

Spring 2011

Wild Goose Poetry Review, Spring 2011

If it's true that pride comes before the fall, then I guess I'm about due for a tumble because I'm very proud of this issue of *Wild Goose Poetry Review*. I'm proud of the poems. As I entered them into the template in preparation for release, I was impressed again and again with how interesting, unique, and vital the poems are. From first to last, this may be the strongest batch of poems WGPR has put together. This is definitely an issue that should read all the way through. I'm also proud of the fact that 4 of the selected poems came from workshops (usually "The Greatest Writing Prompt Ever") I've taught this spring. And I'm proud of the fact that 4 of the poets whose work is included here are participants in the writing group I facilitate. While any poem in WGPR has to be strong enough to stand on its own, it does sometimes enrich the experience of a poem for me when I have some familiarity with the poet. Perhaps that is why I've always like bios and author's comments.

Several of the poets published hereafter are familiar not only to me but to habitual readers of *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, but many more are new to me and to these pages. A couple, in fact, are entirely new to publication. The themes they write about are also both familiar and new. Several poems deal with love, even more with loss; several could be called humorous; many qualify as aesthetic, even more as narrative. Some of the stranger topics include a chicken truck, literal emasculation, celebrity branding, a khukri and a Ghurka (you'll figure those out), and the maximization of gas mileage in a Prius. And, as always, there are a half dozen reviews of new books of poetry that I'm very fond of at the end.

For those keeping track of more technical matters, you may have noticed that I have yet to archive either the fall 2010 or the winter 2011 issues. I had (temporarily) decided that I would just leave previous issues in the posts to preserve the unique links to them. Upon further reflection, however, I realize that visitors may want to find poems by specific authors without having to scroll back through years worth of poems. So, in the near future, I will archive and index those two issues, but I will also leave up the posts to retain the aforementioned unique links. Of course those old links won't work with anything prior to the fall 2010 issue since when I archived earlier issues I took them off the main page. All of those poems are only accessible through the links in the index or by clicking directly on the archived issue. I hope this keeps as many people happy as possible.

Now, please, enjoy the poems and leave your comments. Poets love them. Many readers do too. If you enjoy the poems and reviews, please subscribe to WGPR so that you'll receive automatic notices of future issues, and while you're in the mood to read, check out my latest publishing project: *234*, an online journal dedicated to nonfiction, at <http://www.234journal.com>

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Michael Diebert

COUPLING

Much later, after the latest failed coupling,
they curled up on the sofa and again
went over all the options, all of which
he maintained would make him less of a man,
and she said no, they were like a plumber
come to fix the pipes and didn't he want
the pipes to work, and he said when
he was on top of her, thinking how keenly
he wanted to give her what she wanted
and he felt himself go soft, he figured
the only solution was a monastery
for him or a lover for her, or better yet
cut off his dick and be done with it,
the script, the whole groping after bliss,
and she said that wasn't what he wanted,
and he said no but in a way it was,
and she said life without a dick would be
like opera, and he laughed, and after a while
they had said all they needed to or could
so they pressed closer and let the night
and the silence settle, concentrated
on the ticking fridge, the clatter and fall
of new ice, and in this way it became
not a hurdle but a puzzle, and in this way
it was decided they would try again.

Author's Comment: "Coupling" began as an attempt to write a one-sentence poem, and it became what it is now without much direct intervention. I write a lot of poems about male identity and about marriage, and the two roads intersect frequently. It's hard to write about failure, even harder to write about what comes after failure, without hysterics and

floweriness. Here, though, the relationship has its own weight and volition which, I hope, carries both parties through the delicate subject matter.

Bio: I teach writing and literature at Georgia Perimeter College in Atlanta, and I am poetry editor for The Chattahoochee Review and associate poetry editor for Futurecycle (futurecycle.com). Recent poems have appeared in RATTLE, Southern Poetry Review, and The Pedestal, and are forthcoming in an anthology of Georgia poets to be published by Texas Review Press.

Doug McHargue

THE WOMAN IN DOLLAR GENERAL

Her faded raincoat too thin for January
the woman pushes a shopping cart,
the store's fluorescence casting
an unearthly pallor to her face.

I think of John Steuart Curry's painting,
Tornado, his farm woman
clutching baby, running to the cellar
with eyes wide, face green
reflecting a sick sky.

The woman in the store carries her head
like she used to be someone else
her hair still young but sparse
like her body hanging under the coat,
stains spilled over it
like blurred dreams spoiled.

She looks all around wide-eyed
at whatever the world offers
on its shelves, pain's aphrodisiacs,
aspirin, Aspercreme, hair dye, pink nail polish,
and she fills her cart against the storm.

A few weeks later I see her
at the grocery in that coat,
her hair starving, face
now the color of transient angels.

She turns to look at the people
next in line as if they
are works of art, safely framed,
her head floating above a body
running ahead of life
before the coat vanishes.

Bio: Doug McHargue is a frequent contributor to *Wild Goose Poetry Review*. She lives in Statesville, NC.



Morgan DePue

TONIGHT

I felt my heart beat beneath the press of bone and flesh
for the first time since you left
I still feel you breathing the soft caress of your kiss down every curve of my body
I remember the night I memorized every line and blemish on your being
Absorbing every inch with the trace of my lips
from the tip of your nose to the arch of your hips
I needed to know you the way I know me
So my tongue soaked up every fatal flaw
While my pores were permeated by your perfection
This way when I needed you
I could draw you out of me
Water from a bottomless wishing well of us

Author's Comment: This poem was written as a display of deep, raw emotion. "Tonight" relives a tender night of passion between two lovers who are going to face a period of separation.

Morgan DePue

FAIRYTALE FRIENDSHIPS

I worry that I am like my mother
in the way that many of those who claim to love me
only do so to access the undiminishable generosity of my heart.
Wearing leviathan smiles
while playing the part of a true friend,
but it's easy to pretend
when all the king's men are taught how to feign
putting Humpty together again,
so they may claim action in crisis
and significantly stroke over-sized egos
into docile submission
to what others declare normal and just.
If you must wear a mask,
at least try to hide those fangs a little better,
'cause I've read 'Little Red' far too many times
to trip in the traps
set by those lines.

Author's Comment: Sometimes friendships are just like Grimm's fairytales: brutality with an important lesson laced in.

Bio: Morgan DePue has current/forthcoming publications in the online magazine Stepping Stones and The BEST of the Main Street Rag Reading Series, Poetry Hickory, 2011. She has read at various poetry events including Poetry Lincolnton, Poetry Hickory, Poor Richard's Book Shoppe's "Women of Poetry," and CPCC's Sensoria arts festival. She organized the Poetry Viva Voce poetry nights at Gaston College. Currently a fulltime student at Gaston College, she plans to transfer to the University of California at Davis to study English with emphasis in creative writing.

Helen Losse

OF SUMMER LOVERS, WINTER STORM-CLOUDS

after the picture "Winter Trees" by Kathryn Hoover

Summer trees were the witnesses,
gave shade for a blanket, picnic supplies,
lovers who tarried, and had there
been no rainstorm, perhaps would have
lingered till dawn.

