

issue 4 - spring 2016

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#### Art / Publication Design

Katie Redfield Denver, Colorado

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### **ARTISTS & AUTHORS** THIS ISSUE

#### **Brian Michael Barbeito**

Brian Michael Barbeito is a Canadian poet and photographer. He currently has work at CV2 and The Canadian Journal of Poetry and Critical Writing. In addition, his work is forthcoming in Fiction International from San Diego University.

#### **Carrie Conners**

Carrie Conners is an Associate Professor of English at LaGuardia Community College-CUNY, where she teaches creative writing, literature, and composition. Her poetry has appeared in DMQ Review, California Quarterly, Tar Wolf Review, Cider Press Review, RHINO and Steel Toe Review.

#### **Pijush Kanti Deb**

Pijush Kanti Deb is a new Indian poet with more than 234 published or accepted poems and haikus in more than 75 national and international magazines, journals, and presses such as Down in the Dirt, Tajmahal Review, Pennine Ink, Hollow Publishing, Creativica Magazine, Muse India, Teeth Dream Magazine, Hermes Poetry Journal, Medusa's Kitchen, Grey Borders, Dead Snakes, Dagda Publishing, Blognostics and many more. His best achievement so far is the publication of his first poetry collection Beneath The Shadow Of A White Pigeon published by Hollow Publishing available online at Amazon or Barnes and Nobles.

#### **James Fowler**

James Fowler teaches literature at the University of Central Arkansas. His work has appeared in Cantos, The Milo Review, ELJ, The Poetry Quarterly, The Bicycle Review, and Parting Gifts.

#### Shittu Fowora

Shittu Fowora, storyteller, poet, freelance writer and editor, is a lifelong fan of history and the power of scented words who has recently been motivated by the winsomeness of birds and the wisdom of ants. His works have recently appeared in or are forthcoming from Sentinel, Quarterly Review, Cha, Monkey Star Press, Storymoja, Rousing Reads, The Write Room, Helen Literary Magazine, Naija Stories, Danse Macabre, WritersCafe.org, national dailies and various literary outlets.









#### **Brad Garber**

Brad writes, paints, draws, photographs, hunts for mushrooms and snakes, and runs around naked in the Great Northwest. He has published poetry, essays and weird stuff in such publications as *Embodied Effigies*, *Clementine Poetry Journal*, *Sugar Mule*, *Barrow Street*, *Ray's Road Review* and other quality publications. In addition, he was honored to be a Pushcart Prize nominee in 2013.

#### **Eugene Goldin**

Eugene Goldin was born in Manhattan and grew up in Queens. He teaches at Long Island University and was recently published in *Apeiron Review*, *In-Flight Magazine*, and *The Lake*.

#### **Allison Grayhurst**

Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. She has over 550 poems published in more than 275 international journals, including *Parabola*, *Literary Orphans*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *The American Aesthetic*, *Agave Magazine*, *South Florida Arts Journal*, *Gris-Gris*, *The Muse – An International Journal of Poetry*, *Storm Cellar*, *New Binary Press Anthology*, *The Brooklyn Voice*, *Straylight Literary Magazine*, *The Milo Review*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, *The Antigonish Review*, *Dalhousie Review*, *The New Quarterly*, *Wascana Review*, *Poetry Nottingham International*, *The Cape Rock*, *Ayris*, *Journal of Contemporary Anglo-Scandinavian Poetry*, *The* 

*Toronto Quarterly, Fogged Clarity, Boston Poetry Magazine, Decanto,* and *White Wall Review.* She has eleven published books of poetry, seven collections, seven chapbooks and a chapbook pending publication. She lives in Toronto with her family and sculpts with clay. Find more about her at <u>www.allisongrayhurst.com</u>.

#### **Robert Gregory**

Robert Gregory has published four full length collections of poems, most recently *The Beautiful City of Weeds* (Hanging Loose, 2005), and three chapbooks, including *You Won't Need That* (Willow Springs/Acme Poem Company, 2013).









#### IN THIS ISSUE

#### Pat Hanahoe-Dosch



Pat Hanahoe-Dosch's collection of poems, *Fleeing Back*, was published by FutureCycle Press in the summer of 2012. Her poem "A 21st Century Hurricane: An Assay" was recently nominated for the 2014 Pushcart Prize in Poetry. Her educational background includes an MFA from the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona, and she is currently an Associate Professor of English at Harrisburg Area Community College, Lancaster campus. Her poems have been published in previous issues of *The Paterson Literary Review* as well as *The Atticus Review, War, Art and* 

Literature, Confrontation, The Red River Review, San Pedro River Review, Marco Polo Arts Magazine, Red Ochre Lit, Nervous Breakdown, Quantum Poetry Magazine, Abalone Moon, Apt, Switched-on Gutenberg, and Paterson: The Poets' City (an anthology edited by Maria Mazziotti Gillan), among others. Her articles have appeared in Travel Belles, On a Junket, and Wholistic Living News. Her story "Sighting Bia" was selected as a finalist for A Room of Her Own Foundation's 2012 Orlando Prize for Flash Fiction.

#### **Chloe Hanson**

Chloe Hanson's work has appeared in *Red Cedar Review*, *Off the Coast*, *Driftwood Press*, and several other places online and in print. She teaches beginning composition at Utah State University.



#### **Robert Hobkirk**



Hobkirk thought about this idea: which would be better to have as a gift, a talent for writing or making a lot of money selling books? He believes talent is the more valuable gift. He self publishes with CreateSpace and Kindle. He has found not having money as a motivator and not having to be given permission by a publisher to be liberating. When he's in the middle of writing a book, his imagination usually wakes him, telling him a story that seems so real. He writes usually in the morning. He had no idea how many times it would take to proof read a book to get the glitches out until he did it – brutal. But doesn't love endure all? Here's a link to his

Amazon author's page http://www.amazon.com/Robert-Hobkirk/e/B00UM11TDE

#### Paul Hostovsky

Paul Hostovsky is the author of seven books of poetry and six poetry chapbooks, most recently *The Bad Guys* (FutureCycle Press, 2015). He works in Boston as an Interpreter for the Deaf and a Braille instructor. Visit him at <u>www.paulhostovsky.com</u>.



#### **Jacqueline Jules**



Jacqueline Jules is the author of the poetry chapbooks *Field Trip to the Museum* from Finishing Line Press and *Stronger Than Cleopatra* from ELJ publications. Her poetry has appeared in over 100 journals including *Inkwell*, *Soundings Review*, *The Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Gargoyle*, *Imitation Fruit*, *Calyx*, *Connecticut River Review*, and *Pirene's Fountain*. She is also the author of 30 books for young readers including the Zapato Power series and *Never Say a Mean Word Again*. Visit her online at <u>http://jacquelinejules.com/mypoetry.htm</u>

#### Tamam Kahn



Tamam Kahn is the author of *Untold, A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad* (Monkfish Books, 2010). She was invited by the Royal Ministry of Morocco to read her poems there in 2009. Kahn has been awarded writing residencies at Ragdale and Jentel Foundations in 2013 and earlier. She has recently completed her second book: *Fatima's Touch, Poems and Stories of the Prophet's Daughter*, forthcoming, 2017.

#### Bénédicte Kusendila

Bénédicte Kusendila received her M.A. in Germanic Languages, English and Applied Linguistics (Catholic University of Louvain). In a former life, she was a member of the South-African Afrikaans Writers Guild (Afrikaanse Skrywersvereniging). In addition, she holds a Master of Philosophy degree in Education and Applied Language Studies (University of Cape Town).



#### **Mercedes Lawry**

Mercedes Lawry has published poetry in such journals as *Poetry*, *Nimrod*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry East*, *Natural Bridge*, and others. Thrice-nominated for a Pushcart Prize, she's published two chapbooks, most recently *Happy Darkness* (Finishing Line Press, 2011). She's also published short fiction, essays and stories and poems for children. She lives in Seattle.

**VTHIS ISSUE** 

#### **Gypsy Amrita Mack**

Gypsy Amrita Mack is a seventeen-year-old writer and contributor to *Quail Bell Magazine*. She is a college student and aspiring anthropologist with a love for language, words, and intercultural communication. She lives in Scottsville, Virginia. Find more of her writing at <u>www.</u> gypsyamritamack.tumblr.com and <u>www.quailbellmagazine.com</u>.



#### William Miller

William Miller has published over three hundred poems in such journals as *Shenandoah*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The South Carolina* and *The Southern Review*.

#### Suchoon Mo



Suchoon Mo is a Korean War veteran and a retired academic living in the semi-arid part of Colorado. His Ph.D. is in the area of experimental psychology, and his research articles mostly deal with time perception. His poems and music compositions appeared in a number of literary and cultural publications. His recent chap book, *Frog Mantra*, has been published by Accents Publishing of Lexington, Kentucky.

#### William Morris



William Morris is an MFA candidate at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. His work has been published or is forthcoming online at *Crab Fat Literary Magazine*, *Fiction Southeast*, *Oblong Magazine*, *drafthorse*, and *5x5*. He is the recipient of the 2015 Besse Patterson Gephardt Award for Fiction. William lives in St. Louis, where he devotes his time to cats, coffee, and creative writing.

#### **Rich Murphy**

"As Enfolded in a Blanket" is a poem in Rich Murphy's book-length manuscript "Body Politic," accepted by Prolific Press for publication in 2016. Murphy's credits include three books: *Americana* (Press Americana, 2013), *The Apple in the* 



Monkey Tree (Codhill Press, 2008) and Voyeur, winner of the 2008 Gival Press Poetry Award (Gival Press). He has published six chapbooks, *Great Grandfather* (Pudding House Press), *Family Secret* (Finishing Line Press), *Hunting and Pecking* (Ahadada Books), *Rescue Lines* (Right Hand Pointing), *Phoems for Mobile Vices* (BlazeVox), and *Paideia* (Aldrich Press). Recent prose scholarship on poetics has been published in *The International Journal of the Humanities*, *Reconfigurations: A Journal of Poetry and Poetics*, *The Journal of Ecocriticism*, and *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*.

#### **Rachel Peevler**

Rachel Peevler is an artist and poet residing in Colorado. She has studied Art and English at the University of Northern Colorado. Her writing has been showcased in *The Artistic Muse, Apeiron Review, The Write Room, Gutter Eloquence,* and *The Circle Review.* 



#### **Elizabeth Perdomo**



Elizabeth Perdomo has lived and written in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas these past fourteen years, moving to the region from the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. Born in Kansas and raised both there and in Colorado, she has written poetry works since a young teen. Perdomo also lived in the Southeastern USA for a number of years. Her written pieces reflect on local place and culture, ecology and nature, traditions, spirituality and much more.

#### **Ruben Rodriguez**



Ruben Rodriguez writes, paints, and wastes his time at the foot of the San Bernardino Mountains. He is the fiction editor of *The Great American Lit Mag* and the author of chapbook *We Do What We Want* (Orange Monkey Publishing, 2015). Some of his poems have been deemed fit for consumption by the likes of *OxMag, Welter, The Stillwater Review, Dewpoint, Suisun Valley Review, Homestead Review, Perceptions, 94 Creations* and others. You can find him at <u>www.</u> rubenstuff.com.

#### **David Anthony Sam**

David Anthony Sam is the grandson of Polish and Syrian immigrants. He has written poetry for over 40 years and has two collections, including *Memories in Clay, Dreams of Wolves* (2014). He lives in Virginia, USA with his wife and life partner, Linda, and currently serves as president of Germanna Community College.



#### **Domenic Scopa**

Domenic Scopa is a two-time Pushcart Prize nominee and the 2014 recipient of the Robert K. Johnson Poetry Prize and Garvin Tate Merit Scholarship. He is a student of the Vermont College of Fine Arts MFA Program, where he studies poetry and translation, and he is a literature professor at Changing Lives Through Literature.



