

# Summer 2011

Wild Goose Poetry Review

Summer 2011

I am always excited when I upload a new issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review. I know that doing so gives me the opportunity to share my favorite poems from 3 months worth of quality submissions. This issue is no different. All of the poems here have been chosen for their uniqueness, their interest level, and their overall quality. It is a diverse batch, including familiar poets like Helen Losse, Tim Peeler, Ron Moran, and Doug McHargue, as well as poets I've appreciated for a while but who are making their first appearance in Wild Goose — Rosemary Royston and Celisa Steele — and, of course, poets whose work I've only come to know through their current submissions to Wild Goose — Diane Webster, Larry Schug, Susan Rooke, and Katherine June Abrams. However they've come to me, I am pleased to present each of them to you, the reader, and convinced that your poetry experience will be enriched by reading them.

And don't forget the reviews. Among them is a review of what may very well be my favorite book of the year, John Lane's *Abandoned Quarry*. There is also a review of the new book of poems from Ron Rash, who may very well be my favorite living author. Additionally, new books by Celisa Steele, John York, and Corey Cook are provided.

As always, most of the authors have sent along a brief comment on their poems to spark further discussion. I hope that you will join in the dialogue by leaving a comment of your own. Finally, I received an unusually large quantity of submissions immediately AFTER the end of the reading period (July 31). If you have a submission in that batch, I'll be getting to it shortly, and I'll be continuing to read submissions until October 31 for the fall issue, due out November 15.

Enjoy!

## Contents

Katherine June Abrams, Links

Katherine June Abrams, My Grandmother's Confession

Celisa Steele, The Feeder

Celisa Steele, Pie at 3 AM

Joseph Milford, Janitor Moonlighting

Joseph Milford, Jekyll Island Afternoon  
Joseph Milford, Domestic Dispute After Reading Some Stephen Crane Poems  
Susan Rooke, How Do You Like Me Now  
Diane Webster, Funeral  
Diane Webster, Home Alone  
John Stanizzi, Kayak  
John Stanizzi, The Hat  
Doug McHargue, The Color of My Room  
Maren Mitchell, Submission Requirements  
Maren Mitchell, Why We Want to Fly and Swim  
Ron Moran, Suppose the Return of Christ  
Tim Peeler, Faith CLXIV  
Steve Roberts, Inundation  
Steve Roberts, The Fractal Tide  
Rosemary Royston, Reasons Not to Wear Pantyhose  
Rosemary Royston, Brief Encounter on Stairwell  
Larry Schug, Green Heron in Rain  
Helen Lose, Flowers Along the Railway: A NC Triptych  
Aaron Poller, The Chicken Slaughterhouse of Dobson

### **Reviews**

Scott Owens, Review of *Abandoned Quarry*  
Scott Owens, Review of *How Language Is Lost*  
Scott Owens, Review of *Waking*  
Scott Owens, Review of *Naming the Constellations*  
Scott Owens, Review of *What to Do with a Dying Parakeet*

Katherine June Abrams

LINKS

Four years younger than mine,  
her daughter lies under the rubble.  
Kathryn Stripling Byer, from "Her Daughter"

In a cement room with three windows  
you read us your daughter's poem  
while somewhere in the desert  
a woman whose daughter is dead  
writes elegies on cinderblock walls  
with the ashes of all she has left.

Your words gather us together,  
student with teacher with  
women with daughters, linking  
us to each other like a fence  
clinging to the wide arc  
of our Blue Ridge Parkway.

These poems wave over us in  
rust-grey ink on white flags,  
transparent against a peach sunset  
the same color  
whether falling behind  
mountain greens or desert browns.

**Author's Comment:** Much of my writing has focused on finding the ways disconnected things can make a connection, and cohabitate in a meaningful way. When Kathryn Stripling Byer was a mentor for my senior seminar class at Appalachian State University the year she was Poet Laureate of North Carolina, we talked a lot about that theme in poetry. I was drawn

to her own works that expressed those ideas, and found myself wanting to link to Kay, who was a visitor, and through her to the larger world, in a more permanent way.

Katherine June Abrams

MY GRANDMOTHER'S CONFESSION

I didn't want him.

When the morning sickness  
started for the second time,  
I did not weep with joy.

I just wept.

