

Fall 2010

WILD GOOSE POETRY REVIEW, FALL 2010

Writing Way Out West

Most people who pay any attention to writing in NC are aware of vibrant writing communities in the Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill area (thanks to multiple universities and the NC Writers' Network), in Wilmington (thanks to UNCW), in Greensboro (thanks to UNCG), in Charlotte (thanks to Main Street Rag), in Asheville (thanks to Malaprops), and even here in Hickory (thanks to Poetry Hickory, Poetry Lincolnton, and Lenoir Rhyne's In Their Own Words series), but farther out even than Asheville there is another vibrant writing community spearheaded by the NC Writers' Network NetWest.

This group includes writers from the 8 NC counties west of Asheville, but also draws participants from bordering counties in GA, TN, and SC. Key figures in the group include writing fixtures, such as Coffee with the Poets and Writers Circle Founder Glenda Beall, John C. Campbell Folk School Writing Coordinator Nancy Simpson, former NC Poet Laureate Kay Byer, Young Harris College Instructor Janice Townley Moore, and Your Daily Poem blogger Jayne Jaudon Ferrer, as well as "up and coming" writers like Rosemary Royster and Karen Holmes, among others.

Just a few highlights of the group's activities would include Coffee with the Poets at Phillips and Lloyd Bookshop in Hayesville and City Lights Books in Sylva; Mountain Writers meetings at Blue Ridge Books in Waynesville; the Netwest Poetry Group meetings at Tri-County College in Murphy; Writers Night Out at Young Harris College; the Writers Circle Workshops in Hayesville; and regular weekly creative writing workshops at the John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown.

Now, under the capable editorship of Nancy Simpson, the group has gathered forces in an anthology of stories, essays, and poems by writers living in and inspired by the Southern Appalachian Mountains. The anthology is called Echoes Across the Blue Ridge and has been published by Winding Path Publishing.

I am honored to include in this issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review a special section dedicated to and featuring new work by poets from Echoes Across the Blue Ridge. That section begins with a review of the anthology, which is followed by poems from 10 of the writers included in its pages. I hope you enjoy this special section and all of the poems and reviews in the Fall 2010 issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review, and please never underestimate how much the writers enjoy the discussions you begin by leaving a comment after their poems.

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Rae Spencer
A CROW, FOR ENDINGS

Tool user, problem solver, raucous
Riot of feather and roost
Claw and call

Calm morning split by the caw
As raiders probe for careless
Garbage, rob the songster's nest
Or mob unwary hawks

Graced with mischief and a mocking
Tongue, inquisitive eye and quick
Invitation to speculation

That the fish thief, scavenger ghost
Harbinger bird flocked by the murder
Might turn graveyard host or guide
For any fresh spirit, lost without their flesh

Author's Comment: This poem's title is taken from a poem, "Aviary", which I wrote some time back. "Aviary" explored the use of birds as metaphor. The birds stayed with me, demanding more attention and space than I allowed them in the original work. Eventually each bird (or pair of birds) matured into an individual poem.

Bio: Rae Spencer is a writer and veterinarian living in Virginia. Her poetry has been published in Grey Sparrow Journal, vox poetica, The Glass Coin, Sliver of Stone, The Foundling Review, and elsewhere. In 2009, she received a Pushcart Prize nomination.

Helen Losse
BEYOND CHILDHOOD

*I wish I was little again,
when the hardest choice
was picking a crayon.*

— A Facebook Group

Red fire. Purple shadow.
The orange sun. A yellow bird.
Complexity of choice becomes
a multi-colored word phrase.

Outside after snow,
trees blossom in white and pink.
Grass grows by the driveway.
As I bend to touch green blades,
the back of my hand brushes
violets, so I ask, "What color is
joy?" Silence is invisible
but closest to deep-ocean blue.

Some words like hands
must be kept to oneself.
But if I use my outside voice,
will a rainbow appear?

Bio: Helen Losse is the author of 4 collections of poetry, including her most recent, *Better with Friends*. She is Poetry Editor of *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature* and lives in Winston-Salem, NC.

Douglas Ann McHargue
CLEOPATRA OF THE CATAWBA

Her back a young tall column
and the raft a vinyl barge
the woman reigns,
the boy paddles up river,
photo-shooting spiders.

Camera strapped to her chest
she holds her head regally
but stiff as Egyptian drawings,
Cleopatra exploring small beasts' worlds,
comparing their web to hers.

The boy is movement
his muscles pushing the raft
but silent as Cleopatra's slave
who thinks if he throws down the oar
and dives in, how he will
open the waters.

Bio: Douglas McHargue is a poet living in Statesville, NC.

Harry Calhoun
THE NEXT POEM

You fell asleep in front of the TV
and when you woke after
I had made next morning's coffee.

You started awake and pointed
at the TV and asked me where
the next poem was coming from.

And I said, "I'm not sure what you mean,"
because you so often talk in your sleep.
But I'm pretty sure the next poem

won't come from the TV. May come from you,
from me, from some mixed-up mess
of the two of us, with a little Autumn rain

for a bass line. Not the TV. You drifted off
rather than watch the tube. The next poem
won't put you to sleep or to rest.

At least that's what I hope.

Author's Comment: I know that a lot of people don't react well to poems about writing poetry, but hell, it's what we DO. Also, I think that this one, and a lot of my "poems bout poetry," is only incidentally about poetry and more about the events that go into making a poem happen. My wife really does talk in her sleep, often after she's drifted off in front of the TV. The poem progressed naturally into an explanation of what might be the making of a poem, then ends with the wish that the poem will be more interesting than the TV.

Bio: Harry Calhoun's articles, literary essays and poems have appeared in magazines including Writer's Digest and The National Enquirer. Check out his online chapbook Dogwalking Poems and his trade paperback, I knew Bukowski like you knew a rare leaf. This year, his poems were published in the book The Black Dog and the Road and his chapbooks, Something Real and Near daybreak, with a nod to Frost. He edits Pig in a Poke magazine. Find out more at <http://harrycalhoun.net>. Oh, and another chapbook, Retreating Aggressively into the Dark, will appear on Big Table Press within the next month.

Pris Campbell
INSIDE A HEARTBEAT

I shiver, naked under my cellophane raincoat,
walk in traffic, weave down city streets,
hope this wanton behavior will
flush out a sexy hero,
wherever he may be hiding.

A bum on the street corner
hands me a blanket and cardboard box,
never blinking an eye at puckered nipples,
never noticing we sit alone in the rain, or
that the silence surrounding us
is like the inside of a heartbeat.

Author's Comment: Sometimes we all feel desperate enough to try anything to get what we feel we need. Maybe it's not walking nude in a cellophane raincoat but the feeling is similar, nevertheless. The woman in this poem doesn't find what she set out for, but rather a tramp in a cardboard box, an angel in disguise, perhaps, who offers her a warm place. A person who doesn't take advantage of her desperation. Someone who gives her a chance to slip into the heartbeat of a wider kind of love.

Bio: Pris has been nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize. She has five poetry collections to her credit. A former Clinical Psychologist, she was sidelined by ME/CFS in 1990. She makes her home in the greater West Palm Beach , Florida , with her husband and three pets.