THIS ISSUE

#### Jessica Smith

Jessica Smith grew up just outside of Buffalo, New York (which explains her undying love for chicken wings and sponge candy). She has lived and taught in Minnesota and Maine. She currently teaches writing and literature at Central Maine Community College and has had work published in *Ruminate*, *The Louisville Review*, *Berkeley Fiction Review*, *The Portland Review*, and *Not Somewhere Else But Here: A Contemporary Anthology of Women and Place* (Sundress, 2014).

#### **Robert Vivian**

Robert Vivian calls his prose poems "dervish essays"; His first book of these, called *Mystery My Country*, will be published in the spring of 2016.

#### **Bruce Wise**

Bruce Wise is a writer of charichords (anagrammatic heteronyms). When he lived in Europe for a couple of years, he once went to Paris with one of his friends, Joe, who was in awe of Napoleon. The author of this poem on that experience is one of his French charichords, U. Carew Delibes.

U. Carew Delibes is a music critic and poet enamoured of France, its art, its music, and its poetry. His intimate circle of friends include art critic Beau Ecs Wilder and poet Claude I. S. Weber. His influences include, inter alia, the Impressionists, Les Fauves, Romantic composers from Berlioz on, and the Parnassians.







### **EDITOR'S WELCOME**

"Not all those who wander are lost." J.R.R. Tolkien, from Lord of the Rings

Writers and artists know it best: getting lost is at least half the fun of any creative journey, often preceding the most unexpected of discoveries and delights. I hope you will enjoy meandering through the pages of this issue to stumble upon new vistas or to lose yourself along deep, winding trails of narrative or thought, places where you wish to pause, to look or to consider more carefully an image or a fresh presentation of a familiar scene or storyline. Once again, we are proud to be publishing an international sampling of creative work; we sincerely thank all of our contributors for submitting such unique, well-crafted art, photography, poetry, and fiction for reading and viewing pleasure.

This will be *Aji*'s fourth issue, and what a wonderful journey it has been for magazine staff. We have learned a great deal along the way, about ourselves and about each other. But most of all, we have learned that there exists an exceptional kindness and community among the writers and artists of the world, whoever or wherever they are. Whether our journeys are physical, intellectual, emotional or spiritual, fashioned with a camera, paint, or words, the desire to share them connects us — the desire to express, to appreciate, to understand and to be understood, or to respect that which cannot be understood, the mysterious or inexplicable, this desire is what brings us all to this virtual space where color and shape conjure again and again the places we've been, the things we've seen, the people we've met or imagined, and the people we are, have been, or may yet become.



Ei Theill annabar

Erin O'Neill Armendarez Editor in Chief

photo by Gypsy Amrita Mack



IN THE BREATH OF HISTORY: TAMAM KAHN REVEALS THE PAST THROUGH POETRY

BY MELISSA GISH

#### By Melissa Gish

Tamam Kahn first came to *Aji* with the poem "in flight," which appears in Issue 3, Fall 2015. I found her to be a fascinating writer and wanted to learn more about her work and philosophy of writing.

Tamam Kahn currently lives in the San Francisco Bay Area. She holds a Master of Arts in Eastern Art History from San Francisco State University. She is married to Pir Shabda Kahn, the spiritual director of the Sufi Ruhaniat International, where Tamam has taught for more than 25 years. She has studied Classical Arabic and traveled to sacred sites in Morocco, Syria, Andalusia, and India. These experiences, combined with careful research of early Islamic history, led to her book *Untold, A History of the Wives of Prophet Muhammad* (Monkfish Books, 2010).

*Publisher's Weekly* describes the book as "an illustrative window into early Islam and everyday Arabian life 1,400 years ago." The *Huffington Post* calls the book "remarkable." I wanted to talk with Tamam about *Untold*, which I found fascinating and wonderfully challenging. The book transports readers into a 7th-century Arab world where the lives of Prophet Muhammad's wives are revealed in a unique combination of striking poetry and exhaustively researched prose. At the forefront is Khadija, Muhammad's first wife, who was not only present for but also participated in the birth of a new religion.

MG: You wrote that you were inspired to write Untold: A History of the Wives of Muhammad when you "imagined [yourself] in Khadija's life." Were you channeling these women's voices more than simply presenting a narrative about their lives? How were you able to accomplish this?

TK: I wouldn't say "channeling." This is more a practice of *concentration*. I have learned to focus on "being in the breath of" the person you are concentrating on, feeling her core, her heart, beyond the tidbits of historical information. For example, I wrote about Khadija, the only wife of Muhammad for 25 years, mother of his children. History says Muhammad fled to her after being, "squeezed by Angel Gabriel" saying: "Cover me, cover me!" He was terrified. To me, it would follow that she covered him and rocked him, with the words (mine) "Hush, you are safe now." I could see it. Plato once said that poetry is nearer to vital truth than history is.



Tamam Kahn celebrates with friends (page 17). Tamam Kahn at a reading (at right). MG: Your book explains that prior to Islam, women in Arabian culture were marginalized and abused, but with the rise of Islam, things improved for women. You wrote, "Muhammad felt strongly about women's equality"; however, with the Prophet's death, "the empowerment of women ceased." So much of what many people understand about Islam today is based on the media's presentation of current gender issues in the Middle East. How do you think attitudes might change if Muhammad's vision for women were more widely known and understood by the American public?

TK: Unlike Christianity and Judaism, Islam has not experienced a reformation yet. Although there are millions of Muslims who treat women with respect, most of the national and international press does them a great disservice by ignoring the gentle, positive side of Islam.

MG: Do you feel your book can be a tool to help people (both Muslim and non-Muslim) develop a valid understanding of Islam—specifically, the "equality of all believers"?

TK: Anything that can help restrain the tilt toward right-wing, repressive versions of Islam is good. The King of Morocco calls the heart-centered and loving Moroccans who follow the path of Sufism, "a hedge against fundamentalism." I was invited to a conference in Marrakesh by the Minister of Culture to read my poetry in 2009. After the reading (it was translated into Arabic), several Imams smiled and gave me a peace sign when we passed each other.

**MG:** Untold: A History of the Wives of Muhammad is a mix of prose and poetry in a structure called prosimetrum. The prose is narrative history, while the poetry is very personal. How did you decide on this structure for the book?

TK: I was inspired by Lucille Clifton's poem on Joan of Arc, "to joan," Marie Howe's "Poems from the Life of Mary," W.S. Merwin's "Ulysses." You assemble a vehicle that takes you to that time and place. If you are lucky, the spirit of Joan, Mary, or Ulysses will show up for a moment. *Prosimetrum*, a word used in former times, meant prose with poems embedded in it. This is useful when the reader doesn't have the back-story. Then the poem drops you into a moment that can open and reveal another layer of the story. This form was suggested to me by master poet from North Carolina Fred Chappell.





Tamam Kahn outside a small shrine in Delhi, India. This is the tomb of the very famous Urdu and Persian language poet of the 19th Century, Mirza Ghalib.

### MG: At what point in your life did you decide that writing poetry was a worthwhile endeavor? How did it happen?

TK: I was editor of the literary magazine in high school called *The Full Cry*. In college I was intimidated, and gave up writing my own poems, to study Shakespeare and Proust. Then in the late 80's I began to write again, and went to hear Carly Simon give a rare concert at the Concord Pavilion near San Francisco. Her album was called *Letters Never Sent*. She summoned all her old loves and wrote a song to each one. I tried it with poetry and was stunned to slide into relationships long lost. Then I submitted those few poems for a week-long workshop with Naomi Shihab Nye called "Flight of the Mind." I was accepted. That did it. I came out of that workshop and have called myself a "poet" ever since.

#### MG: How has your writing evolved from those early years?

TK: It was when I stopped writing to release unprocessed feelings and began writing to communicate to the person in the back of the room that I finally became a writer. When I wrote the 70 poems in *Untold*, I pictured Queen Noor of Jordan reading each one. She was an American I greatly respected, who would have an East/West perspective, not that she ever read them. That is not the point.

#### MG: Who has been inspirational to you as a poet?

TK: The poets I mentioned earlier inspire me. I am unswerving in my appreciation. When my words seem dull, I read Heather McHugh. I love Robert Bly's work and Mahmoud Darwish—the Fady Jodah translations. (He speaks for those who have lost more than a country). As I become more interested in how meter seems to connect me with earlier history that relies on verbal poetry, I have been drawn to the beautiful work of Marilyn Hacker and A.E. Stallings. Annie Finch has offered critical guidance to these new poems, and Fred Chappell has been there for me since the 1990's.

#### MG: What do poets need to be poets?

TK: To me, being a good poet is not different from being an excellent athlete. Practice, train, write whenever you can. Read all different kinds of poetry. It has been very important for me to have a writing partner, someone to show my work to, talk poetry, and travel to workshops with. I have been fortunate to have poet Wendy Taylor Carlisle in my life. I don't believe you can be an interesting writer without that kind of feedback.

### MG: What are some of your latest projects? I understand you have written a book of poems featuring Muhammad's daughter, Fatima. In fact, three of the poems from the book are included in this issue of *Aji*.

TK: My article with poems entitled "Mothers of Islam" is in the 40th anniversary issue of *Parabola Magazine* (Spring, 2016). The book, *Fatima's Touch: Stories and Poems of the Prophet's Daughter*, will be published in 2017. It was a logical progression to go from Wives of Prophet Muhammad, to telling about his famous daughter, Fatima (pronounced *FA-tim-ah*). I feel some urgency for this story of her life to be known. A great family quarrel similar to the Catholic/Protestant split has fractured Islam and is spilling into Middle Eastern hatreds we lack the education to understand. Fatima and her family are at the center of the Shia/Sunni split. My poems on Fatima will attempt to bring the two sides together in one book, and begin to educate Americans about this history.



All Images Courtesy of Tamam Kahn (pages 17-21).



These poems are from Tamam Kahn's as-yet-untitled forthcoming book on the life of Fatima al-Zahra, youngest daughter of Prophet Muhammad. She is well known and held in high esteem by millions all over the Muslim world, yet virtually unknown in America.

#### **Sacred Names**

Five-year-old Fatima playing alone hiding in curtains, counting to ten, yelling in Arabic: "here I come!" LIGHT OF HEAVEN, here I come!" PURE. BRAVE. GLORIFIED. SHINING. "They'll call me these names when I get to heaven." KNOWLEDGEABLE. SHE-WHO-SATIFIES-GOD.

Fatima at the door recites: THE-PATIENT-ONE. CHASTE. She takes up one of her father's sandals to slip on her small foot, then stands in the other shoe, clunks into the back yard. CLEAN. She scuffs up a dust cloud. IMMACULATE. She squats in palm duff, RADIANT. pulls at each sandal-strap and examines each dusty shoe, concentrates. GENTLE.

VIRTUOUS. PROTECTED. VIRGINAL. She spits and polishes the leather with the front of her tunic. FRIEND-OF-GOD. She smiles at the camel eating next to her. AFFECTIONATE. "You are my *habibi*<sup>1</sup>," she coos to him. Her clothes are dirty, soiled from His shoes. STAINLESS. Her sticky fingers smear her face. BEAUTIFUL.

Muhammad stands in the doorway, arms folded, delight all over his face. "O, Zahra, DAUGHTER-OF-LIGHT. I am BLESSED with how GENEROUS you are. My shoes. How you care for them! Fatima gives him a long look: WISE. VICTORIOUS. SATISFIED. MOTHER-OF-HER-FATHER.

Father, may I walk with you wherever you walk.

<sup>1</sup>*Habibi*— Sweetie, beloved; One of several traditional names of Fatima al-Zahra, the iconic mother to many *Muslims*.

Tamam Kahn

#### Jinn

Past generations claim dubious allies genii or jinn pressing dark inspiration.

That's what Muhammad was worried about once when Gabriel made him recite Revelation.<sup>3</sup>

What if one Jinn, all unnoticed, should wriggle in between Fatima's hands while she's praying?

Thanks to the words on the ring, he'd be speechless, blinded and stunned as the angels threw stars at him.

One ring that belonged to Fatima was engraved: "Praise God for restraining the jinn from speaking."

<sup>3</sup>When Prophet Muhammad received Qur'an the first time from Angel Gabriel, he was afraid he had met a delusional jinn.