Black winter trees now reach skyward.
The hill absorbs light, produces absolute
blackness and nothing but speculation,
concerning the lovers.

Summer trees saw cake and wine,
yet brush strokes left no tell-tale bristle
to solve the unspoken mystery
that echoes up from the core of this
dark-winter earth, of what else they saw.

Behind the hill is a storm-cloud.
Will it join others—white, gray, blue—
separate bands of winter storm-clouds
from which snow and ice descend—
like the cumulous clouds of summer that
brought torrents of evening rain, doused
lovers who ran from clapping thunder?
One cloud—painted in heavy texture—
is behind the winter trees.

Storm clouds and black winter trees
haunt with beauty not the facts.

Author comment: I was attracted to the painting because I find times when the trees are black silhouettes to have a strong spiritual pull. I added a back story to make the poem more than just a description. I added some details that are not in the painting, but I wanted to leave parts of what happened last summer to the imagination of the reader. We know only the present. We don't know for sure that the clouds will bring a storm, and we know little about the lovers. As a reader speculates and adds details to what is seen or said, he can add to the story, but only the trees know for sure, and the trees aren't talking.

Bio: Helen Losse is the author of four collections of poems, including *Seriously Dangerous* (Main Street Rag, 2011) and *Better With Friends* (Rank Stranger Press, 2009) and the Poetry Editor for the online literary magazine *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. Her recent poetry publications and acceptances include *Main Street Rag*, *Iodine Poetry Review*, *Willows Wept Review*, *Referential*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *ken*again*, *Hobble Creek Review*, and *Literary Trails of the North Carolina Piedmont*.

Rosalyn Marhatta
EPICUREAN LOVE

You brought a hotplate to your dorm room,
made it the center of epicurean adventure
where the palate was ravished by delight
with curried chicken spiced with toasted cumin
and crushed black cardamom pods
that released the rare and perfect perfumed seeds.

You cooked rice pullao with plumped up raisins,
fried potatoes and cashew nuts,
and told me how the King of Nepal
would dine on this:
a dish created for royalty
and you made it especially for me.

You spun a tale of a tiger
who leaped from a photograph
to kill a king in a locked room
because the king could not escape his fate,
we argued about fate's inevitability
on our second date.

You led me with your stories
to a land of silk sarees
and husbands who were gods to their wives,
and I touched your curved khukri,
the weapon of the Ghurka warriors
who pushed past fear to deliver death to the enemy.

I shivered in expectation
as your smile spoke to me of promises
yet to come and I dipped my tongue
in exploration of your cuisine
tasting your love, while fate decided
in her own way what was to be.

Author's Comment: I was in grad school in CT and met a man from Nepal who cooked fabulous food on a hotplate in his dorm room. I knew where Nepal was on a map since I was 12; he made it come alive with his spicy cuisine and stories about his childhood, especially those about his grandfather who learned medicine from a tiger and was court physician to the prime minister of Nepal . (We were married for 20 years.)

Rosalyn Marhatta

CROSSWORD

She tasted his name in her mouth,
the hardness of consonants soft
as lemon rind against her teeth,
roundness of vowels dripped
honey wax from her lips
kissed at 8 a.m.

A pillow cradled the crossword
scribbled with smiles in green ink
on Sunday morning as their bodies
sought each other abandoning
time and thoughts of anything
but larking on a featherbed.

Sometimes though, syllables
collided like worry beads
and crashed to the floor where kittens
pawed at anything and chewed
at his photo in a magazine.

She picked up the syllables
in a dustpan, tossed them outside,
then pulled him back into
a bed of passionate distraction,
sparklers and ocean waves.

Author's Comment: This poem came to me when I thought about difficulties in relationships and how on Sunday mornings when all you have to think about is making love and sharing the challenges of a crossword puzzle, it can be wonderful. I don't know where the kittens came from but there was an orange stray cat I was attached to in Saudi Arabia (when I lived there). It ran into my home one day and knocked over the birdcage with two birds I was taking care of for a vacationing neighbor. The birds survived. My heart almost didn't.

Bio: Rosalyn Marhatta loves to write poetry and solve computer problems. Her mind travels to inner space looking for poems. She's traveled the world, lived in Saudi Arabia and Guam where she avoided too much sun. Her poems appear in Referential Magazine, Eclectic Flash, The Dead Mule, Diamond Diva Magazine and soon to be in Vox Poetica. Find her on twitter @poetic_line.

Joan Cannon
AFTERWORDS

Under gilt and ruby baroque
we sank beneath glorious waves
of Bach and Brahms and Stravinsky.
Not quite drowned, we stood in the stairwell
and inhaled. I tried not to be coy.
After the concert, you took your leave.

No, too long ago and I'm too long alive
to try to tell it in a single narrative.
Memory is not dependable nor fact
because it is ruled by what cannot be told.
Yet survival instinct is marrow deep;
no lingering breath will relinquish
what it knows must last till there is no time.

Lost, then found, then forever bound
in the toils of ambition, work and laughter
and children. Hope as strong as the grass
that breaks pavement filled us to the brim
with humble thanks. To begin,
the end is the starting point because
there is never to be one — an end, I mean.

Author's Comment: Books often have forewords. I thought of a narrative poem that might tell the story of my late husband and my lives together, then I realized there was too much to be told as a narrative, so I told of our meeting and condensed the rest like soup in a can.

Joan Cannon

BEDSIDE MANNER

Is it patience that makes your voice
so cooing and soft, gestures slow
and soothing as the brow-stroke
of a mother whose child is sick?
Or are you rigid beneath
that top-coat of pliancy and calm?

We who hover hoping to help
perhaps have no right to muse
on what we see as we step with care
lest some alien tap upon the floor
might shake fragile equilibrium,
as a lightning flash against the dusk—

Do you know how your stature
intimidates? Because you now have
come where we may one day stand,
the pattern may be before us, in you.
To profit we need to understand
and not be misled.
Will you look into our eyes?

Author's Comment: As I observe more people requiring various kinds of support and care at life's decline, it occurred to me that those who render that care seem to possess special knowledge. The watchers might wish to have the benefit of what those attendants might be able to tell them, but they dread what they might learn.

Bio: Joan Cannon is a retired high school teacher (of English and theatre arts), editor, author of two novels, addicted reader. She has published poems in The Odessa Poetry Review and Lowestoft Chronicle (current issue). Her short stories have appeared in various magazines, and she writes reviews and essays for <http://www.seniorwomen.com> .

Nickie Albert
ASCENSION

In the dream there is no oxygen tank. There is no I.V. tree
with its laden, plastic fruit. There is no hospital bed.
There is no hospital.

In the dream we're walking up endless flights of stairs, effortlessly.
Tier after tier of steps, one follows another and we follow each other
and it's easy. We both breathe easy.

There is no scarring on her lungs and I don't smoke. We are both young,
healthy, almost the same age. Mother and daughter laughing as we ascend.
Then we come to a ladder.

Stopping to look up, then back at each other, my mother goes first.
She grabs each rung as if it's a brass ring with her prize. Smiling,
she looks back to see that I'm still behind her.