Barbara Moore

LOSING

Aunt Mary is losing her grip
on the polished clothesline pole
supporting lines of string
where freshly laundered shirts
still flap in the breeze
of her once perfect memory

Unsettled she sits at the window
facing the north wall
of the rehabilitation center
she now calls home
Everything has been sold off
her handmade furniture
her collection of quilts

And the letters of love
sent by high school students
from her teaching years
have been misplaced
She can no longer
read them over and over

She mostly sits and stares
at the unrelenting wall
perhaps dreaming of her
lost vegetable garden
as she picks imaginary lint
from her wrinkled housedress

Author's Comment: "Losing" is one in a series of poems inspired by my 103 year old Aunt Mary. I spent my childhood summers with her in Shoshoni, Wyoming. She was my role model then and continues to be, as she faces the losses accompanying aging with dignity and courage.

Bio: Barbara Moore was born in Danville, Virginia, adopted at three days old and flown to New York, where she resides today. She was an editorial researcher and later a therapist working with adolescents and substance abusers. Her poetry has appeared in Here and Now, lines written w/ a razor, heroin love songs and a Goldfish Press anthology. She occasionally performs her work at open mics in NYC.

Phoebe Kate Foster
(ALL THINGS EVENTUALLY DISAPPEAR)

when you
(reluctantly)
reach
a certain age,
you wear mortality
like a cross.
not on your back
like the Christ,
but on your head
turning ashy
and sparse,
on your face
now unfamiliar
and (in some lights)
harsh
from the pain of knowing
you're one of the chosen
due for removal
to an unseen place
at some moment
coming sooner
rather than later.

and you hate
the clock's tick
and the dirty tricks
time plays on the mind
and the need for
so much sleep
(which seems like
a dress rehearsal
for the final rest) and
(though you know
you shouldn't)
you take umbrage
at spring's callously
cruel and arrogant
blooms and profligate

yellow pollen marring
your car's flawless face
and the yowl of nightly cats
who seem perpetually
and desperately
in heat.

in your bed,
you uneasily lie
(an unappealing heap)
listening to life
go on without you
(though you're still
very much here),
and consider the reality
(with growing fear)
that judgment has been
imperiously passed
before the trial's over
and the unfair sentence
irreversibly handed down:
you'll be doing hard time
for the rest of your years.

Author's Comment: The inspiration for this piece is three-fold. First, a recent "milestone birthday" where one is likely to receive bouquets of black roses, boxes of Depends and "you're-over-the-hill" cards. The reality is age doesn't matter—until you're conscious of yourself aging, that is. Second, an apropos quote from Jim Bishop: "The future is an opaque mirror. Anyone who tries to look into it sees nothing but the dim outlines of an old and worried face." And finally, a reassuring article that said the French don't believe you're old until you're at least eighty. That's my official definition of it now, too.

Bio: Phoebe Kate Foster is an Assistant Editor at The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature and a former Associate Books Editor for Pop Matters, an online magazine of global culture. Her poetry and short fiction has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, included in numerous anthologies and appeared in over fifty literary journals. After enjoying a nomadic existence for years, she has finally settled down and now calls the Raleigh area her home.

Dennis Lovelace
MOMMA

She never wanted it this way
Machines breathing for her,
Eating and pissing and shitting
For her, measuring vital
Signs to no avail
Surrounded by her children who lack
The courage to say, no
Open your eyes, Momma
I need to tell you I love you

Author's Comment: In February of 2004, my Father passes away. One week he was fine and the next he was gone. It was devastating to my Mother and our family. Mom was always the one sick and we expected her to go first. On March 31, Momma collapsed and rushed to Carolina Medical center in Charlotte. She was in the heart unit in intensive care and on life support for the next 6 weeks despite her stated wish. My siblings and I were not able to handle the thought of losing both parents so quickly.

Bio: Dennis M. Lovelace was born on October 14, 1954 in Shelby, North Carolina. He currently resides in the Mountain View section of Hickory N.C. with his wife Diane. He is a retired Letter Carrier from the U.S. Postal Service. He spent 10 years in the U.S. Marines Corps.

Dennis Trujillo

WHY I RUN IN THE RAIN

Because waterlogged shoes are a small
Penalty for the primal privilege of striding
Through the wet harvest of clouds
With squinted eyes. Because dashing
Through puddles with mud-splattered legs
Shatters the stress of job deadlines
And the twenty-four hour news channel.
Because a drizzle elicits golden
Isolation—sane runners with soft spleens
Take to treadmills—leaving trails open
For hearts of reckless abandon and startled
Fat earthworms fleeing inundated abodes.
And finally because the caress of a soft
Cotton towel and a sip from a hot cup
Of tea are the same bounty reserved
For angels after an ebullient run in the rain.

Author's Comment: I have been a runner my entire life and enjoy the challenges of nature during my runs—and yes, I never run on treadmills. This past summer I experienced an unusually high number of rainy day runs and felt the urge to write a poem about them, but I couldn't find the words. Then one day while running in a cool rain, I noticed that my only company was the occasional earthworm—that's when the words for this poem came streaming out.

Dennis Trujillo
PRECIOUS MOMENTS

I'm amazed that people have so much trouble
Identifying the most precious moments of their
Lives. When asked they are apt to say:
My wedding day, The day my child was born,
Or, The day I graduated from cosmetology college.

But these aren't precious moments—
They are memorable, to be sure—but they
Are also moments of future trepidation.

For me, naming the three most precious
Moments of my life is as easy as eating apple
Pie a la mode at a comfortable table next
To the window while snow is lightly falling.

Most precious—undoubtedly—was when,
As a fifth grade schoolboy, I came home one
Day and could smell mom's banana bread
Before I even opened the door. Second
Was definitely a day this past April
(I think it was April 5) when for the first
Time this year it was warm enough to run
Without wearing heavy winter sweats.

See how easy that was—no need to focus
on momentous past events
As if taking a high school history exam.

Oh, and the third—it occurred just this morning:
While drinking tea I had the idea for this poem

Author's Comment: I really was having my morning tea when this poem announced itself to me. It deals with the common motif of finding joy in the simple pleasures of life, but I wanted to relate the concept with a bit of humor and surprise. I hope the poem works for you.

Dennis Trujillo
DRAGONFLIES AND ALGEBRA

Today as I taught algebra
A throng of dragonflies
Hovered at my classroom
Window—gossamer wings
Gleamed in the autumn
Sun. Thousands of lenses
In compound eyes seized
Upon every number
And symbol on the board.

My students were watching the clock:
waiting to be rescued by lunch
But the dragonflies gazed
With rapt attention—
Iridescent bodies beamed
With interest. They shunned
The classrooms near mine
—English Lit and History—
As they sought only
The cold light of math
And were unmoved
By Shakespeare
And the Industrial Revolution.

The bell rang and gel-haired
Students vanished
But the dragonflies remained
—Wanting more.
I turned
To the next lesson and began
Explaining exponential equations.

Author's Comment: I really was teaching algebra when the idea for this poem came to me. It wasn't a "throng" of dragonflies — just two — and they may have been mating. Still, they hovered at my window for a few seconds and it was enough to cause me to stop speaking in mid-sentence. One of the greatest joys of poetry is when inspiration strikes.

Bio: Dennis Trujillo is a high school math teacher who happens to love poetry. He is a new poet: this is his first year of writing poems for publication. Several of his poems appear in current or forthcoming issues of *The Storyteller*, and Atlantic Pacific Press. A 1976 West Point graduate, Dennis served in the Army for twenty years before embarking on his current career as a math teacher. Although this is perhaps an unusual background for a poet, he takes inspiration from Borges's declaration that poetry is a combination of fire and algebra.