Later I wondered  
if those tears  
poisoned him;  
if they somehow  
dripped down  
into that aching cavity  
and dissolved like honey in tea.

**Author's comment:** I was playing, for a time, with dramatic monologues, and experimenting with how to speak in another person's voice. Most of those poems ended up being in the voice of women in my family who had passed away, and they became deeply personal moments in my family timeline. I was able to express things I could only imagine they would have wanted to say themselves, but never had the opportunity, or the audience, or the courage.

**Bio:** Katherine June Abrams is, at 31, a new mom and recent entrant into the Goddard College MFA program. She wandered away from the Windy City in 2002 and found herself in Blowing Rock, NC, where she met her husband and built her home. She has been trying to make poems come alive since she was eight years old, and plans to bring creative writing to at-risk youth when she completes her degree.

Celisa Steele  
THE FEEDER

God, you were a meticulous man  
and stubborn,  
wouldn't let me fill the feeder.  
Even the last year when you couldn't sleep  
and standing wore you out,  
you'd set the kettle to boil,  
leave your sugar and dye  
to cool like thin blood  
in the kitchen you'd built, cramped  
because you'd forgotten room for the oven.  
The feeder was nothing fancy —  
four flaming gloxinia with crisscross plastic  
hearts you tended like a fine machine.  
How those little birds seemed to love  
or anyway trust you, zoom in, rest  
for a second, drink with you standing right there.  
From the window I marveled  
at their confidence or credulity or instinct,  
how those thumb-sized birds, deep  
in their minute frontal lobes,  
tiny throbbing hearts, knew you meant nothing  
but love, old man.

**Author's Comment:** This poem and "Pie at 3 AM" both started as exercises from *The Poet's Companion* by Kim Addonizio and Dorianne Laux, specifically the chapter astutely, brilliantly titled "The Family: Inspiration and Obstacle." I'm working through the book with another poet, Iris Tillman Hill. We meet roughly every other week to share and critique our

results from a handful of the exercises. We spent almost two years going through Steve Kowitz's *In the Palm of Your Hand* before moving on to *The Poet's Companion*. I recommend both books—and working through them with another poet.

Celisa Steele

PIE AT 3 AM

She and Pop slept in the basement  
when we visited—me in Dad's old room  
where the bluebird on the magnolia branch  
he painted at twelve still hung;  
Mom and Dad in my grandparents' room.  
Mattress sour and baseboard sticky  
in the summer's humidity, the basement bed  
was tucked near the washer on the slab floor.

I don't know if she pulled the chain on the bare bulb  
or climbed the open stairs in the dark,  
but when the sixth step cracked like old knees,  
I'd slide from beneath the limp sheet.

In the kitchen, Gram in her thin gown was backlit  
at the refrigerator. I loved watching  
her hands—huge, dark with liver spots,  
hot as a poultice—work the cold Crisco.  
She'd peel the skin from those wormy apples  
that grew beyond the well into long ribbons  
that curled in the slop pail beneath the sink.  
Sugar, salt, squares of pale butter. Then she'd flour  
the counter, the floor, her fat bare toes, and roll the dough.  
Pie plate draped in crust, she'd hoist it eye-high,  
spin it in a slow circle on her finger tips,  
trimming the excess with a knife long as my forearm.

Pie in the oven, I'd go back to bed without a word,  
sweet steam mixing with the smoke  
from her forgotten cigarette burning to ash  
on the kitchen table, her eyes fixed  
on the uncurtained window  
where all was still dark.

**Author's Comment:** It's fitting that this poem and "The Feeder" should appear together as the Pop mentioned briefly at the beginning of this poem is the old man addressed in "The Feeder." It's been a long time since I made pie crust from scratch.

**Bio:** A native of Arkansas, Celisa Steele ([www.celisasteele.com](http://www.celisasteele.com)) now makes her home in the Paris of the Piedmont, Carrboro, North Carolina. Her poetry has appeared in *The South Carolina Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Anglican Theological Review*, *Kakalak*, *Pinesong*, *Bay Leaves*, *Always on Friday*, and others. Emrys published her first chapbook of poems, *How Language Is Lost*, in May 2011.

Joseph Milford

JANITOR MOONLIGHTING

The candelabra of the stars' canopy above me.

I adore urns, domes, and gourds;  
all shine in an await of shattering.