#### **Camera Obscura**

Fatima dreams the sun in her hands restores those who call to her. She wakes to Ali's voice trying to tell her something. She sits up. I'm in a hotel in Phoenix, my mind holding the ashes, warm ashes of Fatima's story, as a long freight train, crosses my wall, a blur of boxcars just beyond the fence, passing through, thrown on the wall from a gap in the drapes — dark light dark, dark light dark, wheels on tracks, on tracks. Camera obscura<sup>4</sup>: two places at once, two flung-apart centuries. Fatima lifts her hem, the cotton scented with dried orange-peel from Syria, to flee her husband's quiet words: a second wife. She'd like a track to glide upon. She runs. She's a night-storm with lightning. The train whistle warns: *it's not safe, not safe anywhere*! Fatima wants to know what gets me out of bed every day, how I live the dark times. I answer her with a word about gratitude, and a line of sacred syllables —light on dark on light now and now, motion-picture-like, the same words her father taught her now bless the train, the whistle, the track, the whole sky, the ashes of everything.

<sup>4</sup> A darkened chamber in which the real image of an object is received through a small opening or lens and focused in natural color onto a facing surface rather than recorded on a film or plate.

Painting by Robert Hobkirk

### poetry spotlight ROBERT HOBKIRK Aji Editor-in-Chief, Erin O'Neill Armendarez, takes us inside

the unique works of Robert Hobkirk

#### By Erin O'Neill Armendarez

The poems in this collection reveal an artist's attention to the visual, especially color, as Hobkirk shares memories of his surroundings, his childhood, and of his mother, father, and Polish grandmother. There are elements of literary naturalism in unflinching portrayals of death, as in the poem "Sparrow," and of the cycles of nature and of life, as in one of the finest poems in the collection, "Scarecrow in Winter Field." At his best, Hobkirk's lines are in par with practically anyone else's, making use of ordinary words and images to create lines with just the right economy of sound and syllable to bring the reader into the world of the poem, as in these simple but evocative lines from "Memories" (p.93):

Somewhere Poetry Grows Wild Under the Eucalyptus Robert Hobkirk

I was back in Michigan

On a cold gray day Bundled up in wool Wearing leggings and black galoshes Coming home from school

"Grandma, I'm home"

Read aloud, these lines contain no excess, nothing other than the bits of narrative spun to successfully convey scenes from childhood, simple, predictable pleasures all too often taken for granted until, as Wordworth said it best, "emotion recollected in tranquility" prompts the poet to infuse such memory with feeling to be appreciated by an attentive reader.

On occasion, Hobkirk's poems may remind readers of Carl Sandburg, a poet who without pretense captured the humble everyday sights, sounds and smells of his place, or even of William Carlos Williams, as in "Wild Almond Tree," a poem which refuses to "mean" anything, instead offering readers a poem that fits Archibald MacLeish's definition from "Ars Poetica: "A poem should not mean/But be."

Hobkirk is a talent placed loosely in American tradition; his poems show a remarkable craftsmanship firmly grounded in the American free verse canon. However, he may pay a price among contemporary critics for ignoring some commonly accepted caveats currently preached in MFA programs. For example, if one peruses the pages of the typical elite literary magazine, one might find that most poets (admittedly not all) conform to the standard rules of punctuation, as these conventions often help rather than hinder reader understanding. While it is true that most of this punctuation is not much missed in Hobkirk's poems, it seems also true that the poet might reconsider the use of commas, periods, and other standard conventions of punctuation as potentially useful in sculpting his lines and stanzas.



Hobkirk dabbles in visual arts, too. His paintings (like the one above), digital art and mixed media pieces can be found on his blog - http://hobkirkartblog.blogspot.com/ .

When it comes to line breaks, American poets must devise an "inscape" for a poem that doesn't wrangle itself into a standard form, and one must carefully study the choices of other writers, the rhythms of our language, and the energy and tempo of a particular poem to determine where line breaks should go. If poems are to be read aloud successfully without the poet present, and if the poet means to give readers sufficient cues as to how to read a poem, it is helpful to think of punctuation marks as cues for varying degrees of silence and the control of pace in a poem. Without them, Hobkirk has nothing but stanza and line breaks to suggest a place for a pause. At points, he uses a single conjunction or preposition to fill an entire line, and since all the poems in the collection are double-spaced, this seems to apportion an inordinate amount of time and sound/silence combination for a single connecting word. For the most part, the lines themselves are quite carefully crafted, and so those that seem less careful are all the more apparent.

In addition, Hobkirk has chosen to center his poems on the page instead of left justifying, which again seems to ignore a fairly standard convention. True, contemporary poets will often stagger lines on a page for perfectly good reasons, but to simply center the poem seems unjustifiable (pardon the pun?) if a writer means to show his or her knowledge of how fuzzily-understood free verse conventions are most commonly practiced in the U.S. today.

Clearly, Hobkirk is a gifted poet, one who should be read. The poems in this collection establish that fact. His work should be read not only for pure appreciation, but also close analysis of his poems could be used to introduce questions about the use of punctuation and the crafting of lines and stanzas and what these things signify to a wider readership.

Should it be "Grandma was in the kitchen/cooking/", or "Grandma was in the kitchen cooking," or "Grandma was in the kitchen, cooking"? For a poet as talented as Hobkirk, such subtleties and the messages conveyed by those choices can be quite meaningful to other poets.

"Back in the Sea" is the poem most helpful in understanding the poet's overall intentions. In holding back work that has the potential "to make something bleed," Hobkirk shows an admirable wisdom and unwillingness to exploit his subjects for shock value or for vengeance. His poems project the maturity of a gentle voice that can be trusted. In the last lines of the last poem in the collection, he attributes his unwillingness to use words to harm others to his mother, who is the subject of the poem.

A reader can't help but hope the best for this poet and to look forward to more of his work. The written word holds a power misused by many in a society where we all defend one another's right to say pretty much anything. Hobkirk doesn't take that right or the power of his words for granted; consequently, anything he puts on a page is probably worth a reader's time and attention.



The pleasure in reading Robert Hobkirk's haiku is twofold. First, there's the surprise, the delight that emerges as a reader finds the joy of a doughnut in the last line of #248, or the mundane comfort of coffee in a camper after snowfall in #230. The collection is filled with lovely lines that bring to life many flashes of the simple blessings of contemporary American life. This pleasure should be more than enough to entice any poetry lover into the book. Second, beyond the many unique, fresh depictions of the exquisite in the ordinary, readers will inevitably want to test Robkirk's creations against contemporary notions of the classic form, which at its best transcribes an almost mystical epiphany into seventeen syllables. Kaiko Imaoku, a Japanese American haiku artist of note, has recommended that haikuists writing in English consider limiting themselves to around eleven syllables with a short/long/short line structure, as more can typically be said in seventeen syllables of English than of Japanese. Further, she has observed that significant differences in the grammar of the two languages cause difficulty for American writers, difficulties often most successfully addressed in "free form" haiku.



Robert Hobkirk

Admittedly, Hobkirk has challenged himself (and other American haiku writers) by faithfully adhering to the traditional Japanese form, although he willfully abandons the traditional subjects when inspiration of a different sort calls. His seventeen syllable forms do on occasion invite readers to remember Imaoku's admonitions. At points, perhaps he says a bit too much, leading the reader away from the moment and scene in question, whether physical or mental, toward an abstraction or a conclusion that comments or concludes rather than represents. The use of the first and second person can be problematic even in forms as tight as these, where a word or two can collapse the compressed form into a mere sentence, albeit a sentence well worth reading for its evocation of sound, visual image, scent, or passing thought.

As other reviewers have noted, some of Hobkirk's haikus quietly mimic the form, bringing a smile to the reader. A writer must be very careful in such situations to be deliberate about the ultimate intention for the poem.

Admittedly no expert on haiku, it is in the interest of debate that I point to a poem like #218:

T.V. football game mostly women in the church men rest on Sunday.

This little gem invites a reader to contemplate gender roles with respect to sports and religion, and there's a subtle irony in the suggestion that the women in the church may not be following the second commandment, as they are not resting like their male counterparts. This poem seems to smile while making a general observation, possibly even offering social critique or noting a complicated irony.

There are no sensory images in the poem at all, but instead abstractions, generalizations. As Americans in the spirit of Whitman are bound to break almost any rule, often with extraordinary result, I will not fault Hobkirk for using the syllabic Haiku form for purposes uniquely his own, particularly because the subjects are in virtually every case worthy of a reader's contemplation. However, I will suggest that the haikus written more closely to the classic form are the most resonant in the collection. #190 on page 69 is quite lovely. Still, the critic can't resist wondering—what would happen if the writer tightened this poem (think 11-14 syllables), replacing the abstraction "playing songs" with words that imitate the sounds he means to create in the reader's mind?

A similar temptation invites the critic in #245, where the "earthy bedroom sounds" made by cow hooves in wet mud might imitate those sounds instead of distracting a reader with the question, *which* bedroom sounds? There are so many--sucking? Kissing? Surely not moaning—



Hobkirk sometimes writes his haikus into digital art (above). He shares this work on his blog http://hobkirkartblog.blogspot.com/.

One could do worse than to contemplate such puzzles. For the most part, readers of Haiku Avenue: 333 Haiku Poems will spend most of their time in this book admiring the beauty of poems like #229, which describes tangerines in winter. But again, the most perverse of us will wonder what specific visual image might be more precise than "ripen," although it does seem the perfect word against the "green leaves/sweet fruit. . . ." The sound stresses in Hobkirk's lines are very careful and consistently place emphasis in just the right places. Tight forms draw attention to the smallest things, but as perfection is obviously impossible in any endeavor, readers might best occupy themselves appreciating all the wit and evocative sensory image in these haikus.

For the most part, Hobkirk's haikus awaken the almost mystical quality the best haiku achieves, as the writer has used simple words, simple situations, and sometimes deceptively simple observations to successfully transport readers from their distractions and stressfilled days into microcosms of unexpected beauty. What more could we ask from any poet?



All Images Courtesy of Robert Hobrick (pages 22-27).

Rasta Haiku (at right).



Jacqueline Jules

#### **My Allotted Suitcase**

With money and a plastic surgeon I can choose the size of my nose and my breasts; just not the length of my life or the loved ones still present each morning I open my eyes.

A father's suicide, a sister's cancer, a friend struck by a car all trees knocked down in a straight-line wind.

*Shikata ga nai*: It can't be helped. Like the interned Japanese, I pack my allotted suitcase and board the train for relocation.

Where I work hard to keep my eyes off the barbed wire, craning my neck upward toward shifting white shapes in the sky.

Jacqueline Jules

#### **Train** Therapy

Stuck in this speckled seat, an oversized purse in my lap, I consider calling a friend someone who hugged me at my wedding or pushed her stroller beside mine at the park, one of the many who send e-mails, saying I'm in thoughts and prayers.

With a cell phone, it's easily done. Never mind disturbing all the plugged-in passengers with half of a weeping conversation as they type or read on fold-down trays.

Instead, I turn to the velour-suited woman beside me, exchange destinations, admire wallet-sized photos of toothless grandchildren, wait until she pats my hand and asks about me.

I am grateful she doesn't know my last name, can offer tissues without needing them herself. My burdens no more than a sad movie, she'll forget when she leaves this train, not luggage a close friend would drag for days.

Brad Garber

#### Saturday by the Lake

Eventually, I will venture to get groceries red-skinned potatoes and brussel sprouts to be exact, but for now on this most luscious of days I sit surrounded by the music of spring-singing birds, babbling passing walkers, swishing tires far off laughter and my thoughts. In younger days, I might find a road to run past fields of corn in sunlight or ride in search of wild asparagus on parole from the winter my skin a sponge, muscles taut snapping like fingers to a beat. Today, the rabbit stock is boiling my bare feet cradled in warming air the comfort of my life on display around me the reasons for foregoing this day's habitual search for reasons.



