though what it said I couldn't say  
or argue with when it arose  
across a land where nothing grows  
and billowed in my open mouth.  
I hadn't known there was a drought  
or ever thought of breath as deference,  
when all at once wind made the difference,  
filling the space of where I was  
as if I'd sighed without a cause.  
Whatever mind wind might forebode  
deciphered its remorseless code  
prior to wind and mind's conjunction,  
which I forgot without compunction.



Andrew Frisardi

## **The Apricot Tree**

This year, I think, we will have apricots.  
The tree down at the bottom of the garden,  
which seemed a splintered twist of bark that rots  
within, is blossoming February's pardon.  
Last year the fruit it gave us was negated:  
shaded light that cooled the afternoon  
like grief no one was ready yet to prune  
the useless branches from. And so we waited.  
Serena, oracle of cats, is staring  
past it, seated on the ragged slope,  
as if she might divine how things are faring  
where we can't see. Her stillness ripens hope  
that what's still possible will soon appear,  
like apricots I think we'll have this year.

## **Rain At Night**

The city lies back in its winding-sheet  
while little digits drum a steady beat

on roofs and terraces, and rolling rain  
crescendoes in the hushed collective brain.

Pensioner, wage-enslaved, impoverished, posh,  
the sleeping people feel it wash wash wash

in runnels, through dark tunnels under grids  
and manholes, down detritus till it rids

the buildup. Hands like these may be minute,  
but such masseuses' touches work the root,

as buried wishes loosen from debris  
and multitudes of deltas meet the sea.

## **Pilgrim**

He started out a favored son of Florence,  
most bellicose among Love's devotees.  
An arrow early barbed his boyish ease.  
The mythic monsters of his own abhorrence  
and love swallowed him, spat him out. Adherents  
of papal power and the Fleur-de-lis  
seized all except a sieve of memories  
he'd use to strain existence from appearance.

Exile was his stability: the salt  
of others' bread, his beggar's role, the cares  
he cauterized and bandaged phrase by phrase.  
In lieu of pilgrimage he spent his days  
ascending and descending others' stairs,  
as if in restless search of grace in fault.

## **Song Of A Bottle Man**

*Rome, 1943*

When he was young he had his pride,  
and thought his pride would never end,  
but now his dearest friends have died  
and he has no country to defend,  
he hobbles out a daily beat  
while gathering bottles from the street.

Sometimes he puts a good drunk on,  
and folds at playing cards too late  
to win the day. His money's gone  
when he reels home to wife and fate,  
and in the windows' darkened maws  
glimpses what his father was.

He'll slip a bit on rotten fruit  
on cobbles, shouting something base  
at shadows. He can be a brute  
to Giulia too. She slaps his face,  
but then makes room for him in bed  
when he crawls in, the rest unsaid.

He dreams night is an empty bottle  
with other bottles in a stall,  
the lot of them as dumb as cattle  
asleep beneath a silent pall,  
all left there when he left off work,  
their empty bodies full of dark.

***Benjamin Harnett***

**Hollow**

“In the hollow of my hand” may be  
a place of sheer fact, dictionary  
definition and all that; I grew up  
in a hollow, in a house in new woods  
at the foot of one hill and the head  
of another. Now a pair of beavers  
have dammed up the stream

so that it is swollen into the valley,  
laps the bases of some grand old willows,  
will kill them, eventually, by a slow  
rot. It was all a goat farm  
once, shorn clean of tree and branch.  
Just brilliant meadow, a one-room  
schoolhouse for the kids,  
blacksmith shop,  
the white farmhouse  
with green shutters,  
a horse and trap to town.

My parents built a home there  
with their own hard labor.  
I can almost see it at the corner  
where the crease of my lifeline  
makes a road through my hand.

*Metaphora* means “moving.”  
Modern Greeks splash it  
across their trucks.  
The hollow is a metaphor,  
and, like a mover,

I’ll fill it with all this stuff.

*Eric Janken*

## **Recollections of an Elderly Radio Weatherman**

### I. Flood

Coffins rose on a lock of storm-froth,  
breaching cemetery turf.  
Recalcitrant rain bickered with the levees.  
Bent street signs jutted out near  
the unmoored barges scuttled atop  
angels glazed in motor oil.

### II. Blizzard

After it snapped forty degrees,  
ranch hands drove a forklift  
past the dung-specked slushed  
  
arroyo to exiled calves frozen  
in their crates, no longer  
trying to suck on a frozen nipple.  
Though blunted by gloves, one felt  
a heifer's ice-coarsened tongue,  
as they dragged thawing carcasses  
  
atop pallets, hurrying to stack every  
Hereford before sunlight knifed  
through and bellies began to swell.

**David M. Katz**

## **The Poetics Lesson**

Her name was Mrs. Lazarus, the wife  
Of Mr. Lazarus, my seventh-grade  
Physics teacher. He was dry as chalk  
And lost to us behind a boring cloud  
Of crabbed equations, though we loved  
The block and tackle, with the hook that raised  
An anvil high. He drew that diagram  
So we could understand how pulleys work.  
His wife was something else, at least to me.  
“In Flanders fields,” she read to us one day,  
“The poppies blow, between the crosses, row  
On row.” Her voice was hoarse, as I recall,  
And only loud enough for us to hear  
If we leaned forward. When she read the part  
About the dead, I saw the open graves  
Of pain, and listened to a sleepless voice  
Inside of me. The night before, I’d tossed  
In fear of being buried in the dark,  
Dreamt another dream of World War III,  
My parents gone, along with everyone,  
And me alone amid the rising smoke  
And fallen pyramids, a broken tree.  
The worst has come to pass, the voice had said,  
And it was time to either scream or waken  
From my dream. More than fifty years  
Have passed, and still that voice is in my head,  
About to speak, while Mrs Lazarus  
Returns to earth to read those lines again,  
The lines in which the living hear the dead.

*Jean L. Kreiling*

**“Old Sport”**

*(Jay Gatsby’s name for acquaintances)*

Presumptuous or charming? Much too keen  
to claim an intimacy that in fact  
he had with nobody, or did he mean  
no more than breezy, gentlemanly tact?  
The moniker suggests a chummy past,  
with inside jokes and shared sophistication—  
but as a pal Jay Gatsby was miscast,  
his act weakened by stilted conversation.  
Although he might have meant to strike a pose  
that Nick and Tom and Daisy would accept,  
they must have sensed what any reader knows:  
the nickname, slick and phony, only kept  
him far from so-called friends. Whatever game  
might save him wasn’t in that specious name.



**Rick McKenzie**

## **Don't Blame Me**

The only station I could get, up in West, by God, Virginia,  
Was blasting out the music that I basically can't stand,  
But then the DJ said, "Here is one from Lumey Storch  
And his Stomping Creek Coon Dogs. Hair-raising, paint-peeling  
bluegrass,  
And it's called 'She Got Real Fat.'" A pause, and then the song took  
off  
Three hundred miles an hour picking each and every string.  
When the velocity got scary, then they started in to sing  
Like squealing tires up the nose in three-part harmony,  
Wailing that she got real fat right after we got married  
And I found out what she does with that woman from the store.  
Couldn't make out all the words, but there were some about a gun.  
And then the whole thing ended in just about three minutes.  
My hair was raised; my paint was peeled. The DJ said, "There's  
Lumey Storch  
And his Stomping Creek Coon Dogs. Their new CD is *Moonshine  
Seizure*."  
The car was stopped; my mouth was open. Can't believe I want to  
buy it.

**Richard Meyer**

**An Ever-Fixèd Mark**

a whisper knurled in gold  
the voice that spoke my name  
and drew me, drew me in

assurance in the tone,  
the lure of how it said  
*This time, This time, This time*

and hesitation fled  
where love's roulette stood poised  
attending me alone

giddy as the moon  
sanguine as a rose  
I wagered all I had

everything riding on red,  
bouncing and clicking  
against the spin of the wheel

and my heart danced  
like that little white ball, leapt  
and whirled with love's bright pebble

until it dropped  
with a clack  
in a black slot

stuck like a stone in mud,  
its blank white eye  
without pupil or iris

staring  
pitiless

Richard Mayer

## **A Grateful Witness**

This blue-skyed and blushing green April morning  
I sit on the back porch, sipping coffee, looking out at the yard.  
The newspaper, unread, lies on the tabletop.  
The troubles of the nation and the world must wait,  
rolled into a tube and bound with rubber bands,  
for now a flock of cedar waxwings glides in  
to feast among the branches of the crab apple tree.  
They gorge themselves on the winter dried fruit,  
wrinkled and deep red, the size of cranberries,  
and when the tree is a flurry of gray wings  
and sleek cinnamon bodies and yellow-tipped tails,  
just then, from across the high hedge,  
through the neighbor's kitchen window, I hear a radio  
begin to play the melody of "Simple Gifts"  
from Aaron Copland's *Appalachian Spring*.  
A carnival of birds. That music in the air.  
And I, sitting in my sunlit chair,  
the grateful witness to this lovely, unexpected thing.

**Todd Easton Mills**

## **The Reverend's Tale**

Mimi's, the local faux-French bistro, stood alone in the vast parking lot of the Pacific View Mall. The restaurant was *pittoresque* with checkered tablecloths, geraniums in the flowerboxes, and posters of the famous *chat noir*. Its garden, narrow as a boulevard meridian, had irises and iceberg roses. There was an olive tree, old and gnarly, and all was enclosed by a tidy boxwood hedge.

Piper came here to think about things and to daydream. She had selected a sunny booth by the window that overlooked a broken concrete sundial. It didn't matter that the waitress hadn't taken her order—she had a book to read and had eaten a big breakfast. Her husband, Mark, had said something this morning that wasn't true. She couldn't have *anything she wanted*.