I eat crackers all night while pushing  
the dustmop through the detritus  
of the floor of the planetarium.

My job is to sweep up what is left  
of the stricken spectators.

How many of us can sustain that interest  
when viewing the ceilings and walls of  
the gyroscope of anon? The sidereal  
rays from the projector more real  
than those shafts that have traveled  
light years outside the dome.

Signs sometimes should be heeded.

I'm beyond that, and numbed beyond  
all belief by the brilliance  
of one tiny nail-hole in an otherwise  
immaculate plaster wall in the hall.

One center of focal decision was rooted there,  
a puncture. A small star of its own.

Something was hammered-in, then undone,  
pulled out, the ghost of the event jettisoned.

In other words, I tend to work

In the observatory of long hours alone.

The planetarium has taught me  
to notice particulars. I did not outdo my teachers  
as Pythagoras did Thales.

Minimum wage and vending machine fare  
entail more for me than Meton's lunar year.

Under the structures of the baffling, under  
the balcony I envision, they were all

ravenously chawing popcorn  
as the Euclidian production suddenly glitches  
in its production, and then no catcalls  
because instinctually the audience knows  
that this isn't the actual end of the universe.  
The technician quickly gets  
The Cosmos going again.  
Ironically, irony will have endless sequels.  
What particle, what iota, what mote  
Stopped the explanation of the monad  
and the stellar apparatus? What virus  
paused the supernova software?  
What grain of the eternal,  
I imagine? A nail-hole, a kernel, a formula,  
a star. An instance under a canopy,  
a ceiling made in the likeness of a sky—  
that irony again. I do my mundane sweeping  
beneath this. We all do our sweeping  
up of the moondust beneath this.

Joseph Milford

JEKYLL ISLAND AFTERNOON

There is a siesta for some of us.

A child with a mangled hand throws a stone into the ocean.

I came here to understand painters.

I came here to learn semiotics from the surf.

This is salt in the eye and sand in the ears.

As if preparing the body for the eventual putrefaction.

If I could paint I would paint the world around his hand.

Of course, he would throw a stone at me

and laugh in the sun.

Joseph Milford

DOMESTIC DISPUTE AFTER READING SOME STEPHEN CRANE POEMS

We had a fight  
a mutual tantrum.

I banged the guitar  
like an instrument of percussion.

Strumming, cursing  
an oblivion until my hand bled

Profusely  
a prolific poetry.

“You are bleeding  
on your guitar,” she said.

But it’s my guitar,  
I said.

In some desert somewhere  
I must have been  
a very proud man.

**Bio:** Joseph Milford is host of the Joe Milford Poetry Show, author of *Cracked Altimeter*, and co-editor of *Scythe*.

Susan Rooke

HOW DO YOU LIKE ME NOW?

She took the scissors to the long  
gauzy hair that shrouded  
her back like a cheesecloth veil  
just for spite one night  
because they'd fought and  
she had to have the satisfaction  
of the last word.

She slammed the bathroom door  
on the little girl crying in the bedroom  
and got out the nail scissors  
the ones with the tiny pointed blades  
like a needling beak

hacked it down  
short like feathers  
snick snick  
stripped her head so she looked  
like a bright-eyed bird

then flushed the brown nest  
of it down the toilet  
and when he came back  
into the room  
to tell her he was sorry  
saw the hair he loved long  
gone  
she chirped at him  
malicious

"How do you like me now?"

**Author's comment:** Some childhood memories are vague, shapeless things that swirl briefly to the surface before sinking back into the pond, but some walk beside us formed and clothed completely, always the same each time we think of them. Perhaps the event didn't happen

quite the way we remember, but the memory has such a burning, visionary clarity that it becomes indelible. This is one of my indelible memories.

**Bio:** Susan Rooke lives in Austin, Texas. Her poetry has appeared recently or is forthcoming in Main Street Rag, U.S. 1 Worksheets, The Christian Science Monitor, Stone Telling and The Orange Room Review, among other publications. She edits the Austin Poetry Society's monthly MuseLetter, and has just completed her first novel, a fantasy.

Diane Webster

FUNERAL

Closet lovers hover like window shoppers.  
Sit with the family, sit with friends.  
Too many people to hide feelings I can't hide.  
Damn their whispers! Damn the closet dust  
clinging like ashes to ashes to my soles.  
My lover died. They can't hurt me anymore.  
When night grief subsides to sunrise and dew,  
I won't care what anyone says.  
I won't regret not being buried beside her,  
we had more between us than bodies.  
When our ashes whirl together in wind,  
I'll never worry about my place again.

