

Summer 2010

SUMMER 2010 Contents

One of my favorite things about giving readings and teaching workshops and classes is meeting good poets that I might not otherwise have encountered because they have not yet published widely or because they publish in places outside my usual range. This issue of Wild Goose features a surprisingly large number of such poets, including Maren Mitchell and Brenda Kay Ledford, whom I met at a reading in Hayesville, NC; Douglas McHargue, from a reading at Mitchell Community College; Jean Rodenbough and Caren Masem, from workshops sponsored by the NC Writers' Network; Lisa Brewer, from a reading at Wilkes Community College; and Bethea Buchanan and Ethan Sigmon, two of my students at Catawba Valley Community College. I should also thank Roxanne Newton, Glenda Beall, Ed Southern, and Nolan Belk, organizers of these readings and workshops that made such meetings possible.

Of course, the issue is not limited to poets I've met this way. There are also poems by "old" friends like Harry Calhoun, Tony Abbott, and Debra Kaufman, and poems by poets I've never met like Clare Martin, Austin Hackett and Frank Finney. And don't forget the reviews. I thoroughly enjoyed all of the books I chose to review, but some of them seemed to give me the opportunity to not only offer insights into the poems but to make aesthetic statements about poetry in general. If that sounds interesting to you, make sure you read the review of Steve Roberts' *Another Word for Home*.

As always, I hope you enjoy the writers' comments on their work and hope that you'll take the time to leave a comment of your own. I've heard numerous times from the authors how much they enjoy seeing what others have to say about their poems, and these comments often spark a lively dialogue about the poems, poetry, and the issues brought up through the poems. You can use the links below to go to a specific poem or simply scroll down the page to see the entire issue.

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Debra Kaufman
ON LEARNING HIS DIAGNOSIS

After September rains flies
cluster on the porch
like one still breath.
Tiny opportunists,
they zoom inside
in crushable husks,
settle on fresh-picked blackberries,
buzz lamps and windows.
Pitiless,
I vacuum up their no-account lives
as they cling to screens
in the last light they'll ever know.

Author's Comment:

At the end of my vacation, I learned that my father, 1000 miles away, had just been diagnosed with stage 4 cancer. I loathe flies, both living and dead, and we were being invaded. As I vacuumed them from the windows, a wave of fury and disgust rose up, coupled with a sick feeling of triumph—"take that, die, you nasty creatures." I had the power over their lives as I did not over my father's. The "s" and "z" sounds echo the flies' invasive buzzing.

Debra Kaufman
THE DROUGHT SPEAKS

You harvest what little
seemed hopeful in spring,
yank weeds that break off,
leaving tangled roots
to spread under crust.
You may never know when
the dark took root
in your son's heart
or how to save him
from the brambled path.
He comes sometimes
when you're not home,
leaves footprints, t-shirts,
milk dregs—ways to tell you
it is my story now
but keep the refrigerator full.
I leave you this:
coneflowers and coreopsis,
black-eyed Susans, Queen Anne's lace—
it's the wildflowers that prevail,
their ragged foliage
still green in the heat,
new blossoms about to open.

Author's Comment:

I started this poem many years ago, with the mother as the speaker. I couldn't get the tone right—some emotional resonance was missing. I rediscovered the poem recently, and as I weeded my garden, a voice said, "Let the drought be the speaker." That gave me a new way in. As in the vacuuming poem above, often when I am doing a mundane task, inspiration flaps its wings, and if I pay attention, I let it in.

Debra Kaufman
IN THE EUCLID LIBRARY

Seeing her bowed
over a book,
he estimates the degree
of her neck's curve,
the angle of her bent elbow,
considers the cascading
process of her hair.
He imagines her
among the ruins
of the Parthenon
focusing on points
of light in the sky.
She'd incline toward him,
her eyebrows perfect arcs,
smile cool as a slice of moon.
He'd encompass
with his fingers
her thin wrists,
study the configuration
of her convex belly,
elliptical thighs,
the parallel lines of her legs,
until, like a splayed
painting by Picasso,
she embodied geometry.

Author's Comment:

I wrote this when I was copyeditor of the Duke Mathematical Journal and I had math terms in my mind—a fascinating language I love but don't pretend to understand. I imagined someone with a mathematical mind observing beauty and feeling passion in terms that he understood. The more geometrical I imagined the woman, the more it became like a cubist painting. It was fun to write.

Bio: Poet and playwright Debra Kaufman is the author of three poetry chapbooks—*Family of Strangers*, *Still Life Burning* (winner of the 1996 Kinloch Rivers Chapbook Competition), and *Moon Mirror Whiskey Wind*—and one full-length collection, *A Certain Light*. Her poems have appeared in many literary magazines, including *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Pembroke*, *Carolina*

Quarterly, *Spoon River Quarterly*, and the *Greensboro Review*. She received a playwriting scholarship from the North Carolina Arts Council in 1997 and a Central Piedmont Regional Artists Hub Program grant in 2010. Her short and full-length plays have been performed throughout North Carolina and elsewhere. She lives in Mebane.

Linda Parsons Marion
HUGE

Ignorant of full vegetable potential,
I've overplanted my first year, unplanned
victory in this strange gift of rain. Umbrella,
wing, elephantine—I've used every word
for huge—for plump pods and rinds bounding,
multiplied for the multitudes, over brick
borders built to keep out the dog. Yet my pot
of June soup melts rainbow chard into submission,
leaves broad as sails steamed to ribbon.
Early Girls flatten, enter the fabric of broth.
What I hold big as life in hand, deep in
memory's tall canebrake, stews on the back
burner. Those uneasy ghosts of violence
and argument that supplanted my childhood
still walk the rows. If I use the right knife
or flick of the wrist, I can cut down to size
what once loomed large in my mind. Stalks
of ruined history distill in the heat of stirring:
sea salt, parsley, cheese toast, overtaken
by untamed enormity.

Author's Comment:

My poetry often joins the inner and outer landscapes to bring about larger understanding, discovery, and healing—for me, and I hope for my readers. In this piece, the speaker's first vegetable garden is made even more bountiful by unseasonable rain. In comparison, the childhood past, with its implied darkness, looms equally huge. By stirring memory with maturity and hard-earned strength, we can at least subdue those 'uneasy ghosts,' cooking them down to something more palatable and less fearsome.

Linda Parsons Marion
HUNGER

Who stunned the dirt into noise?

—Theodore Roethke, Praise to the End!

In the trough of sink, the meal's afterthoughts:
serrated core and peel, potato eyes and bruised
heel, white ganglion of Christmas tangerines.
These hoarded leavings, my winter sacrifice
for bony feet submerged, delicious confetti
tossed skyward to rain on the thirstiest root.
Such dinner can't hurt, so I let it lay until
the stew boils down, coats the underworld
in primordial cream. To be fed full to bursting
is the wish we all bear into hard wind,
our seams split with hearty reassurance.
One year I'll wade thigh high in a wire bin,
grounds turned to the sugar of days,
the rotten cabbage's small din.