Mark worked at home with the door closed, making long calls to cronies, and liked to travel to San Jose or Silicon Valley for meetings with other VCs. She volunteered at the Rescue Mission in Santa Barbara. She wondered if her good luck had changed her. That was an interesting question. Their house was a pristine Spanish Revival by George Washington Smith; when they traveled, they stayed at five-star hotels and resorts, and Mark always did the online research to find Michelin-rated chefs.

She was thinking about this when an old black man, tall and straight, appeared at the hostess' podium. He had a cracked leather cap and frayed satchel and looked like he had been on the road for a long time. He waited, standing back, while the hostess seated two ladies in business suits. "Can I use your restroom, ma'am?" he asked, his voice soft and deferential.

The hostess smiled warmly. "It's through the dining room and on the left, sir."

*That's nice*, Piper thought. A week ago the same hostess had told a surfer in a scruffy Pendleton to use the public restroom at the mall. Piper picked up the menu: French onion soup, coq au vin, hamburger with mushrooms, Silk Mud Pie. She looked up when the old man walked by—and he touched his hand to his cap.

Suddenly, as if remembering an appointment, Piper asked: "Would you like to join me for lunch?" Then awkwardly: "Don't worry, I was homeless myself. Well, homeless with a car, that's a separate category." She blushed. "My name is Piper."

“Nice to meet you, Piper. I’m Reverend James James—Father liked the name. I’m trying to get back to Mohave. My car broke down and I have been walkin’ for six miles. No one in this town wanted to give me a ride. Maybe you know where the bus stop is—somewhere on Telegraph?”

“Please sit down. Join me. Have something to eat.”

“You are blessed by God—I can see that. Broke down first time on Highway 14. Man put in two parts charged me \$167, left me with \$4. Broke down again in a place called Carp.”

“Carpentaria? How’d you get to Ventura?”

“A good Christian gave me a ride.”

“Well, don’t worry. I can drive you back to your car. I know a mechanic. We’ll get you back on the road.” She remembered how her old Camry used to break down. “Would you like something to drink, Reverend?”

“Well, yes, ma’am. Water, if it’s no trouble,” he said, sitting down.

“And you’re having a good dinner.”

At that moment, the waitress, tall and blond, arrived to take the order. Like the old man, she was almost six feet tall. She asked if she could move his bag to one of the chairs so that it wouldn’t be in the aisle. As she picked it up, Piper saw a Bible in the outside pocket. “I’ll have what she’s havin’,” said the Reverend.

It turned out, the Reverend traveled up and down the state, witnessing to gang members in Oakland, Salinas, Bakersfield, East L.A., Pomona, Compton, and San Diego. He had enormous hands that he displayed before he clasped them to bless Piper for her “Christian heart.” When the meal came, she was surprised by how fast he devoured it, ejecting tiny bits of mushroom-and-brie burger.

The Reverend said he had seen many miracles, like when he was witnessing to a gang leader who had killed a lot of men. “When I laid my hands on him, a black worm dropped out of his mouth.”

“What did you do? Step on it, I hope,” Piper asked, excited by the story.

The Reverend nodded in an odd way.

Piper, who had perfect pink fingernails and hair streaked by the best stylist in Santa Barbara, wanted to tell her story. “When I was living in my car, I didn’t have any money except what I could panhandle. Sometimes for dinner I would go to bars at Happy Hour. The good ones serve chicken or steak, but it’s usually too

spicy because they want you to drink. I would shower at the 24-Hour Fitness. I had a membership—”

“Another time,” said the Reverend, interrupting with a stronger voice, “I was witnessing in front of a liquor store in East L.A. There was a drug dealer in the parking lot who didn’t want me there. He said it was his street and I was bad for business.”

“You probably were,” Piper said.

“That’s right. He told me to move on and I told him: ‘This is where God wants me to witness.’ We had a standoff for a week, then somebody threw a Molotov cocktail in my face. I had a clipboard and I blocked it, but it exploded all around me. The sound it made was *whooooooooosh!* When I woke up, I was in the hospital on the drip—seventy percent of my body was burned. They gave me so much morphine, I was out of my head. I called my son who’s a doctor and I told him the hospital was tryin’ to kill me. I could feel pins in my blood.”

“My son said: ‘Dad, you’re in a very good hospital. They’ll take care of you.’ He was in Mombasa workin’ at a hospital over there. In Mombasa they’ve got ivory tusks that cross over the streets. My son sent me the picture. I could handle the pain; but when they cut me back, it felt like lightning. I begged for more.”

“I can’t imagine. How awful.”

Reverend James removed his leather cap to show uneven patches of pink and white on his scalp. He rolled up his shirt sleeve, showing faint vertical lines. “That’s where they did the skin graft.”

“How long were you in the hospital?”

“Four months. I told them I needed to get out of here. My son helped me transfer to a rehab center. That was worse than the hospital. The pain got real bad.”

“Did your son come back from Africa?” Piper asked.

“He was helpin’ with Ebola. He works for the CD—”

“The CDC?” She paused. “Are you sure you don’t want me to drive you to your car? I’ll call the Auto Club and they will help you.”

“I have Christian friends in Mohave. They’ll tow me back.”

“Let me call the Auto Club.”

“I just need to get to the bus stop on Telegraph. I’ll take the bus back tonight. I don’t worry about money. When I witness, money comes. Excuse me, I gotta go to the restroom again. I got pros-tate cancer. When you got pros-tate you need to go all the time.”

“Are you getting treatment? Did your son tell you about watchful waiting?”

“I heard of that—watchful.”

There were facts in the story that troubled her. Living in the street you acquire a sense. She tried to remember how many years ago she was homeless. It would have been before she met Mark. That night she was scrounging food at Happy Hour and Mark never guessed she was living in her car. Mark was a software engineer when his company went public. He cashed in at thirty-eight, bought a house in Montecito, and was a member of an angel investor club. Recently, the club had made investments in virtual reality.

Her curiosity burned. Why did the Reverend drink so little water? Just a few sips. At the hostess station, she remembered him standing up straight. Now when he walked, he was bent over and very slow. Why wouldn't he accept her help to get his car back on the road? It would take him eight hours to get home by bus. She decided she needed to look at his Bible.

As soon as he turned the corner to the men's room, she jumped out of her seat and plucked the good book from the outside pocket of his bag. In *Timothy* she found a slip of paper with the handwritten words: “PROSTATE.” In *Ezekiel* she found a receipt from a pharmacy for drugs she didn't recognize, but there was with no patient name or address. It was a large-print Bible of impressive size, inscribed to somebody named Gretchen Anderson. Reverend James was suddenly beside her.

“I was looking for the part where Moses says ‘I am that I am.’ You hear it a lot in songs and different places.”

“I gotta get to the bus stop, Piper.”

A large man, about forty-five, who looked like a retired fireman, had been listening to the conversation from the table behind them. As he got up to leave, he nodded to the Reverend. “Hello, brother, are you a Christian man? Reverend James James.” The Reverend put out his hand. “My father liked the name. I'm tryin' to get back to Mohave—my car broke down and I've been walkin' for six miles. No one in this town wanted to give me a ride. Maybe you know where the bus stop is—some-where on Telegraph?”

“This poor man is trying to get back to Mohave,” Piper said.

“Mohave? That's a long way. Excuse me for listening in: is it: ‘I am *that* I am, or I am *who* I am’? There's a difference.”

“Are you finished?” asked the Reverend.

"I just have a few more bites," Piper said.

"Can I have my Bible? Bless you, sister."

"Do you need a ride to the bus stop, Reverend?"

"Thank you, brother."

After he left, she thought about "I am that I am," which he said means "the ugliest man filled with the spirit of God will think he is the most handsome man in the world." That morning she had eavesdropped on a handsome man making a phone call in front of Peet's Coffee on State Street in Santa Barbara. He was talking about how you can borrow from certain Swiss banks who charge zero percent interest "for loans up to billion dollars because Swiss banks have too much money and are required by law to lend it." She wanted to hear more, but the man moved away. Across the street she saw a woman holding two dollars in her hand. She was dressed in a black skirt and shawl and held a baby swaddled in a pink blanket with silver stars. When Piper got closer, she heard: "Do you have change? I tried to get change at Starbucks, but they wouldn't let me because babies aren't allowed." "Can I see your baby?" Piper asked.

"She's sleeping," said the woman.

Piper saw a rectangular bulge under the blanket. She touched it softly and could feel a shoe box.

"She's sleeping," said the woman, unfazed.

"Sleep tight, little shoe," said Piper. She had forgotten the incident until just now. *Funny how one thing reminds you of something else*, she thought. There were other things about the Reverend's story that didn't add up. *Wouldn't he have terrible scars?* He said the man who threw the Molotov cocktail "was just tryin' to scare me." *That's all?* she thought. *Just scarin' him by burning off his face?*

*Was it a story, his hustle? It doesn't matter. You do what you have to do.* She was happy to live and let live. She looked out the window and watched a seagull land on the sundial. Beyond the hedge stretched new blacktop with freshly painted stripes. It was twilight and you could see the silhouette of palm trees in front of the Ford dealership. It was the time of day when you start to look for a place to park for the night.

Her mind went back. That was the day she had found a piece of new shag carpet sticking out of a Dumpster. It was so new, she could smell the rubber backing and scent of lanoline in the wool. Her doorway was one of the side entrances to the Santa Barbara Superior Court; it was Friday so the doorway was *hers* until Mon-



day morning.