SPECIAL SECTION: WRITERS FROM ECHOES ACROSS THE BLUE RIDGE

Imbued with the Spirit: A Review of Echoes Across the Blue Ridge – by Scott Owens

Echoes Across the Blue Ridge (Winding Path 2010)

Edited by Nancy Simpson

238 pages, \$16

ISBN: 9781450701525

What makes the Appalachian Mountains so special? Certainly one distinctive quality is age. Where else can you see stone so old it crumbles, trees left alone to grow as big around as houses, houses bent on one knee but still lived in, and traditions as old as . . . well, as old as the hills?

Things, even people, are allowed to grow old here without someone knocking them down in the name of progress or shuffling them off to a nursing home. And that's how the real magic of the place happens, because, in one respect, nothing dies here — not really. Sure, physical presence may come and go, but the essential character of things is retained in stories, poems, songs, artifacts, traditions, and, most of all, memory.

The word "haunted" has a negative connotation in most places, but one can hardly read about the southern Appalachians without that word or a synonym being, if not named, then at least implied. Robert Morgan uses it in his Introduction to *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge*: "The deep valleys seem haunted by the natives who once lived there." Kay Byer uses it in a comment quoted by Nancy Simpson in her "Note from the Editor:" "our most haunting artifacts." The first poem, "Beyond the Clearing" by James Cox, certainly suggests it by referring to "a place sublime / where spirits sing invisibly." And the first two stories, "Rendezvous" by Charlotte Wolf and "The Third Floor Bedroom" by Lana Hendershott, are, to some degree about the sensation of being haunted. And despite the usual expectation that non-fiction wouldn't involve such fanciful ideas as spirits and haunting, even the first essay, "The Oldest Answer" by Steven Harvey quotes Bettie Sellers saying, "My bent was to espouse the unseen that's in the woods at night." To which, Harvey adds, "It is the need to fill all this haunted otherness with something human."

All of this repetition of the word "haunting" or the sense of being haunted reminds the reader that the implication of the word is in fact not limited to an unpleasant habitual visitation but rather to a persistent presence of spirit, a presence that may be desired, embraced, just as I, a flatlander, have been haunted by images of Cade's Cove, Caesars Head, Graveyard Fields, and the Devil's Courthouse since visiting them as a child and returning to them as often as I can manage. This usually pleasant but sometimes unsettling lingering of spirit is closer to the type of haunting the writers in *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge* have discovered in these mountains and expressed in these pages.

Not that every piece in this anthology deals with the past or memory or spirit. Some of the selections deal with other reasons people are attracted to these mountains. Ellen Andrews comments on the beauty and sense of community in the mountains in "Homing:" "We are connected not by school uniforms / but by a raging lust for these purple mountains." And in

poems like Gene Hirsch's "Where It Comes From," we see even more closely the intimate relationship between the human and the natural: "Love / sprouts from lichen, / in the shade, by the lily pond . . . / in the thicket / of a chapter of floating / leaves / beneath the silky / hairs of a willow."

Even the descriptions of nature are, however, frequently haunting, as in Janice Townley Moore's "Photos from Another State," where she describes the sound of a creek as "lyrics from the unseen." Similarly, Jennifer McGaha's reverie in "Looking Glass" is punctuated by images from the past: "You see your great-grandmother, her long, gray hair pinned in a bun, stooping over the quilting loom by the black wood stove in her cabin, and you see her strolling in her garden, her brown, crinkled hands pulling a green bean fresh from the vine." And Susan Lefler's harrowing story "The Spirit Tree" tells of one little girl's attempt to use the spirits of nature and tradition to fend off the hazards of her mother's emotional disorder.

Whether spirits of joy or grief, familiarity or strangeness, there is no doubt that the southern Appalachians are possessed by a presence that transcends the physical and temporal. In the same way, the poems, stories, and essays in *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge* are possessed by the various spirits of these mountains, leaving us standing, in the words of Janet Sloane Benway's poem "Sugarloaf Mountain," "in awe, / even in the face of sorrow."

Karen Paul Holmes
FRUITFUL HEARTS

Like grapes
hearts have existed for eons
can be consumed whole
fermented, can muddle the brain

Like pumpkins
hearts grow big, round, full
can be hollowed out
and carved into something grotesque

Like peaches
hearts have a warm fuzzy feeling
give to gentle touch
might be sweet or sour

Like pears
hearts have a distinctive shape,
wider at the bottom,
ideal for child bearing

Like pomegranates
hearts come in more than 700 varieties
can withstand drought
are associated with abundance, fertility, luck

Like vines
hearts easily tangle with each other
benefit from a little pruning
flourish with frequent feeding

Like fruit trees
when properly propagated,
hearts will live on in others
will nourish generations.

Author's comment: For some reason, I woke up one morning thinking about similes for the human heart. My first two ideas were, "Like peaches, they can have a warm fuzzy feeling" and "Like grapes, hearts can produce fine whines." The latter got deleted from the poem because it seemed too corny... though the fuzzy peaches border on corny too. Once I decided to create a whole poem of similes, the ideas started rushing in, and I had to narrow it down to the most effective or the poem would have been 100 lines long!

Bio: Karen Paul Holmes is an award-winning freelance writer and poet. A former VP-Communications at ING (a global financial services company), Karen now regularly participates in poetry readings throughout Atlanta and the Blue Ridge Mountains. She belongs to the North Carolina Writers' Network, Georgia Poetry Society and Atlanta Writers Club. Karen's publishing credits include journals such as Poetry East, Atlanta Review and Sow's Ear Poetry Review and anthologies, including *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge: Stories, Essays & Poems Written by Writers Living in & Inspired by the Southern Appalachian Mountains*. In January 2011, she'll be teaching a writing class at John C. Campbell Folk School in Brasstown, NC.

Janice Townley Moore
GEESE

We round the steep curve to evening
fanning out over Lake Chatuge.

Hiking across the earthen dam,
we may talk or not.

Trees shaped like a Japanese pagoda
top a distant peak.

One of us always mentions that,
or the light in the leaves at sundown.
It is the same and never the same.

Walking in heat, sometimes through fog,
we wait the arrival of geese.

How will they surprise us tonight?

Author's Comment: This poem reflects a familiar relationship enjoyed in a familiar scene. Perhaps nature has the potential for more surprises than the relationship. Or is it that the relationship is energized by the expectations that the geese provide? One can imagine the geese entering the scene in a dramatic way, perhaps emerging from the fog or silhouetted against a red sunset.

Bio: Janice Townley Moore's poetry has appeared in such journals as *Georgia Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *JAMA*. Her chapbook, *Teaching the Robins*, was published by *Finishing Line Press*. She is a resident of Hayesville, NC, and teaches in the English Department at Young Harris College.

Cecily Wells
FALLS

He kneels,
plucks the Oxeye
Daisy, tucks it
behind her ear.
They hike along
holding hands
until the path
narrows.
She drops back,
admires his sinewy legs;
smiles as he names
wildflowers,
warns of dangers.
At the top of the falls
spray cools and refreshes.
He guides her
onto the ledge,
his hand warm
on her waist.
She turns
to kiss him,
but he is gone,
his scream, if
there was one,
drowned in
the roar of
water.

Author's Comments: The hike up Triple Falls in DuPont State Forest provides wonderful photo opportunities. I love the serene beauty of the area in all seasons, but am continually amazed by the number of people who ignore the warnings about swimming in the waters around and under the falls. Every year someone dies or is severely injured by underestimating the power of water. In my poem I found it interesting to contemplate the ying and yang of the falls.