Author's Comment:

In my gardening poems, I feel very kin to Roethke, who found such life and mystery in the earth. Because I don't have a compost bin (yet), I use the whole yard as one, feeding the many beds with kitchen scraps, coffee grounds, etc. In turn, I am rewarded with the rich loam of thought and word. Whether astraddle the ground or page, I take up tools to excavate these landscapes, acknowledging the importance of both personal underworld and the bright 'sugar of days.'

Bio: Linda Parsons Marion is the author of poetry collections Home Fires and Mother Land. She served as poetry editor of Now & Then magazine for 14 years. Her poems have appeared widely and are forthcoming in Potomac Review, Birmingham Review, Pembroke Magazine, and Connecticut Review. She is an editor at the University of Tennessee and lives in Knoxville with her husband, poet Jeff Daniel Marion.

Maren Mitchell
SELDOM SEEN

When the Blue Ridge Mountains and I were fifty years younger,
your ancestors, unafraid, ate roadside picnics with us.
Now your range is reduced. Now you hunt at night.
Without warning, your daytime shape appears.
You shadow toward our house like a dream.
The quivering tops of the cedars betray you.
Politely (using the steps), presumptuously (not bothering to knock),
you make yourself at home. Claws not clicking,
you pad the lengths of our deck.
Your studious head points astute tongue,
sponging up bird seed from the rail.
You're so young I want to invite you in
for a sit-down or stand-up breakfast of freshly baked biscuits
dripping with butter and honey,
fried ham, eggs sunny-side up,
and coffee afterwards with blackberries and cream.
You don't smell me.
You suspect I am moving
behind windows and doors,
but can't quite focus to care.
A small scar on your flank
feels to me like a skinned knee.
You were caught unaware.
You're short enough to hug.
All graciousness, in spite of your brown,
with an under-tone of red, shabby coat,
you methodically move on to cracked corn
piled across the lawn for turkeys.
Uneasy without camouflage,
you loop back along the road
toward your forest exit.
I hear a returning van coming to meet you
head on. I stomp the deck hard.
Alerted, you re-enter your world,
loping through fading rustles of long-dead leaves
at the speed of a ghost.
Next time I see you
I need to remember

that a two-hundred-pound bear
can move faster than I can imagine
and eats more than bird seed.

Author's Comment:

This poem tells the facts of my encounter with a young hungry spring bear. Not having seen a bear up close in daylight in many decades, I felt very fortunate. Humans are more frightening to me than bears. Only the breakfast menu is fictional.

Maren Mitchell
THE NEXT BUS

The woman's hairline leaks
the color of hair she grows.
Bus stops jiggle the ruffles of her throat
while jaw muscles pump gum.
Thick gold earrings pinch, pull and sway lobes.
She doesn't want the wind to threaten her hairdo.
To get me to close the window
she has a cold.
Does she believe that the other woman won
him with real red hair, or is she addicted
to 30 years of camouflage,
like the weekly shopping trips downtown
accompanied by weather and bus gripes
to the person she's forced to sit beside.
Auburn pencils up her eyebrows
then down the bare skin of her temples—
naked without them,
never answering the door at night.
Maybe she's let herself be his heartbreak,
sacrificing their love to a lifetime of selfless duty,
her Pekingese consolation on her Saturday night slippers,
eyes bulging adoration,
mouth yipping everlasting faithfulness.

Author's Comment: Thirty years ago I saw this woman on a bus, sitting right in front of me. She was as described. Not a pretty sight. From her appearance I imagined her life as it might be, with conditions into which no one would want a loved one's life to evolve. Some readers have found humor here, I do not.

Maren Mitchell
SWEET BASIL

sacred for two thousand years
to the Gods of India,
herb of love, peppermint cousin,
frustrated tree, a bit of a bully,
you're easy to grow, hard to kill.
Even when we're apart
your fragrance is in my cells,
fragrance of warm cinnise.
Pointed ovals cup toward earth,
veins stretch to maximize sun.
Branches bristle translucent ivory flowers,
bob with the rhythm of sucking bees.
Body bare from harvest,
your roots conjure second growth.
Diced with garlic, shaken with vinegar and oil of olive,
you exalt what we wouldn't otherwise eat.
You blend into Mediterranean butter,
marry with marinara sauce to satiate,
thrive as indoor bouquets,
tolerate the familiarity of being rubbed,
of being brushed up against.
In winter's worst, from freezer
you release summer's ease,
travel up our noses on steam,
take over our tongues' definition of contentment,
bringing the promise of June nights,
the gold code of July fireflies,
the fulfillment of August.

Author's Comment: Basil being one of my favorite herbs, I tried to celebrate it to the enth. Its scent is "basil" scent, but that does not define it to those who don't grow or use fresh basil. Not finding a word definitive enough, I created one, "cinnise," the combination of two scents, cinnamon and anise.

Bio: Maren O. Mitchell's poems have appeared in *The Arts Journal*, *Red Clay Reader*, *Appalachian Journal* and *The Journal of Kentucky Studies*, and she has work forthcoming in *Southern Humanities Review* and *Echoes across the Blue Ridge*. 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.

Caren Masem

A WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

Once a large presence, her shrunken body
hunched over the stove. Her back formed
a right angle of hollowed bones. Sweat rolled
from under a muslin kerchief tied around grayed hair.
Once glistening cocoa hands kept oiled
by almond-scented Jergens looked ashy
as they ladled soup from her large dented pot.
Green okra slices swam in tomato base.
Succotash bubbled beside them.
Palladium windows, her eyes welcomed us,
her pale children. She shared a meal and memories.
After golden pound cake, she sweetened
our minds with tales of our youth.
We came for lunch. She served us our history.

Author's Comment: A Woman of Substance is a poem of remembrance. It describes a visit my sister and I made to a woman who helped raise us in Charleston, SC, where she worked as a housekeeper in my mother's home until she retired. I last visited her shortly before she died in April. Her fabulous culinary prowess as well as her home-grown wisdom sustained me through the difficulties of growing up.

Caren Masem
HARD HIKING

Thinking I know you well
I plod through the forest
unaware of hidden thoughts
belonging to half of us.
I take a walking stick to help me
push aside the branches and brambles
you never cut back quite enough.
“New growth,” I say, “needs sunlight.”
“Not always,” you hint.
“Some plants thrive in a bit of shade.”
Even after all the paths we journeyed
twigs scar me still.
And yet, solitary,
I keep moving through a shaded wood
toward finding you beneath
the leaves of yourself.

Author’s Comment: Hard Hiking is the first of a series of poems about my love of hiking. The poems also mark the different passages of my life. This one describes how, with effort, the ability to communicate with a spouse continues to grow throughout the years. My husband and I have hiked together for over 40 years and we are still speaking.

Bio: Caren Masem has written and taught poetry for many years. She earned an MA in English at Iowa State University where she was an instructor for four years. In addition to college teaching, she taught high school English and poetry workshops. Her poems are in several anthologies including *In the Yard and Mountain High* published by Old Mountain Press as well as in *Appalachian Writers Guild Anthology MMVII*. She was also a finalist in the South Carolina Poetry Foundation Contest and was published in The State newspaper in Columbia. Now retired from teaching, she is working on her first book of poetry.