*I have time to get my tires rotated before they close. It's free,* she thought. It had only been five thousand miles since the last rotation, but Mark liked her to do it. *Anyway, Pacific Tire is next door to Macy's, and I can do some shopping.* She remembered the last time it took several times to align the Mercedes on the hydraulic lift. *They made a big deal out of it, funny guys. When you're not working, you have time to enjoy the joke. Was that it?*

She was sitting at the wheel, lost in thought. She drove past the tire store and continued past Macy's to the back of the mall where there was a row of Dumpsters. She remembered a tree—a bushy pepper with branches low enough to hide her car. Years before she had slept in this spot until a security guard discovered her. He banged on the door and shined his flashlight into her face. Now, Piper felt tired. She crawled into the backseat. She folded her sweater to make a pillow and drew up her legs. After a minute, she curled over on her side.

*The night it happened, I showered and shampooed at the gym. I know because it's what I do if I'm going to Happy Hour... so I would be wearing lipstick and eye makeup. It was cold, but I had my good blanket and a double-layer of cardboard under the carpet. The arch over the door hid the stars and I fell asleep right away.*

She was breathing heavily now. *I was fast asleep when somebody shook me. I had never seen him before. I don't think he was from around here, maybe New York. He didn't say enough for me to pick up the accent, but I think New York. His cologne made me sick. He said: "I'm cold, can we share the stoop?"*

She turned over on her back with her knees up and held tightly together. *He hurt me and I saw flashes of light. He put his hand over my mouth so hard I couldn't bite him. I tried to push him off but there was no way I could fight--he was too big. When he was done, he flopped on his back and lit a cigarette. That's when I screamed and he ran off. I never called the police. I'm sure of that. And I never used the story when I was panhandling. I screamed once, I'm pretty sure. I pushed it out of my mind. I push it out and here it is again. I'm going to think about something else. No, I never hustled my story like the Reverend, even if his story is true. It's a beautiful sunset tonight. I'm not going to fight the traffic. I'll just take a little nap.*

It was nearly dark. The palms were purple and the mall looked like an indigo fortress—in the poor light it was hard to tell if Piper was driving a Mercedes or a Camry.

**Timothy Murphy**

**from “Another Flood of Memories”**

for Eldridge Hardie

**The Legacy**

I come to sing my praise of Super Chief,  
sire to the greatest lines of hunting Labs.  
Through long research I've come to this belief,  
studying pedigrees and keeping tabs.

My five dogs, all have borne his mighty seed  
and his famed father's named for the Black Hills,  
Paha Sapa. They are the Dakotas' breed.  
When mallard drakes are flashing orange bills,

when pheasant cocks wake before dawn to crow,  
when geese abandon gravel river banks,  
when Labradors precede us through the snow,  
I praise the Holy Ghost and offer thanks

for two dogs whelped when I was a young child  
first following my father in the wild.

Timothy Murphy

## **Lone Scotch Quartet**

Heavy to carry from a gravel road,  
his magnum twelve too much gun for his age,  
too much kick from a 3.5 inch load,  
my father ridiculed my twenty gauge

before his final hunt when he recanted.  
Decoys arrayed in darkness, first dim light,  
Maud and I breathless as four mallards slanted,  
wings tip to tip, greenheads aligned just right,

one shell, three dead, the distant one a swimmer  
Maud splashed to snatch out of the six inch water,  
then fetch three in the crepuscule, its glimmer,  
proving she was Diktyinna's worthy daughter.

My little gun, Father no longer scorned  
three weeks before the Murphy family mourned.

***Apologia pro sua aetate***

Chucky, will we be skunked or *Really Skunked*  
like Maggie in that pile of blown-down trees  
so many years ago? My head is thunked  
by a low limb that fells me to my knees.

I think there's not a cock in Ransom County;  
whatever, glorious November weather  
whether or not we harvest any bounty  
or find more than a fallen pheasant feather.

You are so young, and I am grown so old,  
I feel sorry I can no longer hunt  
as with your famous predecessor, Bold  
Fenian, like you a muscled runt

from Lone Willow Kennel, which whelped two males  
to lead me where the flushing rooster sails.

Timothy Murphy

***La meilleure saison pour sa foi***

What is it that an old hunter believes?  
When all the corn is combined on our hills  
and startled puppies make their first retrieves,  
the first frost forms on country window sills.

The tired beaver sleeps in his well-built house,  
the widow piles the blankets that she weaves,  
and gun shy grow the wary sharp-tail grouse  
while Protestants sing “Bringing in the Sheaves.”

When fall plumage puts on its bravest show,  
red and green heads, the geese in V-shaped ranks  
flee the Dakotas in November snow.  
He bows before his Maker to give thanks

for the grave grandeur of the prairie’s girth,  
a seventh decade to patrol the earth.

—Deer Opener, 2016

**John Poch**

**Love Poem**

Your name is your name because of tongues  
and the repetition of how you were made for mirrors.  
Poems are not alive unless one loves artifice  
and intelligence which leaves the windows open.  
Never doubt that I will go strolling mornings  
to persuade my squid-black ink to make a brown  
that settles for nothing less than the gold  
of your summer skin against a whitewashed town.

It is always sobering for me to kiss you this way  
because just the memory of your teeth can bite  
a mountain awake. Darkness knows how lava pines  
for the various glows and resin of your youth.

Bet your wealth of imagined outdoor rooms  
that I'm believing Sundays are for sleeping.  
But only your sleeping while I meditate  
on last night. With grace, our inside jokes belittle rulers.  
Bet your best foreign money I'm bitten.  
And we can spend the winnings on a train trip for two.  
At two hundred miles per hour I can tell you  
my riddle about drinking the end of the infinite.

## **An Affinity for Form: A.E. Stallings’s “Explaining an Affinity for Bats”**

### Explaining an Affinity for Bats

That they are only glimpsed in silhouette,  
And seem something else at first—a swallow—  
And move like new tunes, difficult to follow,  
Staggering towards an obstacle they yet  
Avoid in a last-minute pirouette,  
Somehow telling solid things from hollow,  
Sounding out how high a space, or shallow,  
Revising into deepening violet.

That they sing—not the way the songbird sings  
(Whose song is rote, to ornament, finesse)—  
But travel by a sort of song that rings  
True not in utterance, but harkenings,  
Who find their way by calling into darkness  
To hear their voice bounce off the shape of things.

The sonnet is the poem of the magician and the underdog. It is also the poem of the mathematician, the lover, and the rebel. In its first few hundred years, it was used almost exclusively as a form to convey the thoughts and feelings of love. But in the last few hundred years, the sonnet writer seems to want to make it do a new thing every time, even while maintaining its basic structural form of fourteen lines of rhyming iambic pentameter, and sometimes even pushing those boundaries. More recently, it has been used as a poem able to express and reflect the political, the personal, the elegiac, the natural world, and even Olympic feats. Its fourteen lines are usually broken up into an eight-six form of octave and sestet. One of the primary effects of this form is to have the final six lines outdo the former eight which have set up some kind of initial argument. In Shakespeare’s development of the form, the final two lines often seem to outdo the previous ten combined.

There are two primary types of sonnets. One, the Elizabethan or Shakespearean form, has seven different rhymes, which make it easier for the English practitioner (because English is rhyme poor compared to Italian) to make a poem without straining too much for multiple rhyme words. The Italian, or Pe-

trarchan form, uses only five rhymes, at most. The first eight lines are made up of only two rhymes that alternate in a brace rhyme scheme: abbaabba, as seen above in Alicia Stallings' poem. If you think this is not difficult to do in English while developing a clear argument in meter while paying attention to lines and the entire sound/syntax/sense of the octave, give it a try some time.

Like baseball, the sonnet is a game of inches (or feet). And the numbers of the stanzas, rhymes, feet, and variations in the overall structure are just as important as the numbers of innings, players on a baseball team, the distances between bases, pitcher's mound, and home plate, and the differences between the speed of a fast-ball and a slider.

Alicia Stallings is one of the few strong contemporary poets who works almost strictly in form, and one of the few to be able to pitch a perfect game. Her training is classical, and her translations of Lucretius, Sappho and Virgil, and especially her own poetry, early on in her career have garnered her many awards, perhaps most recognizably a Guggenheim and a MacArthur Genius Award. Her sonnet here seems, at first, to be a poem about the natural world, but like many of Robert Frost's great nature poems, it goes much further than that, signifying deep spiritual truth.

Stallings's poem begins, via the title, with the presumption that she must explain to us why her speaker likes, or has an affinity for, bats. Many of us have an irrational fear of bats due to the bloodsucking mythology that surrounds them, even though ironically they actually save us from a lot of bloodsucking due to the number of insects they devour. But there is no denying that their nocturnal habits, their diet of insects, and, up close, their razor-toothed, rodent faces and hairy, jagged skin-wings are slightly terrifying. So, Stallings has some convincing to do.

The first line begins *in medias res*, in the middle of things, viewed from our human perspective below. The bat is in flight, we assume, at evening, in the last light. The decline into darkness has begun. Line two seems like a psychological denial of what we imagine, or it is at least a somewhat more familiar image of flight since we are creatures of sight. We don't want to see a bat, so we go with something more angelic than demonic. A bird rather than a rodent. A swallow. Line three (perhaps because it is getting darker) relates the sight to a sense of sound: "move like new tunes, difficult to follow." Line four completes the first brace rhyme with "they yet." So we move from "silhouette" to "they



yet.” “Yet” is a word which creates uncertainty in the movement of the bat and/or our observation of it. This ending on a rhyme word of such uncertainty reminds me of Robert Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” where Frost writes: “Whose woods these are I think I know. / His house is in the village, though.” In conversational speech someone would say something more like: “I think I know whose woods these are, but his house is in the village.” A poet, however, wants to do more work with words, to make them mean more, to emphasize them, especially their sound, so Frost allows “though,” via rhyme with the previous “know,” to resonate aloud and create a feeling of uncertainty. Stallings does the same here with “yet.”