Brad Garber

#### Road Trip Rendezvous

Somewhere in Nevada, he saw her walking her dog in the morning past hillside silver mines and boardwalks heading back to her loaded truck mud on the Colorado license plate where he was headed after breakfast. Southeast of Winnemucca, she passed crow hair flying in an open window imagined road ahead, flashing smile disappearing over the hill. It may have been Utah, land of stone where he caught up to her again windows down, Hejira music blaring dog staring into the distance and he acknowledged her with a nod as he passed and wondered why; why the dot of her behind him was never far behind, why he might be making a mistake by leaving with nothing but a girl and her dog forever in his mind, a day's mirage. When he pulled into the dust lot of a roadside bar, she followed his name, her name, two travelers entering for beers with morning locals for fantasies and stories of destinations. He went to the Volkswagen, bending beneath the weight of his belongings and pulled out his guitar to sing her the last song he would sing to her two people pulling away, never able.

Carrie Conners

#### Home Remedy

Somewhere a man grinds granules of salt between his teeth because he heard somewhere from someone that it calms the nerves. He debated with the fridge for twenty minutes in his kitchen muttering, *it was pepper, no it was salt. I wouldn't trust a man recommended pepper...* finally settling on salt since pepper makes him sneeze, he swears he read that once a man's heart exploded when he sneezed, who wants that when you're tense. He stares at the Morton girl cool and clad in caution yellow eternally impermeable as his nose leaks and twitches against the intensity, the texture, a mouthful of sulfurous sand. He curses at cows, placidly lapping at salt licks all day, grazing and lowing, unbothered by the stinging purity of things.

#### Honeymoon, Mallorca 2008

My *esposo*, saying it in a foreign tongue somehow makes it less strange, takes pictures of the cliff faces that shelter the cove, enamored with the texture of the rock. I'm not interested in the surface of things, in the eerie shading that dusk casts on the winding cobblestone road we take into town for a late dinner. It's the tension in the breeze, a sharpness that makes you shiver in the thick, hot air. The bats swoop so low you could reach up and pluck one from the arc of its course, the stray dogs lock eyes with you for a heartbeat too long as if the whole place is possessed by *duende* and everything is a crazed performer about to begin, reveling in the dangerous silence, heightening the audience's fervor. Even the gnarled-branched olive trees are holding their crippled poses until night falls when they'll loosen and shake their limbs, a grove of Medusas stunning chance admirers into stillness.

David Anthony Sam

## The Exile Ashore

I fall upon alien sand to leave impressions of hands and knees affecting prayer.

Above a seagull laughs and drops a glitter of gum wrapper as gift.

The ocean hisses whitenoise for its music, and tides abandon the land.

Within a cold wind I hear my longing as a song's silence in poisonous dreams.

David Anthony Sam

## The Exile of Nowhere

The dream gasps me awake alone in a dawn of dried tears that pillow my face to sheets.

I am chilled from too much hope with nothing left here but farewells of oily gray dawn.

My ashes live my exile from a past of no present. Tomorrow no longer expects me.

And my voice is mute of words from either tongue that spoke me. The song of a journeyer

must always end in silence as the birds of autumn prepare to abandon themselves to other winds.

No migration marks my way. Nothing remains of me in any land except the shadows of my absence.

Therefore, I exile all my desire and return myself— as a stone falls back to the ruins of the earth.

David Anthony Sam

## The Wind's Exile

From over the horizon a stranger comes singing with empty hands

The wind that blows him here speaks of an abandoned home

For the lost man another road brings yet another wind

He and the wind are both unable to stop seeking a refuge

The lost man strives to unlearn his past— The wind has none



Ruben Rodriguez

#### **Never Meant To**

Once in Montana driving along a ribbon of asphalt sewn in purple mountains I saw the edge of a storm a sheet of rain falling as flat as a wall. At the edge there must have been a line where one could split oneself down the middle. I never reached it.

# Jammed

I don't mind traffic.	I like to get a close	examination of the machine.	Like to feel the people around me.	
Anxiety of a break	light, the jaded lull	of a trade-commuter, I hear	that bass, I see you brother, you exist,	
even if only through annoyance.		I spy on people. Everyone	caught in my rearview	
mirror, and I wonder if they		see my eye, or if I'm actually	spying, glimpsing a person	
		ow globe, eyes frozen tance is a cyclical idea,	to the next fifteen minutes usually caught in a cycle that	
		includes traffic jams and obtrusive eyes		

## The Congregation of Great Probabilities

The congregation of great probabilitiesas these are so defined and witnessed wandering always around something good, comprised of some heart-soothing goodness as these are already estimated and perceivedunder or over, can build their nests in empty pockets on the hint of an unknown diplomatic finger for achieving a mysterious but benevolent purpose resulting in the arrival of all sorts of scarcities to arrest their hands and feet, an unabated feeling of guilt for doing nothing good in accordance with their mouthful names hopefully kept as kindness, generosity, benevolence and others enriching only the verbal dictionary and a frequent and long sigh of repentance looking at their vast but useless hearts and barren hands with nail-less fingers.

Pijush Kanti Deb

## A True Lover

Truthfulness bites and a true lover groans in pain yet he longs for a big hand, an ever-increasing enthusiasm to bring the truthfulness up wishing still a collocated nest for his migrating love-bird forgetting its lonely autumn and spring despite living among the hilarious crowd, knitting of the net of barren dreams covering the tiny blossom bloomed in a hidden corner of his vast heart and his unabated soundless mono-clapping in the whispering airfetching the unknown fragrance and the unnamed color of his capricious lady-lovethe only vague image he and his sighthe only close friend of his love story, can enjoy looking at his starless transparent sky.

Pijush Kanti Deb

# The Neglected Refugee

The extra piece of breadthe neglected refugee made by the brimful stomach exhibits the pride and contumacy nurtured by the egoist, along with a few dirty flies rotating on it; relates the secret story of the partial clouds those shed extra-rainfall in the ocean keeping the desert aside thirsty and gloomy, tempts diplomatically to be misused in the formation of Hemlocka great follower of the canon of equality, to bring ocean and desert together around the same table to enjoy the wonderful by-product forgetting the cause and effect of their fortune-good or bad, and bewitches the inelastic stones to enjoy the greatness of the ocean lying on the dry sand of the desert.

#### Street Cred, Downtown

"Understanding someone's suffering is the best gift you can give another person." - Thich Nhat Hanh

who were sleeping on either side of the walkway in blissful negligence

who were to come alive daily by the blare of vehicular horns

who were alive, living and surviving adjacent the black-white-striped paper-thin ears of death

who were bantering always, poking, gleefully slapping hands, to incredible absurdities around

who were left to trust and hope, cutpurse and taunt passersby as the come and go

who were left to hawk and plead and talk-to municipal staff and commuting traders all year round

who were free to chant cants and windy litanies perfected into hitsongs

who were running daily circuses and marionettes with acrobats, clowning with monkeys and Kabbala to fend and roll

who were habitually bawling and jesting like clowning Old Nick missing, by hairsbreadths, potshots from Hell

who were willing to peddle cheap wares, and biscuits and balms and shoe polish and purses, and tatty wallets and belts

who were given to hit and miss and tip at hawking girls with cheap mascara and kohl liners in cheeky boasts, hoping to hit the spot with them

:dirt-poor downtown boys — maybe not so grim really, a youth on self-mission thought to teach them the risk of *thinking for self* with a map, of the city, in case they seek to ignite someway, a revolt on the highway, someday.

#### Us

May we invent an us-language? Gasp, skip a lexeme ...our opinions locomote through a lexicon.

I do not know all the words to all the languages that humans speak

We shall unmake dialects and speak a new language:

With syntax such as "If love, then love" a straight to code language without the disturbance of tongue

Wherein "Yes equals Yes", without secondguessing is an absolute

This term "No" will suffer to get spelt, it will hardly make it into our registers and scrolls

Ours shall be such as is conceived; the fluency of which is best communicated by soulmates

you start a sentence, with my lips against yours, I punctuate it all through to a full stop.

# Valedictory Songs for the Genius IV

Half smiling, I remember that doctor

who

tormented us commoners with expired drugs and stale air, he prescribed it, 'fresh air'

Then

Harrumph, I squeeze my visage to a thought of arson—

come again?

setting all his loot afire ... distraught me,

Smiles.

## I Kept Her Guessing

at the place, where all hammers meet all of joinery and metalworks happen all enginery collocate and clamour for oil and cooling, a desi lady, rocksure of her glamour,

who with her malicious scrutiny, spurned Africans and my bloodshot eyes in particular

but revered my beards and my pen and my long caftan, aspired to only one thing —to lace and tie the knot, around my sandals

she mumbled a song that said those of them few from Po Hai thought us blackmen gentle, to which, with a mild pat on her shoulder I kept her guessing.

### On the Outskirts

she cannot say sleep, and force it to reappear

she cannot whisper God, and cause him to touch her

she cannot taste the crescent moon of arabic caligraphy

she cannot bait the myrrh in her aramaic to raise the molars of her ancestry

once, she employed magic and listened to the grave and the agency of its diligent worms

now she smells of graveyard and stale overnight oatmeal

once, she knocked the ouija and heard the red-rustle in bone marrows of the dead

once, she watched pupils manufacture mountains out of ancient language older than words

once, she distilled ideas in coffee urn and had it fossilised into idioms

once, she sought the waist of the moon, the backside of it too –trying hard to sort out its missing symbols(stars) once, she espied a dummy run in the pool of cool water profiling history

once, she saw snakes turn, mating aggressively trying to impregnate the earth

once, she teased dreams by its beards itching it to make it gasp

she cannot say sleep, and now, her eyes are stone still unmoved like the white wall, tired as wood-coal laid in the ashtray with no memory of lanterns or crockpot.

Domenic J. Scopa

### Playground on a Hill

After Mary Szybist

The startled dock alive with them, fishermen hosing down their decks–spraying side-to-side they blast the scum, attentive not to slip–surprise of foghorn– steadily aggressive hosing. One just there on the bow–gone before I take a breath or can describe him. No one moving stays long enough.

How long since we've worked together the way these fishermen work their boat, washing, making it into a thriving thing– Foghorn again– Another fisherman goes towards the bow without holding the banister.

I cannot catch a boat in my imagination on which I'd sail with you. In the pounding of sharp sunrays, the hose line looks tangled, but I notice, when the fisherman pulls it apart-tension drawnthe coils didn't even touch. He seems snared, kicking frantically. I haven't seen the one who was at the bow, not for minutes.

Through a porthole, two others touch at their faces, mouthing something (actually they're eating)-I'm sick of paying attention. All seem the same. It's too hot to swing here, pushing off with more momentum to get a better look at the boat. Why bother hosing down the deck, why bother leaving the bridge for the bow, why do I miss you now, but not then, the old you, the you I molded and remade again, and again, until you hardened into something else entirely, more truly and more strange. Why not look at squirrels hurrying for tree trunks, or look across at islands, or wonder why that particular crowd of people are spearing sun-dried trash on a far shoreline, or if I'm capable of remaking you better or at all

from this distance.

Domenic J. Scopa

### Euthanasia (2)

Just before the door closes my younger brother turns toward me, clutching the cedar cremation box, bones and flesh turned decoration for a mantelpiece-Cry, he seems to say, cry with me and cave in, to create a scene, to sweep away embarrassment, *cry and be an older brother* the terrible speed of his turning toward me-how bravely he turnswithholding nothing, unraveling teardrops light as steam-And it's unsaid, all the pleasure I stir in when I say it's just a dog as acid does with metal-bleakly, lovingly.

Domenic J. Scopa

### On the Death of My Cousin

He doesn't speak a word, I don't speak a word, though I can seecemetery dirt keeps piling between us. If I had time for grief, if I had time for forgetting, I would till his garden, plant those cherry tomato vines-but I must live here, where he, too, lived-I must walk here, where he walkedhere I must reluctantly leave the corridors of heaven behind. My corroded car door grinds like teeth. If it weren't for siblings, children of my own, repeated promises to parents, I would lie down, finally, in open conversation with another sky, so our voices might talk together -fill its breathing solace.

Rachel Peevler

## The Saint

When he died he wore a halo of gunpowder. His hands were

christened with the blood of his slaughter. He wore

prayer beads of pills around his neck:

ecstasy, Prozac, Adderall.