In the moment when I see how blue her eyes are, not the grey of illness,
I begin to fall behind. My legs feel the weight of gravity and I know.
This is not my trip.

Author's Comment: I wrote this poem shortly after my mother died of pulmonary fibrosis. I had also recently watched the HBO version of Tony Kushner's play, *Angels in America*. The scene where Prior Walter is climbing the flaming ladder to heaven (aka San Francisco) was very powerful to me. I think these two events combined in my subconscious and produced this dream, which provided vivid imagery for the poem.

Bio: Nickie Albert is a poet and playwright. She is currently working on a new play, *Use No Hooks*. She has worked in a number of professions including social work, educational administration and ice cream. She now supplements her literary career doing Software Development. She lives in Brooklyn, NY.

Beth Paulson

FRAGILITY

easily broken

a white porcelain cup

so thin light comes through;

easily damaged or destroyed

as pages of a rare or very old book;

delicate, light as a newborn's

fingernails, frail skin,

lined and veined, the bones

of an old woman's hand.

She had a fragile beauty.

This body/ I risk to carry/

I think of as strong/is fragile./

To be human/is to fall down

occasionally/to break down finally.

Author's Comment: In this poem I reflect on the tenuousness of the physical body both in the sense of accidents that can befall us and in situations in which we take physical risks. I love to climb mountains and ski and I have put myself in a few dangerous spots, but somehow managed to get out of them. There are also times we can feel emotionally fragile. As I watch my elderly mother age, I see her skin and bones become fragile, her hold onto life become lighter.

Bio: Beth Paulson's poems have appeared widely in small magazines and anthologies. She has received three Pushcart Prize nominations, including one in 2010. Her newest collection, *Wild Raspberries*, was published by Plain View Press in 2009. Beth lives on Colorado's Western Slope where she teaches writing workshops and climbs mountains.

Barbara Conrad

ON BUYING A WRITING DESK AFTER THE DEATH OF MY DAUGHTER'S BEST FRIEND

for Michael

When the decorator tells me
the table I like is too big for my space,
I tell the woman I'll take it
and think of the boy who couldn't be coached.
The coach said so — would watch him
blowing free in his own wind

up and down the soccer field, defiant
ringlets of hair a halo on his unleashed body.
The wood on this table is bold beneath my fingers,
a rich heart pine the color of honey,
a good place to write these words.
I rub its shiny skin, and think about the boy
bearing down on the goal, the boy too big
for the soccer field,
the school,
the gravity of this earth.
Watch this, the coach would say before a play,
and after the shot — Did you see that?

Author's Comment: Sometimes when a story, image or life moment is too painful for words, a writer needs to focus on something else. During those sullen weeks after young Michael's death, I just happened to be combing antique stores for a writing desk when a decorator presented the "something else". The absurdity of her rules about size, space and conventionality stunned me toward the image of that precious boy who was anything but conventional. The embrace of the table became the metaphor I needed to not only find my words but to make them celebratory.

Bio: Barbara Conrad is the author of a chapbook, *The Gravity of Color* (2007) and editor of *Waiting for Soup* (2004), an anthology of poems and stories from her creative writing class

with the homeless in Charlotte, NC. She has been published in Tar River Poetry and other journals and anthologies such as Icarus and Kakalak where her work received honorable mentions. In 2009 she was nominated for a Pushcart prize.

Nancy Posey

VERNICE'S TATTING SHUTTLE

She sat patiently beside me,
her shuttle in my hands,
her fingers hovering over mine,
trying to teach me to tat,
a Rumpelstilskin trick, turning
mere thread to lace.
She'd work; I'd watch, then
try to mimic her every move.
We both knew I was too young,
the thread too fine; my knots,
a constant conflict, matched
the knots in my gut.
I so wanted not only to know,
but to learn at her side.
When she died, she left me
all her shuttles, some still reeling
off lengths of lace that found
their way to collars of dresses
my babies would wear.
Her favorite shuttle, worn smooth
from her fingers' magic-making,
I kept close, sometimes rubbing
between index finger and thumb.
At last, I learned. Timing, after all,
is everything in turning straw to gold.

Author's Comment: "Vernice's Shuttle," like many of my poems, was inspired by my family. I spent hours with my great grandmother, digging through her boxes of keepsakes, listening to her stories, and trying to learn to tat. Although I didn't master the craft until after I had babies of my own, I still love the connection to her when I feel her smooth silver shuttle in my hand.

Bio: Nancy Posey is a native of Florence, Alabama. She currently teaches English at Caldwell Community College in Hudson, NC. Her first collection *Let the Lady Speak*, published in January 2011 by Highland Creek Books, began as the winning submission in the November Chapbook Challenge on *Writers Digest's Poetic Asides*. Posey serves as a board member of the Poetry Council of North Carolina.

Karen Taylor
MAHMAH

She couldn't read a pattern;
Told me that, herself.
She could crochet just about anything,
But couldn't read the pattern.

Afghans, hats, pocket-books
Doilies, scarves and pillows.
Made up her own. I guess.

Once, my Dad asked her for a toboggan cap.
One that covered the face;
For fishing and hunting.
She made him one, but not from a pattern.

She read Grace Livingston Hill books,
Harlequin Romances
and the Good Book, several times.

Long after she was gone,
My aunt said that I was her favorite.
I don't know about that.
I just worshiped the ground she walked on,
And all the hats and pocket-books she made me.
Because she couldn't read a pattern.

Author's Comment: After attending a writer's workshop where both Julia Nunnally Duncan and Scott Owens advised us to use familial memories to inspire our writing, this poem just happened in my mind, so I wrote it down. Mah Mah was my maternal grandmother, and she and I had a very close relationship. Being overweight, wearing braces and glasses, caused me to gravitate to someone who really accepted me, in spite of my appearance.

Bio: Karen Taylor was born in Rutherfordton, N.C., lived in Spartanburg, S.C., for forty three years, and moved back to Rutherfordton after the loss of her husband. She is pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in English.

David Poston

ASKED TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE BUTTON CHAIR IN MEMORY OF MY MOTHER, I
SEND MY REGRETS

One life we spend; one life spends us—Jane Hirshfield

A preacher's wife, she trusted
the Broadman Hymnal, King James Bible,
Democratic Party, Readers' Digest, and her doctor,
who gave her Celebrex and a pat on the hand
for the dark mushrooming she hid in her breasts.

One weekend a year, she went to prison and
taught the ladies crafts. She kept the church books,
counting coins and stacking bills on Sunday afternoon,
From the choir loft, she kept an eye on everyone,
stern enough that even my ex-wife quailed.

When we let her go, we gave her clothes to the VFD.
Funny, I know where Allen Philbeck's heart beats on,
in the breast of a woman over in Forest City,
but not who came to the firehouse

and wears even one button-up sweater, one cotton blouse.

Angry for what I failed to see, what she
failed to tell me, I regret I did not make her face it,
that I was not holding her hand at 2:00 a.m. in Pardee Memorial Hospital,
that I was sleeping deep as St. Peter.

I don't have even a button. I send you this.