Clare L. Martin

OPEN ME WITH A FIRE OF WORDS

I long for the quiet hour: the hour
within the hour, the hour within
myself in which my self
expands with quiet,
into quiet.
I am stilled, then, to hear
the resonance
of a stirring word— the words
thrumming yes
against the solar plexus,
this knife of the sun,
this the pronouncement of lightning
engendered in me
in the quiet hour,
in the exquisite,
quiet hour.

Author's Comment: OPEN ME WITH A FIRE OF WORDS rises from the feeling I experience when poetry comes to me in moments of solitude and silence. It was composed in a long stretch of night when I was sleepless and the house was not. This poem comments on the ineffable, the mystery and magic of inspiration, and the translation of thought into text by the poet/creator. The title refers to what I, as a reader and poet, wish of the experience of poetry.

BIO: Clare L. Martin is a poet/mother/wife and graduate of the University of Southwestern Louisiana. Clare's creative writing has appeared in *Inch*, *Eclectica Magazine*, *The Dead Mule*, *Wheelhouse Magazine*, *Blue Fifth Review*, *Melusine*, *Press1*, *Scythe and Glass: A Journal of Poetry*, among others. She has work forthcoming in *Literary Mama*. Her work has been nominated for Best of the Net and Best New Poets.

Anthony Abbott
AT THE CHRISTMAS PARTY

of the book club that doesn't read
books, the ladies introduce their men
who with the ladies consume much
wine and enjoy staccato bursts
of conversation. The poet is baffled.
He cannot make words in this festive
scene. He moves from room to room
spinning in his mind like a dervish.
Living room, dining room, kitchen,
den, guest bedroom, and back again.
He listens to the break neck talk,
the roars of laughter at what must
be something he has completely
missed once more. He can make words
from the turning leaves of the soul
but this he cannot fathom. What
can they think of to say that brings
such smirks, such grins, such open
mouthed chewing? What news
from Bethlehem? Where do the kings
lodge tonight? Will they tell all
to Herod? Who will there be to warn
the children, to cry to the nursing
mothers—pluck up your babes
and leave before the soldiers rattle
in with their copper armor and their
thick heads. The poet wants to shout
“Fire!” and watch them all disperse
into the tumbling rain and fog out there.
But he keeps his peace. Instead he
knocks on God's door three times
to give thanks for the strange child
who must have hammered nails himself
before the nails hammered him
and sent the world reeling into darkness.

Author's Comment: This poem surprised me, which is very exciting. It turned at the question “What news from Bethlehem?” into a very different kind of poem. The last stanza really blew

me away. It was a very special gift to me, which I honor, this final reaching out to the real mystery of Christmas that is completely lost at the party, and I really didn't know it was coming, especially in this way.

Anthony Abbott

THIS IS NOT A DREAM

Last night I was driving
to town, alone, windows
closed, listening to music—
to Tchaikovsky, the Piano Concerto.
Yes, that old chestnut, you will say,
but wait. I loved it as a child.
For years I stayed away
from it, warned by sophisticates
to have more mature tastes.
Now, I don't care.
I play the disc every day
in the car to and from work.
And last night, something
happened. It was as if I heard
every note, every piano note
for the very first time. Wait,
don't laugh at me. I heard
every note for the very first time
as it was created in the composer's
mind, as it was played by
the pianist. And the beauty was
so astonishing—this hearing
of every note for the first time
and the last maybe. I don't know.
I played it this morning
and couldn't get it back,
but that was all right, because
you see, I'd had the experience
once, and that was enough
to last forever, to tell me
something is out there
I still don't fully know
may never fully know—
these absolutely perfect
notes that I heard in the car
last night for the first time.

Author's Comment: I went through a phase last summer of rediscovering the music of my childhood—Tchaikovsky, Grieg, Dvorak—those great creators of pure melody sophisticated musicians love to dismiss. I found myself frequently alone in the car on trips to poetry meetings just surrounded by the sound of these pieces, deeply moved by them as if hearing them now, in my seventies, for the first time. I was able to actually feel the music with more intensity than I ever had before. I was able to become one with the music. Hence the poem, and hence the title.

Bio: Anthony S. Abbott is the author of five collections of poetry and two novels.

Harry Calhoun
EMOTIONAL WRECK

Driving home from the liquor store
and Bryan Adams' Summer of '69
blaring from the Blaupunkt and I crank it
all the way up, it's hot and humid out
so I blast the air conditioning too,
and dust or something flies out
and gets in my eyes, and after
the emotion from the first song
the DJ decides to play Pink's
Please Don't Leave Me, and
impossible to tell if it's dust
or rock 'n' roll lust but I'm crying,
can't see where I'm going
but I couldn't pull off the road
and there was no place to go
but home, the best place
to sit in the driveway sobbing.

Bio: Harry Calhoun is a widely published poet, article and essay writer. Check out his trade paperback, *I knew Bukowski like you knew a rare leaf*, the recently published *The Black Dog and the Road* and his chapbook, *Something Real*. He's had recent publications in *Chiron Review*, *Chiaroscuro*, *Orange Room Review*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Monongahela Review* and many others. He is the editor of *Pig in a Poke* magazine.

Austin Rory Hackett

THE BEST BLUES ARE WRITTEN IN THE FALL

My roommate has been way too happy
to write any good blues songs lately,
but I have hope for him come fall.
You see, blues written in the spring
have too much undercurrent of optimism,
surrounded by evidence of the after-darkness dawn.
Summer blues are half-hearted, almost forced –
trying to pretend things are bad
during long, warm days.
And winter blues are unneeded, overdone,
like kicking the dead, honking in a traffic jam,
or burning a bent and broken building.
But the fall, that's a time for some killer blues,
when Nature herself is saying, "Yeah, we're all gonna die,
but we're going down in high style,
dressed in our best autumn clothes."

Author's Comment: My roommate who wanted to write blues songs is one of the happiest people I know. He was trying to remember (or make up) bad things that had happened to him to write about. That made me start thinking about why so much of the art I'm attracted to deals with tragedy, or at least the artists themselves were complete wrecks. I wondered why that is. I started writing and ended up with this poem that just ended up going back to the fact that my roommate can't write blues.

Austin Rory Hackett
GRAVEDIGGER DICTION

Your deep, slow, expressionless voice
that I first heard when you volunteered
to read Creon's part in "Antigone" out loud
is exactly like the one I imagine hearing when I die,
and Death arrives in my bedroom
with his scythe and billowing black cloak.
My hope, though, is that your voice is not the only trait
you and the stealer of souls have in common;
the more similarities the better, really.
For example, I hope to find him rocking nervously back and forth
obviously unsure how to start the conversation –
wringing his hands, then stuffing them in his pockets.
I assume he will be accompanied by a cold wind, and if this
happens to lift his cloak a bit, I want to see over-sized tennis shoes.
I want thick white socks bundled around his skinny ankles.
And above all, I want so badly
for him to explain the details of my imminent fate
entirely through references to Star Wars.