He walked through the gates of heaven with a hunting rifle strapped to his back.

Rachel Peevler

## Joy

Today is a day of joy. Everything is gold and sunlit. Let us drink sweet summer night dew out of chipped glass teacups and watch the stars slowly migrate across the velvet sky. We'll eat fireflies like raspberries and our teeth and tongues will serves as nightlights. We'll lie down in the grass; a sweet lush green carpet under out heads, and be infants of the earth. Today us a day of joy, I declare giggly grins and inebriated stares as evening prescription. I claim perfect morning sunrises eternally and we'll place bets on how the sunset should go.

We are fresh and new and happiness is easy. Today is a day of joy magnificent, effervescent, rare, raw honey joy.

Rachel Peevler

### **Forest Fire**

Strike the match. Throw it to the underbrush. Run.

The earth sparked under cold gray skies. Smoke rose like an empire, fell like the ashen bodies of soldiers, and evaporated into ghost towns and shadows.

Fire is the great purifier. It is ambition. It conquers whole kingdoms immaculately. It is warm and volatile and it does its work swiftly.

As I stand from afar and watch and I say,

"Consume me— burn me."

I am jealous of what fire does. I want what fire is.

Béné Kusendila

### Mountains and Oceans Between Us

around the world Degas' ballerinas dance their never-ending finale

on canvas Icarus hardly ever falls into the sea

you and i though Pieces of Art are bound to places and morrows to be

- and when I stumble, I usually go flat-out face first into the mud -

but my heart was sculptured after Nel & Rik Wouters it loves you in the colours of Matisse

watch Andy's paintings turn naturally green with selfies of you and theatres

far away featured in its catalogue, "In 80 Days"



Eugene Goldin

#### Vision By Design

By design all insects and birds are always working. So admire but do <u>not</u> interrupt. And please do show some respect!

By design things changed with the advent of the mirror. Before that you really did need a friend or live near the water.

By design I dreamt that everyone woke up one day and came out of a closet. Oh mother Oh father Oh GOD!! You?

Eugene Goldin

## Foolishness

foolishness disguised as eccentricity is no vice. (Harry Goldwater said that) a high end tuxedo won't take away the discomfort of a hole in the shoe particularly when dancing in the rain, and rendering cruel verdicts, "cruelfully", takes a particular type of Lucification of the soul but the house's money here tonight, my dears is clearly on foolishness. So, Hazzah!!

## The End of Summer in Atlantic City

1. Then

Midnight shift on the boardwalk. Around 3 a.m. cops and other street walkers stop in for coffee, maybe an omelet or doughnut.

Around dawn shadows rise from under the boardwalk,

slowly, smelling of sweat, brine, piss or vomit. Sand flakes off their clothes and feet,

absorbs some of the grease on the floor as we sweep it all out, later, scouring the linoleum with the abrasive residue.

We can't keep enough doughnuts and apple pie in stock, though we buy them, frozen, from a grocery store nearby.

Sugar and sand, sugar and sand, sugar and sand, crystals or grains, all laced with the guarantee of a slow drowning,

the surf's lullaby ahead, salt water taffy and fudge, parking lots, crunch of shells and bone, behind, below,

horseshoe crabs, sand fleas and the cackling of gulls as they drop clams onto the boards to break the shells, then pick out the flesh, squabbling and screeching.

Nearby, the empty, wooden life guard stands sit, waiting for crowds and day to begin.

2. Now

The boardwalk is a line of exits for casinos, lounge bars and buffets. A few shops still sell t-shirts, taffy and hermit crabs around the edges.

Pizza, fries, candy, videogames and stuffed animal vendors clump around Central Pier and then there are just a few more casinos and finally, the inlet, dark gray waters laced with oil and bilge where boats still haul fish, tourists, and crystal meth.

Anyone can dive among the wrecks along shipwreck alley, the coastline famous for its storms and destruction.

The boards lie across the sand, shadows huddled beneath, steadfast before impending winds building gray jagged boulders of clouds and rain as the season's nor'easters blow in, hurricanes gather strength southward,

gamblers drift out from slots and roulette and poker to admire the view, the surf, the sand, the horizon changing colors and striations as it darkens,

lights bobbing through the roiling black. Boats scour their way to one inlet or another, and always, the smell of brine, salt and sugar from somewhere.

Pat Hanahoe-Dosch

#### Djinn Poem #3

The genie stands by a museum wall, angels carved into the stone, their wings folded together like huge hands at prayer. The stone, he thinks, must keep them from flying. Beyond, a marble sarcophagus, Egyptian mummies. Greek statues. Lapis Lazuli collars, rings, sword hilts, and then, finally, the artifacts of his people, bones, and glass, like coffins with labels.

People move around him, talking and pointing at the bones. They do not understand how centuries, an ocean, war, a desert are not much space between them. Such a small moment, and then he is sand seeping through corners and hinges, drifting around each knuckle, tooth, and rib until he lies interspersed through them all, rippling along memories and moments when they were men and women.

All around, the museum lives its usual kind of day. No one can hear the gunfire, screams and bombs in Syria, far away, not even the genie, or the hand missing one tiny finger bone, which is still trapped under a rock just beyond what was once the archaeologists' dig site, where it had curled into the dirt and packed sand that trucks and tanks now drive over and over and over and over

Mercedes Lawry

### Surface

High and sweet, the sparrow trills, glissando on wind before soft rain. The pallor of a boy in a damp country, the glisten, as if stories brimmed beneath skin, the insides threshing at muted sky. Nothing of sorrow sticks in the branches of the hawthorn. Nothing of regret. The boy is a muddle, chancing little with his musings. His long fingers needle the leaves as he keeps watch. Perhaps his truth will emerge from the gray layers, sporting its own wings and clever eyes. Such hopes whistle at the edge of an hour and he strings them together like shiny beads and wears them around his slim neck.

Mercedes Lawry

#### **Excuses** Abundant

I would have been galloping but the ivy wound around my bones. I would have counted clouds but the babies were crying. I would have told a longer story but the bees needed calming. I would have traced the origin of the river but the boxes had fallen and grown damp and become useless. I would have given the dog a better home but there was a clamor at the back door. I would have made a pie but the spoons were missing. I would have played the piano all morning but the neighbor was shouting, Halleluiah! and I thought I would too so I shouted Halleluiah! Halleluiah! over and over until they dragged me away.

## The Flat Plane Of Imaginary Heaven

Far, as the minute mile that rests on my shoulders like a dream, waterlogged. Dirt under my fingernails that won't go away. Summer on my tongue that won't go down smooth, won't let me near the balloons or the genuine smile, takes me out of my nest and puts me centre floor with the predators - with the dangers of too-strong a dream, or like petals caught in the wind. I begin to fly without direction or control, fly without decision, but wanting a change, wanting to ride the log down the river, steering with perfect gusto. The complex edges of touch, the final shadow of all once loved passing over like a life undone, like a place of magic but without God, like a place of kindness but no warmth, or like perfection lacking any sense of surrender bound to the shackles of a predictable reality.

Allison Grayhurst

#### New Poem – Not a Poem

Block and embrace the energy action, circular, the fastest stroke of curved precision. Bend to grow strong and final as a setting sun seems to be. Above all else, wait for the promise to gain momentum, height, far from where the common acceptance will allow. Wait for the baptism, the tenth time around, baptism into deeper layers of valley rhythms - heaven is in these depths. Fulfilment and freedom comes better under the weight of spiritual obligation to God. To God: I climb close to you. I find you outside of my lineage, including my walking and my destination. I know you now as a solid certainty. I love you though I am still close to breaking, close to you, permanently placed on the threshold

where all things begin and all things end.



James Fowler

#### **Revelation**

Eight days out of Arkansas Post and he'd seen nary a one, white or red. Just himself and woodland creatures. Wasn't that what drew him at first, not long after the Purchase, the chance to settle ahead of the crowd? So now these wild stretches, hill and hollow, were practically his alone. Unaware, he fingered Heckaton's amulet, a charm for good hunting. If only it all weren't so desperate. He needed a rare thing of Nature, a white deer, to counter a poison dire and outlandish in its action. He wouldn't end like that boy in Kentucky, lashed to a bed frame, frothing and snapping. Beforehand, he would make peace on his terms.

By the eleventh day he'd spotted several bucks, grand antlered sovereigns, and would have shot one otherwise. As it was, he stuck to small game, moving meal to meal. Once he had to persuade a black bear to forage for its own dinner. The weather was cold, but no snow had denned animals yet. Still, trekking all day as he did, he sometimes felt heated, partly from having to keep the worry under. He also tamped down the word *feverish*. When swooped by a jay, he dove to the ground and cursed himself for a coward, spooked by winged things that bite. Out night hunting, he'd found himself the prey. Two small drops of blood wrenched him loose from life. Folks said he had a month, maybe two, to track down a bezoar more precious than diamonds.

(Continued from previous page) Revelation by James Fowler

In his third week he stood on a height looking east, to where the river ribboned through the dense growth. At first he thought himself a touch wobbly from the climb, but then the ground seemed in motion, rippling in waves like a woman shaking crumbs from a tablecloth. And like waves on the shore, they broke in spray, steamy disgorgings from the depths. He'd heard that the poison did this, made the stricken imagine things, unreal things. For want of a madstone, he might need cross into madness. If so, it was coming on hard, as he now saw trees walking like men in ranks downhill. Not a praying body, he was forced to his knees, and held his head for very sanity. Birds swirled above by the thousands, and in the river below a shape arose to push against the stream. Verses of Scripture drilled into him when young, a chronicle of end times, played out before his astonished gaze. A whole mass of forest to the south simply sank from view. Likewise, his own small fear for his skin that had driven him to this place was swallowed up by a larger, an awe that cauterized all wounds.

The hours and days that followed, racked with slippages and tremblings, showed the world itself convulsed, not him. He would turn home. Most beasts had fled the wreckage. On a distant ridge he even saw a Cherokee band beat a path westward. Somehow he thought a man who lived to tell such a tale would live. Hardly the preaching kind, he could yet bear witness to wonders in the earth vouchsafed a lone wanderer, now set on gaining himself a wife and child.

James Fowler

### Transit

We Goers sit above the Ground Boxed in streamlined Metal— The Places seem to come to us Working Wheel and Pedals.

We lift our Feet from off of Here— And set our Minds on There— The process is reversible To suit the way we fare.

A Life in Transit fills our Eyes— And keeps us on the run— Although we may be driven by The Darkness in the Trunk.

Our daily Spin may whisk us by A Spread of well-kept Lawns— The Road ahead entices us To go—until we're gone.

Elizabeth Perdomo

## Hidalgo County History Lesson

This place has a quiet history, witnessed by bright sub-tropical starlight, a flatbed ocean slow to recede, just stubborn *colichi* soil & temperamental weather, from winter mild to *horno* hot summer dust blasts which blow up across the Mexican desert.

Here, find no deep flashing canyons, no Alamo mission bloodshed, no architectural monuments, no grand sites speaking archeological words.

No stones unturned, just quiet lives of struggle, twisted mesquite, prickly pear thorns grown amid dust blown bi-lingual secrets, homemade salsa & some midnight *rio* crossing sites.

Sorting out a scattered genealogy, spun of impermanent stories, carved like wind into the future, eroded into rangelands & row crops & *arroyos* lined by citrus groves which now fade like seasonal plowed crops.

William Miller

# The Day LBJ Died

He drove a golf cart across his ranch, got out at the cottonwoods.

He looked across the hills and saw a gangly teacher in an adobe school.

And he was good at words taught, numbers added; his giant shadow filled the room ...

That day in Dallas, John's brains on Jackie's suit, was the day he took the oath.

Many said he was a man without feeling.

But what if the Reds launched a strike and only the President knew the codes?

His General said the only way to win a jungle war was to kill more VC than they killed soldiers.

He had two dreams In those last, restless days: (Continued from previous page) The Day LBJ Died by William Miller

stampeding cattle, a wave about to crash over the whole world ....