Bio: Cecily Hamlin Wells has published poems and short fiction in Long Story Short, MoonShine Review and in several anthologies including Echoes Across the Blue Ridge. Additionally, she received Honorable Mention for her two entries in the 76th Writer's Digest

Writing Competition and for her two entries in the Writer's Digest 5th Annual Poetry Competition.

Maren O. Mitchell
LEARNING HOW TO KILL

Piss, crazy, ghost, sugar: evolved from wasps,
the only other creature to herd for food,
they crouch like mammals to drink,
bathe with the grace of cats.

Extreme Communists, they change sex, sprout wings
for the good of the whole.

Sick nest survivors emigrate, forsaking family.
Hearing the warmth of spring they invade early,
flowing back and forth along my windowsill,
up and down mini-vases of pansies and thyme,
laying chemical trails: Aphids ahead! Good milking!
Casual across a hot stove,

they stagger out of microwave minutes with nothing
but slight brain damage.

Kept fresh in the fridge for days, they move faster than I do.
The freezer stops them dead in their tracks.

They fall for the false sweetness of Pepsodent,
become muscle-bound unscrewing the cap,
dizzy from navigating threads.

They reconnoiter a cache of "stevia," sugar x 300,
sweeter than all the perfumes of Arabia.
With sheepish smiles whitened by traces of the forbidden,
they offer cocaine to their Queen,
foreseeing her fashionable waistline,
her rise among her peers.

Across counters, with 70% alcohol, I swipe
devastation through orderly fat-foraging ranks.
They retreat in routs from the big "it."

Marching lines spin drain-ward,
fighting up against the down.

Not a picnic, I kill from all angles.
I see no faces, slaughter with ease.

Finding one alone I roll it to
death between thumb and forefinger.

Within days my soul has sprung a leak,
compassion escaping at an alarming rate.

Fearing afterlife, I grant intermittent mercy,
rescue with oar finger those drowning,

blow others into legendary flights to be recounted by their descendants.
Research tells me more than I want to know.

Foiled by compulsive bathing,
the salmonella, the pseudomonas they carry are news.

Prudent, they import golden Mr. Clean-smelling resin,
sterilize feet before crossing their thresholds.

Instinct kicks in; rescues cease.
Guilt recedes. I know murder.

Author's Comment: Writing about killing is difficult for me. Beginning with an essay, I took the smallest creature that I knowingly kill en masse, the sugar ant, and treated experiences with humor through exaggeration. Thus, some of the ethics of killing were more easily addressed. This was a very uncomfortable subject to attempt.

Maren O. Mitchell

THE SENSUAL ART OF TOMATO SLICING

Approach expectantly with a thin blade,
serrated, pointed,
long enough to cross the body.
Take your time.
The tomato, succulent salvation of sandwiches,
useable from skin through flesh to seeds,
will tell you where to cut.
No need to chisel, freeing the sculpture within.
Let the knife descend unerringly.
Slices fall upon one another,
wet velvet bound by circular selvage.
Leave nothing. Capture
the escaped liquid and imbibe
the promise of pleasure to come.

Author's Comment: I love healthy tomatoes. Slicing them, although destructive, is pleasing. I agree with advertising, one can make love to anything.

Bio: Maren O. Mitchell's poems have appeared in *The Arts Journal*, *Appalachian Journal*, *Echoes Across the Blue Ridge* and *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, and she has work forthcoming in *The Journal of Kentucky Studies* and *Southern Humanities Review*. She has worked as cataloger at the Carl Sandburg National Historic Site in Flat Rock, NC, and lives with her husband and two cats in the North Georgia Mountains.

Jayne Jaudon Ferrer
REQUEST DENIED

I start to click "Confirm," then stop.
I didn't like you in high school:
why would I like you now?
Of course, it's possible you've evolved,
gotten over sneering at those whose opinion
doesn't match your own,
realized women have some purpose
beyond stroking your ego,
discovered rules apply to you, after all.
Perhaps your 1147 Facebook friends know
something I don't,
can't imagine your seductive voice
ever uttering crude comments
or racist rhetoric,
are convinced you're where you are
because you deserve to be there.
But probably not.
Probably you're the same jerk you always were,
elbowing yourself into places you don't belong,
like an inappropriate apostrophe: irritating,
out of place,
unnecessary.

Author's Comment: I think social media serves as a validation tool for some: "if I have lots of online friends, I'm cool." I started wondering if the Internet lets us hide our true colors or if our uglier traits still shine through. They do; I recently met a guy I'd known only through emails; he was as odious in the flesh as he was online.

Bio: Jayne Jaudon Ferrer is the author of four books of poetry, one of which has remained in print for twenty years and is currently in its third edition. An award-winning copywriter and freelance journalist earlier in her writing career, Ferrer lives in Greenville, South Carolina, and is the host of <http://www.YourDailyPoem.com>. Learn more about her at <http://www.jaynejaudonferrer.com>.

Carole Richard Thompson
THE PART'S OVER

The mountains wait, stone silent,
for Fall to go about her business
and depart with some dignity.

The hills grow weary of the gaudy
season's riot, and wait for Winter's
housekeeping to blow rattling
crumbs of faded leaves
down to valleys below.

As beauty longs to remove
makeup, retreat from admiration,
the mountains yearn to pull up
snowy blankets and sleep
a dreamless Winter, having set
the relentless alarm clock of Spring.

Author's Comment: I think of the mountains as very old living things. Thousands of changing seasons only affect what grows on them, not the mountains themselves. It seems that by the end of Fall every year they are quite ready to return to their natural state and, have a long winter's nap.

Carole Richard Thompson
36 HOURS

We see them at the same moment;
the doe first, emerging from the woods.
Our bedroom window frames
her aristocratic pose, tawny
rippling muscles, eyes wary.
She quietly moves forward, turns
her proud head back; a signal.
We crouch behind the curtain,
out of her sight, just as the first fawn
wobbles into view, followed quickly
by another baby, somewhat smaller.
Mother doe keeps them there a few
seconds more, as we hold our breath.
Slowly she passes beyond our garden,
then she moves forward, turning
at the road; leading the tentative twins
into safety of dense woods.
Your arms circle my waist, and you say,
"How beautiful."

This morning, almost the same time,
the doe slides past our window again.
Our eyes quickly spot the larger fawn,
following a few feet behind, leaving a void.
Later, we hear a workman found,
near the edge of the woods, a fawn,
curled perfectly; still and cold. You say,
"It must have been weak; this was
Nature's way." I touched my stomach,
remember the tiny life I never got to hold.

Author's Comment: "36 Hours" is a poem close to my heart. I kept wondering how the mother doe handled her loss. I felt such a kinship with her as I wrote the poem. I realized, at last, part of my grief was in remembering a miscarriage I had early in my marriage. Can a man understand the depth of that grief? Maybe.

Bio: Carole Richard Thompson moved to Blairsville, GA, in the North Georgia mountains 20 years ago. She joined the North Carolina Writer's Network, and studied writing under Nancy

Simpson. Her first short story, "A Bag of Sugar for Paula" was published in "The Liguorian", and later in the anthology, "Christmas Presence". Another short story, "The Uniform" was published in the anthology, "Clotheslines". Her poems have appeared in the anthologies, "A Sense of Place" and most recently, "Echoes Across the Blue Ridge". Carole presently serves as NCWN-West's Georgia Representative.