Author's Comment: Brooke Kolconay Bryand created the Button Chair in 1998, and my mother died of breast cancer in 1999. Each button represents either a breast cancer survivor or victim, and the chair raised thousands of dollars for breast cancer awareness. When the chair came through my community, it sparked this poem about a very fresh loss. Since I wrote it, I

have come to better appreciate the rich, intangible legacy of my mother. She did not deal with her disease well, though, so thank goodness for the Button Chair, which is helping other women fight it.

David Poston

LAMENTATIONS 2.1

Though Word saves carefully one by one,
dialogues opened won't bring us images shown.
Actions we've taken cannot be undone.

We can't save anything when the crash comes.
One broken connection brings the network down,
though Word saves patiently, one by one.

Blame errant cursors for what's aborted or gone;
the invisible worm works without a sound,
but actions we've taken cannot be undone.

The icons we've trusted were pirated ones,
and our virtual memory has exceeded its bounds,
though Word keeps on saving one by one.

Commands have been executed; processes run
baud by baud toward a final meltdown.
Actions we've taken cannot be undone.

Fatal errors were made, the damage is done,
the site we keep searching for cannot be found.
Though Word goes on saving, one by one,
actions we've taken cannot be undone.

Author's Comment: I like to call myself the unacknowledged chief Luddite at the Highland School of Technology. Being of southern rural Protestant upbringing, I heard in the language of Microsoft Word some echoes of familiar phrases, some Holy Ghost in the machine. My poetry is sometimes what Flannery O'Connor called "Christ-haunted," but the villanelle is not really a religious or technological lamentation. I just took a phrase from the Word and started playing around with those echoes.

Bio: David Poston lives in Gastonia, North Carolina, where his wife Patty and he both teach at the Highland School of Technology. His chapbook, *Postmodern Bourgeois Poetaster Blues*, won the 2007 Randall Jarrell/Harperprints Poetry Chapbook Competition of the N.C. Writers' Network. Work of his has appeared in *English Journal*, *The Main Street Rag*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, and *Asheville Poetry Review*, among others.

Glenn Cassidy

THE RED HOLE

A collapsed star – a black hole –
pulls all around it in,
lets nothing out, not even light.

A red dwarf is a small and cool star,
like Sammy Davis circa 1963
or Tom Cruise, except cool.

But what do you call that red thing
on the sidewalk at an awards show
that draws in every star from miles around
and lets nothing but stupidity out?

A black dwarf? A red hole?

I'm wearing Armani with Tiffany pearls,
a Gucci bag, Prada shoes,
Cartier pendant earrings
with rocks big enough to warp gravity.

Even the interviewers do it:

I'm wearing de la Renta.

I'm wearing Manolos and Evan Piccone.

How about Pepsi on your shoulder,

Dupont on the collar,

Lay's Potato Chips over your heart?

We've already established you're NASCAR,
now we're just haggling over the brands.

Author's Comment: The Who are you wearing? schtick at the Oscars annoys me without end. I'm still waiting for somebody to answer, "No one right now, but I hope to be wearing Ben Affleck when I go home." Last year was the first time I noticed the red carpet interviewers announcing who they were wearing, and that got me started on this poem.

Glenn Cassidy

HYPERMILE

If you accelerate from a stoplight
slower than an inchworm
millimetering along a yardstick,
your Prius can get a thousand miles a gallon.

If you drive thirty-five on I-95,
eighteen-wheelers, oversize vehicles,
and farm equipment passing
on the left and on the right,
your Prius can get a thousand miles a gallon.

If a blue-haired old lady,
shrunk until her head is barely visible
over the steering wheel, is riding your ass
and flashing highbeams to get you to go faster,
your Prius can get a thousand miles a gallon.

Just ease your foot off the greenhouse gas pedal
and watch the green digits climb
beyond the range of the fuel economy gauge.

Pay no mind to the speedometer
or traffic backing up behind you,
the student driver cutting through the shoulder
with her instructor's blessing,
passengers hiding their faces
from the angry eyes and expressive fingers
of drivers showing their joy
at the opportunity to finally pass you.

If you keep your head inside
the oxygen-rich, CO₂-deficient
bubble, where the gas engine never revs
and you can barely hear
the electric motor's whiny whisper,
your Prius can get a thousand miles a gallon.

Author's Comment: The idea for this poem churned in my head for over a year after observing how his new Prius affected a friend's driving behavior, and it finally gelled one evening on my way to the supermarket. Approaching a red light, I could stop behind a Prius or another car, and I invoked the Prius Stop Light Rule: always choose other. The first line of the poem came to me as I waited, with a complete draft by the time I reached the market, when I wrote it down immediately.

Bio: Glenn Cassidy is a consultant and educator based in Carrboro, NC. He has a Ph.D. in public policy analysis and has taught public finance at several universities including UNC Chapel Hill. His poetry and short fiction often draw on social science and public policy issues, frequently making humorous commentary on the behavior of humans, politicians, celebrities, and other vertebrates. Editors at Main Street Rag, The Dead Mule School of Southern Poetry, Prime Number Magazine, and other journals have been entertained enough to publish some of his work. He maintains a blog at <http://www.anglesandrhymes.blogspot.com>.

Bud Caywood
MOONLIGHT

Here, the surface is all moon, finally still.
The boats and boom-boxes have all gone
into the evening of Sunday's laziness.
The lake holds more tightly onto reflections,
sparkles that dance backward to the other shore.
A clap comes from the sandbar.
A fish jumps and slaps back
with something no longer alive in the air.

Author's Comment: I live on a lake. My house is situated so the back faces east over a wide cove. It has twenty-four windows and one moon.

Bio: Bud Caywood lives and works in Alexander County, NC where he is a freelance furniture design consultant, artist, and writer. His poetry has appeared in many journals and anthologies. He has written one full-length collection of poems, eleven chapbooks.

Aaron Poller

STUCK BEHIND A TRACTOR TRAILER CARRYING CHICKENS TO DOBSON, NC, I
CONTEMPLATE CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Mind driven

I set them free

burst

the tiny cages

bloody fowl

excrement

pissed off

ambience

downy sweep

perplexed

breath hot

unswerving silence.

Author's Comment: I wrote this poem during the time I was teaching at a rural community college and was often traveling the backroads to get there. I had already developed a healthy disregard for these types of vehicles during the years I lived in Pennsylvania where several meat packing plants were located off the same exit of the Pennsy Turnpike as my home and I always seemed to get stuck behind these slaughterhouse trucks and eventually I became a vegetarian. Still am. Sometimes, however, that does not seem to be enough. As a poet, I hold some strong social and political beliefs that often find their way into my work as they are a part of who I am and what I do.

Aaron Poller

THE FLYING CIRCUS

Wants no clown no bears no tent
no Barnum no Bailey no baby elephant
just wake before most other folks
sit still become a small part of it
the flying circus of the mind won't
set up through use of pharmaceuticals
noisy silence paradox redux a
meta-physics that will not self destruct
should empathy erupt hush deafening
if you want feedback you could bring
a sleeve or two of cotton candy bags
of peanuts though you won't eat many
once you settle down 3-D better
four dimensions virtual reality
what you hoped is already here for you
the others may not seem to care won't
get much out of bed before the sun
dream life sweet perpetual double bind
the rest of you must simply sit and wait
come for the flying circus of the mind.