The second four lines (a quatrain, if you consider the way the brace rhymes cordon off those lines) continue the observation, developing our sense of a binary world: light/dark, sight/sound, bird/mammal, solid/hollow, height/depth. All of these binaries seem to move toward darker, more limited, or less inviting choices as night comes on. And then we move to stanza two, the sestet, where, if we are trained sonnet readers, we can expect a development or shift, what we call the *volta*. The *volta* is often, in some way, the reveal, or the twist, or the appearance of the dove from the magician’s hat. It is not the end, but a new beginning: something that we will want to solve, perhaps. How did this shift happen?

At this point in her poem, Stallings switches the focus, immediately, on sound rather than sight. *Focus* may not be the right word here, but I mean to use it to convey a different kind of seeing. After all, by now the deepening violet has taken us into near total darkness. We might think of the stanza break as the moment where the evening grows so dark we are blinded to our surroundings. There is a shift in the way we must perceive things, so we will need to rely upon our sense of sound. In the sestet, sound takes over where sight leaves off. In the octave she has mentioned already the “new tunes,” but remember that was related to visual movement. And the “song” of the bat is not the music of a bird, rather it is a kind of music that gives us, beyond song, information. Sound in this first stanza is a kind of foreshadowing of what will happen more fully in stanza two. In the tradition of poetry, most poets relate the singing of the poet to the song of a bird: larks, mockingbirds, thrushes, ovenbirds, etc. But never bats. Stallings is hearing (and seeing) things differently, as poets are known to do. Indeed it is one of the primary aspects of any poem to turn our emphasis from one way of perceiving to another.

So many great poems are about poetry itself. We call this *ars poetica*. This poem is no exception. The poet is completely aware that her affinity is not only for bats but *with* bats, and for the way that they survive by eating, locating their food not by sight, but sound. The first stanza, looked at in regards to how a poet might understand, allows the words to do double duty. A “glimpse” is a first sight of something that could be developed further. A swallow can be a bird, but it also can be an action of ingesting, nearly the opposite of a song that comes forth from the throat, not into it. “New tunes” are what the Modernist poet Ezra Pound suggested poets needed to put forth when he made his famous pronouncement of “Make it new.” Of course, many readers understand that a poem is “difficult to follow” due to its multiplicity of meaning and directionality. Poems perceive much in the way the bat must be discerning in lines six and seven, and a good poet goes through much “revising.” Stallings is having some fun here with the notion of what it is to write (and read) a poem.

The poet, like the bat, makes sound but not just to hear herself. The poet makes this music to hear the thing the sound describes, the very shape of it, so that the poet can find what that thing is in the dark and either veer around it or consume it. If the thing to be perceived is finally internalized, it can then be made one with the poet. So many poets I know, when asked why they write poems, say things like: “To understand words better” or “to figure out what is going on in the world” or as I so often tell people, “To find out who I am.” Putting words in the best order is similar to arranging molecules to make a better medicine or writing a more successful code for a more efficient computer program. A poem does not just emote feelings, though often we are taught this from elementary school to high school; it has to do with discovering how to live and be in the world. Just about any artist would admit this self-discovery as a purpose in making art.

As in Shakespeare’s sonnets, the final turn happens in the couplet, though in Stallings’s sonnet, the last two lines don’t rhyme. Still, they act as a turning point for a powerful final thought. Remember that the sonnet moved from sight to sound between octave and sestet. Now, within the sestet, between the first four lines and the couplet, the movement goes from making the sound to hearing it. This is the “last-minute pirouette” we might have “harken”ed was coming if we had been paying close attention to line five. The echo has returned, finally, formally,

strategically, geometrically, and we end locating the exact shape of the thing: the sonnet. The formal shape of this poem cannot be emphasized enough.

Many readers unfamiliar with the finer qualities of sonnets might miss a thing or two, but that is not an insurmountable problem. Any art requires a breadth of knowledge of formal understanding to glean the most appreciation of the effects. It can be difficult. Line three's "difficult to follow," then, is not just the difficulty of our seeing the bats at night and with their zig-zagging movements, but this also has to do with our understanding of good poems or even complex sentences strung across lines. As well, if this is an *ars poetica*, we realize the poem is barely begun here in line three. It is, here, a "new tune," and the poet must be asking herself how she will arrive at her destination. That is a difficulty for the writer. The difficulty for the reader is another thing. Some readers prefer a simpler poem of superficial feeling and sentiment. But this is never what we would ask of scripture, which we consider the greatest literature. The British poet, Geoffrey Hill, said of poetry: "In my view, difficult poetry is the most democratic, because you are doing your audience the honour of supposing that they are intelligent human beings. So much of the populist poetry of today treats people as if they were fools. And that particular aspect, and the aspect of the forgetting of a tradition, go together." While not anywhere near as impenetrably allusive and arcanelly historical as Geoffrey Hill's own poetry, the beautiful difficulty of this sonnet is something to be engaged, admired, and praised.

It should be noted that bats are not blind, only limited in their ability to see, especially at night. Stallings doesn't go into it (the sonnet form doesn't have room), but we know the echolocation the bat uses is one that will allow it to eat and survive. Without the aid of night vision goggles that we might use in the dark, they need some help locating insects in the pitch dark; and the use of vocalization and hearing function perfectly. In the gospels, we read that Jesus continually emphasized both the senses of hearing and of seeing to encourage His followers toward the kingdom of God. He healed both the blind and the deaf and often especially emphasized hearing. Eight times in the gospels, He says: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." He knew that our earthly hearing and seeing are continuously fraught with error due to our fallen state, so the statement is not only encouraging but somewhat ironic. In Matthew 13:14, He quotes Isaiah and

says: “Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive.” He understands that we might have glimpses of the truth, as Peter did when he called Jesus the Son of God, but then the world grows dark around us and we can end up in the place of blindness and denial. Peter, later, staggering, even after he had seen the risen Christ, would need some night vision. He would need the light of the Holy Spirit and not just the light of day. The ear had to hear differently. The words had to shift: he would need to rely upon his calling, not as a fisherman, but as a fisher of men. Of course, here, for the sake of linking us back to this poem, a poet myself, I’m playing with the word in Stallings’s penultimate line, “calling.”

Again, look at the diction in the sestet whose words have to do with sound: “sing,” “songbird,” “sings,” “song,” “song,” “rings,” “utterance,” “harkenings,” “calling,” “hear,” “voice.” The sonic quality of the poem hardly could be emphasized more. The poem ends with the “shape of things,” sure, but this shape is arrived at through sound, not image. Surely, this is true of the way, at times in our lives when we can’t see for the darkness around us, we can attempt to understand our predicament through listening. We must learn to see differently, via sound, or a different kind of sight. We might call that “faith.” It has a shape and a way of knowing more certain than we might, at first, imagine.

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One last note on the title: the word “affinity” is a word used to express a relation by marriage, as opposed to the word “consanguinity” (literally, “with blood”), which would signify that “sanguine” relationship. Stallings doesn’t pretend to want to be related to the bat by blood. She is neither into the old Romantic songs of birds nor the more recent romantic vampire craze and certainly doesn’t want to be bitten; rather, she desires to sing and be sung to, hearing some divine echo. She is brought into the family of these strange, winged creatures through a marriage, a pronouncement of words.

*J.D. Smith*

## **Selected Innovations**

I am talking about Pong  
along the back wall of a bowling alley.

I am talking about Asteroids in an arcade  
and Galaxian and its spawn Galaga  
and all the killing pixels can do.

I am talking about the games  
that took over TVs,  
from Frogger to Resident Evil.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

I am talking, too, about  
the walkie-talkie phones  
the size of bricks with long antennas  
that grew up-slash-down into candy bar, flip  
and tablets that were also phones  
and cameras with more computing power  
than the cluster of metal and cathode ray tubes  
that once browned out Philadelphia.

I am talking about a coffee pot  
at a university in England  
that could be watched all over the world,  
and a hamster dance, and a dancing baby  
and everything that acquired  
the name "meme," the tag "viral,"  
and maybe more about the Jules Verne  
dream come true of two-way videotelephony,  
now with dog fights or nude strangers,  
and Orwell's dread of a spy  
installed in every home.

Which is to say I am talking about  
how a life little more than halfway done  
holds all of these, with more to be rolled out

and none of them will stop  
for my convenience or slow learning.  
They won't pause for a moment of silence on my passing  
but keep going until they run out of rare earth minerals  
and maybe not then, as I won't be around to see.

J. D. Smith

## On a Photograph of Two Bluesmen

Because it is a well-worn cliché  
and under certain conditions obligatory  
for a white boy with some college  
to take as his heroes less-lettered Delta men,  
a picture hangs in the mind.

In the foreground sits Otis Spann,  
who is not alone, holding up  
a three-foot long and very live alligator  
the way most people would handle a cat,  
and he looks calm, having no doubt  
faced far greater dangers  
in a time of, to put it mildly,  
backs of buses and sundown towns.

To the left of Mister Otis  
sits a man who can damn nearly be  
referred to as Him with a capital H,  
one McKinley Morganfield, aka Muddy Waters,  
wearing a bandanna like nobody's business  
and eating breakfast like a mere mortal  
at an early-generation TV tray  
because even a legend well along in the making  
needs his strength to buzz around a hive,  
let alone drink TNT and smoke dynamite  
as he sang about, Mister Waters—

Mud, if I may be so bold to say,  
and just this once there's a good reason.  
Born in Jug's Corner, Mississippi, he spent his last years  
in Westmont, Illinois on the Burlington Northern line  
between Chicago and the home town,  
in part peopled by migrants from Holly Springs,  
of this aging white boy who left money on the table  
and never stirred himself to see Muddy Waters live,  
just like he once showed a good woman the back of his hand  
and all the times he called whiskey  
a better friend than the morning light.