Glenda Barrett
THE WORST PART

was not the funeral
but the cleaning of the house.
The smell met us at the door
and clung to us like guilt
as we filled garbage bags
with empty aluminum cans
piled on the living room floor.
The tattered, green couch
stained with urine and feces
was thrown in the trash pile
in the center of the yard.
Wooden floors covered
with blackened grime
were swept and mopped.
Dried, dirty dishes stacked
high in the kitchen sink
were washed and dried.
The dining room table
covered with rat droppings
was washed and disinfected.
We worked long and hard
but no amount of cleaning
could erase my feelings
of loss, shame and guilt.
When the work was done,
I sat on the porch steps
and watched the debris burn,
remembering this man who claimed
never to have a problem,
this man we allowed to be left alone.

Author's Comment: This poem was not an easy one to write because it involved a member of my family, but I wanted the secret of the dreadful disease of alcoholism to be brought out in the open. As so often happens it is hidden. I can remember how when anyone suggested that he get help, he would always refuse. And the worst part was, cleaning the house, and to realize what the disease took from this man, and how awful it make me feel to see his life end in this manner.

Bio: Glenda Barrett, a native of Hiawassee, Georgia is an artist, poet and writer. Her work has been published in numerous publications including Woman's World, Country Woman, Farm & Ranch Journal, Chicken Soup for the Soul, Mary Jane's Farm Journal and Journal of Kentucky Studies. Her Appalachian Artwork is on display at Fine Art of America.

Joan Thiel Blessing
MOVING PICTURES

Today I heard laughing
helps prevent heart attacks.
Smiling may be beneficial
but wholehearted laughter
does the most good.
Spontaneous eruptions
like those unholy
howls the Marx Brothers
roused in my father. Sprung
from his recliner
he'd reenact a scene. Let loose
hoots that left him choked
and wheezing. When he
was old, hearing all but gone,
I promised tapes
of silent films he loved:
Chaplin, Harold Lloyd,
the best of Buster Keaton.
Oh Dad, I didn't understand
the urgency. I should have
made a festival for you.

Author's Comment: An article on the connection between laughter and a healthy heart became the catalyst for this poem, which honors my father's raucous sense of humor while giving expression to the sorrow I felt about an unfulfilled promise.

Bio: Joan Blessing, a retired lawyer and editor, divides her life between Hendersonville, North Carolina, and Naples, Florida . Her work has appeared in *flashquake*, *Pinesong*, *Kakalak*, *moonShine review*, *The Legal Studies Forum*, and other publications.

Glenda Beall
NO SAFE PLACE

I check the locks, front door, glass doors downstairs.
I'm beginning to remember your ritual every night.
You, the man I trusted to keep us safe in this,
our house, our bed. With you slumbering beside me,
you'd hear what we should fear before I was aware.
You'd know what to do, and you would use a gun if necessary.
Your pistol still lies in the bedside drawer.
The old dog, hearing worse than mine,
snores on our bed. Awake, alone
at three a.m., I fear no stranger lurking in the dark.
No firearm, locks or barking dog can save me
from the endless grief that stalks me in this house.

Bio: Founder of Coffee with the Poets and the Writers Circle, Glenda Beall is the author of Now Might As Well Be Then. She lives in Hayesville, NC.

REVIEWS

Review of *The Red Tower: New & Selected Poems*

by David Rigsbee

NewSouth Books, 2010, \$24.95, 192 pages

ISBN: 9781588382313

Like countless others, Thoreau, for example, or Camus or Whitehead or Sinatra, I have been haunted most of my life by a single question. Stephen Dobyns put this question into words in perhaps his best known poem, "How to Like It." David Rigsbee, in his new collection of poems, The Red Tower, has an answer to that question. In his opening poem, "Harp," he concludes, "Pointless speculation, and yet / / that is what I did with my life." Granted, "pointless speculation," may not sound like much, but one shouldn't judge that summation of human existence and endeavor too harshly. After all, with the exception of that special certainty granted by what we call faith (others might say imagination or fantasy or denial), as far as we can ever know, all of our efforts to explain and understand the nature or meaning of life are ultimately speculative, and lacking the truth that is necessary to make one's efforts truly meaningful and purposeful, they must be deemed in all likelihood pointless as well. More importantly, however, the answer to the question, "How do we like it," that Rigsbee provides in The Red Tower is that we embrace the uncertainty of our existence, and all that entails, in other words, that we try.

Such uncertainty is a frequent source of frustration, sometimes even depression or desperation, but it is always also a source of possibility and purpose. I think of Robert Frost's wonderful poem, "The Road Not Taken," and how any attempt to determine the nature of the road Frost is suggesting one should take is frustrated by the poem's embrace of uncertainty, leaving one with the conclusion that Frost's real point is not which road one should take but only that it is one's willingness to choose a road and pursue it that makes "all the difference." In other words, it matters most that one is willing to try. Rigsbee's poems in The Red Tower have a similar undercurrent. He recognizes that his answer to the question is an embrace of uncertainty, which creates possibility, and each of the poems in this book clarifies how one pursues possibility, what one might encounter in that pursuit, and what consequence might occur along the way. The first clarification comes in his second poem, "After Reading," where he declares, "Purity is a curse . . . / It better fits / to turn away from the shore / in favor of the garbage and the grief."

The next clarification comes in his third poem, the book's title poem, "The Red Tower," where he attempts to discover meaning out of his brother's death, finding instead no transcendent answers. He declares that "Yeats was wrong when he wrote / that God talked to those long dead," and adds, "Even if / God talked to the dead, what could / He possibly say to them?"

This is not the first time anyone has asked this question, and Rigsbee makes clear that it shouldn't be the last. If God is to have any real meaning to humanity, then this question needs to be asked repeatedly and persistently. The doubt expressed in those lines is repeated in the next poem, "The Apartment," as well, where he tells us that "Saints were said to emerge from their cells / and pause, before going forth out of the spirit, / in their rope belts, into the stony forests." If even saints pause between the realms of the spiritual and the physical, between life and death, then how could the rest of us expect any certainty, any correctness, any purity in our choices?

The four poems mentioned thus far are all from Rigsbee's new poems, so it's not surprising, perhaps, that the subject matter and attitudes they express are similar. It is most interesting to note, however, that the same perspective exists in the selected poems from his seven previous collections as well. My favorite of his expressions of this embrace of uncertainty comes from "The Stone House," a poem in memoriam of Edmund Wilson, whose very life embodied the necessary dialectic between ontology and epistemology, what one might call the balancing act of being human. Rigsbee proclaims:

Wanted: a sky-blue life,
wild valleys brought to heel
by threshers and the queer tame men
walking the swath of a glacier.
Wanted too, a meaning for these footsteps,
these crawfish on the stone ledge, crawling
back to the river, and the tiny water-shrew
there, particular and bashful.

We want both to be and to make meaning out of or discover meaning within being. Embracing this balancing act and the effort necessary to persistently create meaning from it is also central to another of my favorite of Rigsbee's older poems, "Equinox."

It is the equinox, and today I feel
the thrall that reconciles the animal
and the hole, cloud and lake, the sexes.
The ticking at the window grows . . .

but in the kitchen the summer flies still swirl.

I hunt them all, as if nothing
should learn to expect the impossible.

Negative eloquence . . . /

is why the fire saves nothing, discards nothing.

Rigsbee stresses appreciation of the difference between life, which is clearly eternal, and individual life, which is decidedly not. He also stresses the necessary duality of living and being aware of living, being in the moment and aware of being in the moment.