Then he was here, the ranch, his bad Baines heart.

He saw a little boy on the steps of a country house, dressed as a cowboy.

And that boy waved a cap pistol, silver and black, shot at the deepest, darkest shadows.

William Miller

## Pound's Cage

Two soldiers dragged him through Venice streets to a wire cage.

He was tried, sent to an asylum outside DC; his sentence had

no end. Soon, he liked the routine, meals brought to him, a ream of paper

to write his Cantos. But the famous tried to free him from

his cage; Hem wrote letters to his Congressman.

And in the hold of an army ship, he wrote one line

then more, rolled them like waves in his mind ...

And Venice was still the only city where you didn't need

to be in love; its canals, ancient buildings, were enough. And he

picked words from a golden cage, Chinese words, sprung rhymes.

William Miller

### Onan

"He spilt his seed on the ground."

A young scribe saw the end of it and cried for Yahweh Himself.

And the elders thought of an awful punishment, stones to break his lustful bones.

But the eldest said no. He must live outside the tribe, no bride or lawful seed.

Onan drifted across the desert until he found a cave, half-buried in the sand.

He fell asleep and dreamed he was a prophet:

a great crowd stood in the desert, young men and women.

He preached against the tent peg and the loom, told them to wonder at the stars, the ant's black eye.

(Continued from previous page) Onan by William Miller

And his disciples went in different directions, forgot the sacred scroll ...

Onan got lost, gladly lost, in deserts or city streets, a tribe of one.

"He spilt his seed on the ground."

Robert Gregory

## Aliens

Suspended in the humid air that's dense and motionless the aliens come floating in silence shining turning rising moving in deep confidence above the cars and sidewalks, dish antennas, power lines, hundreds and hundreds drifting through the ordinary streets of Our Oblivion as tiny wispy shreds of some fragmented cloud. The cottonwoods down by the river running green today for once instead of chocolate brown have shed their seed, pushed it all away from home to look for places where the water runs up near the surface, as they do and have been doing for a thousand years or so.

They need to. They feed the Clouded Border and the Purple Thorn, and Svensson's Copper Underwing, they feed the Gray Dagger and the Brick, the Common Quaker and the Poplar Kitten, the Darling Underwing, the Hebrew Character, the Viceroy and the Nutmeg, the Pandora Pinemoth and the Twin-Spotted Sphinx, and also their amateur admirers, the aliens who should be adding something to their resumes but saw and were bedazzled and so never found their way back home to Normal.

Chloe Hanson

### White Dwarf

"We are made of star stuff." - Carl Sagan

I was formed in a glittering embrace slid into life white, ignited.

Filled skin and skull with things raw and red, like carrion on a highway.

Burned too hot like a black July macadam, uncomfortable against anything that grazed me, bare.

Turned, timid from the glare of my Red Giant father, lived in fear of becoming his florid reflection.

Dimmed my light, sure that he would find some fault in my insignificant supernova.

Only giants die with more than a sigh, and what am I but a White Dwarf in a cosmos of glittering embraces?

I pray I may fall into myself, small and quiet, and let the world know me in my sparkling death.

Chloe Hanson

## Life of the Goddess

Perhaps your body was not a body at all but an ectoplasmic layer of spiritskin over spiritbones light and hollow, like a bird's, and perhaps

you watched those first bodies crawl from the ocean that was the world to the first green places, perhaps they were pink and soft, buoyed up on the backs of great oysters nestled like pearls.

Perhaps you saw them break like brittle shells, white bones sharp and delicate pushing through skin and sinew, painted red, and you showed yourself to them, so that you too could feel, could be.

Perhaps they carved your likeness in marble, perhaps they fashioned it from the cleaned carcasses of their kills. When they gave their children to you run through with swords of bronze and steel, perhaps you grew stronger, and wished you had not.

When they forgot your name, forgot to rechristen you, forgot the stories and the idols, the crumbling remnants of your image, perhaps you returned to the ocean they once crawled from and let yourself be carried off, white foam on the water.

Chloe Hanson

## Thanatophobia

The water bleeds into the jetty, grey everything seems to be that color here save for the limbs of creatures on display: cephalothorax, pincers in the wier. I fill my pockets with the polished homes that draped grey, writhing bodies like fine frocks like them I have no strong and straight backbone and fear the crashing water's aftershock. For I am sunbleached, polished, torn apart a human crustacean specimen: look there, radius, ulna, sacrum chart the path of a fainthearted denizen and I tremble to know we are the same: a catalog of useless proper names.

Suchoon Mo

# **Christmas Is Coming**

in the post office a man stands in the waiting line holding a cardboard box christmas is coming

in the airport a woman stands in the boarding line holding a baby christmas is coming

I am holding nothing where do I stand? christmas is coming

Suchoon Mo

### Now Is Now

what time is it? a wrong question

time is not about what time is about when

when time is it? it is now

when is now? now is now

## As Enfolded in a Blanket

"You are just a human being, afraid, weeping under that blanket, but there is a great space within you to be filled with that love. All of nature can fit in there" - Lame Deer

Enfolded in dearth until death, great grandparents once cartwheeled among the cycles that spun heavens and earth: Unity dizzied with a comfort.

Last Deer engages in hand-to-mouth combat on a reservation against cyborgs who beat from dirt inroads for impulse.

The mechanical consumer-fetish demands from the inspirable, the brand new (or facsimile) for closet, attic, curb. A computed-wardrobe repertoire, authenticity stages, technology pinching to invent cheeks.

Geronimo, the cannon ball, will splash for generations to kingdom come, the hole in the country side, wallpapered for mantels.

The broad-loomed earth absorbs also, missing the mark, missing the people fearless to face the presentation by the sun, moon, and doom.

#### Parts Of A Windmill

When the ink runs out I write with my lungs, my teeth, DNA scraped from the roof of my mouth—I write with my bruised fingertips, a smudge of grape jelly, a smudge of peanut butter, flowers pressed between the covers of a book and book itself, recycling the wonder, the sunburned pages, the holy writ and when the ink runs out the salmon know it is time to come home, lay their eggs and die, 2,500 miles even, hero no hero, martyr for the race, for the love of God, for grizzlies, for sky and atmosphere, no country but all country, terra firma sublime and every water way, so even my tears I write with when the ink runs out, the black liquor with which men and women write, as Johnson once said—and when the ink runs out and the thermometer plunges to -2 and there is no other refuge, no lighter fluid, no paint or spackling material, no ooze, no lily pad, I write with my ear lobes, those funny little plugs and I write with whatever is close to hand, wood pile, stack of newspapers, credit card receipts even, torn envelopes, the feathers of birds found on a crumbling sidewalk, write with tilt and lean of feeling, write with Emily Dickinson's warm breath on my neck as she whispers "Go, go, little quakling"—and I write for you, for me, for no one, for my nieces, my nephews, for the stars, the trees, the sudden wind and the constant wind and when the ink runs dry and the ink is no more, I have vast resources of inner ink called blood and artery, diastole and systole, dilating, through, through, then contracting, holding on before letting go over and over again and then the writing is raw but true, the writing partakes of no overriding Idea but life itself and turning windmill about to fly off its noggin, parts of a windmill trembling, shaking, rocked to its alacrity core center, cab grinder, iron eyebolt, shuttered opening, hopper chute and all things writing and all things written, courting the ink of ages and courting the birth of stars in semaphore astonishment and delight and blown away astronomer standing out with Walt under the naked and shimmering sky and when the ink runs out, when it comes up short, when a shake of the nib produces no juice, no mojo, no little wonder of phrase or feeling, no moan, no whimper, no shout, no breathless cry then I write with a dose of Osip's stolen air and we breathe together and breathe as one writing poem, poem, prayer, hymnal, beauty's outrage, wild flames streaking as we burn down Icarus-like from a rainbow sky shot through with the smoke of our souls, our contrails and trailing vapors disappearing in a delirious goodbye.

#### **Ginger Root**

My hands are tired and cramped from the constant and repetitive movement of chopping and cutting and slicing roots into the tiniest pieces of what was once whole, beautiful, and golden. Every day, a portion of my time comprises of chopping up this golden root – ginger – and boiling it gently in a giant steaming vat. It stings my eyes, which is more pleasurable than the sharp sting of a sliced onion, fills my nostrils, and clears my head. It gives me movement and rising heat within my physical and my mental body, which perhaps helps to counteract the downfalls of my naturally quiet demeanor.

I take this mixture of boiled chopped ginger root and I mix it with lemon juice, crushed garlic, and copious amounts of honey. Some ask me, "Aryahi, why do you chop all this ginger, when you could just as easily grate it all with a nice steel cheese grater?" The truth is, I think I actually enjoy that part of my day where all I have to focus on is the repetitive motion of chopping. It allows me time to think. Who exactly am I making this tea for? Why am I chopping, who and what will my chopping help? Perhaps the intense thinking and intention that occurs during my chopping is the reason that people always come back for more of this tea, when the iciness cuts our throats and the cold slips in through the seams of even our warmest clothes. Perhaps the intentions I put out are the reasons why I do have a place to sleep, a warm blanket, clothes, and food and tea in my cupboard while so many other people do not.

I set my knife down, and run my tired hands underneath the warm water that runs out of the slightly loose faucet, luxuriating in the relaxing cleanliness that spreads down my fingers. My hands are what I love most about my body. They are, in my opinion, beautiful – the skin is soft, my fingers are elegant and straight and have the sensitive ability to create the previously uncreated. I know that eventually my hands will also be like a map, with crisscrossing lines like rivers and wrinkles like mountains. Part of me can't wait for that day, and part of me is scared. I don't want to end up like my grandmother. I suppose I've already escaped that fate, the fate of always remaining the same (same person, same place, same life, same love), but I always remember how I'm still young, and sameness can still be established in this new, "not-same" place. Am I just continuing that lineage of sameness by working all winter to recreate, again and again, my grandmother's age-old healing tea recipe, by chopping ginger for so long every day?

I remember my grandmother's hands from when I was a child, those maplike hands. I remember them chopping ginger into tiny pieces, much smaller than I'll ever be able to achieve. I remember the striking aromatic quality of the root, how it pierced the mountainous air, seeming to cleanse our breath. I remember how cold it was; how I copied the way my grandmother wrapped her shawl around her shoulders. "Why are you always the one to make the tea?" I asked my grandmother, my young fingers running themselves over the fascinating shapes of spices, herbs, and roots.

"I'm the one who knows how," my grandmother replied. "It's my duty. As I grow older, I cannot provide through work and I cannot create new life, but I can do something that the younger members of the family cannot – I can heal."

"Is that what the tea is for?"

"For healing? Yes. The magic of the roots and herbs and the spices are extracted by the moving and healing qualities of the water, and it all melds together and goes into our bodies and works to wash out what we don't want and set the space for what we do want."

I remember thinking that my grandmother was amazing, that I wanted to be just like her when I grew up, that I wanted to go through life's journey with her guidance and input, *always*. That was until she left, and continued on the bigger journey, the bigger cycle, and everything that she taught me and showed me became too painful. I began to think of her as a stuck, stagnant person. In my head, she wasn't the wise, powerful woman of my childhood; she was a rural girl who was never given opportunity, who never used her voice. She accepted what was given to her without choice and called it love, without a fight. I didn't want to be like that. I wanted to escape and I wanted to do bigger things. I wanted to change the world and myself, I wanted to forget where I was born and raised.

The only thing about my grandmother that I can think of without pain are her hands chopping ginger, and the taste of her tea spreading warmth all the way to the tips of my toes.

That's why I'm here now, supposedly furthering my education, when really all I'm doing is making healing tea from my grandmother's recipe and giving it to those who need it in the wintertime. Here it's as cold as it was in my place of birth and childhood, though I can just barely see the snow-capped mountains in the distance. The people here needed the warmth and movement of ginger just as much as my family did back home, and I needed to escape the place of my family, of my grandmother, of my past – I needed to start over. But I find that in my motions of ginger chopping, I'm still back where I started. I'm still with my grandmother – it's as if her hands are my own. Perhaps it's time for me to come to terms with the fact that my grandmother was a stronger person than I will be in my entire life, that she was the wisest and most healing person I've known or can ever hope to know.