These are, I know, about some pale-ass blues

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that no one will pick up a harp to play,  
but maybe, just maybe if I confess as much and beg  
Otis Spann and Muddy Waters will let me  
slip into that picture for five minutes' time.  
There's no third chair, but I'll gladly sit on the hallowed floor  
if I can join them in their long-past meal.  
May I then across time and space  
call on the help of an old friend, a mojo hand  
or the almighty and hell-hounded mercy of Robert Johnson  
to keep the gator off my plate.



## Payable on Delivery

It was 10:40 p.m., ten minutes after the time we'd agreed on, so I could check on things without feeling like some kind of high-maintenance dick.

I stood outside the taqueria's front window and pretended to look at the menu over the counter. Though by now I could have recited it backward at the end of a long night of drinking—pretty much the way I'd first stumbled into the place.

What I really wanted to see was if the contractors had made it.

They had, and they fit the description I'd gotten. As a white guy I'm usually not too put off by my own kind, but these were far and away the scariest white dudes I'd ever seen in person. The shorter one, about five-eight, was a fireplug with Popeye forearms who looked like he hadn't been out of prison long enough to get out of shape. He had on a cap like Sluggo in the cartoon, and jagged tats covered his skin from elbow to knuckle, with probably full sleeves and more under his shirt. Other patches crawled out from under his collar like some kind of art cancer.

The other dude, a tall lanky thing in a cowboy shirt and a bolo, had black hair slicked back in a pompadour and huge gnarled hands that could have belonged to an eighty-year old and cheekbones that could cut through sea ice. Seems like he'd taken the prison-to-rockabilly route that some guys did in Chicago. I didn't know what that was all about, and after tonight I planned to live a happy life without ever finding out, as long as they did their jobs.

They looked a little flashier than I would have wanted, but that wouldn't matter if nobody was left to ID them. I liked the odds. Different as they were, they both had dead eyes, with nothing behind them. It reminded me of a lizard I'd seen at a pet shop when I was a little kid. Later on in school I read about how a lot of animals were equipped mostly to take care of the four Fs: fighting, fleeing, feeding. And reproducing. I didn't want to think much about that last one, but the way they hit their burritos reminded me of that lizard and its meal of live crickets—a quick bite, then a swallow without any chewing to speak of.

I exhaled into my hands so nobody would notice my breath in this weather, and I walked away before drawing any attention to myself. The two were working for me by way of a one-percenter MC contact and half up front, half payable on de-

livery, but they didn't know I was their customer. If I caught their eyes, coming out and kicking my ass would just feel like a warm-up before the main event.

So I just might end up getting my money's worth.

I got lucky with the EI and didn't have to wait long out in the cold in January. Back at the apartment, I checked for messages. I'd left the cell at home to cut down on distractions. All I heard, and the only emails I had, were from strangers trying to sell me things—for once, the way I wanted it.

I put some Beam in a rocks glass, no ice this time of year, and I started to count down.

Then again, I'd been counting down since the first time I walked into that place and saw Catalina. She wasn't even the one who took my order or called it out when it was ready, but I got a look at her when I counted my change, and our eyes met. It wasn't some meet-cute thing like in the shitty movies my ex dragged me to or some flirting where I got busted for checking her out. It sure as hell wasn't the thunderbolt that leads to a quick hook-up, then second-guessing and maybe a trip to the free clinic. Been there, done those.

It was just two people thinking, "Oh, it's you. Let's get this started."

I must have been pretty obvious, because as soon as we sat down with our trays and plastic baskets my boy John said, "That's not on the menu, dude." Once we left, and after I'd gotten distracted enough to end up wearing more of my tacos than usual—and that's saying a lot—John's brother Mike caught me looking back and said, "Nothin' special there, amigo. Nobody's gonna mistake her for the girl on the mudflaps."

This was the sort of thing he would say. His last couple of girlfriends had worked part-time as auto show models. They looked like they'd been customized in a couple of places themselves, though, and they both made shithouse rats look sane. Because Mike was driving I didn't rip his fucking head off.

Sure, Catalina wasn't going to be some pin-up, and different from some of the other Mexican girls I'd dated. She wasn't one of those back-and-a-rack types.

She had something different going on, more angles than curves, and you could have called her delicate. I'm not sure she topped five feet. Catalina said it was on account of her Zapotec ancestors, and the pictures of her family in Oaxaca showed me what she was talking about.

And in that tiny body she had a big heart. You could tell right away she'd seen things and suffered, and it took me a while to learn how.

I haven't seen it all, but so far I've seen that people who've had a lot to deal with can break one of two ways. The first one seems a lot more common. People say, "I've got my problems, you've got yours. Get tough or die." Another way's out there, too, though you can't always count on finding it. Somebody says, or acts like they're thinking, "Yeah, things are hard. Let's not make them any harder. Hell, we could even make things a little better here and there."

Catalina didn't make any noise about it, but you could tell she'd picked door number two. Once I started dropping in on the regular, I'd see her reach in her own pocket, and not the shared tip jar, and pull out bills to top off the check of somebody who couldn't pay his whole tab. Before the first time we went out, if you could call it that—pie and coffee at an all-night place across the street after her shift—she threw together a plate of burros from scraps that would have ended up feeding roaches in the dumpster, and she took it to a broken-down dude who'd been poking through trash cans outside.

"Why'd you do that?" I asked her for the first time. And the last.

"Why wouldn't I?"

She did that sort of thing time after time, but she did everything else by the book. I always paid full freight before we headed out across the street, and eventually farther, on the nights when her Uncle Ramiro wasn't working or he was out of town. And only on those nights.

I finally learned why. The first time we were going to be together, together that way, I asked her what she was doing with me, anyway, a guy who'd just squeaked through high school and lived on odd jobs. If she'd just wanted a white guy, or any man, she could have done a lot better.

"You treat me good," she said. "You respect me."

Seemed like she was setting the bar kind of low. I had her go on, and she told me about how other men been bad to her—a couple had even raised a hand—until she decided she couldn't live like that anymore. I was ready to go out and administer some beat-downs, but she wouldn't give me any names.

The talk moved on. "So why can I only see you when your uncle's not there?"

“Because he didn’t like the others, and he doesn’t like you.”

“Why not?”

“Because you’re not him.”

I didn’t know what to say, and it was quiet for a minute before she said anything else.

“He touches me.” Her eyes filled with tears and I didn’t have to guess how she meant it. It had started in Mexico, and she was too ashamed to tell anybody. When he moved to the North and set up his business—nobody knew how he’d gotten the money so fast—she had a break for a year or so. Then he sent for Catalina. She didn’t want to go, but her own padre told her she had to go so she could have a better life. She went, and the touching started again. A sister and a brother and a couple of cousins came up later so they could get a better life too, just like her.

“But you’re a grown woman now. Why can’t you make him stop?”

“You don’t understand,” she said, and I didn’t. It turned out he kept her green card and other papers in a safe nobody else could open, and if she was done with him there were others in the house, and more where they came from.

“How do you know he hasn’t already—“

“I don’t. But I don’t know what else to do.”

Calling the police was out. Tio Ramiro had an F.O.P. sticker in the window, and maybe he slid some cash their way. They returned the favor by staying out of his business, whatever all of it was.

An hour more of tears came. We would not be together that night, or for several more weeks.

I knew what to do, though, and there was no point in worrying Catalina by letting on too much.

As I topped off the rocks glass I figured that, if everything went the way I’d planned, she would never know.

If some insurance came our way too that would be great, but it didn’t matter much. She’d be free, and she could go home if she wanted to, maybe take me with her. I didn’t like the winters here any more than she did. I’d already learned some Spanish at jobs, and I could probably learn some more.

But I was getting ahead of myself. First, things had to fall into place. At eleven fifty-two, I topped off the glass again and went over the list. Again. Had I told her to stay away from the restaurant tonight? Check. Had I told her I wouldn’t be calling for

a couple of days before tonight? Check. And that she shouldn't call me during that time? Check.

If she called me later tonight, after it was done, nothing would look suspicious; she'd need a shoulder to cry on, or just be in shock. Somebody smarter could have come up with a better game plan, or a more complicated one anyway, but I was stuck being myself, a guy who'd tried chess for about a week once and decided anything that hard should come with a paycheck. Somebody with more patience could have gutted things out until Tio had a grabber or a stroke, being as fat as he was, or got on the bad side of whoever had helped him set up the business so fast. They probably hadn't done it out of the goodness of their heart. My folks had been pretty good at saving up some money for retirement, to go on a cruise someday, until they hit an ice patch and drifted head-on into the path of a semi. I'd had my own fill of waiting, and of getting filled, hard, in my six months at Audy House after acting out and boosting stuff when I was still getting used to being an orphan. I hadn't gotten around to telling Catalina about that. She already had enough to deal with.

She'd decided to reduce the amount of suffering out there, but I'd learned to bounce it back and spread it around. So if Sluggo and Tex did their jobs right, after the last customer had gone and once nobody was standing at the counter, one would go out and bar the back door to the alley. The other would bust into the kitchen, cut the gas line and set a fire on his way out. The rest would take care of itself.

Twelve-thirty. Time flies when you're having booze, especially compared to waiting things out sober. Catalina could be calling any time. The blast would set off any alarm for a block around. The police would find out, and they'd have to tell the next of kin, who'd tell the family. And she would call. She'd have to call.