Finally, in "Caught in the Rain," another of Rigsbee's best early poems we hear the same message in perhaps his clearest words as he contemplates the freshness of world metaphorically washed clean of loss, regret, the ever-present past by rain:

It will be

like falling in love again

to feel the sky-chilled rain
wanting to press my shirt
into the likeness of my body

until I am the submissive one,
part bird, part worm, part of
what is without reason . . .

knowing only the present tense.

Throughout his decades-long work, Rigsbee has encouraged us to live better, to make life better, by embracing the present tense, by submitting to an understanding that each of us is only a moment, by embodying Keats' idea of negative capability: "being in uncertainties,

mysteries, doubts without any [or at least too much] irritable reaching after fact and reason.”
It is lesson that will do us all good and that we need to be reminded of regularly.

Review of The Circus Poems

Poems by Alex Grant

Lorimer Press, 2010, 53 pages, \$16.95

ISBN: 9780982617137

<http://www.redroom.com/author/alex-grant>

<http://www.lorimerpress.com/CircusPoems.html>

Alex Grant says he loves the circus. And why not? We all do. And his new collection of poems, titled The Circus Poems, illustrates why. Grant begins his book with a quotation from artist Marc Chagall: "For me, a circus is a magic show that appears and disappears like a world. A circus is disturbing. It is profound." That statement conveys so much of what we all find appealing about the circus. It is "like a world," or better yet, like **the** world, like our world, only better. Better because whereas in our world the oddities, the personal foibles, even the freakishly super abilities are hidden from view by closed doors, pulled curtains, family secrets, the masks of normalcy we all wear, in the world of the circus, they are paraded forth, laid bare for all to see in the safe enclosures of tents and rings and stages. Safe because the circus comes and goes, "appears and disappears," unlike our daily lives, and we decide whether or not and how often we will enter that world. Safe, in other words, because we don't live in the circus; the residents of the circus are not us, not our family, not even our neighbors.

Nevertheless, what makes the circus world most appealing is that it is still relevant because its occupants are, in a number of ways, very much like us. Thus, while they appear different, they remain hauntingly, "profoundly" and "disturbingly" familiar. Archetypally speaking, if the circus is a microcosm of our world, then the residents of the circus, particularly the residents of Grant's circus, represent those who populate the world . . . us. Just as we understand that everyone in our dreams is a manifestation of some part of the dreamer, it is clear that every character in these poems, every figure in the circus, manifests some aspect of the poet and the reader, some aspect of who we are as people.

The first of the figures Grant presents us is "The Ringmaster," he who controls, who narrates, who keeps things "contained in a small box . . . on a shelf," just as we attempt to direct our lives by keeping them contained in the boxes of home, job, routine, and just as we attempt to control the interpretation of our lives by collecting memorabilia, photographs, letters, journals, etc. and keeping them in small boxes on a shelf. The reader's, and thus all of our, complicity in these efforts to control and contain is made clear by a subtle shift to second

person in the last line as Grant names something we all collect: "The brittle shards of day under your fingernails."

Another such archetypal figure is "The Human Cannonball" who echoes Thoreau's "lives of quiet desperation" as he is constantly propelled by forces he neither sees nor understands while he "dreams the same dream night after night." He also becomes Sisyphean in the way he is described as "a subterranean voyager riding towards his nightly salvation." The nature of this salvation is unnamed, of course, because it will be different for each reader: religion, family, money, etc. What is most interesting, however, is that even the certainty of this salvation is brought into question as the audience all have "knives glinting in their hands."

In each poem Grant presents in the image of a circus figure another statement on what it feels like to be human. In "The Tightrope Walker," for example we are shown the necessities of risk and uncertainty inherent in the human condition, as well as the uncertain redemption gained through self-awareness and self-declaration: "Smile fixed dead ahead—we all walk without the net, . . . high wire Hottentots in love with the world . . . each body singing of its own downfall."

Interspersed among these poems of subtle conceits are others that are not clearly circus-related but that, like the circus poems, cause us to think about the nature of human existence. "The Road to Archangel," for example, follows up imagery of human atrocities and suffering with this statement about our resilience:

to be born human
is like coming up for air in an infinite ocean
and finding your head inside the only ring that floats—

and you hold on to the ring, you can breathe the air,
and somehow you reach the shore, and this,
. . . is only the beginning—and here I stand,

alone in the forest, looking down at the ocean—
Body of water. Breath of salt. Beginning.

As that poem suggests, Grant explores the full range of human nature unblinkingly, including those elements he, along with most of us, would resist, and a lesser poet would deny. The best image of these elements of humanity comes from the book's best poem, "Trampling Down the Vintage," where Grant weaves together the stories of John Brown and the Nazi genocide of Gypsies, characterizing the source of these atrocities archetypally as "a black-capped judge // deep in the sleep of ignorance," whom the speaker must confront:

All my life, I have felt your hands around my throat,
your gloves thick and warm, smelling of nothing.

We will meet again, in a field out beyond today,
stripped, like holy men, holding our arms in the air.

This is not Grant's first circus. He has already written a significant number of impressive, engaging, deeply meaningful poems in his previous books, but none have been more resonant than these because these function as a unit, each one adding texture to the one before it and to the work at large. Simply put, The Circus Poems is not just a good collection of poems but an important one, and one of my favorites this year.

Review of A Brief History of Time, by Shaindel Beers

Salt (2009)

ISBN: 9781844715053

What's not to love about Shaindel Beers' first collection of poetry, A Brief History of Time? It is confessional, political, classical, formal, imagistic, language-driven, realistic, fantastic, sensational, conventional, innovative, consistent, personal and diverse. Almost anything you want from poetry –unless you want facile, sentimental drivel – you can find here. This book could be used as a companion piece to a fairly large dictionary of poetics, illustrating a great number of the concepts and terms spoken of in the practice of poetry. There are 4 sestinas, 2 sonnets, a villanelle, and a ghazal; there are wide-ranging examples of a seamless stream of consciousness technique and crystal clear and straightforward conventional narratives; there are metaphors and motifs, references and allusions; and through it all there is vivid imagery and a facility with sound and language that lets the stories, thoughts, and perceptions unfold fluidly down the page. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, Beers' virtuosity is not limited to the technical aspects of poetry but extends into her selection and expression of subject matter as well, offering significant insights and opportunities for understanding in areas of both personal health, psychology, and relationships and broader issues of social justice.

Focusing just on the versatility Beers displays in these poems might be misunderstood to suggest that the book lacks cohesion. In fact, however, the poems revolve quite provocatively around a central idea suggested in the book's ambitious title. Taken together, they form a sort of narrative of a young woman's personal and social development towards self-actualization in late 20th century America as she becomes increasingly aware of the inconsistencies between what has been promised and what is actual and as she explores the possibilities for reconciling these differences. The story is not linear because any story that strives for realism will resist linearity. The story is "brief" because it arises from and focuses on a life that is still incomplete. Nevertheless, the story is wide-ranging because Beers recognizes that any segment of any human life seen honestly and accurately will constitute a microcosm of all human life, of "history."

It is the unblinking realism, the haunting familiarity, of these poems that is most appealing about them. Auden said the poem "must say something significant about a reality common to us all," such that its "readers recognize its validity for themselves." Otherwise, we might ask, what would be the point. Beers writes about things that matter and things we recognize, and time and again she gets it just right, so right, in fact, that the reader finishes nearly every poem feeling as if they've just read a record of their own thoughts and experiences.