I turn the faucet off and shake the water off my hands, reach into the bucket by my feet to get another whole root, and begin to chop again.

#### **Mountain Mists**

I come from the place of revered poetry, the place of mysticism in language and everyday life. The mountains of my home are shrouded in mist, between their peaks and within their mists resides the panacea for the deep pain and destruction that has ravaged this place throughout the world's history.

Peshawar, Pakistan, where the world meets. Where terrorism collides with an ancient and accepting mystic tradition. This city is just a step away from the mountain road that takes you to the tiny area where Afghanistan and Pakistan meet, two nations so close in terms of distance yet so far in terms of culture, separated by the fearsome Hindu Kush. The dust of these crowded streets covers my feet and sinks into my clothes; the dust of this land cleanses me for prayer when there is no water.

I am not alone in this feeling of deep rootedness in this land, and I am not alone in the anguish I feel when I witness and hear about the pain and hurt that occurs here. When my family heard about what happened at the shrine of Abdul Shakoor Malang Baba, a silence descended onto our home. Though I was much younger back then, I knew that it would only get worse from then on. A year ago, when the school was attacked, I could not sit still until my father came home safely with my younger sister. I cried for what had happened, and what could happen in the future. I felt helpless. There was nothing I could do, so I prayed – harder than I ever had before.

I am so very far from that place now, in terms of physical geography. In terms of my mental geography, I am still there. As I walk the new, unfamiliar, and straight streets of this new place, I am actually walking the winding and old streets of my own city. I look for inspiration in this new place, new things to express in language and words and writing, but I find myself always going back to my home.

My home needs healing. I need to help this healing. I need to go back to those mountains, I need to search through their dust and their mist and bring their healing powers to the rest of the world. The dust of my home and the dust of my mind are inseparable. I am inseparable from those mountains, that mountain mist, that source of all that could heal my country and myself.

#### The Lake House

When Marie first told Joanna about the lake house, she tried to play it off as no big deal. "It's nothing fancy," Marie said, but Joanna, whose family owned zero waterfront properties, thought its mere existence was fancy, and for two months they spent nearly every weekend there.

Marie's family didn't use it anymore. Most of them were old, pickled and bitter from years of vodka and feuding. Each aunt and uncle owned a share but no one could agree on repairs or improvements so the house remained much as it had in its 1970s glory days. It had shag carpet, wood paneling, and a denim couch.

Marie and Joanna drove up most Fridays after work, moving in a weekend's worth of provisions. Cheeses. Baguettes. Salamis. Fruits for sangria. It was all carried down steep rock steps slippery with pine needles.

They did little of consequence those weekends. They drank late into the night and slept until noon. During the day they sunned themselves on the dock or took the kayaks for a paddle. At sunset they mixed gin and tonics and took the boat for a cocktail cruise around the perimeter of the lake, waving to everyone they passed.

Marie's boyfriend, Brent, often came by after a shift bartending at Grover's, and every now and again he'd bring his friend Owen, who worked out back in the dish room and thus arrived smelling chemically clean with hair hanging in damp curls against his forehead.

Joanna loved Owen. She loved his tattoos and the way he rolled his cigarettes. She loved the times he would dig out the communal guitar from behind the denim couch and make up songs about the type of night they were having: "Another G&T for Me" or "Spiders in the Kayak" or "Why Won't That Loon Shut the Fuck Up?"

But Joanna wasn't the only one who loved Owen. Marie did too, and she dashed to reapply makeup whenever he came over—a fact that struck Joanna as patently unfair because Marie was already the prettier of the two girls, though she worked hard for it.

Brent was a good boyfriend to her—funny and patient and affectionate—but Marie had the habit of carrying on emotional affairs directly in front of him. She never sent men away when they hit on her at bars, and she gleefully took phone calls from them for weeks afterward until they realized they were wasting their time.

Once Marie made a set of CDs for a boy she slept with in high school. She titled it *Ethereal Love*, *Volumes 1-5*. The songs were slow and whispery, and after the guy listened to them they spent hours on the phone discussing how those songs made them feel, how they reminded them of the old days. All this while Brent sat next to Marie on the couch, playing a video game and trying not to look stricken.

Joanna loved Marie, but all this made her hate her a little too.

But that summer at the lake it was mostly love. They sipped sangria as the sun went down and curled together on the couch to watch movies. They danced to salsa music. They ignored thunderstorms and went in the water anyway, diving as electricity crackled above them, rattling their teeth.

"If we're about to die," Marie shouted, "I like that we're going to die together!"

But then one weekend Marie fell asleep early on the couch. Brent carried her upstairs to bed, leaving Owen and Joanna alone. They took the remnants of the night's sangria down to the dock and dipped their feet

in the water. They talked about his job—he loved it, despite its bad hours and filth—and her job—an entry-level insurance position she was desperate to transcend—and they talked about bands they loved, shows they'd seen, pets they'd owned.

At a lull in the conversation, Owen cleared his throat loudly. The tattoos on his hands—the words *sacred* and *profane*—glowed in the moonlight.

"I think about you a lot," Owen said. He kissed her then, and they kept kissing until morning kayakers paddled past with fishing poles sprouting from their boats.

"Good morning!" the kayakers called, waving.

"It is the *best* morning!" Owen shouted and Joanna turned into his shoulder, blushing.

And all the while, Marie slept soundly upstairs, certain everything she wanted would be hers, just like always.



The end came quickly after that.

The next Friday Owen and Joanna rode to the lake house together. They'd spent the week talking late at night, when Owen came home. Each morning Joanna went to work bleary-eyed and half-asleep but marveling at how awake she felt, how suddenly aware she was of her life and the shapes it could take.

They made plans to show up together and tell Marie and Brent what was happening—"What *is* happening?" Joanna asked, to which Owen responded, "We're becoming boyfriend and girlfriend," and Joanna nearly fainted—but they hadn't expected anyone would be unhappy about the news.

Joanna pulled down the driveway while Marie was unloading a crate of food. Marie waved and smiled, but when Owen stepped into view her smile collapsed.

Brent came out of the house whistling then cut the sound abruptly. "Well, I didn't see this coming," he said. He strode over to shake Owen's hand and pat Joanna's back. "Mazel toy," he said.

Marie set the crate at her feet. "I brought burgers," she said and went inside.

She sulked the whole night. Joanna turned up salsa music, and Marie snapped it off. Owen picked up the guitar to sing "Where the Hell Is the Corkscrew?"—composed the week before when they'd had to improvise with pliers and a bolt—and Marie stomped down to the dock. They called to her half an hour later, told her dinner was ready, but she pretended not to hear them though their voices carried clear across the lake.

After dinner, Brent refilled drinks and gazed down at Marie, who sat on the edge of the dock, chin resting on her knees. "I should probably go out there," he said.

Joanna nodded. "I think that's what she wants."

"Oh, don't I know it," he said, voice warm and sad from whiskey.

After Brent left, Joanna and Owen could hear the stifled hiss of an argument rolling back from the dock.

"Is this about me?" Owen asked.

Joanna refilled his glass. "It's not about you," she said, which was mostly true. What was going on was only

a little about Owen and a lot about something else entirely. She wasn't sure she could really explain it. Sometimes things between girlfriends happened this way; the possibility for disaster always lurked. And Joanna had felt it for weeks now, a heaviness pressing at the edges of each weekend. The girls laughing and shrieking and diving into the water—it had seemed fun and free and beautiful, but at the same time impossible to maintain. How could anyone expect it to last forever?



The next morning, Marie would not come out of her room. Brent cooked all her favorites, but still she would not come.

Joanna and Owen quietly packed their bags after breakfast and came downstairs to find Brent staring out the window at a canoe cutting across the lake.

"We're going to get out of your hair," Joanna said. Idly, she swept crumbs from the counter and deposited them in the sink.

Brent's face was grim. "What can I say?" he asked. "I'm so sorry."

Joanna squeezed his arm. Owen shook his hand. "See you at work," he said.

Brent nodded and poured himself a cup of coffee.

Later, when people asked after Marie—where she was and why they hadn't seen her for such a long time— Joanna couldn't quite figure what to tell. It sounded disloyal to say it was one of those things that could happen to women friends; she felt like a traitor to the sisterhood. But it was true. Sometimes wanting got in the way. Or was it something else? What was the thing now gathering in the pit of Joanna's stomach as she tried to memorize every part of the summer? The sun in the pines. The boozy boat rides. The musty, unloved smell of the house. Marie, beautiful and undone, slicing into the water as lightning came down around them. It felt like nostalgia, but surely it was too soon for that.

#### Starlings at Midnight

We were walking along the Mississippi when she told me about the job. I knew something was on her mind because of how she stared at the water, bit her lip, and darted her eyes up and down the shore. That face was full of thought, and I was just waiting for the levee to break. To be honest, I thought she was going to dump me. And then she told me how a guy in one of her business classes worked in a building that needed a nighttime security guard. It was only a matter of time before she came to me with something like this, I guess.

"Just promise me you'll try," she said.

"I will," I said, because I could tell what it meant to her. She was breathing fast, like bringing it up might start a fight. But her eyes softened when I said I'd try.

At home that night, I flexed in front of the mirror while she was in the shower. She was my girlfriend, so she was obligated to tell me how strong I was and how safe I made her feel. But if we're being honest here—I couldn't kid myself, I was in no shape to guard anything. My arms were thin enough to reach in that crack between the fridge and counter whenever she dropped her keys, and I hadn't gained a pound all through college. She came back in, wearing nothing but a towel, and I pretended to be looking at the painting on the wall, near the mirror, instead of my own weak muscles. She said she liked that one, but it was just another landscape with buildings and cars. This was what I'd been doing instead of applying for jobs after graduation.

She set up the interview the next day in class and came home to tell me it would be that night.

"Such short notice?" I said. "I'm not prepared."

"It's just a formality," she said. "No big deal."

So I showered and shaved and left the paints and canvas where they were, right in front of the couch. I had been working on a study of the TV, while watching a documentary about an indigenous African tribe. I can't remember which tribe it was. They seemed to live pretty comfortably, and had a communal system for sharing milk and crops throughout their numbers. Of course, they worshipped a sky god, and considered the bark of a particular tree a symbol of fertility, so their rainmaker was made to eat dangerous amounts of this bark in times of drought. The tribesmen cheered as the rainmaker chewed and grimaced. The cameraman, I remember, set his equipment on a rock and accepted a piece of the bark, too; it wasn't in his mouth more than a few seconds before he spit the woodchip out, covered in blood. Tribesmen jeered and hollered as the narrator explained that the rainmaker's mouth was callused from years of experience.

The job was in a building downtown, not far from our apartment, and I interviewed with the property manager. He showed me crime statistics within a few-mile radius as proof of the job's low-risk status. He also mentioned how close I lived, and that I could walk there each night. She must have told the guy in her class that we lived in the area, and he probably relayed the message.

"You'll just have to do rounds," he said. "It's a peace-of-mind kind of thing for the businesses, really. Our last guard just retired after 30 years, conflict-free." I think he could tell I had reservations about the position. Not that I had much of a choice in what job I took at that point. I'd sold a couple of landscapes—mostly to friends, but hadn't really brought in any income. So I caved and signed papers after letting the manager talk about the property for a few more minutes. I started work that night, which was a surprise. I hadn't come ready for that, really. Basically, I worked from sunset to sunrise. I was allowed to bring food, energy drinks, books, whatever, as long as I did hourly rounds and regularly monitored the footage from the security cameras. He gave me a ring with a few labeled keys on it and a can of pepper spray and a whistle, said he'd be back in the morning to see how my first night went, and left me there to guard the building. My first night was kind of rough because I didn't have any food or anything, so I had to live off water alone. The kitchen was nice, and I was tempted to steal food from the fridge, but thought that might not look so good on my first night. If I had a dollar on me, I could've bought something from one of the vending machines, but I didn't even have that.