**Author's Comment:** Originally "Funeral" was part of a series of poems I tried to get published as a long poem, but it never got any positive responses so I split it into individual poems. Some have been published; some are still awaiting acceptance. After a lifetime of hiding a relationship, I wondered how a person handles the funeral where no one knows your relationship, your feelings. Should you continue to hide the feelings, the love or yell, "Screw it!" and reveal everything? After all, the most important person in your life is already gone. What more can they do to you?

Diane Webster  
HOME ALONE

The house smells like her letters  
when I used to live without her.  
Her afghan lies on the couch  
with the pillow cupped for her head;  
a bookmark flags the page last read;  
a water glass trembles half full, half empty.  
I lie on my side of the bed listening  
for snores reassuring  
that all is safe in the night  
until sun rises morning after morning.

**Author's Comment:** This poem was also part of the long poem I tried to get published. So many reminders of a person are left behind when they leave. One evening I came home, and the house smelled like the person I live with, like the letters I used to breathe in as soon as they arrived. I woke up during the night and noticed how comforting I felt when I heard snores. And how one day I was going to have to live this way, alone.

**Bio:** I try to stay observant of life whether it be everyday events or drives in the mountains where I look for wildlife and scenery to inspire my writing. I work in the production department of the local newspaper office. My poetry has appeared in "The Orange Room Review," "Illya's Honey," "The Hurricane Review" and other literary journals.

John Stanizzi

KAYAK

for my son, Jason. and my grandson, Jonah

The rainiest June since 1989,  
and the weighty vault of gray clouds  
spills open every day —  
three inches yesterday!  
Enormous trees lie down in wet grass,  
as easy as uprooting jewelweed,  
and let the rain bathe over them,  
their ragged crowns of roots exposed,  
as in the peripheral hills  
lightning shorts out the sky  
and bottom-heavy thunder  
snarls in the distance,  
looking for attention.  
But my son calls anyway,  
eager to defy the persistent weather,  
wanting to scull the kayak  
through the day's foggy midday funk,  
parting the mist to reveal the sun  
and us emerging from the haze.

So I agree to go,  
though I'm not in the mood.  
We climb into the tandem kayak,  
my grandson, my son, and me.  
The air is sodden and thick,  
and the gray sky so low I can touch it.

We seat ourselves in the boat,  
triplets, matryoshka dolls —  
two-year old Jonah in front,  
the smallest,  
the one everyone wants to hold,  
curious and smooth ,

hand over the side,  
parting the water with his fingers,  
searching for everything  
that lies between and beneath.

His father, Jason, is in the middle,  
nicked up,  
largely overlooked,  
and huddled between infancy and old age,  
his past a kind of love.

And me in the stern,  
grandfather, father.  
still strong enough to hold them both,  
but worn by light,  
worn by darkness  
and growing tired of the long,  
silent stories  
of men who, once they go,  
can never return.

**Author's Comment:** the moment the poem was born was when my son, Jason, Jonah's father, remarked jokingly that floating around in the kayak, lined up the way we were, made us look like matryoshka dolls; the three of us look just same, only different ages and sizes. I thought it was a remarkable enough observation to want to write about it. And of course, the smallest doll, the doll we go for, is always the most beautiful, the most pristine, the most sheltered.

John Stanizzi

THE HAT

She had given me the hat as a peace offering  
during one of our  
to learn to like one another  
counseling sessions.

It was one of those paperboy hats,  
brown plaid,  
that looked good sitting catawampus  
on my head.

I did everything in that hat,  
and I was in such a good mood  
that I even painted the yellowed kitchen ceiling  
a nice soft white.

But the counseling didn't take,  
and I slept on the living room floor for three years.  
Along the way my hat vanished  
and I thought about it all the time.

One day I needed to borrow something,  
I don't recall what,  
from the guy next door,  
and to my amazement,

here he comes,  
wearing my hat.

I was stunned and delighted.  
Something that made sense.

"Man! That's where my hat went!" I said,  
relieved of the obsession  
of wondering what the hell  
I had done with it.