Perhaps the most impressive poem in the collection is the first one, the title poem, which in some ways serves as a model for the entire book. This free verse stream of consciousness journey from mixing coffee through Virginia Woolf, dinosaurs, annuities, "People Magazine's 50 Most Beautiful People," *The Last of the Mohicans*, and a 1983 Cutlass Supreme to an image of the moon as a baseball reveals a personality that wants it all to make sense, understands it never will, but finds purpose in the effort. She muses (more poetically than this excerpt can achieve), "There seems to be a message here, but I don't know what it is nonetheless, I keep on trying My regular duties pouring Gatorade, wiping away sweat and shards of bicuspid and incisors just another type of insanity doing the same thing the same way and expect[ing] different results. I did it to help people by writing these untruths."

As these lines, this poem, and indeed this entire book suggests, the separation between what is of concern personally and what is of concern socially is much narrower than we usually, for the sake of convenience, conceive. It should not be surprising, then, to discover that the poems I find most powerful are those that appear more personally probing but in the process produce lines that bear larger social implications as well, such as these from "Flashback:"

When you are four, you don't realize
that a road can go on forever, take you from forest
to wheat field to desert, that there are worlds you
have never known. Worlds where the dull sound
of your mother's body hitting a wall, a door, the baby's
changing table are as alien as saying *I love you*.

It is through the consideration of such personal poems that we begin to recognize our own potential for the greater social responsibility expressed in lines like these from "Rewind:"

If we could invent
the automatic rewind, bodies would expel

bullets that would rest eternally in chambers,
130,000 people would materialize

as the Enola Gay swallowed the bomb,

landmines would give legs and fingers

back to broken children.

Right now, teeming cancer cells

would be rebuilding blood and bone.

Perhaps the most worthy ambition of poetry is to help us achieve greater empathy and understanding, to help us recognize the universal through the familiar. Shaindel Beers accepts this challenge of the poet. The speaker of one of her poems chastises herself for lacking the courage to stand up for “things that matter, the stuff of life and death.” [A Brief History of Time](#) may very well be the penance for that lack of courage as these poems face unflinchingly that task of promoting our ability for compassion and action.

Review of A Short Report on the Fire at Woolworths: Selected New and Old Poems

By Stephen Smith

Main Street Rag, 2010, 108 pages

ISBN: 9781599482576

Stephen Smith's new book of poems, A Short Report on the Fire at Woolworths: Selected New and Old Poems, 1980-2010, is really two books of poetry. The first, united under the Roman numeral "I" in the book, might well be called A Short Report on the Fire at Woolworths since the poem by that title is the last poem in the opening section, but it would be more revealing to call it "Living In the Shadow of the Bomb," since that idea seems to be a unifying undercurrent in this first section. One could argue that if that title suggests the poems are mostly about life in the 50's and 60's in America, then it could be used for the second section, called "II," as well. Such an argument, however, ignores two key facts regarding this second section of poems. First, it would be most appropriate to simply call the section, "The Bushnell Hamp Poems," since every poem in the section deals with the world of Smith's loveable old (as in first collected in 1980) character by that name. Second, the difference between the world of the two sections is that the first deals with the 50's and 60's South of the suburban middle class, those who were most worried about the bomb, while the second deals with a slightly older and considerably more rural and lower than middle class South, a South that seems at times to be an updated version of the South portrayed in the novels of Erskine Caldwell. Taken together, then, the two sections create a fairly wide and deep view of the South over a span of some 30 to 40 years.

One thing the poems in both sections share is the sense that they are real. There is no pretension or intellectual affectation here. The poems feature people we know, although in the case of Bushnell Hamp and his friends we might not always want to admit it. The stories and emotions are revealed with such clarity that time and again they move the reader to either tears or laughter, usually because we recognize ourselves in the narratives or revelations of motivations, anxieties, failures, and successes. Former NC Poet Laureate, Fred Chappell, comments about the book that Smith manages "to find the general in the specific, the universal value in the local detail, to grasp the small part that will imply the whole." Smith, himself, discusses this practice of seeing ourselves in others in his poem, "Love," when he says, "what we love / in lives of strangers is an inevitability / we perceive as just." This comment follows the narration of a celebrity love triangle where each participant ultimately receives their "just desserts."

Smith's ability to reveal the universal in the specific is even more apparent in "Cleaning Pools," where he tells a story that illustrates how shared labor between father and son creates an understanding that goes beyond words:

Sheet lightning streaked
over the Chesapeake, and I began to notice
how after each flash, I went momentarily blind.
"It's strange," you said, finally, and without
my having spoken a word, "how quickly the pupil
closes to the light and how complete the darkness is."

.....

... Perhaps,
as you said, it is like death, this sudden light
and inevitable darkness. Or perhaps it is the
purest grace. It says what fathers and sons
mostly cannot say.

And, again, in my favorite poem in the collection, "Coming Back to the Old Emptiness," he uses the story of an abusive grandfather to portray social determinism, the parental desire to protect, the mutability of all things human, and the familiar necessities of understanding and forgiveness in what he calls "impossible love:"

So my grandfather rises
from the depths of the Depression
to flail my father (then a child
younger than my small son)
with an electric cord

.....

My grandfather is dying tonight,
the madness of eighty years—

.....

all of it crumbling.

.....

Because we suffer impossible love,
my father grieves tonight for his father
just as I grieve for mine,
and my son, safe in his bed,
will learn of these cruelties
only in a poem, which itself must
someday crumble, its dust rising in
final dissolution.

Unlike so many poets today, however, Smith is not always morbid, depressing, or heavy. He recognizes that amidst the grave seriousness of our lives, there is also great levity. The Bushnell Hamp poems take full advantage of this levity, but its presence in Smith's perception of the world is made apparent even before the second section of poems and without the use of the dialect which characterizes the Bushnell Hamp poems and helps (re)create their levity. One example is "Dear Michael," where we hear the story of a boy whose wit makes the best of essentially falling into a urinal at a roller skating rink:

What must happen to everyone
who ceases motion happened to you: the world
rolled out from under. And to save your life
you put both hands in the urinal

.....

your pink
fingers frozen among the soggy cigarettes
and dead gum

.....

you asked me, "Want some spearmint?
How about a Lucky Strike?"

Similarly, in "Cricket Poem," Smith's appreciation of humor comes through as we hear about a young man who spills a box of 100 crickets in his car only to later have them interrupt a potentially fruitful moment:

She was about to moan yes
when a cricket whispered in her ear
and another called from
the glove compartment
.....
the cricket tabernacle choir singing
in ninety-nine part harmony
Nancy Nancy Nancy Nancy
save yourself forever.

Equally entertaining are the moments of irony Smith notices, such as the no smoking sign in a doctor's office after a terminal prognosis is given in "Sign for My Doctor's Waiting Room," or the accidental destruction of turtles, sole survivors of the Woolworth's fire, beneath the wheels of fire trucks, in the title poem.

Ultimately, the appreciation of the humor, importance, and urgency of life experienced by those who populate these poems, those who populated mid-20th century America, is driven by the looming shadow of the bomb. That motivational presence is conveyed in "Fallout Shelter, October, 1962" and in "Bomb Dream," but the same sense of urgency is present in "Nothing," in "Fluid Drive," and in many of the Bushnell Hamp poems, suggesting that while the threat of the bomb may have led some to a greater appreciation of life, it served mostly as a more imminent and tangible presence of the death sentence, the indeterminate "green mile," we all live with. Thus, perhaps, the overarching message of these poems, the understanding which Smith expresses, is that mortality is our greatest motivator.