She'd be crazy with grief because it was family, as fucked up as it was, and because he was a human being, if she wanted to call him that. He wouldn't be much of anything by the time I called it a night. If one or two of his socios went down with him, I might even sleep better.

Even whiskey can do only so much to speed up time. I looked into the bottom of an empty glass and put it in the sink to slow my roll. I needed to start drying out for whatever came up next.

She wasn't calling. Nothing on the landline or the cell.

What if nothing had happened?

I turned on the TV and surfed the channels for news, but there were only reruns from ten o'clock. AM radio news didn't mention anything, and neither did the stations' websites. Maybe I shouldn't have been surprised. There were a lot of buildings in Chicago—hell, for that matter even a lot of taquerias—and if one blew up now and then it wasn't big news. Did she forget to call? Not likely. She knew my birthstone off the top of her head, and the ones for the other months too.

Maybe she just fell asleep, or fainted from the news. I'd never seen a woman do that except in a movie, but maybe it could happen. Anything was possible.

Like it was possible I was driving myself crazy wondering what was going on.

The hell with it. I picked up the phone and called the landline at the house. If it woke somebody up, too bad. If I wasn't sleeping nobody was sleeping.

On the third ring somebody picked up and coughed.

"Pendejo! Do you know what time it is? I'm sick as a fucking dog here."

The voice was Tio's

There was no turning back now.

I apologized and asked for Catalina.

"She's at work. Don't call no more."

The click at the other end sounded like a hammer driving a nail into my skull.

*She's at work.* And what had just happened at work? And who had made that happen? A scream built up in my head and broke out until it filled the room and spilled over onto the street. I picked up the rocks glass and smashed it against the countertop, and a big jagged piece added my blood to the rest.

And I still owed the MC the other half. Payable on delivery.

**William Thompson**

## **Recommended Reading**

***Night Vision*, by John Foy**

(St Augustine's Press, 2016)

In our best poets we hear the voices of other poets too: Williams in Ammons, Stevens in Ashbery, Lowell in Walcott, Donne in Donaghy, Moore in Ryan. The remarks on the dust jacket of John Foy's *Night Vision*, winner of the 2016 New Criterion Poetry Prize, place his poems "in the tradition of Frost, Bishop, and Larkin." There are echoes of other poets as well, though Foy's voice is manifestly his own:

When Wilbur accidentally killed a toad,  
it was the power mower once again.  
He clipped its leg, and off it went to die  
beneath a cineraria. He used the words  
"ebullient" and "emperies"  
to talk about the life he'd compromised.  
What would Philip Larkin think of these?

When my turn came, it happened in a field.  
I hadn't known that I'd gone over it,  
but there it was, a rabbit much the worse  
for having been beneath the rotor blades.  
I'd laid its back right open to the bone,  
but it was still alive and looked at me,  
and then I had to kill it with a stone.

Like Larkin, Foy opts for a plainer diction than Wilbur used. Wilbur's toad is buried unsympathetically beneath the poem's rhetoric:

He lies  
As still as if he would return to stone,  
And soundlessly attending, dies  
    Toward some deep monotone,  
  
    Toward misted and ebullient seas  
And cooling shores, toward lost Amphibia's emperies.

Foy's poem is as literary as Wilbur's, but its reserve makes us feel a little of what the helpless speaker felt: *it was still alive and looked at me.*

Foy's poems about the death of his mother naturally involve much more complex emotions and, sometimes, a refusal to be comforted:

*Oh, Father McRay, fuck you and stick  
your bereavement journey up your ass.  
We all have to die, and what  
you've found to say is not enough.*

(from "The Answering Machine")

You've lost  
her now, few care, and nothing  
can help, and no one knows the cost  
you've paid—but everyone knows  
we die like dogs in the deep snow.

(from "Condolences")

Finally, after grief and anger and sadness, Foy arrives at another possibility:

What if, past a certain point, it weren't  
so bad to die? What if it were like  
lying on a couch at 3:00 a.m.,  
the mind aloft and quiet, given over  
to a few piano notes finding ways  
melodically through predetermined loops  
in Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*?  
That's what you'd be listening to,  
music for those places where we go  
to go away, the music of going away,  
and you just disappearing into it  
without effort or pain,  
finding peace in knowing to obey  
means at its root only to listen.

Just under half of the poems in *Night Vision* are sonnets like this one, often with non-rhyming or off-rhyming heterometric



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lines, the kind of thing that, in the wrong hands, can come across as slipshod. But Foy's variations are pleasing both rhythmically and phonetically. One of my favorite parts of *Night Vision* is "Jovian," a sequence of six sonnets that apostrophize Jupiter, four of its moons, and the space probe Juno:

What is it, Juno? Why have you come back  
to visit Jupiter? So much went wrong,  
and after so much time what's left to say?  
Your husband is a dead gas giant now,  
encircled by some sixty-seven moons  
that can't appeal to him or slip away.  
There's nothing untoward here anymore.  
You, too, perhaps have made a compromise.

You are a spacecraft now, an artifact  
embarked upon a one-way trip to look  
your antipathetic other in the eye.  
You'll go around him more than thirty times  
and then drop down, unbearable though it be,  
to feel again the might of his command.

The more time I spent with *Night Vision*, the more deeply I enjoyed Foy's poems. This is a book I will happily read again.

***Devotions*, by Timothy Murphy**

(North Dakota State University Press, 2017)

In a 2012 T.V. interview with North Dakota's Prairie Public Broadcasting, Timothy Murphy described himself as a "formal poet" who is "highly confessional": "The protagonist in almost every poem is Tim Murphy. And I don't pull any punches. I have not had an easy life." *Devotions*, a selection of poems spanning the 8 years since he re-embraced Catholicism, was written by a man who has endured "the struggle between belief and disbelief, struggles with alcohol, [and struggles with] my sexual orientation." And yet, to paraphrase St. Paul, Murphy's endurance has produced character and hope. The abiding temperament in *Devotions* is one not of struggle but of gratitude:

I have a brother who's no blood of mine  
except, perhaps, back in the Viking days.  
Nobody else so passionately prays  
I'll play my minor part in God's design.

He's never smoked, never drunk to excess.  
Inches taller and years shorter than I,  
two times he saw me such a sodden mess  
he told his wife, "I think Tim's going to die."

Ranging afield for years with dog and gun  
we forged a bond that is unbreakable,  
and certain as the rising of the sun  
we share a faith that is unshakeable.

Samaritan, he found me in a ditch.  
With that which matters most I am most rich.

Murphy knows full well that he is lucky to be alive. Some of the most moving poems in this collection have to do with one who was not so lucky, the poet and translator Alan Sullivan, Murphy's partner who died in 2010 after fighting leukemia for five years:

I draw to the close of my sixtieth year  
without you. Still I reach for the phone  
every morning, right after I hear

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my frail monsignor's baritone:  
*Through Him, with Him and in Him.*

We treasure your versions of the Psalms.  
I've started working for Vincent de Paul's  
charity, raising the needed alms  
for our parish poor. St. Vincent calls:  
*Through Him, with Him and in Him.*

You perch on my shoulder much of the time,  
whether I'm wrong, whether I'm right  
on matters of faith, reason or rhyme,  
and I trust that we shall reunite:  
*Through Him, with Him and in Him.*

Dana Gioia, in his preface to this volume, places Murphy's poems in the long tradition of Christian devotional verse. But Murphy, whose passion for bird hunting rivals his love of verse-making, is also a poet of landscape:

The prairie is a poem rarely read.  
    Its looseleaf pages blow.  
Too many students of this landscape fled  
    its poverty and snow.  
    Today I limp on stiffening knees,  
hoping that heedless pheasants take their ease  
  
in pigeon grasses sprung from durum stubble,  
    in fragrant cedar shadow  
where a boy watched his father down a double.  
    Maker of marsh and meadow,  
    grant me more time to understand,  
more years to walk and memorize this land.

Often in Murphy's poems, the spiritual and the natural flourish together as struggle gives birth to hope:

A year ago Steve saw me in seizure's throes  
and told his wife he'd bidden goodbye to Tim.  
Frank Miller gave me the last rites, and Frank knows,  
Christ's priest that he is, when eyes go dim,  
pulse slows, blue takes the fingers and the toes,

pray for the soul.

Tonight a full moon rose  
and sang over my head a harvest hymn.

When describing himself in the interview mentioned above, Murphy put the strongest emphasis on this statement: “From the age of 17 on I have had one goal, and that is to become a major poet.” He must know, however, that most poets’ reputations rise and fall unpredictably. On the other hand, he clearly realizes that he has found something infinitely more important.

*John Whitworth*

## **Thingies**

The mordant, black and midnight priest,  
Sophisticate of seeming,  
The horrid, humped, carnivorous beast,  
That bellows down my dreaming,  
The bone-yard's luminescent feast,  
The interminable, teeming  
Ghosts of the recently deceased,  
The recent violently deceased,  
Uninterrupted screaming.  
The boxes in the garden shed,  
The sacks behind the paling,  
The coffins in the flowerbed,  
The hammering and nailing,  
The Lord Protector's wizened head  
Transfixed upon a railing,  
The sense of overpowering dread,  
Of truly transcendental dread,  
And somewhere something failing.  
The shitehawks on the blasted oak,  
The hornets in the attic,  
The bumboy sniffing lines of coke,  
The murderous asthmatic,  
The message from the shadow folk  
You hear above the static,  
This time you need to go for broke,  
To smell the smoke and go for broke,  
And do the full dramatic.  
You need to startle the devout,  
And trample on their hearses,  
You need to spell your blessings out,  
You need to count your curses,  
You need to twirl yourself about  
To ponder which the worse is,  
You need to sing, you need to shout,  
You need to shout without a doubt,  
And chant your wicked verses.