Weeks passed like this. A small portion of my checks went to buying food to keep me going through the night. Otherwise, I helped pay rent and sometimes took her out for lunch. I hadn't really noticed the tension before I got the job. Or, maybe I had, but didn't want to admit it. Sometimes, back when I was painting the landscapes, I had a feeling like she was upset, or she might be on the verge of leaving me; overall, though, I really felt like she was on my side. After taking the job, I stopped painting. At the time, it felt like a big deal, but I started to think maybe the painting was just something I had to get out of my system—like a cleansing thing. But what I was trying to say was, things were a lot better after I started working. She was happier, and I guess that made me happy, too.

I got myself into a sort of routine at the job. The property manager was right: it was basically a peace-ofmind thing. I hadn't seen a single person pass the building on the security cameras, and on my rounds everything was normal as usual. I would make a few rounds right around sunset. This was early summer now—she finished that business class with good marks—and the sunset came pretty late. So I would get to work around 7 and do a walkthrough of the entire building. When it grew dark, I would go around again, sort of checking, but a lot less carefully. Then I went outside to secure the front of the property. This was around 8:30 or 9, and I ate dinner on the marble steps. It was a peaceful kind of solitude; sitting there in the still, empty night.

We spent weekends together, and I usually got to see her for a few minutes after she got off and before I left for work. Sure, it would have been nice to spend more time together; but sometimes I think more time would've messed things up. I slept most of the day, so I could be awake at night. When she got home, she was tired and ready to kick back. Our schedules just didn't mesh.

On this particular night, after eating dinner, I went back in and opened an energy drink. It was the kind of hot summer night where you think the clouds are going to melt and flood the streets. In my little basement room, I kicked back and watched the monitors. Nights like these were nice because the moonlight was so bright between passing clouds, I could make out the shapes of the office furniture onscreen without much help from the night-vision lens. I had bought a couple of paperbacks a while back, and I was thinking about starting one. But I couldn't stop thinking about those paintings I had done. It wasn't so much that I missed doing them, though; I wondered more why I had painted those landscapes at all. They were exclusively of buildings—similar to the one I was in: lacking in any sort of depth or meaning. I glanced at the paperbacks and thought about how books are supposed to have deeper meanings. This is a symbol for that, et cetera. Maybe that was what my paintings lacked. Maybe working inside a building would give me a sense of what meaning or symbolism could be expressed through painting one. Then I could go on to become an artist later in life. Plenty of people had gone that route, I thought.

It was 11:00. Since I hadn't kept up very well on rounds, I jumped up and got to work. I took the stairs from floor to floor, ten flights, and checked each hall. The building wasn't enormous, but it was a tall order for one man to do all this. That's why I usually broke it into segments, checking even-numbered floors one hour, and odd the next, throughout the night. This time, I took the whole building in one big sweep. Everything checked out.

In my haste, I'd forgotten the pepper spray and whistle. Despite the safety of the area, I wanted to retrieve those before checking outside. There was always the chance of a freak accident—some madman wandering across my path, and I didn't want to be caught unprepared if I could help it. So I pocketed the pepper spray and hung the whistle from my neck. On the monitor displaying the building's entrance, something seemed different. The resolution on that screen wasn't great in general, which was why I had to physically go out there to do my checks, but it was clear enough to see that there was something littering the ground beyond those grand marble stairs. They were just grey-black shapes on the tiny screen.

My imagination carried me to the entrance. Inside, there was a small fountain made of marble similar to that outside. It was someone's job to shut the water off each night after the businesses closed, and I wondered who did that. The doors were tall—maybe twice my height, and made entirely of glass. As I pushed one open, the litter outside started coming into focus.

That unmistakable sound of rustling feathers hit me like a wall. The surveillance cameras failed to capture the sheen on the birds' wings and backs; or maybe my eyes were failing me from sleep deprivation. But there was no doubt about what stared back at me as I stood atop those steps, mouth agape. There were countless starlings packing the sidewalk and street, the moon's glow reflecting off their tinted feathers from its apex. I shut my eyes, I guess in shock. When I say the birds packed the street, I mean they were crowded wing-to-wing. There had to be hundreds of them, and each bird's feathers glowed with color, making it look like a flock in itself.

How I knew they were starlings was, when I finally opened my eyes, they started to sing. I remember hearing somewhere that these birds could mimic sounds from their surroundings. What followed was a chorus of car alarms and screaming telephones, ringing through the street. I can't explain why the birds were out at night, but it seemed as though all their speckled eyes were glaring into mine. It was an awful sound. The birds were beautiful, absolutely; but their cries sounded like something from a worse part of town, where alarms and sirens sang through the night. It did not belong here.

Their songs died off gradually. The noise grew faint, then faded into a hollow silence. With a shudder of wings, the birds took flight, all at once, and seemed to disappear into the sky. My ears were still packed with those familiar sounds, made so foreign by all of those blue and orange and black birds.

When she came home from her internship the next night and I was sitting on the couch, painting over one of my old landscapes, working the little birds in with dabs of blue-black acrylic and specks of blood orange for the eyes, well past when I should've left for work, she froze.

"You're doing this again?" she asked.

And in that moment, I thought her eyes resembled the birds' eyes. I didn't tell her what I'd seen. I turned back to my painting to capture that look, that sentiment her eyes expressed.

"You know you're late for work."

But work could wait. The image, the tension in that moment where one great avian heart trembled in the midnight street, was immediate. It was with me, desperate to get out.

"You said you'd try," she said. My ears rang then, as they had the night before, and I heard the hundred things she may have said next, about how it was over and I was unfair and unrealistic; but still the moment felt beautiful in its own right, as some moments are bound to feel.

#### Coupvray

Jacob and Evelyn were going to France, finally, really, *vraiment*. Not to Paris but to Coupvray, the little village an hour east of Paris, where Louis Braille was born, and where he was buried--part of him, anyway.

Jacob had wanted to make the pilgrimage ever since reading about it in the back of the new Louis Braille biography, which included an appendix with a map and directions to the exact location of the little cemetery in Coupvray where the grave--practically a shrine--was situated. Thousands of blind people every year made the pilgrimage to pay their respects and give thanks, often leaving behind little brailled notes and letters and poems and prayers--and hundreds of brailled business cards--a veritable garden of braille growing all around the gravesite in piles of stippled white paper

Evelyn had studied French in high school and could still remember a few words and phrases, such as *vraiment* and *pas du tout* and *s'il vous plait* and *ou se trouve*. She had dug up her old French book and was going over it now on the sofa next to Jacob, their suitcases huddled by the door, an hour before departing for the airport.

They would have loved to meet Braille back in the day, and to pick his brain about his eponymous code, if only they were alive back then, or if only Braille were alive today, which, in a sense, he was, or at least that's how it felt to Jacob and Evelyn when they read--it felt like they were in touch with Louis Braille himself. Or part of him, anyway.

The part of Louis Braille that was buried in the grave at Coupvray were his hands. Only his hands. They had been separated from the rest of him when the people of Coupvray and the bigwigs from Paris got into a tug of war over his remains, some 100 years after his death. According to the new biography, when Braille died in 1852 his system of raised dots hadn't quite caught on yet. In fact, it had been flatly rejected and even banned by the benighted sighted teachers and administrators at the school for the blind in Paris where Louis had been a student and also, later, a teacher. That's why almost no one was using braille when Braille died, and so he was buried, in obscurity, in the village where he was born, where the villagers knew him and loved him and would remember him always.

But it wasn't long before the dots began to spread, surreptitiously at first, then more openly, more boldly, among the blind teachers and students and graduates of the school for the blind who loved the dots and used them and believed in them and could understand them better than the cumbersome embossed print letters that were in use at the time. And pretty soon the code of dots caught on like wildfire, all across France, then Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas, and it wasn't long before blind people all over the world were reading braille and calling Louis Braille the Father of Literacy. And so a hundred years later, in 1952, when the bigwigs came down from Paris and tried to talk the village elders of Coupvray into disinterring Louis and bringing him up to Paris where he could

be properly buried in the Pantheon among "the great and famous dead of France," the village elders would have none of it. They told the bigwigs where to go. "And the French have some very colorful ways of telling you where to go," said Evelyn, fingering her French book on the sofa.

But the bigwigs were adamant; they wanted him moved up to Paris. They cajoled and pleaded and begged, and finally they reached a compromise with the village elders of Coupvray: Braille's hands would remain in Coupvray, because they were the vessels, the vehicles--the hands that had imparted to the hands of blind people all over the world a perfected means of reading and writing--and the rest of him would be shipped up to Paris and buried with great pomp and ceremony in the bowels of the Pantheon, sans hands.

"*Coupe* means 'cut' in French," said Evelyn, seemingly apropos of nothing. Jacob was reading the directions to Coupvray one last time on the sofa beside her. "The verb form is *couper*," she said, "which means to 'cut off'. And since *vrai* means 'real', I wonder if Coupvray means 'really cut off'. As in, "they *really cut off* his hands.""

"I don't see how that could be," said Jacob, reaching over to take a look at Evelyn's French book, his finger lingering briefly on the conjugation of *couper*. "Chronologically, I mean. The village was called Coupvray long before they cut off his hands. So the name couldn't be derived from that, now could it?"

"I'm not saying the name is derived from it," said Evelyn, shaking her head back and forth, back and forth, in negation, or disagreement, or maybe just for the sheer pleasure of getting the energy out that couldn't get out through her eyes. "I'm saying it foreshadows it."

"That's a creepy thought," said Jacob, closing the Braille biography and gingerly placing it on the pillow beside him. The suitcases bulged by the door. Outside, a car horn bleated its blunt editorial.

Evelyn closed her French book, reached for Jacob's hands and held them in hers while she spoke. "It IS creepy. And it's barbaric, cutting off his hands like that, don't you think? Even though he'd been dead for a hundred years. What is it with those French? First they invent the guillotine. Then they cut off the hands of Louis Braille. Liberty, equality, fraternity. And mutilation."

Jacob gave a little laugh. Evelyn laughed, too. And then they kissed. And the kiss resembled two singleengine planes coming in for a landing with zero visibility, a bit of turbulence as they briefly navigated the air currents and crosswinds that separated their faces, then touched down successfully with a soft bump, coming to a complete stop, which they held for a long time, like a lost suitcase the hands had believed they would never see again. Then, together, they rose from the couch, opened their folding canes, and set off for France.

Bruce Wise

### In Paris With Joe

by U. Carew Delibes

I was once in the city of love. I walked down the Champs-Elysées. I went all the way to the Arc de Triomphe without a cell phone.

I also went into the Louvre, ablazoned in millions of rimmed suns bursting vermilions and crimsons reminding me now of the giclées of Leonid Afremov.

I went over too to the Centre Georges Pompidou with its exoskeleton of brightly coloured tubes: red, yellow, green and blue.

At Les Invalides, you went straight for Napoleon's Tomb. I still remember the room, colossal, and filled with my gloom and your awe,

like Cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris, grand and vast, such an enormity. I sat in it a minute... It seamed an eternity.

I walked to La tour Eiffel, and leaning on the iron lattice on the Champ de Mars, I fell under the spell of Marc Chagall and Guy de Maupassant.

(Continued from previous page) In Paris with Joe by Bruce Wise

You went to the Basilica, Sacré-Couer, on Montmartre's curve, while I sat in a Station of the Metro, waiting, on a cold, hard, gray bench in *la réalité ciment*,

and later that night, amidst a rainbow of light, after exquisite champagne, I was mugged in Pigalle, my train ticket back to Heilbronn stolen.

## The Man at the End of His Journey

by Wu "Sacred Bee" Li

I never wanted *then* to take *this* journey, but I'm here; and yet what other route would I have taken—far, or near? When I was young—much younger—I would toss my words away; I'd no desire to keep them. Life was for living. Hey! All else was false. O, I was sure of that. I knew that. Why? I turned the dial of the microwave. Cook it on high. But now that I am here. I can't go back, nor do I wish for what will never happen. I am glad. I hear a shih... that comes down from the mountains gleaming in the brilliant sun. Where have I been? Where am I going? O, what have I done?

photo by Brian Michael Barbeito