Promises to Keep: A Review of Debra Kaufman's The Next Moment

The Next Moment, Poems by Debra Kaufman

Jacar Press, 2010, 64 pages, \$13.95

ISBN: 9780984574025

What keeps us alive, motivates us, makes us human are our relationships and the obligations they entail. Frost knew that and memorably expressed it in his lines:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
but I have promises to keep,
and miles to go before I sleep,
and miles to go before I sleep.

Now, in The Next Moment, Debra Kaufman reminds us of the vitality of those relationships as well as the sometimes overwhelming difficulty of them.

Ranging across relationships with grandparents ("Knitting"), parents ("Smile"), spouses ("Nice"), and children ("The Drought Speaks"), Kaufman creates a detailed and honest "atlas of the difficult world" (thank you, Adrienne Rich) that defines who we are, who we have always been, as human beings. And Kaufman goes on to remind us in other poems that when, through such things as death, maturation, and divorce, those relationships seem to fade from prominence, the ever-present relationship with ourselves remains ("Epiphany"), and those other relationships always inherently linger there ("Last Words"), a fact made clearest in these lines from "Hope and Despair Are Not Opposites":

The body experiences one moment,
then the next,
is always in the present,
while the mind spins into the future
or loops back to the past.

This duality of human existence is treated again both stylistically and thematically in the collection's two best poems: "Minestrone, Rainy Day" and "Too Late / The Scream." These two "braided" poems combine two poems each in a perfect marriage of form and function. In the former, one string of words illustrates how meticulous attention to detail and routine is used to assuage and even combat the fear, guilt, and uncertainty, the "unraveling" effects, caused by the depression, abandonment, and drug abuse presented in the contrapuntal other string of words. Similarly, in the latter poem, participation in art and writing is used to balance and resist the terror, the undoing, created by the unthinkable awareness of our children's mortality and vulnerability.

It is certainly common enough that a book of poems contains one or two brilliant pieces. In The Next Moment, such brilliance is the rule rather than the exception, and it manifests not only in the form of the poems but also in frequently resonant phrasing. One line, for example, in "After a Drink or Two You're Beautiful" memorably summarizes a child's experience of living with an alcoholic mother: "Such heaviness, so many empties." Another example of Kaufman's facility for phrasing comes from "Last Words," where the last stanza rivals the power of Thomas's "Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night":

I wish he'd die, now, quickly.
But first would lay
his rough hands
on the crown of my head.

The theme of a father's loss treated in this poem is addressed with equal poignancy in "Comes a Time":

In a black-and-white snapshot
proof that he once held me aloft:

my infant fist clutching his finger,
worry and wonder in his gaze,

the world opening—
our world of earth and air,

touch and smell,
grasp and release.

If it is true that we can judge a person by the company they keep, then certainly judging a poet by whose work they call to mind is a fair means of assessment. Frost, Adrienne Rich, Dylan Thomas . . . poetically speaking, Debra Kaufman is indeed a fine host for an outstanding selection of guests as her work takes its place at the table remarkable and memorable poets.

Review of Lucille Lang Day's *The Curvature of Blue*
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Simplicity is typically a quality we think of as desirable, especially, perhaps, in poetry. Emerson said, "To be simple is to be great;" Whitman that, "Simplicity is the glory of expression." They were wise, admirable men; surely they got it right. Simplicity is a word we associate with poetic concepts like beauty, clarity, and purity. Stevens said, "Not ideas about the thing but the thing itself." We might think of haiku and the apparent simplicity of imagery stripped of commentary as what Stevens had in mind. But then, haiku often has two images, the juxtaposition of which complicates things a great deal. We are compelled to seek the significant relationship between these two images, and as we pursue that relationship, we discover a nearly limitless range of possible "interpretations" of the images themselves; we discover a variety of "ideas" that cling to these "things," demonstrating that what Stevens proposed was not, in fact, simplicity, and that simplicity is simply not possible. The problem is that inherent in the concept of simplicity is the idea of singularity, the condition of being uncombined, uncompounded, and unambiguous, and none of those conditions exist to a significant degree in human experience.

This is why Lucille Lang Day's recent collection of poetry, *The Curvature of Blue*, conspicuously avoids and even demonstratively denies the existence of simplicity. Perhaps not surprisingly, Day's scholastic and professional background features as much science as poetry, and few arguments for simplicity exist in the world of scientific research. Coming from such a background, Day's poems not only avoid simplicity but seem to be about complexity more often than anything singular theme, seem at times to joyfully wallow in the compoundedness of things.

The first poem in *The Curvature of Blue* is a perfect example and a poem I absolutely love. It is called "At the Museum After Closing," and Day's bio will confirm that she does indeed work at a museum, but what makes the poem effective is the way she uses that experience as a metaphor for a book of poems, for this book of poems. Not that Day ever mentions poems in this poem—that would violate Stevens' directive—but assuming the speaker of the poem to be the poet, it's a short leap to seeing the museum as being the collection (book) of exhibits (poems) "created" by the curator (poet), and we're off and running with a wonderful conceit. Greater complexity occurs when the speaker points out that she, like the exhibits (poems), but not an exhibit, is also inside the museum (book of poems), visible by but separated from the museum's patrons (readers) by her glass office walls (limitations of language).

Metaphors are inherently complex, and this seems a particularly apt and fresh metaphor for poetry. We come to it for the poems, but we always find in addition the poet laboring there, looking back at the reader through glass walls of words, visible, but never quite within reach, both drawn more powerfully towards one another and towards creating significance by the frustrating nature and promising potential of such proximity. Of course, this metaphor also captures the emphasis on complexity that exists at the core of these poems. The speaker-

curator's somewhat awkward duality as exhibit and worker, as subject and object, her existence as seer and seen, her being here and not here, being real and not real, her simultaneity, her "andness" belies any suggestion of simplicity and frames the primary significance of these poems as it reveals itself in various surprising and epiphanous ways here and in other poems.

One of the most prevalent oxymoronic coexistences in these poems occurs in what may be the cleverest poem in the book—clever because it appears to be a fairly simple thing: a love poem. This, however, is a love poem whose primary vehicle for expressing that emotion is the language of science, a detailing of colors, plant species and statements about the universe. Right away, then the simple notion of separation between art and science, emotion and intellect, love and logic is called into question by the presentation of one in the language of the other. Day's speaker continues her blurring of simplicity by using colors synaesthetically, claiming to "hear cinnabar, / olive, raw umber, magenta, / violet and chartreuse," and then saying, "when you hold me, I feel / a surge of indigo, amethyst / and tangerine." But the compounding won't stop there. Having begun with the premise that "The universe is beige" (an apparently singular color), Day's speaker (channeling Hopkins' "Pied Beauty") ultimately concludes:

. . . . Suddenly
stippled, mottled, streaked,
I don't care if the universe
is the color of buckwheat
because iridescence spills
from you and me.

Thus it continues throughout this remarkable collection of poems, things we commonly think of as simple laid bare and revealed to be inextricably compound, intricately ambiguous, undeniably complex, shown in their truest light, as if Day's motto came not from Emerson and Whitman but Whitehead's injunction to, "Seek simplicity and distrust it." Even such an unquestioned concept as contemporary apathy is challenged in "Letter to Send in a Space Capsule," when the speaker writes to her post-apocalyptic audience, "It may sound strange, / but most people cared deeply about the planet / and each other." One thing is clear: Lucille Lang Day cares deeply enough to look at things honestly, to admit complexity, and to never tire of exploring the bright, colorful, and infinitely varied and complicated fabric of human experience.