But my neighbor was instantly belligerent.  
"This is not your hat.

This is my hat.

This hat was a gift, man!"

For a moment I thought about straightening him out,  
but saw that it would be pointless,  
so I walked away, keeping at bay something like  
raging wounded liberation and massive silence,  
never mentioning until now,  
the afternoon I found my hat,  
that stubborn spot of white paint  
still on the brim.

**Author's Comment:** The Hat is rather like the last bit of punctuation in a story about a crumbling marriage. When I finally "find" my hat the rest of my life is in a shambles. The line raging wounded liberation and massive silence tries to capture that fact – there is no point in making an issue of the hat, because it just does not matter anymore. So...the "wound" rages....the "liberation" rages...but the "silence" is massive, because by that point there is nothing left to say.

**Bio:** John L. Stanizzi's books are *Ecstasy Among Ghosts* and *Sleepwalking*. Besides *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, his poems have appeared in *The New York Quarterly*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Rattle*, *Freshwater*, *Passages North*, *The Spoon River Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *The Connecticut River Review*, *Stone Country*, *Hawk & Handsaw*, *Gutter Eloquence*, *SNReview*, and many others. In 1998, Mr. Stanizzi was named *The New England Poet of the Year* by *The New England Association of Teachers of English*. His newest book, *Dance Against the Wall*, will be out later this year.

Doug McHargue

THE COLOR OF MY ROOM

A girl, I dreamed of aqua rooms  
but got pink.

Sick in bed I planned to float  
on waves of aquamarine,  
take my liquid lungs  
to dry lands where I'd breathe  
air, not water.

Now I've got those aqua walls,  
window raised, air wet enough  
for me to swim, float out  
on waves joining earth's streams  
where everybody went,  
my folks, my husband,  
all the other men.

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

Maren Mitchell

## SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

It always starts in vague unhappiness –  
a faint and irrepressible desire  
that builds and builds into the restlessness  
that needs submissions, quick, to quench the fire.  
You're known, not known. To be much more known – now!  
Be sure to check their influence and fame.  
Then, enter fast or send too slow. Highbrow  
your best. Submit a lot. Augment your name.  
The odds are better simultaneous.  
Rejections only make you put out more.  
Acceptance! Rare. Rejoice and crow. A fuss  
that lasts a day or two, then, as before,  
the itch begins to build, and, tired or not,  
just like a shot, you enter, send – you're hot!

**Author's Comment:** Throughout last winter I spent much of my free time submitting poems to journals. Every once in a while I would announce to my husband that I was "planning to submit today." His eyebrows would rise in fake shock. On that humorous note I developed a list of "submission" terms, all with double meanings. The subject was added to my list of subjects for poems. This spring and summer, while taking an online course in verse forms through Oxford University, I used it for an assignment – a Shakespearean, or English sonnet.

Maren Mitchell

WHY WE WANT TO FLY AND SWIM

Because we can't.

Because we could

before we shed feathers, sprouted thumbs,  
unfolded into walking plants, tethered to earth,  
reaching for dominion.

We remember with

cartwheels

flying dreams

spaceships

diving

submarines.

We feel the itch tease below each shoulder blade.

Majestic wings almost unfurl.

We remember leaps of faith into the blue canopy,

lords upheld from beak to breast to tail,

coasting from warmth to warmth,

leaving solid below.

Lonely legs long to be one, sculpted for speed.

We ache for the ultimate caress of liquid surround,

fractured light playing around and past us,

navigating by currents, season to season,

our bodies all grace,

circumnavigating time.

**Author's Comment:** Last year I had several "what if" subjects on my subjects-to-write-poems-about list. Since our species is notorious for wanting to do what it can't do, I speculated about why, in the case of flying and swimming (underwater), drawing on the premise that we evolved from creatures that did and do fly and swim.

**Bio:** Maren O. Mitchell's poems have appeared in the Red Clay Reader, "The Arts Journal," "Appalachian Journal," "The Journal of Kentucky Studies," "Echoes Across the Blue Ridge, an

anthology, "Southern Humanities Review," and Nurturing Paws, an anthology. Poems are forthcoming in "Pirene's Fountain," <http://www.pirenesfountain.com>, Japan Anthology, and "The Classical Outlook." She lives in northeastern Georgia with her husband and two cats.