Author's Comment: As a writer (and as a human being) I am interested in the play between mind and matter: the contrast between large and small, between significant and insignificant, between action and inaction. I think that in this poem I just found that proverbial "golden thread", grabbed hold of it and followed. The poem pretty much wrote itself. That being said, I have spent several years re-writing it and wonder if I will ever think it is really finished.

Bio: Aaron Poller was born in the Bronx, New York. He holds degrees from the University of Pennsylvania, Montgomery County Community College, and LaSalle University. He has worked for over 35 years in mental health nursing and since 2005 maintains a practice as a psychotherapist in Winston-Salem, N.C. where he also teaches mental health nursing at Winston-Salem State University. He has two grown daughters and lives with his wife, four dogs and two cats.

Justin Ganser

HANG A WARHOL

A homebody, I go to hang
a Warhol in oil-spilt colors
bought on campus, to decorate
an institutional wall
too close to bed.

My toolbox clasps shut,
forcing down its upper jaw,
the wrong bits rattling loose
in its belly — galling like glass
littering a sidewalk.

Though I've the drill, wall
screws, and another afternoon
on my own, I haven't the cash
for another accessory
to help hide a wall.

And driving miles,
the hardware store dazzles
a homebody going to hang
shit on a wall, finding change
for another drill-bit and
a piecemeal life.

Author's Comment: while attending grad school in Milwaukee and after purchasing some reprints sold on campus, the refrain of "write what's closest" inspired me to try a poem of what a person may do when he or she is desperate for fulfillment but too disenchanted by happiness eluding those who want it most.

Bio: Justin Ganser is a graduate of University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and teaches at Catawba Valley Community College as an English Instructor. Originally from Wisconsin and a transplant to Hickory, NC, he has been published in Wisconsin Review and is currently working on confessional and ekphrastic poetry for future submissions.

Yvette Doss

SPELL FOR THE CREATION OF MENTAL SPACE

Mix two spoonfuls of dragon's blood
(substitute OPI nail lacquer in Lincoln Park After Dark)
to protect you from interfering forces;

a dash of lavender oil
to chase away the bad energy;

mandrake root:
(substitute ash leaves)
to scatter in the four directions
for success;

and wormwood:
(substitute a shot of absinthe)
for astral projection.

Next, take a sprig of rosemary:
sprinkle the resinous leaves
in your bath water
for clear thinking;

and woodruff. Carry
to change the course
of your life. Burn
to clear away barriers
to success.

Be sure to exclude
all love-inducing properties
of aforementioned herbs, resins
substances;
also, steer clear of
the bud from a new rose, aloe, and sweet balm
(who needs all that binding,
love-making energy?)

Think. Write. Create.

Repeat.

Author's Comment: Spell for the Creation of Mental Space is one of a series of poems I'm working on that explore the intersection between magic, prayer, witchcraft, herbal and folk remedies and good old superstition. I'm fascinated by how often we tend to turn to incantations, prayers, spells and charms for help when life gets difficult, and how often they seem to work for us, either through divine intervention or the power of the mind.

Bio: I am a graduate student in the M.F.A. Program in Creative Writing at the University of California at Riverside. My non-fiction and essay writing has appeared in the Los Angeles Times, Ms. Magazine, the San Jose Mercury News, and on NPR radio.

Barbara Groce
THE DEER HEARD

It was one of those moments,
that seek a permanent place
deep in your memory.

In the golden afternoon
of a summer day, I stood
on our front porch looking
at the cloud of dark gray smoke
rising from a hillside
about two miles from us.

I heard my husband softly say,
“Come here.”

In our back yard eighteen deer
stood motionless, and every head
was turned toward the hillside,
although our house obscured the view.

We had not heard a sound.

Our presence on the back porch
did not frighten them away
as it always did before.

In a few minutes they continued
toward the forest, their earth tones
becoming one with woodland hues.

Later we heard that four lives vanished
when their plane fell from the sky
into the hillside of a
hundred shades of green and
boundless yellow flowers
growing wild in the golden
afternoon of a summer day.

Author's Comment: We felt connected to the community in this tragedy because we saw the smoke directly in front of our house. The deer evidently heard the crash because they stopped, looked in that direction and did not spook on seeing us as they normally did. The pilot, we later learned, had done his best to avoid homes and was trying to reach the grassy meadow.

Barbara Groce

SO CLOSE

Curlicues of wood
fall to the floor,
then clouds of dust
fill the workshop air.

A bluebird emerges
from basswood.

Glass eyes,
metal legs,
cerulean paint
complete him.

Perched on driftwood,
he gazes ever outward
set to fly away
and sing his stillborn song
in fields of grain
and flowered meadows
just beyond the window pane.

Author's Comment: My husband Bill carves realistic birds. His Blue Bird was promised to our daughter, Marti, but graced our cabin for a few weeks before being whisked away. He spent the time with us looking at the view, exactly as the poem says, ready to fly away.

Barbara Groce
PRESENT PAST

My Grandmother Liz
could square dance and two step
better than anyone else in Pike County.
She smiled at every partner,
but told me only one of them
caused her heart to soar.
She saw him last waving good-by
from the steps of the train
that steamed into the great World War.

She moves with grace at eighty-five,
but has not danced since she was young.
She naps in the old rocking chair,
a quilt in progress on her lap,
her skin fine and crinkled
as a page from our Bible,
eyes the same blue as veins
in her hands-those hands which
raised six children, coddled my Grandpa,
a miner, who drank and gambled
away what was theirs.

I know she dreams of dancing years,
fiddler's songs and two strong arms.
Drops roll from her eyes, down her face,
fall into the folds of the quilt,
and become part of it, like her life,
filled with stitches and tears.

Author's Comment: People who knew Grandmother Liz as a young woman have told us she was indeed the best dancer in these parts. Truth dwells in most of the other lines too. This is my favorite poem because of the strong connection to her. She died in 1962.

Bio: Barbara Groce and her husband Bill moved to Blue Ridge, GA four years ago from Roswell, GA and are enjoying the many opportunities to be involved in their favorite activities. Barbara has loved writing since college, but only began seriously studying and writing poetry in 2007 after moving to the mountains. She has been published in local papers and Pegasus, journal of the Kentucky State Poetry Society.

Review

by Scott Owens

LET THE LADY SPEAK

by Nancy Posey

Highland Creek Books, 2010

ISBN: 9780982085820

So what makes a writer put into words all the joyous, difficult, embarrassing, sad truths of one's life? Hunger. A hunger unlike that known by animals, a hunger that cannot be named but can be endlessly described. The same hunger that Nancy Posey knowingly saves for the last poem in her new collection *Let the Lady Speak*. Ironically, the summative hunger, the hunger of all humanity, she captures in the poem "Hungry" is the first hunger of humanity: Eve's hunger to be, fully, to partake of existence consciously, to experience and speak truly. In the poem, Eve says, "Who could have blamed me if I had said, when asked / why, I was just so hungry, and the fruit looked so good."