Author's Comment: It's okay to make fun of people if you do it poetically, right? This kid sat behind me in a class a while ago and it killed me (get it? killed me, Death, etc.) every time he read out loud. This is me talking behind his back. This is you being an accomplice.

Bio: I have a BS in genetics from BYU and am a medical student at Columbia University. My work has appeared or is forthcoming in The Battered Suitcase, Falling Star Magazine, and Inscape. I won first place in the 2010 Hart-Larson Poetry competition.

Douglas Anne McHargue
THE POWER OF THE MOON

In October, month of mystery,
an old woman burns a pile of leaves
and behind her, remnants of the sunset,
twilight sky and rising moon.
She leans on a gnarled cane
and turns to stare at me
as smoke rises, offering to appease
a moon who brings in all tides,
pulls babies from wombs.
Sliver of silver, the crescent hoop
worn by the gypsy in Belk's Cloth
and Notions when I was five.
I'd heard when gypsies came to town
clerks had to watch them carefully
for they'd take stuff, steal babies.
But here they were, the gypsy woman
surrounded by sisters and daughters
looking at fabric to sew into dresses
like my mom did, who'd told me
Only loose women wear hoops
in their ears. Then I looked
at the gypsy's dark hair and saw
that crescent moon dangling from her lobe,
orbiting, pulling on us all.

Douglas Anne McHargue
DOWAGER QUEEN

1

near Oxford Dam
Hurricane Hugo's slaughter
still rots on forest floor

2

fallen pine allows
wisteria to cover her wormy corpse
like a purple pall

3

wrap my neck in ropes
of amethyst so no man
will see my decay

4

fishermen sit on great gray rocks
bony arms casting rods far away
from slam-door screaming

5

cars on number sixteen
follow the road to Charlotte
escaping to frescoed skyscrapers

6

stick-leg herons
gray ghosts of pterodactyls
statues borne from rocks

7

cigarettes burn
against men's faces, undershirts
phosphorescent in the night

8

sunburned necks cooled
and pale, a white fog
surrounds them like a cloud

Douglas Anne McHargue
BLUE NEON BAR

Jacob parks his pick-up in front of the bar,
its cement blocks sprayed white
and he remembers pictures in school
of the Taj Mahal, white, too
and built by an emperor for his love.
He looks in the dirty fifties' picture window
and sees the usuals shooting pool,
shooting the breeze, smoke filling the room
like a fog hiding everything real.
Jacob walks into the haze,
his eyes like a hunter's,
trained to look for something even when
nothing is there.
He sits at the bar, not ordering a beer,
but listens to emptiness
until somebody starts the jukebox
and his heart begins.
The blond beside him has hair
burned by a permanent left too long
in pink plastic rollers,
its split ends circling a round face
with watery blue eyes that have searched forever.
She lights a Winston and speaks soft
garbled messages from angels
while the smoke floats
above her like a halo.
She reaches over and runs
ruby red fingernails lightly over
Jacob's wrist veins
and he sees the Bud Light sign above them,
its blue neon pouring into the room
the way blue stained glass lit the church
where he went as a boy, and would press
his hand against the glass
wondering if the blue was the sky
filling his translucent
transcendent veins.

Bethea Buchanan
ALBERT ALBERT

99% cotton blend, preshrunk material
clinging to lithe, underdeveloped frame
sparks excitement in Uncle Albert's eyes.
Sunbleached, short cropped curls
wide, innocent eyes that trust-
implicitly, no questions, no suspicions.
"Do you want to be a movie star?"
Pull the strings, push the fabric,
click! pop! flash! — disoriented, smiling
anything for Uncle Albert.
To be the favorite, get the presents
the attention- the love.
Put on a happy face.
It's what grown ups do.
"Don't you want to be a woman?
Don't tell mommy! Don't tell daddy!"
Grin and bear it.

Author's Comments: "Albert Albert" is a poem inspired by a report written about Lewis Carroll and one of those stories you hear about your uncle that's told in hushed tones at the holidays- usually including the phrase "bless his heart" in the telling.

Bio: Bethea Buchanan is a student from Hickory, NC. Her poems have appeared in Dead Mule, and in a red journal tucked under the mattress.

Jean Rodenbough
AT SAN DAMIANO

the trees
through high glass windows
we watch them and the way
they bend and twist from the earth
California live oaks and rouge-marked Madrones
rough-barked, cross-trunked
they lean to the dining room
we eat here beside the great trees
meditation walk
quiet
only the shuffled sound of sandals
the silence covers even softest thoughts
in this line of walkers
as we enter the chapel
our meditations merge into the bright
day of prayer and singing
music strings our petitions together
a necklace of words
gates
we know to close gates
wrought-iron security from deer
who crave the flowers in tamed
gardens where the once wild
outside is held by earth inside
we have no choice
lest the intruders enter
and eat all the pretty colors,
the green and the red,
blue and lavender – succulent
flavors lure longing creatures –
flower Sirens call to Odyssean deer
tempting tastes for their tongues
we close the gate with a sharp click!

Author's Comment: Recently I attended a weekend silent retreat at San Damiano, not far from San Francisco, CA, a Franciscan Retreat Center in Danville, CA. Situated on a mountain, the setting is beautiful, and the landscaping of the grounds with all the different species of

flowers and shrubs makes for a wonderful place to be. The trees astounded me with their beauty, surrounding us from every location. I felt compelled to do this series of poems to capture at least a taste of the experience.

Bio: In my retirement (from Presbyterian ministry) I am returning full time to my writing after a 30-year hiatus. I belong to the poetry critique group of the Writers Group of the Triad, and also have completed a manuscript about children of World War II, accompanied by poems as reflections and commentary. I live in Greensboro, NC, with my husband Charles, also a writer these days. Our four children and their families also live in the area. We're down to one dog, a Beagle/Jack Russell, and several granddogs from time to time.

Ethan Sigmon
LANGUISH

When Atlas cracked
under the weight of eternity,
did he think,
"I deserve this," too?
Did his anger overtake his throat,
raging titan,
bitching and sweating?
Did he tire of enduring roads for godly men,
not because of his failure to be strong,
courageous, powerful, mighty,
but for no reason that made reason.
Why should a god like himself
endure the weight of heaven?
Why should he carry paradise when it beats,
cracks, splinters
chews into fingertips,
rips at nails,
callused hands,
hopeless trembling arms burning,
sweating, fuming with fury and might
wasted potential,
mere volition.

Author's Comment: There is a slight beauty in watching things fall apart. If you can appreciate that, then surely the cycle of life will suit you well.

Bio: Ethan Sigmon is currently a student at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington. He actively participates in loud music, a dead-end band, some painting, some writing, too much working, and a little bit of wasting time. Ethan has previously been published twice in the Dead Mule School of Southern Literature and is actively seeking to get his work out to a greater audience.

Harry Youtt
AND WHAT OF THE DAWN?