## **My Friends**

So many of my friends are sick  
My words are notches on a stick.  
So many of my friends will die  
My words are bibles in the sky.  
So many of my friends are dead  
My words are prisoners in my head.

My friends are stranded in the words.  
I let them fly like little birds,  
Like little birds on little wings,  
To tell the world astounding things.  
I celebrate them as they go.  
I know and soon the world will know.

And then the world will stir and start  
And feel a chill about the heart  
And beat a pathway to my door  
And cry in thunder, 'Tell us more!'  
But I, within my little house,  
Will sit as quiet as a mouse.

John Whitworth

## **Dead Boy**

The dead boy comes to his bed at night  
And he is warm as a living child  
Smelling of earth and the forest wild  
And his eyes and his mouth shut tight, shut tight,

And the father cries to his Heaven's height  
From the dirt and the dust and the gravel piled  
On the bones of the child who was meek and mild,  
And he cries to God that it isn't right.

It isn't right and it isn't just  
That the father lives and the boy is dead,  
For the bones are white in the dirt and dust,  
And the voices of God are inside his head,

The voices of God from the gates of horn,  
And fiddle-de-dee the voices say,  
Better by far you had never been born,  
Never crawled to the light of day.

So wrap your heart in a sheet of lead  
And drown it deep in the cold black sea.  
The father lives and the boy is dead.  
Better by far this should never be.

## Twin Souls

My soul is pure, unspotted, edged with light,  
A clear window, opening on the blue,  
Still surface of a lake whose birds are white.  
See how they glide and plane across the view  
Of sky and water, circling endlessly,  
And calling as my soul calls out to you.

And you are flying like a bird to me.  
I hear the swish and shiver of your wings  
Inside my head, inside my heart, for we  
Were born to cleave together in all things.  
And you are here, but oh, your wings are black,  
Your eyes are flame and all your body sings.

Across the water like a razorback,  
A song of darkness, violence and blood.  
It breathes sweet perfumes' aphrodisiac,  
Not nurtured on anaemic angel food.  
It sings that everything you say is right.  
It sings that everything you do is good.



John Whitworth

## **Dr Donne Likened to My Cat Jack**

(The beautiful opening couplet is from Peter Ryan's remembrance of Izaak Walton's 'Life of Dr John Donne')

*Oh thorny, glowing, twisted heart  
That walked the London streets a while,  
Teach me to work your subtle art  
And coax the sweetness from the bile.*

Teach me my soul to recognise,  
That wandering, sportful, wayward twin.  
Teach me to see without my eyes,  
Teach me to feel beyond my skin.

Here, in the coffin of my bed,  
I cogitate on this and that,  
God and his Angels at my head,  
Warming my footsoles, Jack the Cat,

Soft fur-ball, connoisseur of purr,  
Who knows the thinginess of things,  
Jack the divine philosopher,  
Observer at the courts of kings.

Say Jack the Cat is Jack the Lad,  
Cavorting with the muses nine,  
And Jack the Priest, who tames the beast,  
Turning the water into wine.

Sprucely, surefootedly he stalks  
Up Ludgate Hill to Old Saint Pauls.  
O listen to the talk he talks  
As kites foregather on the walls.

Watch, as he steps fastidiously,  
Neatly evading fire and flame.  
His glowing, twisted heart is free,  
And Jack the Poet is his name.

*John Sibley Williams*

### **There is No Such Thing as Trespass**

Having bolt-cutted our way through  
the steel mesh separating our world  
from the neighbor's slightly larger  
share of things, we realize nothing  
here is worth stealing we do not  
already own. A century compacted  
into a single red silo: ours. & inside,  
a mountain of uneaten grain. Ours:  
three old shovels heavy with earth's  
rust propping up a house that in turn  
holds up one small corner of a sky.  
This rain we mistake for the sky  
grieving. Wet, white, bodiless dress  
someone else's sister left too long  
on a thin line between almond trees.  
& ghosts, as always, all around us.  
Our dead. Our grief. Our mother's  
voice calling us home through holes  
built into the fence. & this hurt: still  
ours. Same empty place at our table.  
Same hunger we mistake for god.  
Same cross-stitch of smoke & ash  
working its way up the horizon.

*James Matthew Wilson*

## **Self-Possession**

This girl in heels walks by a mirror  
And stops to sweep hair from her shoulder,  
Then turns and goes, as if she were  
Destined to be her own beholder  
And that glass in the hall put there  
For no one else, its frame growing older  
Deprived and emptied of the face  
Whose visitation was its grace.

With the firm setting of his jaw,  
And straightened back, the young man steels  
Himself against the threat of awe  
To loose his flabby soul and peel  
Away composure, lest some raw  
Sensation rob him of what's real.  
Thus armed and solid, he'd appear  
To her whose beauty wanders near.

Others may call it all deceit:  
The confident body, air of grace,  
The mannered greeting, swift retreat  
Of hands, the raised repose of face;  
Those frail and viscous hearts that greet  
The world lie hidden as in a case,  
Losing what life they seek to gain  
Immured from all such honest pain.

But, heart, who lies within such dark,  
And strives to beat in measured tune,  
You lend the decent form its spark  
While it sustains you when you swoon,  
And gives thought's flight its well-aimed arc,  
Inscribes what from sense fades too soon,  
So truth my not die in the ear  
But, suitably disguised, appear.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Victor Altshul** began writing poetry four years ago after attending a psychoanalytic conference on Elizabeth Bishop's "One Art." He has been practicing psychiatry in New Haven, Connecticut, for over fifty years. He is a graduate of Harvard College and Yale Medical School and is on the faculty of the latter. He has authored three volumes of poetry: *Stumblings* (CreateSpace, 2013), *Singing with Starlings* (Antrim House, 2015) and *Ode to My Autumn* (Antrim House, 2017). In his earlier years he ran twenty marathons and rowed in twenty Head of the Charles Regattas. He regularly performs in opera choruses and occasionally sings "old guy" roles such as Alcindoro in *La Bohème* and the Bonze in *Madame Butterfly*. He lives with his wife Laura, also a published poet, in New Haven.

**Neil Arditi** teaches literature at Sarah Lawrence College and lives with his family in Hastings-on-Hudson, New York. His essay, "Notes Toward a Supreme Biography of Wallace Stevens," will appear in the next issue of *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*.

**Judith Askew** is the author of two books of poetry, *Here at the Edge of the Sea* and *On the Loose*, and she was coeditor of *Out of the Cellar, a Book of Women's Poetry*. *On the Loose* won the Bass River Press Poetry Competition judged by Tony Hoagland and was the first book published by the press. One of her poems won a Broadside on the Bus contest, another was selected first place winner by Marge Piercy in the Annual Joe Gouveia Outer Most Poetry Contest; she was a finalist in the Regional and National Poetry Competition, and one of her poems can be found in the archive of Massachusetts poets at [masspoetry.org](http://masspoetry.org). Her poems have been published in many journals including *Slant*, *Rattle*, *the Alembic*, *Schuylkill Valley Journal of the Arts*, and others. She has worked as a journalist, corporate editor and taught at many levels of private and public education, including teaching college writing. To learn more about her and her work, please visit [judithaskew.com](http://judithaskew.com)

**Mark Belair's** poems have appeared in numerous journals, including *Alabama Literary Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Michigan Quarterly Review*, *Poetry East* and *The South Carolina Review*. His latest collection is *Watching*

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*Ourselves* (Unsolicited Press, 2017). Previous collections include *Breathing Room* (Aldrich Press, 2015); *Night Watch* (Finishing Line Press, 2013); *While We're Waiting* (Aldrich Press, 2013); and *Walk With Me* (Parallel Press of the University of Wisconsin at Madison, 2012). He has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize multiple times. Please visit [www.markbelair.com](http://www.markbelair.com)

A seventh generation Pittsburgher, **Jay Carson** taught creative writing, literature, and rhetoric at Robert Morris University, where he was also a faculty advisor to the student literary journal, *Rune*. He has published more than 80 poems in national literary and professional journals, magazines, and anthologies. Jay published a chapbook, *Irish Coffee*, with *Coal Hill Review* and a longer book of his poems, *The Cinnamon of Desire*, with *Main Street Rag*.

**Catherine Chandler** is an American mother, grandmother, poet and translator, born in New York City and raised in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. She also holds Canadian citizenship and, prior to her retirement, held the position of international affairs officer at McGill University, Montreal, where she also lectured in Spanish in the department of translation studies. Author of three full length collections of poetry, *Lines of Flight* (Able Muse Press, 2011), shortlisted for the Poets' Prize, *Glad and Sorry Seasons* (Biblioasis, Windsor, Ontario, 2014), and *The Frangible Hour* (University of Evansville Press, 2016). She is the recipient of the Richard Wilbur Award, the Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award, the Leslie Mellichamp Prize, and *The Lyric Poetry Prize*. Reviews, poems, audio recordings and a full list of awards are online at her poetry blog, *The Wonderful Boat* at [cathychandler.blogspot.com](http://cathychandler.blogspot.com). Catherine currently lives and writes in Saint-Lazare-de-Vaudreuil, Québec and Punta del Este, Uruguay.

**Alfred Corn** is the author of eleven books of poems, the most recent titled *Unions* (2015) and two novels, the second titled *Miranda's Book*, which also appeared in 2015. His two 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. This past April Chamán Ediciones in Spain published *Rocinante*, a selection of his work translated in Spanish, followed this year by its publication in Mexico. A new collection of essays titled *Arks & Covenants* appeared in May of 2017. This past October, *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 he will be inducted into the Georgia Writers' Hall of Fame.