Ron Moran

SUPPOSE THE RETURN OF CHRIST

So I'm thinking, perhaps irreverently, about why Christ  
returned

in ways his disciples could not recognize him, as on  
the road

to Emmaus, by the shore of the sea with fisherman,  
elsewhere

to, and I keep wanting to ask Why? Why did Christ  
come back

incognito? And suppose he were to return now —  
in

what guise should we expect to find him? Maybe  
as a broker

on Wall Street, a paramedic in the Sub-Saharan,  
and, well,

how can we be sure it is Christ—because he says so?

If they could not

verify his person, how can we recognize him now?

Is it that God

prefers his son to be incognito, to check out the land,  
so to speak,

and if so, what are we to do when the doubters feed  
the media

with historical analogues, with controversies boiling  
about Christ,

his authenticity, his redemptive quality; and what will  
happen

to Christianity—perish in the textbooks of the world,  
with Christ,

as a person, but what kind of a person, a good guy  
or an agitator,

one whose journey, whose sufferings were justified,  
or one  
whose way goes the way of the steep four corners  
of the Earth,  
like a discounted theory of the origins of the universe,  
and where  
will we be then?—better off than now, in our beliefs,  
or diminished,  
our faith being rubbed out, as if by an eraser on a board  
of history?

**Author's Comment:** "Suppose the Return of Christ" is a very different poem for me, not in format, for it follows the long/short line technique that I adopted several years ago, which also includes, at times, my use of rather long sentences in order to generate a rhythmic motion. Anyway, I am a Christian. Perhaps this poem was occasioned, in part, by the guy who recently predicted Judgment Day and the end of the world on May 21. It made me think of how very, very difficult it would be for us to accept anyone who claimed to be Christ, and how difficult it was for even his closest followers to accept him after his resurrection.

**Bio:** Ronald Moran has published 11 collections of poetry, the most recent being *The Jane Poems*, two books of criticism (one coauthored), and hundreds of poems, essays, and reviews in a number of journals, including *Connecticut Poetry Review*, *Commonweal*, *Emrys Journal*, *Evening Street Review*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Meadowland Review*, *Northwest Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Southern Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Thomas Wolfe Review*, and *Wild Goose Poetry Review*. His writings and memorabilia about them are archived in Special Collections of the James B. Duke Library at Furman University. Moran lives in Simpsonville, SC.

Tim Peeler

FAITH CLXIV

Like most children of his generation,  
He's trying to figure out his father  
Long after his death,  
Driving past his grave  
On a freezer burned automatic morning  
When the slate gray sky is the kind of poem  
That annihilates an already tired audience,  
Tanked on caffeine,  
Suffering the ambiguity of the age,  
And he knows in his casual contemplation  
That he is a lesser being,  
Faithless as the metal filings  
Scattered by the magnet, memory.

Steve Roberts  
INUNDATION

In this split  
Second, as I stare from the rocker  
At the rollicking Atlantic,  
Somewhere on this dizzy, dozed-off planet,  
Someone is dying.  
Might we call this “the subconscious”?  
Off the water’s dull gray surface  
A boisterous wind blusters  
While insinuating waves curl  
In quick and tight.  
Inside the enclosed porch’s  
Windows where walls would be,  
I sip warm and frothy emerald-green Irish coffee  
Out of a glass-bottomed mug  
Heavy-as-stone  
While the young waitress is being shown  
The latest technique of opening  
More bottles of wine than she could ever  
Even imagine drinking  
Before the unabiding ocean.

**Author’s Comment:** I was sitting in a rocker looking at the Atlantic and drinking an Irish coffee. It was a dark and stormy day, and though we know people are dying every second, we are rarely conscious of it. There is the correlation between the removed view of the “enclosed porch” and the limitation of the conscious mind. The waitress was being shown how to open bottles of wine which drew a parallel to “opening” the unconscious. The liquidity of the ocean, my beverage and the wine compounded together. It is also true that the brain is surrounded by fluid.



Steve Roberts

THE FRACTAL TIDE

–for William Harold

Thursday arrival:

Not the ocean, vast as it is

Seamless, but the populated pier like some fool's penis

Overextended. As I scan from my fourteenth-floor balcony,

My eyes a seagull's meet.