And what of the dawn, I'm asking?
All of us — and the rooster —
rushing headlong into the new day —
not knowing where we'll have to be turning first.
It isn't for the thrill of light the rooster crows,
and not for the waking of the world.
Rooster proclaims his own plan, nothing more,
simply because he's been the first to think of it.
And the turning world rushing headlong
carries all of us along (we have no choice)
and even as we move we stay the same.
Do you see what miracle it is now?
Simply feathers, shirking night,
never choosing alone to enter another morning
that flames itself into day, and light enough
for all of us to make our own separate plans —
light enough to begin to carry them out.

Author's Comment: Whenever I can, I escape Los Angeles and make my way up to my mountain cabin, at the end of an unpaved winding road, deep in a Ponderosa Pine forest. Only a couple of neighboring cabins. Peaceful. Serene. Until one of the neighbors got a rooster. The poem was my coming to terms with the rooster. I wrote it very early on the fourth morning. The rooster seemed to appreciate that I had discovered his purpose. Shortly before dawn on the ninth morning, the coyotes came.

Bio: Harry Youtt writes poems and short stories that have garnered a couple of Pushcart nominations. For a long time, he's been teaching creative writing classes and workshops (fiction, non-fiction, poetry) in the U.C.L.A. Extension Writers' Program. He's on the Editorial Board of the international Journal of Consciousness, Literature and the Arts.

Frank Finney
WHEN

the term mixed marriage
needs a footnote.
when
passports get mounted
on the museum wall.
when
someone answers all of
Dylan's questions.
when
we saddle our nightmares
and ride.

Author's Comment: This poem considers a world different from the one we live in. I often wonder, for example, what life might be like in a world in which a majority of its citizens didn't feel the need to use such words and terms as 'foreigner' and 'resident alien' and other expressions of that ilk. Idealistic, of course, and as the third (Dylan) stanza implies, it would be rather difficult to predict 'when' or even if such changes might (if ever) come about. The last stanza can be read as a rather optimistic vision for the future.

Bio: Born and raised in Massachusetts, I have been living and teaching (British and American Literature) at Thammasat University in Thailand since 1995. My poems have appeared in such publications as Orbis (UK), Verandah (Australia) and Green Mountains Review (USA). I have work forthcoming in Offerte Speciale (Italy), Lilliput Review (USA), and Iodine Poetry Journal (USA).

Lisa Brewer
OPPORTUNITY KNOCKED

Hearts love best
That never meet.
Kisses left unknissed
Stay sweet.
Love that never
Did exist
Is the kind
Most deeply missed.

Author's Comment: I was about 20 when I wrote this, not seeing anyone at the time and not writing with anyone particular in mind. There were plenty of romantic involvements and attachments to be observed on the Wake Forest University campus, and I was a keen and willing observer. I might have had some odd couplings in mind when I wrote this very quickly on a dateless but not unhappy night. This is a good example of my preferred writing style, which is lean and sparse.

Bio: Lisa De Maio Brewer (WFU, 1981 and 2008) is an adjunct instructor of English at Wilkes Community College. A former speechwriter and press secretary, she is happily married to her high school sweetheart, attorney Greg Brewer. They have two sons and live in the foothills of North Carolina.

Brenda Kay Ledford
APPALACHIAN MOUNTAINS

I've known mountains:
I've known mountains older
than the Rocky Mountains .
My heart throbs with the mountains.
I bathed in the Irish Sea .
I built rock walls in Ireland .
I herded sheep in the Highlands .
I heard "Danny Boy" and navigated
through storms to the New World .
I cleared the wilderness, fought bears,
rode wagons across the mountains,
built log cabins, planted crops and
lived with the Cherokee Indians.
I've known the mountains:
Ancient, carved mountains.
My heart throbs with the mountains.

Author's Comment: My ancestors came from Scotland and Ireland to America in the 1700's. A few years ago I took a trip to those places. I felt a deep connection to the land. It was as though I had always lived in Ireland and Scotland. The highlands remind me very much of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I can understand why my ancestors chose these mountains to settle. As a native of this region I have known mountains all of my life, both physically and in my soul. My heart throbs with the mountains because they are a part of me.

Bio: Brenda Kay Ledford is a member of NC Writers' Network and NC Poetry Society. Her work has appeared in ASHEVILLE POETRY REVIEW, MAIN STREET RAG, APPALACHIAN HERITAGE, THE JOURNAL OF KY STUDIES, and other publications. She received the Paul Green Award from NC Society of Historians for her poetry chapbooks: SHEW BIRD MOUNTAIN and SACRED FIRE. Both chapbooks were published by Finishing Line Press.

Review of *Another Word for Home*, by Steve Roberts
Main Street Rag (2010), 70 pages, \$14
ISBN: 9781599482491

In Steve Roberts' "The Lamp, the Glass and the Pencil," arguably the best poem in his new collection, *Another Word for Home*, an employer asks the speaker, "Do your poems always center around / Yourself?" The simple implication of the question is that there is something wrong if every poem "centers around" oneself—rampant egotism or narcissism, perhaps, or some unhealed woundedness that causes the self to be the lens through which all perception is filtered . . . but wait a minute; with or without woundedness, the self will always be the lens through which perception is filtered, and to ignore rather than explore that fact is to indulge in a larger sort of egotism by which one presumes their own experiences and perceptions to be objective fact rather than acknowledging the way the self influences what one sees, hears, feels. The employer in the poem is certainly not the first to level this sort of criticism at what has in the past and might still be termed confessional poetry. Both this employer and these prior critics would do well to read a bit a further as five poems later, in "Business," the presumably same speaker gives as good a justification for the confessional tendencies of these poems as I've ever encountered when he remarks: "I have learned / The unsaid can manufacture // Disturbances."

These two poems illustrate several impressive characteristics of Roberts' collection. First, of course, there is the vindication of confessionalism, which I'm sure was not anything Roberts set out to do, but which is nonetheless resoundingly achieved in poems like "The Ground Firms Up the Wet," "Bonewhite Plane Drones," and "Gyre." And, given that the book begins with the line, "I locate," and repeats that idea of locating the self amid the maelstrom of perception, memory, and circumstance that is reality in poems like "Gyre" ("derive the location / Of the sun from an oak's restless / Shadow") and "Location, Location," perhaps the creation of poetry "centered around" the self is exactly what Roberts set out to do. It may be instructive to recall, after all, that in Rosenthal's original conception of confessionalism the only differences between poems identified as confessional and traditional lyrical poetry were the absence of masks and the "customary bounds of reticence or personal embarrassment." Flipping forward to the last poem of the book, "Under Construction" places these confessional poems firmly within the rubric of another hermeneutical context, that of deconstructionism, as the complex psychic presence of memory and past perception must be constantly reevaluated in the construction of one's ever-evolving self.