The poems in *Let the Lady Speak* seek to express, with a particularly feminine quality, that hunger for conscious, autonomous existence, and in expressing it to, at least temporarily and partially, satisfy it. James Agee's classic book of Southern culture is called *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a title taken from the ancient Hebrew text, *Ecclesiasticus*. Posey's title could just as easily be *Let Us Now Praise Famous Women*, as the poems juxtapose the voices of Scarlet O'Hara, Guenevere, Amelia Earhart, Hamlet's Gertrude, Eve, and Penelope with the voices of the poet, the poet's mother, the poet's daughter, etc. But Posey's actual title hearkens back to a tradition just as old as that invoked by Agee, namely that of patriarchy and misogyny. Most of us have little difficulty remembering a time when women often had to be given such permission as the title implies in order to speak or at least be listened to, and so the hunger

expressed in these poems is not just the human hunger to experience the world and speak of it but a somewhat more frustrated and still sometimes denied feminine hunger.

The wonderful thing about these poems is that this deep feminist subtext is just that, a subtext. The surface of the poems is much less serious, much more readily accessible, even playful, such that any reader, feminist or otherwise, philosopher or pleasure-reader, can find enjoyment in them. Take these lines, for example, from "Or Maybe the Day after That," spoken by Scarlet O'Hara:

Right now I have no plans
to make plans. Instead,
I'm going to sit right here
at the foot of the stairs
and have a good cry,
and I don't care if anyone
gives a damn or not.

Maybe tomorrow my thoughts
will come clearer — or
maybe the day after that.

Certainly there is a great deal about life and our approach to it for the literary critic, the hermeneutist, the philosopher to consider in these lines, but most of us, regardless of how "deeply" we want to read, would enjoy the playfulness of hearing Scarlet's most famous line revisited and playfully combined with Rhett's.

A similar playfulness appears in "unvoiced" poems like the wonderfully titled "Hippopotomonstosesquippedaliophobia," which according to the epigraph means "fear of big words." The speaker of this surprising and tender love poem begins, "Shunning Latinate constructions, I choose / instead the simple Anglo-Saxon / monosyllabic words." Then, true to her word, she concludes with the monosyllabic proclamation, "We will share one sweet kiss."

A considerably less playful revisitation of familiar perspectives is offered in several poems, including "Guenevere," where the title character grows cynical and impatient with the limitations of traditional roles and expectations. She knows, as always, that she will "be set / free before" she bursts "into flames" and that "the one / who makes the move / will certainly expect" her "gratitude to burn / hotter than this fire," but she has become disenchanted with this cat and mouse game in which she is always the object and never the subject, always the acted upon and never the actor. She confesses, "I now feel / cold as a winter cave, / surrounded but alone."

Whether playful or serious, familiar or exotic, what arises from all of the voices of these poems is the singular voice of a contemporary woman full of the complexities such identity would imply. Sincere, accessible, insightful, and charming, ultimately, the poems in Nancy Posey's *Let the Lady Speak* are in a voice we can all enjoy . . . and learn from.

Review

by Nancy Posey

SERIOUSLY DANGEROUS

by Helen Losse

Main Street Rag, 2011

ISBN: 9781599482897

By sheer coincidence, Helen Losse's new collection of poetry *Seriously Dangerous*, published in an April marked by a record number of tornadoes and by flood, opens in "The Danger of Pretense" with the image of a "breeze ...gather[ing] courage to kill. The poems Losse has assembled are as much a testament to nature's power as to an awareness of the smallest subtleties of the natural world—a world inhabited by humans.

Losse takes stock symbols of literature—dark and light, drought and flood, the cycle of seasons—and paints them fresh. The synaesthesia she achieves, evoking all the senses through the voice of a speaker with heightened awareness, surprises the reader, often through the most commonplace details.

In her poem "Where Light Is Going," the speaker first piles up autumn images she loves, "that which floats on the wind"—a catalog of sounds and smells and sights, "the long train-whistle that rides / on smoky air"—then shifts to a backward view, noting "that which I love / often comes from memories."

Losse's poetry contains a spiritual undercurrent. Even the title poem "Seriously Dangerous," alluding to the South's dark not-so-distant past, centers around that danger: "the cross without a savior" that "cannot burn away filth & dross, / nor wash us clean. . . ." Her poem "Queen Anne's Lace," beginning with an observation of the lacy late-summer wild flowers, circles around from historical allusion to English royalty to "Saint Anne, who. . . bore Mary, the Mother of God." The expression of the spiritual in these poems, though, seems to emerge not in a formal way but through nature, as she notes that "Grace abound in the ocean" ("Where Light Is Going") and observes three deer, in "The First Night of Winter" that pause within sight to "preach a sermon without words."

Not only does Losse enliven her poetry with musical references—dissonant sounds of a city summer, singing off key, a father's harmonica—but her words themselves play to the ear. "Jazz" is infused with Italian musical terms that roll off the tongue, but she continues sound

play such as that found in "Prayer by the River," in which she juxtaposes drought with doubters and dragon flies.

An underlying theme in this collection is not just the certain movement of time, the shifting seasons, but the human tendency to wish for what we have not. This discontent finds its richest expression in "No Circle, No Loss," a poem balanced between city and mountains, when the speaker "woke up early, amid springtime flowers, / hoping for snow. . . ." Losse turns this disappointment to surprise throughout the book, and in this poem in particular, hearing "what [she] did not expect: Laughter."

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

THE JANE POEMS

by Ronald Moran

Clemson University Digital Press (2011)

ISBN: 9780984259854

Simply put, this is a beautiful book! Anyone who has ever loved someone and lost them, anyone who has known love or loss, anyone who loves memorable, well-crafted, emotionally powerful poetry, will love this book, which reminds us of the vital lesson Galway Kinnell gave us thirty years ago in his best poem, "Little Sleep's Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight:"

learn,
as you stand
at this end of the bridge which arcs,
from love, you think, into enduring love,
learn to reach deeper
into the sorrows
to come – to touch
the almost imaginary bones
under the face, to hear under the laughter
the wind crying across the black stones. Kiss
the mouth
which tells you, here,
here is the world. This mouth. This laughter. These temple bones.

The still undanced cadence of vanishing.

These poems begin at the beginning of the speaker's relationship with the title character, Moran's late wife, Jane. In "The Courtship," Moran charmingly tells us how he, as a young man, took off his tee shirt and mowed "the same // patch of lawn over and over" "on a chance she'd be riding // in a car down the hill that day", "an offering of my unrehearsed // goods in early summer." He follows this with poems of tender intimacy that show the relationship between the speaker and Jane growing over the years. In "Double Passage in Mid-Life," he says to Jane, "I turn to fit the contour of your life." In "Weddings," he comments, "No surprise that we're // getting into each other's / dreams." And in "Room by Room," he

fashions a wonderful analogy for how a marriage is constructed: "Room by room we are taming / this house built sideways / and close to a narrow street." In poem after poem, Moran conveys the depth of this relationship through fresh, effective and vital imagery.