Friday night:

A halo from the luminous pier

Obscures the stars. Crescent moon & sword embroidered

On what look like tasseled red buckets

Inverted above stogie-stuffed

Grins, a parade of waving, scooter-

Weaving Shriners beeps by. Inside the painted-black school

Bus, its flank sawed open-wide, a duet of stomping Shriners sweats

Hard as they fiddle. Feeling a little high pressure

Lately, I'm okay with my barometer

Notching a degree lower, saunter

Back toward the wind-scuttled beach

Where the pier's lights gleam like gold teeth.

Saturday afternoon:

Though from beyond the breakers

A surfer's voice carried, the surf shop clerk says

Every board sold out before the hurricane.

Waves of walkers, runners, swimmers and sunbathers,

But no dunes, the sea gull pees in mid-

Flight. Skinny-lined figure-eight my big toe etched in

Sand and loopy-as-washed-up-seaweed cursive just footnotes

To the muse's surround-sound hone

Of business: the swarm of bikinis hiping back

And forth; sunken clams valving; a kite's dragon-tailed wag

Below the sun before its humming dive  
Down to earth; the all-but-transparent ghost crab's side-  
Stepped dance to-and-from its shadowed hole;  
An air force of arrow-plummeted pelicans; paired-off teens holding  
Hands; the black-&-white-spiral-striped, centuries-  
Old lighthouse leaned into its vigilance.

Sunday morning:

An airplane! a boy raising his bucket directs his sister  
Kneeled on her hands and knees digging  
Into the wet sand's cloud-reflecting mirror. Opposite  
The direction yesterday, a pod of dolphins  
Arches. A woman darts after her plastic-rake-dragging toddler  
Yelling, Angeles! Angeles! An airplane, no — a helicopter —  
Shudders closer as the resurfaced pelican's  
Harpoon beak whisks away another fish, helpless.

Sunday evening:

Two boys throwing football, one's feet positioned  
In the strand of sand, granular and forgiving  
As it is the creamy color of milk, and the other  
Leaping arms outstretched above the rough,  
Chest-high surf hoping for a clothes-line tackle by  
A breaking wave as he hauls in a pass perfectly-timed,  
Remind me of the throws my little brother, twenty-year-old back-seat passenger  
During the pine-splintered, earth-shuddered, aerial-acrobatic  
Stunt of some forty-year-old failed-fool pilot  
Decades of windy Labor Days ago, and I  
Used to complete, our sets of yearning wings too young  
To hold against the sunset's darkening blood.

**Author's Comment:** "The Fractal Tide" was a difficult and challenging poem to write, and if I have done it well it would both surprise and please me. I had traveled to Virginia Beach from the mountains and was writing lines as they would come. The beach was a place where my

family went for vacations. When I got to where I was observing and writing about the boys throwing football, something about the past kicked off, and the poem became altogether something different and personal. Rhyming often helps me to organize a lot of disparate information, and I felt the subject deserved rhymed couplets in a formal, elegiac sense.

**Bio:** Steve Roberts is the author of two full-length collections of poems, *Another Word for Home* and *A Space Inside A Space* and a chapbook, *Every September . . .*. He is the recipient of a North Carolina Arts Council Regional Artist Project Grant, and was a presenter on the “Art and Healing” panel at the 2009 North Carolina National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NC-NAMI) Conference: *Creative Hearts, Healing Minds*. His work received an Academy of American Poets Prize and was nominated for a Pushcart Prize. He works in the film industry in Wilmington.

Rosemary Royston

REASONS NOT TO WEAR PANTYHOSE

(Disposal Directions Included)

Reason 1:

Mother wore them without panties.  
She said the cotton crotch made it okay  
and even though she was the preacher’s wife  
I recall her laughing as she ascended the stairs  
at the mall, catching a man leering up through  
the open stairway, his eyes glued, heaven-bound.

Reason 2:

Hose cut off the air flow.  
No breath makes for sour breath.  
The elastic waist will dig in, leaving a despicable  
indentation. Your belly-button will be pressed  
to your spine, regardless of the cushion of flesh  
between the two.

Reason 3:

Hose can house small critters.

Once a flea snuck in, bit me on my thigh.  
That morning, I'd had to take off and put on  
my hose three times. First the right foot  
was backwards, then the left, then  
the black leather stains from my shoes  
didn't match up. At some point,  
the flea hopped in.