The second characteristic of Roberts' book made apparent in "The Lamp, the Glass and the Pencil" and "Business" is an integral part of the book's deconstructionist context, namely, the habit of creating linked poems, usually by providing an answer in one poem to a question that arose out of a poem several pages prior. Such is the case not only in these two poems, but in virtually every poem in the book, including "The Ground Firms Up the Wet," which

prompts the reader to wonder about the source of the “Mother’s denial, / Rage and revenge,” and wait expectantly for other poems to clarify the father’s alcoholism, the daughter’s schizophrenia, and her own sense of failure as the sources of these feelings. The effect of this sort of linking is that the poems create a sense of a single, unified story, compelling the reader forward and creating a simultaneously satisfying and disturbing sense of vraisemblance as we recognize what we already knew but hesitated to admit — that no experience is self-contained, that everything, every word, every choice has innumerable causes, consequences, and reverberations both large and small.

As remarkable a feat as it is to vindicate confessional poetry and simultaneously create a complex and meaningful lifelikeness in poetry, perhaps what is most impressive in these poems is the sense of control with which Roberts writes. Many of these poems are based on disturbingly intense emotional experiences and all of them on the frustrating and sometimes frightening complexities of human relationships, and yet, there is not a poem among them that could be considered a rant. Similarly, condescension, cynicism, sarcasm, self-indulgent cleverness, rage — all the things we might expect from a survivor’s story of emotional unrest — are entirely absent, replaced instead with such careful and precise choice of words, phrasing, and arrangement of lines that what results is a voice of calm, evenhanded sincerity that the reader responds to with empathy and complete trust. The technical mastery that creates such a response from the reader results from painstaking control at every level of composition. A brief scanning of endwords illustrates that Roberts is much more conscious of the vitality of line breaks than many of his contemporaries. The tightness and subtle regularity of his lines and stanzas makes clear that he carefully orchestrates every detail of his poems. Observe, for example, the absence of superfluous syllables in these lines from “Boot Up,” where every word conveys vital meaning and image despite the ironic and self-deprecatory last statement:

At the nub
Of the cross-beamed, rivet-rusted
trampled one-end
To-the-other fishing pier,
No more human structure, no more
Outpouring of expectation.
From here on, it’s nothing
But ocean, the source of our amoebic,
Word-failed selves.

Roberts is keenly aware not only of the sound of these poems but also the shape of the poems. Several of them, in fact, have a “concrete” appearance. Each of his first three Angelika poems, for example, are set typographically in the form of what I first thought to be a vase, calling up thoughts of Keats, but is later revealed in “Embryonic” to be “An hourglass-figured woman.”

There is so much more that can be said about Steve Roberts' *Another Word for Home*, but these three characteristics are the most significant. Nothing else is needed to mark it as a book that is worthy of being read by all who enjoy the ways poetry works and is relevant to the real world, and as a book that I will read again and again.

Review

The Real Warnings, by Rhett Iseman Trull

Anhinga Press, 2008, 84 pages, \$15

ISBN 9781934695111

I want Rhett Iseman Trull's book of poems *The Real Warnings* to have the subtitle "Taking Chances Because What Else Is There" because that is the message of these poems. Presented as one part apology, one part tribute to love and parenting, and all parts acknowledgement of the difficulty of choosing to take risks and the impossibility of choosing not to, *The Real Warnings* provides vital testimony to the importance of fortitude, persistence, and faith in humanity and oneself.

The opening poem (one of the best) of the collection presents this perspective summarily. The speaker "warns" her parents, "You will burn yourselves on me," and admonishes "Forget about sleeping / I'll dominate the prayers you keep sending up . . . / For every greeting card poem, I will write four / to hurt you. Some will be true." But she advises prophetically, "You will take one look at that new life screaming / into the world, and open your arms." As a new parent, myself, I have no difficulty identifying with this course of emotions.

"The Last Good Dream" presents another image of our willingness to take risks, this time in regards to love,

. . . we give
with unthinned hearts, little knowing
how even if banked by the best words
and buoyed by honesty, love can fail.
Or maybe we do know
and unharbor ourselves anyway.

And "Introducing My Brother in the Role of Clark Kent" puts a more specific face on what we're willing to do for love and how even as we recognize the cost it has exacted from us, we know we would do it again: "he's calculated that he's spent / seventy-one-point-two percent of the last three years in her / presence, mostly happy, unwilling to trade a day of it." One poem after another provides such portraits of persistence despite the warnings and even knowledge of the dangers involved: "The Boy in the Full-Length Women's Fur Coat" "thinks of her, // the girl he keeps loving / and losing;" the speaker in "Everything from That Point On" says, "I loved you most in that moment, knowing // even as I slipped my arm up the back of your shirt, hooking us // together, that you were about to cut me loose;" and "Hanna" in "Study of Motion" says, "Pursue Joy Now" and moves "to San Francisco" to "do what she loves."

No naïve romantic, however, the speaker of these poems knows that in pursuit of joy there will be frustration, failure, even desperation, and she knows the appeal of that desperation,

that “what feels like the end is the end / only if you pull the trigger” (“The Ice Is Our Only Light”). She knows that along the way the frequently unsatisfying nature of life will lead us to almost unimaginable acts to feel again just the possibility of joy, as in “The House of Pain” where she remarks, “As you leave, what begins to haunt you / is not the blisters that bangle your wrist like opals. / It is not the awful things he did to you / but the yes that you roared as you let him.” Thus, these usually hopeful poems are at times painful, at times heartwrenchingly so, as in the best of them all, “The End of the Hour:”

. . . The hour’s over.

Today’s final question: not why
the scars but where? Where else
did you do that?

.....

. . . I

start to remove my blouse, to offer
a look at the marks I scored
that no one’s ever seen. For a moment
I feel human, all masks put away. I will show
her all of it, ugliness I’ve covered until now, but
That’s enough, she scolds, jotting a furious
phrase in her notes before opening the cabinet
with her heel and storing, again, my file.

.....

Don’t ask, I think, if you don’t want to know.
but I say, I’m sorry, sorry familiar
as breath, Sorry, sent out the door half-
unbuttoned.

But what matters most to the anti-nihilist, the existentialist who speaks these poems is the refusal to give up. So, in “Counting Miracles” we hear from a mental hospital resident:

We’ve learned a thing or two
about miracles for the common man,
. . . a nest of robins about to hatch;
fast cars on the highway, going somewhere;
in the sky, webs of lightning

.....

The stars know the danger
of even a bingo-paced Wednesday and light
themselves every night in celebration
of the simple fact of our survival.

And in “The Night before Depakote,” we’re told simply, “It’s enough that we live.” And in “Last Word,” we hear perhaps most clearly from the poet herself the proclamation, “I don’t

really want to be a concrete / signature. I want to grow old choosing ink over blood / with which, on the flank of the world, I'll set my brand." And, then, since the "last word" is really just the last word in this book-length struggle for hope, we read in the final three poems of the rewards for this victory over despair: "The streets of my heart while sun-licked, well-trafficked, amazed, / hosted a previous traveler or two, but none until you / paused to point out beauty I missed" ("The Streets of My Heart"); "Jeff and I, for the better / part of a year, have been trying to start / a life inside me" ("Sonogram on the Way to Earth"); and "Maybe // we'll bring into this world five children and ruin / every one" ("Heart by Heart the House"). Such hopeful planning should be the final breath of every difficult day.