**Joseph Eastburn** was an actor and poet who began writing for the theater, which led to screenplays, books, short stories and essays. His first novel, *Kiss Them Goodbye*, was published by Morrow in 1993, and HarperCollins brought it back into print in 2016. His new book, *A Craving*, was a 3rd Place Winner in the Operation Thriller Writing Competition, and he's writing a full-length noir on Twitter, *The Summer of Love and Death* (<http://twitter.com/darknovel>). His essays and short stories have been published in *Existere*, *storySouth*, *Crack the Spine*, *The Apalachee Review*, *Forge*, *The Doctor T. J. Eckleburg Review*, *Adelaide*, *The Penmen Review*, *Slow Trains*, *Reed Magazine*, *Sliver of Stone*, *The Tower Journal*, *Sand Hill Review*, *The Sun Magazine*, and *Hobo Pancakes*. He lives in California, still reads the *New Yorker*, and drives a beautiful old wreck of a sports car, vintage 1985.

**Rhina P. Espailat** has published ten full-length books and three chapbooks, comprising poetry, essays and short stories, in both English and her native Spanish, and translations from and into Spanish. Her work appears in numerous journals, over seventy anthologies, and dozens of websites, and has earned national and international awards, including the T. S. Eliot Prize in Poetry, the Richard Wilbur Award, the Howard Nemerov Prize, the May Sarton Award, the Robert Frost "Tree at My Window" Prize for translation, several honors from the New England Poetry Club, the Poetry Society of America, the Ministry of Culture of the Dominican Republic, and a Lifetime Achievement Award from Salem State College. Espailat's most recent publications are two poetry collections in English titled *Playing at Stillness* and *Her Place in These Designs*, both available from their publisher, Truman State University Press, <http://tsup.truman.edu>. Espailat has also published a book of Spanish translations titled *Oscura fruta/*

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*Dark Berries: Forty-two Poems by Richard Wilbur*, and a book of Spanish translations titled *Algo hay que no es amigo de los muros/ Something There Is that Doesn't Love a Wall: Forty Poems by Robert Frost*, both available from Amazon.com.

**D. Ferrara** has been an active writer, editor and ghost writer for more years than she cares to admit. Articles, essays and short stories are her continuing obsession—several publications, including *The Main Street Anthology—Crossing Lines, East Meets West American Writers Review, The Broadkill Review, MacGuffin Press, Crack the Spine, Green Prints, Amarillo Bay, The Penmen Review, At the Inkwell, The Law Studies Forum*, and *RIMS Magazine* have fed this mania by including them. Her short stories “Then and Now” and “Pocket Dial” were long listed in the Able Muse Write Prize for Fiction. *Arvin Lindemeyer Takes Canarsie* won Outstanding Screenplay in the Oil Valley Film Festival, a Selected Screenplay (Finalist) in the Hollywood Blvd. Film Festival and a Top Finalist in the ASU Screenwriting Contest. Her play, *Favor*, won the New Jersey ACT award for Outstanding Production of an Original Play, while *Sister Edith's Mission*, and *Business Class* were produced at the Malibu Repertory Company's One Act Play Festival. Three of her full-length film scripts have been optioned. She recently received her M.A. in Creative Writing, where it joined her J.D., L.I.M. and B.A., amid the clutter of her office.

**John Foy's** *Night Vision*, won The New Criterion Poetry Prize for 2016. His first book is *Techne's Clearinghouse*. His poems are included in the *Swallow Anthology of New American Poets, The Raintown Review Anthology* and *Rabbit Ears*, an anthology of poems about TV. They have appeared widely in journals and online, including most recently *The Hudson Review, The Yale Review* and *The Hopkins Review*. Visit him at [www.johnffoy.net](http://www.johnffoy.net).

**Andrew Frisardi** is a writer, translator, and editor from Boston who lives in central Italy. His poems have appeared in numerous online and print publications, most recently *Measure, The Orchards*, and *Temenos Academy Review*, and have been collected in a chapbook, *Death of a Dissembler* (White Violet Press, 2014). As a translator, he has four books: most recently *Dante: Convivio: A Dual-Language Critical Edition*, published by Cambridge University Press in late 2017; his annotated translation of Dante's *Vita Nova* came out with Northwestern University Press in 2012. His

work has been awarded with a Guggenheim Fellowship, a Hawthornden Literary Fellowship, and the Raiziss/de Palchi Translation Award.

**Benjamin Harnett**, born 1981 in Cooperstown, NY, is a fiction writer, poet, historian, and digital engineer. His essays, poems, translations, and short stories have recently appeared in *Brooklyn Quarterly*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Tahoma Literary Review*, *Dead King Magazine*, *Lime Hawk*, and *Moon City Review*. He holds an MA in Classics from Columbia University and lives in Beacon, NY with his wife Toni and their pets. In 2005, he co-founded the fashion brand Hayden-Harnett.

**Eric Janken's** work has been featured in *Shenandoah*, *Southern Cultures*, *Regarding Arts & Letters*, *Carolina Quarterly* and *Aethlon: Journal of Sport Literature*. He is a Thomas Hunter Fellow at Hunter College's MFA Program in Creative Writing, as well as a graduate of Appalachian State University.

**David M. Katz** is the author of three books of poems: *Stanzas on Oz*, *Claims of Home*, and *The Warrior in The Forest*. His poems have appeared in *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *The New Criterion*, *The New Republic*, *The Cortland Review*, and *The Hopkins Review*. He lives in New York City and works as a financial journalist and editor.

**Jean L. Kreiling's** first collection of poems, *The Truth in Dissonance* (Kelsay Books), was published in 2014; her second will appear in spring 2018. Her work has appeared widely in print and online journals and in anthologies, and she is a past winner of the *Able Muse Write Prize*, the Great Lakes Commonwealth of Letters Sonnet Contest, two New England Poetry Club prizes, and the *String Poet Prize*.

**Rick McKenzie** lives in Florida with his wife Barbara. Rick's poems have appeared in *Minnetonka Review*, *Pearl*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Gingerbread House*, *Front Range Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, and the anthology *Hipology* from Broadside Press. "Don't Blame Me" was written during a camping trip to beautiful Watoga State Park in West Virginia.



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**Richard Meyer's** poems have appeared in various publications, including *Able Muse*, *The Raintown Review*, *Measure*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *Light*, *THINK*, and *The Evansville Review*. He was awarded the 2012 Robert Frost Farm Prize for his poem "Fieldstone" and was the recipient of the 2014 String Poet Prize for his poem "The Autumn Way." A book of his collected poems, *Orbital Paths*, was a silver medalist winner in the 2016 IBPA Benjamin Franklin Awards. A former English and humanities teacher, Richard lives in his family home, the house his father built, in Mankato, a city at the bend of the Minnesota River.

**Todd Easton Mills** received his bachelor's degree from Antioch University. As a young man he defined himself as a traveler, working as a laborer, cook, and teacher in faraway places like the Highlands of New Guinea. Now, with his drifter days behind him, he lives comfortably with his Zimbabwean wife in Ojai, California. He co-wrote and produced the documentary film *Timothy Leary's Dead*. His other work has appeared in *Amarillo Bay*, *Rougarou*, *The Alembic*, *Griffin*, *The Legendary*, *ONTHEBUS*, *Voices*, *The Coe Review*, *Yellow Silk*, *AUSB Odyssey*, *Sage Trail*, *RiverSedge*, *Antiochcracy*, *Forge*, *Jet Fuel Review*, *New Plains Review*, *Crack the Spine*, *Serving House Journal*, *Barely South Review*, *Santa Monica Review*, *Penmen Review*, *Big Muddy*, *Euphony*, and in the anthology *Poets on 9-11*.

**Timothy Murphy's** latest book is *Devotions*, North Dakota State University Press, 2017. In 2018 they will publish *Hunter's Log*, volumes II and III.

**John Poch** has published four poetry collections, most recently *Fix Quiet* (St. Augustine's Press 2015) which won the New Criterion Poetry Prize. His poems have appeared recently in *Ecotone*, *The Common*, *Yale Review*, and *The Nation*.

**Hernan Rossi** is a self taught, unknown, unpublished photographer residing in the Pacific Northwest. Abstract images are his bread and butter, but lately he has been exploring other subjects that can be equally engaging.

**J.D. Smith's** fourth poetry collection, *The Killing Tree*, was published in 2016. He is currently at work on a fifth poetry collection and seeking a publisher for a collection of short fiction. He

works in Washington, DC, where he lives with his wife Paula Van Lare and their rescue animals.

**John Whitworth** has published eleven books of poetry and one about how to write it. His latest is *Joy in the Morning*, from the wonderful Karen Kelsay at Kelsay Books. Les Murray likes it, God bless him.

**John Sibley Williams** is the author of nine poetry collections, most recently *Disinheritance*. A seven-time Pushcart nominee and winner of various awards, John serves as editor of *The Inflectionist Review*. Publications include: *Yale Review*, *Atlanta Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Midwest Quarterly*, *Sycamore Review*, *Massachusetts Review*, *Columbia*, *Third Coast*, and *Poetry Northwest*.

**James Matthew Wilson** has published seven books, including, most recently, *The Vision of the Soul: Truth, Goodness, and Beauty in the Western Tradition* (CUA, 2017). His poems, essays, and reviews appear in a wide range of magazines. A scholar of philosophical-theology and literature, he teaches in the Department of Humanities at Villanova University and serves as the poetry editor for *Modern Age* magazine.



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