The second section of poems tells the story of how the speaker spent the last years of his 50-year relationship with Jane living with her illness and with all the feelings commensurate with such experience: stubborn optimism, fear, dread, sorrow, uncertainty. We first discover the illness along with the speaker in "Mirrors," where he sits in the doctor's waiting room trying to "flash" his "new smile" as if he "could // do something to face up to this . . . news now slowly coming to light / in pictures at the end of the hall." Moran takes us through the various stages of emotion one faced with the illness of a loved one will inevitably experience. In "Tic Tacs," he muses, "What will I do / if your heart closes up / like a sundrop after dark?" In "Jane" and "Foreplay" he answers the more important question of what he must do now, expressing empathy for Jane and accepting the responsibility of caring for her. At several points in this book, Moran thanks Jane for "saving his life." In "The Breakdown" we see one of those points when we hear Jane helping him learn what to make of their experience with illness:

as we held
each other, I said "What am I going to do
when you die?"

and she responded, as if she would never die,
and that, hey,
we still had each other, and let's make the best
of it now.

The emotional process the speaker goes through in accepting inevitable loss as well as the responsibility of caring for another and learning to make the most of every experience we have culminates in "A Blessing," perhaps the book's most powerful poem:

I cup her hand leisurely in mine, closing
it slowly, feeling her tremors until my hand
calms hers, and I whisper, "Time to sleep";
and as she does, I count interludes between
breaths, longer than ever before but steady,
then release her, knowing how blessed I am.

The final section of poems deals with Jane's death and the speaker's life afterwards. The first poem in the section, "Lines of Demarcation," describes the speaker's discovery of Jane shortly after her passing. It is one of the most powerful poems I have ever read:

she was on her back, her mouth
wide open
as before, but her thin and bruised body
did not twitch.

She was still, like a figure in a photograph,
not gasping
for breath as when I left her room.
I tried to close
her right eye, barely open, but it would not
stay shut.

The nurse said, "Do you want a few minutes
alone with her?"
I said I'm OK, which I was not, but I only knew
later
how much I was not OK and never would be
again.

The remaining poems take the reader through a second process: the process of grieving, remembering, and coming to terms with being alone. The poems describe the journey with remarkable honesty, admitting all the complexity, depth, and difficulty of grief without trivializing it with oversimplified platitudes, concluding only with a measured joy that might best be called, appreciation:

I keep thinking of E.M. Forster's "Only connect,"
and all I want
is to rerun my life with Jane, beginning in June, where
under
an oak in Walnut Hill Park, we both asked, "Can it work?"
Yes, it did.

Ultimately, this book about love and loss becomes a celebration and an expression of gratitude. No more stirring tribute to the power of another in our life, to a relationship, to

love, has been written. Nor has there been anything more helpful for any who face the prospect of living with a loved one's dying. Moran has achieved those most poetic of ambitions, catharsis and relevance, transforming his life into art that is transformative for the rest of us.

A POETIC RESPONSE TO ROBERT S. KING'S "A GRAVEDIGGER'S ROOTS"

by Scott Owens

I don't usually publish my own poems, but a while back I did publish my poetic response to Jessie Carty's book "Paper House" because the poem served as a sort of "review" of her book. I did the same thing after reading Tony Abbott's "New and Selected Poems."

The fact that a book prompts me to write a poem of my own says a great deal about the impact the book has on me. Writing a poem, after all, is not an easy thing to do. It would be easier just to move on to the next book. Some books, however, "move in" once you read them. They take up residence in your psyche — the place where most poems are born.

Such was the case with both Carty's and Abbott's books and now with Robert King's "The Gravedigger's Roots." This 2009 collection from Shared Roads Press consists of 51 poems written from the perspective of a persona whose significant role in the world is that of a gravedigger. While such a perspective might lead some to assume the poems are inherently macabre, what the reader finds instead is poetry with a wide range of emotional and philosophical contexts all connected by the ever-looming presence and awareness of that ultimate human reality, mortality. I personally found the poems to be refreshingly Romantic in their dealing with that common inevitability. The underlying message of these poems certainly echoes the work of both Whitman and Emerson, but the styles, language and imagery have all been updated to make the reading more immediately relevant and enjoyable.

Readers interested in ordering their own copy of "The Gravedigger's Roots" can do so at <http://www.sharedroads.net>. Now here is my poetic response to the book. The italicized line is stolen from one of King's poems.

The Keeper

after Robert S. King

Heel on shoulder,
hands gripping the shaft,
shift weight forward,
press down,
thin roots popping as the blade moves through,
lean back,
lift.

A hole the only thing it makes,
absence, empty space,
and yet without it, nothing grows,
necessity the smallest understand.

Most come here not to die
but simply to be dead.
Precious few come to live
and do the work
of keeping things going.

Joining the Conversation

A Review of David Rigsbee's *The Pilot House* (Black Lawrence, 2011)

If you read enough poetry you come to realize that most, if not all, poets are involved in a dialogue that enriches each poem. Sometimes the involvement is a conscious one. You read a poem, put the book down and begin one of your own related to what you just read.

Sometimes it is unconscious. Without realizing it, you carry a bit of a poem around in your head for weeks, months, years, and then write what you think is singularly yours, but others may recognize the relation to Whitman, Williams, Neruda. And sometimes it is something even less than (or perhaps more than) unconscious. You write from "something in the air," out of the time, the world, in which you exist intellectually, emotionally, or physically. You respond unconsciously to a moment that other poets have likewise responded to or are simultaneously responding to. In that process a number of poets separately create a dialogue that is further joined by every reader who in their turn puts words to paper.

When I picked up David Rigsbee's new book of poems, *The Pilot House*, and read the first poem, "After Reading," I felt as if he and I must be writing from much the same experience, as if he had joined a lengthy, ongoing debate I was involved in and had been writing about for some time. The crux of that debate is summarized in Rigsbee's brilliant opening lines:

I put down the book thinking
how purity is a curse, how it
puts us off the human
for whom it better fits
to turn away from the shore
in favor of the garbage and the grief.

To turn away from the safe, secure "shore" of "purity" and wade or swim into "the garbage and the grief" of human existence is indeed an unnerving venture, one that demands courage and unblinking honesty, but Rigsbee achieves this undertaking with admirable aplomb and sensitivity by using the familiar as a touchstone for the more disturbing. Thus, each poem resonates with previously unconsidered connections: Cary Grant hanging from Lincoln's Mt. Rushmore nose and transcendence; Latin poetry and the mutability of what passes as even basic human knowledge; yoga and the inevitable passing of every human endeavor.

These are not poems to be taken or undertaken lightly. A brother's suicide, a friend's mastectomy, contemplations of one's own mortality, a father's death from cancer and the manic, last-minute struggle for his soul that precedes it, these are poems that readily admit

the seriousness of life, and that look unflinchingly into the faces of fear, uncertainty, loss and hope all the while refusing the easy sedative of oversimplified explanations like faith, chance, or biology. These are poems that insist we examine the whole human experience, the good, the bad, the illimitably ineffable, and the hopeless and hopeful ways in which we react to it and try to create meaning from it.