Review of *The Sound of Poets Cooking*, edited by Richard Krawiec
Jacar Press, 2010, 172 pages
ISBN: 9780984574001

It happens to all of us at one time or another. Late of an afternoon, we start to feel a certain emptiness, as if something is missing, something needed. We call it hunger or craving. And the more we try to ignore it, the stronger it gets. Maybe we long for something light and refreshing, or something heavier, meaty. Maybe just something sweet. Or maybe we can't figure out exactly what we want. And that's when we know that the answer to our appetite is surely a buffet. And that's just what Richard Krawiec has arrayed before us as editor of *The Sound of Poets Cooking*. Whether we long for something exotic, something familiar and comforting, something spicy, salty, or even a bit saucy, this enticing collection of delectable delights is sure to satisfy.

To be clear and leave metaphor behind for a moment, *The Sound of Poets Cooking* is a new, 172-page anthology of poems about food accompanied by related recipes, from Krawiec's fledgling press, Jacar Press. And it is an impressive debut, featuring wonderful work from poets both familiar and new, including two NC Poets Laureate, Fred Chappell and Kathryn Stripling Byer, and numerous other standards: Joseph Bathanti, Kelly Cherry, Jaki Shelton Green, Susan Ludvigson, Joanna Catherine Scott, Shelby Stephenson, and more, wrapped in a clever cover with an image of Buddha cradling a pomegranate, eggplant, carrots, tomatoes, sweet potato, chef's knife and some spiky yellow fruit I'm not familiar with, appealingly conveying the mixture of spirituality and whimsy one might expect from poetry about food. Of course, individual poems and individual recipes from the collection prove both enjoyable and useful, but like any good recipe, *The Sound of Poets Cooking* also masterfully blends disparate elements to create what might be experienced as a single savory delight, a cohesive record of the diverse ways in which the culinary arts and poetic arts are woven into the fabric of our memories, our experiences, and our daily emotional and intellectual lives. Here a reader finds the mock heroic tetrameter couplets of Chappell's "Pot Luck Supper: Aunt Lavinia Strikes" delicately balanced by the therapeutic free verse of Grey Brown's "Scrambled." Or the stick-to-your-ribs heaviness of Debra Kaufman's "Minestrone, Rainy Day" relieved by the joyful ad-libbing of Alice Owens Johnson's "Gumbo." Or the formal propriety of Jim Clark's "Sunday Dinner" harmonized by the titillating temptation of Deborah Kolodji's "Eggplant Parmigiana."

As for the recipes, there are many I intend to try my hand at, including the onion pie, the Brussels sprouts & goat cheese risotto, and the coconut cake, but like Lenard Moore's daughter, the one I look forward to the most is the three cheese macaroni and cheese.

To whet your appetite a bit more here is a sampler platter of some of my favorite lines from *The Sound of Poets Cooking*. Bon appetit!

from Scott Douglass' "Bread Crumbs:"

. . . I fill

each page with bread crumb words,
a trail for someone, sometime
to follow back to me
from Anne Barnhill's "Tiramisu:"
Don't give me puffy white clouds
Fat as marshmallows
To lounge on when I die.

.....

Just place a generous block of tiramisu
In front of me;

.....

Sin straddling goodness-
Delicious as Dante.
from Pat Riviere-Seel's "Road Trip Conversation:"

Beside you now I am ravenous
for the ripe figs of your fingers
folded around the steering wheel.

from Michael Beadle's "Fromage:"

For a flash of free verse, I invoke
the Goddess of Gorgonzola, //
who bids me long life
as long as I use her bounty //
upon this holy cracker of truth,
this snack we have to share //
as the Muenster metaphor
melts in our minds.

from Susan Meyers' "Fork: Song for the Misunderstood:"

May the fork in its daily travels discover
an insatiable mouth.

May the mouth
always adore the fork's repetitive tune.

Review of *What Hands Can Hold* by Ami Kaye (Illustrations by Tracy McQueen)
Xlibris, 2010, 132 pages
ISBN: 9781450031080

I don't believe in fate, providence, or predestination, but I'm willing to admit that on more than one occasion in my life things have happened with a certain sense of synchronicity. Recently, for no reason I could fathom, I went through a renewed interest in short imagistic poetry — haiku, certainly, but other similar poems as well. And then, unannounced, I received a copy of Ami Kaye's new book of poems, *What Hands Can Hold*, which consists almost entirely of poems that are frequently short, and nearly always successfully imagistic. Only two of the 63 poems in *What Hands Can Hold*, are consciously derived from haiku and its related forms (both are titled "Senryu"), but the influence of an aesthetic commonly thought of as Eastern, is manifest. Certain poems, like "Shadow Hands" bear a great deal in common with haiku — brevity, focus on two seemingly disparate images that resonate when placed, without commentary, together:

against the bright light
hands dance to make a shadow
a black swan rises in
graceful silhouette.

Other poems contain one or more stanzas that come even closer to the traditions of haiku, as in this stanza from "Hands:"

cupping water
the flowing urgency of
silt-green rivers.

And some poems are built entirely upon short, imagistic stanzas, as in "Tea House:"

That last
conversation
left interrupted
when the call
came,
the rush
to leave,
the scrape of wood
against
cherry-blossom
wallpaper,
the silence
afterwards.

The form, nearly always effective in these poems, is particularly so in this one, where the brief, perception-heavy phrasing mirrors the fragmented, methodical processing of a speaker

confronted with a tragic parting.

While, as suggested in the volume's title, Kaye employs the motif of hands and the many uses of hands — creation, communication, support, prayer, praise, service, revelation, control, love — to bind these poems and mark them as part of a unified manuscript, the poems really cover a wide range of topics and themes, from love and parenting to politics and loss. And while Kaye is lyrical and adept no matter what topic she explores, she is perhaps at her best, in the love poems. Take, for example, "Curvature," a beautifully sensuous love poem that transitions seamlessly from one image of curvature to the next, beginning with that of a smile and proceeding as follows:

I am captured entirely
slave to your mirth
no need for words, silence builds
restless and charged, it
changes the quality of touch
air crackles between us, extravagant,
quickenning, lightning fast
like the curve of light
when a rainbow is made
or the curve of your arms
when I'm in them.

"November Rose" is another sumptuous love poem with a number of those haiku-influenced stanzas, but it is also one of the most complex poems in the collection. Ostensibly about a very late-blooming rose, "born from frost . . . / deep in whose petals / burns a hot heart," it is not only about the speaker's love for the person who brings her the rose, or his love for the speaker, or even the speaker's love for things that resist decay, that manage to create or be created out of destruction, it is about a love of so many things — simple things like roses, poetry, music, language, and complex things like the very human existential resistance to death, decay and inevitability that paradoxically deepens and is deepened by the willingness to love despite the great risk such willingness necessitates. This paradox of love born from the awareness of loss's inevitability becomes the central theme of the text; perhaps it is the central theme of all human texts. This theme is most clearly stated in "Intimations of Mortality," where the speaker proclaims, "The hint of impermanence brings with it / the agony, the passion to live."

Even when the stories presented by the poems are most full of pain, the love still remains, as in the heartbreaking political narrative (two uncommon traits in this book), "Snow Globe," in these lines from "Sins of Omission," "She wished, she wished she had / inked on vellum to bear witness, / to tell him what she never said before: 'You matter'", and in "Senescence:"
She helps him change

and it hurts, even though
she's used to his empty eyes
by now.

She feeds him
oatmeal, an orange,
a meal that drags
into a couple of hours
and when she
washes the dishes

. . . //

She remembers
the times his fingers
laced with hers,
how he always knew
when she needed his touch.

It is just this fresh, deep, and wide treatment of a theme so vital to contemporary human existence that makes Ami Kaye's *What Hands Can Hold* both significant and timely. It is also what makes me glad that I had begun to look at short poems with short lines in a new appreciation, and that for whatever reason Ami Kaye decided to send me a copy of this book. So, while I still spurn the notion of destiny, I do find great joy in the presence of and from the consequence of what I might prefer to call serendipity.

Review of *Punching through the Egg of Space*, by Richard Allen Taylor
Main Street Rag, 2010, 75 pages, \$14
ISBN: 9781599482385

Sometimes it's easy to make singular statements about a book of poems. Perhaps the poems in the book cohere around a single narrative, theme, or style. Such singular statements, however, while convenient, usually accurate, and sometimes even helpful, often belie a vital variety and richness in the poems that make them much less artificial than the critical singular statement suggests.

The poems in Richard Allen Taylor's new collection, *Punching through the Egg of Space*, vigorously resist any such singular classification, which is not to say that the volume lacks cohesion. There are several currents that run throughout the poems. There are, for example, a significant number of poems about food, writing, and aging. But it would be grossly misleading to say that the book is about any one or even all three of these topics. There are also a number of poems about being Richard Allen Taylor, which within the literary historical context of Confessionalism the reader understands as being about being human. In fact, one of the many strengths of this text is the seamlessness with which Taylor makes us recognize ourselves in poems that seem to be about him. Nevertheless, to say that *Punching through the Egg of Space* is Confessionalist would also be unfairly and unnecessarily reductionist. Tony Abbott says this "is a book of joyous affirmation." Ann Campanella says it is "a song of joy." And Anne Hicks says "these poems contemplate the role and responsibility of the individual in this world." They are all right, of course, but neither life nor these poems are simple enough to be described in such singular statements, and recognizing this, Campanella adds that the book is about "the paradox of the human heart" and presents "a constellation of humor, gravity, and exuberance." It is exactly this combination of qualities that makes *Punching through the Egg of Space* such an enjoyable read. These are poems written about what it feels like to be alive in the 21st century, a topic immediately relevant to any reader today. As such there is often humor, sadness, irony, philosophical musing, conviction, the loss of conviction, complete uncertainty, surprise, sentimentality, and throughout it all an unmistakable humanity.

Speaking of one friend to another recently I said of the former that he is "a real guy." I couldn't possibly explain what I meant by the phrase, but from these poems I suspect Richard Allen Taylor embodies exactly that quality, a real guy who happens to be very good at finding the perfect word and the perfect image to help the rest of us understand what he means.

I thought I would quote a number of poems to make my points in this review, existential lines about the value of effort in "Landing" and "Outbound," about the irony of success in "After the Moonwalk," lines illustrating Taylor's remarkable imagery in "Moonrise — North

Buncombe County, NC” or “Fancying I Know More about Soil Erosion Than the Artist,” lines revealing Taylor’s perspective on writing in “Obscurity,” “White,” or “Token Rebellion,” but lacking the space to give all the deserving poems, lines, and images their due, I will instead conclude with an excerpt of “Playing Catch,” my own favorite poem from the collection and allow it to serve as a teaser to encourage you to read more:

Watch this kid. He throws the ball
across the plate, chases it to the backstop,
hurries back to the pitcher’s mound,
throws the ball again and again, shouting
gentle encouragements.
A munchkin in a Yankees cap, she just stands there,
never swings the bat, shows no interest in hitting.
.....//
I try to remember what it was like
to be learning the fundamentals–
love, heartbreak, sacrifice.
This kid makes all his errors
on the giving side, and I root for him.

Review

Continents of Light, by David T. Manning
Finishing Line Press, 2010, 29 pages, \$14
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There are days when I'm driving down the road or sitting in a coffeeshop and I see something so remarkably tender that I feel for a moment like I honestly love everyone. It's a nice feeling, albeit usually brief. David Manning, it seems, has had similar epiphanous moments of agape, written poems about those moments, and recorded them in his new collection of poems, *Continents of Light*.

The poems in *Continents of Light* are by and large memorial poems, memorials to the particular objects of love they are about, to those in love, and to the human capacity for love, and by reading these poems, the reader achieves his own epiphany, the sudden understanding that the desire to memorialize is itself a form of love, one that poets in particular are familiar with. In "Opus Anonymous," Manning wonderfully captures the romantic hope of poets to get something important so right that that thing lives on in the words of the poem: "Perhaps she escaped from his dreams / and fell between stanzas into / the white spaces of his poems." And for Manning, this desire to memorialize becomes something even more. As suggested in "Duende," it becomes duty: "I cannot turn my face away. / God has found me and I have / no place to hide."

The flip side of great love, however, is great loss. Reading these poems one feels that Manning has loved well and lost much and understands more than most the nature of the longing that results from having loved and lost, the longing not to simply have something one has never had but to have again what one has known, grown accustomed to, and integrated into one's fabric of being to such a degree that it seems no longer desire but necessity. The reader shares this understanding in poems like "Too Old for Vicky:" "I have lost the color / of her eyes . . . // Vicky has been taken // beyond all nights and assignations. / Taken to the bosom of one / much too old for us all." Perhaps it is even stronger in "Coastal:" "I feel you waiting / where I cannot find you. / I follow you / from empty room to empty room."

The emotional undercurrent of these poems, the longing for connection or reconnection, is so strong that it carries the reader away. This is, perhaps, clearest in "Skipping Stones"

. . . their voices startled me
from far across the lake. I hope
my thoughts reach you this way
sometimes, . . .
distracting you in mid-breath,
soft as the touch of a stranger
in a crowd, . . .
. . . If only

there were this lake
and nothing else between us
I could skip my words
across to you like stones.

This poem is undoubtedly very personal, but the reader can't tell who this long lost "you" is — a lost wife or child or parent, even perhaps the speaker's own past self. Such lack of clarity is often the death of a poem, but in this one, the ambiguity makes it possible for the reader to fill in the blank as they need to. It becomes the white space between the stanzas where Manning has already spoken of memorializing those we love, and the emotions are so familiar and so solidly imagined (made into image) that the poem succeeds regardless of who the "you" becomes to the reader — the world, God, or my favorite, the reader, such that this becomes, in Dickinsonian tradition, Manning's "Letter to the World."