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

VEINS

by Larry Johnson

David Roberts Books, 2009

ISBN: 9781934999691

It takes a significant level of negative capability to forego the comfortable and familiar "I" of the poet-speaker and place oneself firmly, convincingly and insightfully into the complete milieu of a speaker that is decidedly "other." Yet, such a dissolution of ego is a vital component of a great deal of successful poetry as it allows the poetic imagination's free rein run across a wider range of human experience than one trapped in first person, in the "cell of self," could hope to achieve. Among the many impressive qualities of poetic practice present in Larry Johnson's *Veins*, perhaps this ability is the most satisfying as this seasoned writer skillfully moves forward, backward and laterally across time, place and psyche to expand the readers' grasp of the timelessness and universality of human experience.

Make no mistake about it, the clear subject of these poems is what some would say is the only proper subject of poetry: mankind. And accordingly, these poems are steeped in the humanistic traditions of literature, art, music, politics, and philosophy, of man's efforts to create meaning, significance and lastingness. Even in poems about natural beauty or disaster (ivory-billed woodpeckers, Krakatoa, Herculaneum), it is the impact of these natural elements on the human world that is the focus of consideration.

The opening line of the opening poem, "Man Going" (one of my favorites), demonstrates the reason for such a focus. "What is on earth that tenses," the line asks. The inevitable answer, of course, is mankind, the one creature on earth that bears the weight of consciousness, of knowledge, of contemplation of the possibility of ruin; the one creature that might pause to consider the significance of "a meteor sifting through Leo's flank," and taken a step further, might even write it down and follow it with the question, "How may we see beyond this," and then answer that question with the Wordsworthian suggestion that we "ease back to warm sand / and the sucking sea/ and feed on ruins of strange fish."

Thus, with the license granted by such an understanding of the uniqueness of mankind's place on earth, Johnson ventures out into a wide range of human perspectives, sometimes his own, but just as often reinvigorating the circumstances of Marcus Aurelius, Juvenal, Hadrian, Caracalla, and many others. From these perspectives Johnson shares what it did or what it

might have felt like to be there. Given his awareness of the temporal pageant of human history against the larger, more “automatic” pageant of natural history, one might wonder what Johnson offers us in the way of not just experiencing but understanding. The answer is just this — that our greatest defense is our appreciation of the vitality, the potential, of the single moment. Thus, as a reminder of this fact, in a poem perfectly titled “Once,” Johnson shows us an ironic younger speaker lacking that understanding: “The rarest creature of earth, / and I saw one, fallen to earth, / but less precious to me than the helicopter / which had sliced and dipped so silverly.”

It is no surprise that Johnson’s photo on the back cover of *Veins* shows him standing at Keats’ grave. The stance these poems encourage is the belief that life is best experienced in the full consciousness of human history but without the distorting, perhaps even blinding, influence of prejudice or expectation. Could there be a better definition of negative capability than that?

Review

by Scott Owens

SOLO CAFÉ, 8 & 9: TEACHERS & STUDENTS

Edited by Lenard Moore, et. al.

Solo Press, 2011

ISBN: 0941490505

I have never written a review of a magazine. It's not the sort of thing I usually set out to do as most magazines don't cohere tightly enough to be written about as a single piece. But I have written reviews of anthologies, and when I came across the 2011 issue of the annual journal Solo Café, it was clear that this was as much an anthology as it was a journal, and the subject of this journal/anthology, "Teachers & Students," was of particular interest to me.

The various poetry and prose pieces found in this anthology are just the sort that bring great joy, contemplation, and insight to teachers, students and poets, and perhaps most of all to teacher-poets or poet-teachers, however one with such dual "citizenship" might identify oneself. One will find here a full range of learning and teaching situations, including "students writing their fierce and luminous poems" in Laura Boss's "Workshop at the Great Falls, Paterson," where "William Carlos Williams . . . looked / at these same falls so many decades ago" and both prose and poetic tributes to specific teachers, like Earl Sherman Bragg's "Mrs. Davis," who "farm plowed and pushed a field full / of books . . . / taught Shakespeare till Shakespeare, / himself, shook / the classroom walls . . . /" and made clear that in the world of her students, the world of ongoing race war, "'To be or not to be' was never a question" but rather an existential imperative.

As Bragg's poem suggests, learning is not always a simple matter of X's and O's. When things go smoothly, as presented in Sally Buckner's "Teacher," learning is a fine balance of knowledge and passion that meet as they might nowhere more powerfully than in a classroom:

I will fill your plate as full as you will let me. //
I'll bring the bread,
and you — with yearning green in your young heart
and eyes that can see newly each new moment —
You bring the wine.

On the other hand, sometimes learning is a struggle between creativity and correctness, between autonomous vision and received knowledge or expectations of obedience, as in

Randy Pait's "Boy in a Classroom" or Susan Meyers' "First Grade," where a young student, having excitedly colored "a bold yellow sun" belatedly discovers "Words her other hand, / . . . / has hidden from her: / Color the pretty ball red."

Just so, this anthology provides what at times seems an exhaustive variety of educable opportunities, demonstrating learning from history (Kelly Cherry's "War and Peace: Cliff Notes"), and philosophy (George Burns's "Partly Heliotropic"), from art (Ray Gonzalez's "The Long Library"), and books (Michael Harper's "Negritude: a Poem Written When Everything Else Fails to Translate"), from teachers (Kevin Lucia's "Physics") and observation (Terre Ouwehand's "Vital Signs"). Similarly, the selections here cover every level of education: first lessons (Shayla Hawkins's "The Seed"), grade school (Lenard Moore's "The Art of Living"), middle school (Lamont Steptoe's "Instructions"), high school (Nancy Simpson's "In Room Nine"), college (Ray Gonzalez's "Fear of Dying") and adulthood (Teddy Macker's "Teacher").

In addition to the poems, a selection of reviews and essays further examine the influences particular teachers have had upon their students who have become writers. Of particular note in these prose selections is the frequency with which the word "generosity" is mentioned in regards to a poet-teacher. It is there in Mary Ann Cain and George Kalamaras's reflections on Judith Johnson and Muriel Rukeyser, in Karen McKinnon's recollection of George Sidney, in Shelby Stephenson's discussion of Guy Owen, and in John Tritica's homage to Mary Rising Higgins and Gene Frumkin.

If I had known about this journal before it went to press, I would have certainly submitted a poem of my own, and so I add it here to those in Solo Café 8 & 9 not because I think it is as good as those in the journal but because I think it expresses what every teacher-poet knows and one of the things the wonderful writers collected here would like us all to remember. I include it as tribute to the spirit of the poet-teachers this volume celebrates and includes and as tribute to the poet-teachers that have been so instrumental in my own life: Galway Kinnell, Robert Waters Grey, Paul Nelson, Tim Peeler, Ann Carver, Hepzibah Roskelly, Stuart Dischell, Fred Chappell, and many others:

All There Is to Say

If it happens that you find yourself
at the front of a room full of people
younger than you
listening to all you have to say
about what you think you know

and suddenly you hear
from an open window
you hadn't even noticed was open
the voice of a mockingbird
as clear as the voice of God
singing in every language at once
you owe it to yourself
to stop in the almost silence
and say out loud, Listen