Disposal:

Rip the hose off. Do not roll them down gently,  
as in the movies. Next, poke your finger  
through the run that has been there  
since you put them on. Watch the run ripple  
down the right leg. (Warning: The extreme joy  
of seeing and hearing this rip may make you dizzy,  
be sure to have a chair or secure place to grab.)  
Finally, wad the stinky foot-smelling mass  
into a ball and fling it into the trash.  
Enjoy the caress and kiss of the air  
on your bare shins and thighs.

**Author's Comment:** For me, pantyhose are a holdover from such constricting things as girdles and corsets — a fashion item designed to keep women looking a certain way. While this poem does not express my feminist view outright, it does celebrate how free one feels when she finally rids herself of these ridiculous nylon things which are uncomfortable, expensive, and a pain to wear. The first stanza of this poem is my favorite, and I hope it brings a few laughs to those who read it.

Rosemary Royston

BRIEF ENCOUNTER ON STAIRWELL

A sliver of gold, a straw-like filament  
except curved, malleable—  
a strand of hair clinging  
in the delicious dip  
between waist and hip.  
How politely he asked,  
just inches behind her, if he could  
please remove it, his fingertips  
diving into the atmosphere  
of her space, the sound barrier  
breaking in complete and static  
silence.

**Author's Comment:** It's one thing to delve into the physical space of someone you know well. It's another when it is not someone you know, and a certain tension exists. This poem seeks to capture that tension and how some emotions are profoundly felt, yet are never articulated.

**Bio:** Rosemary Royston's chapbook *Splitting the Soil* will be published in late 2011/early 2012. She holds an MFA in Writing from Spalding University. Rosemary's poetry has been published in *The Comstock Review*, *Main Street Rag*, *Alehouse*, *Literal Latte*, *Public Republic*, and *Dark Sky Magazine*. Her essays on writing poetry are forthcoming in *Women and Poetry: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing by Successful Women Poets*, McFarland. She was the recipient of the 2010 *Literal Latte Food Verse Award*. She currently serves as the Program Coordinator for the North Carolina Writers Network-West.  
<http://theluxuryoftrees.wordpress.com/>

Larry Schug

GREEN HERON IN RAIN

The light's not right, too much glare  
for a photo through the rain-streaked window,  
and not being a painter or sketcher  
I turn to words to capture and convey  
the image of a solitary green heron,  
its rusty breast, pointed crest, stiletto beak,  
preening gray/green feathers worn like a cape;  
gripping a branch of a fallen aspen  
with long feet, orange as its legs.  
The steel gray pond bubbles and ripples in the rain,  
backdrop of shimmering quicksilver,  
a scene that could move an agnostic soul  
to believe in the hand of some god,  
with no religion to muddy the image, within or without.

**Bio:** Larry Schug has published his sixth book of poems, "Nails" with North Star Press of St. Cloud. He lives with his wife, dog and two cats near a large tamarack bog in St. Wendel Twp., Minnesota. As I write this I am three days from being retired. Yee-haaa!

About "Green Heron in Rain": How do I capture this particular "now"? The question that poetry answers best. The privilege of seeing a green heron perched on a dead tree in the rain deserves a payback of some kind. A poem of gratitude, celebration and awe will have to do.

Helen Losse

FLOWERS ALONG THE RAILWAY: A NC TRIPTYCH

Near Andrews Geysers—  
an NS coal train winds its way  
down through the loops  
where passage looks impossible.  
Growth of rhododendron  
accent over-hanging rocks.  
Wild flowers fill the valleys.  
Falling water echoes like the train's whistle,  
turning back on itself  
going south on the S-Line.

At the Salisbury Wye,  
railfans sit in pick-up trucks.  
Chunks of coal fall to the wayside  
onto the red, red clay  
near Buck Steam Station,  
that everyone calls "Duke."  
A pig train waits for a crew change  
in the shade of the aging Yadkin River bridge,  
where a lonely passionflower  
grows in crushed-stone ballast.

At Ft. Bragg, a patch of yellow thistle  
pokes through rails  
where the Army practices war.  
South toward Wilmington on CSX tracks  
salt from the Atlantic  
flavors moist air,  
and a short line  
links the Port Authority with DOT.  
Boxcars and tankers wait for cargo.  
Brown sea grass rustles in wind.

**Author's Comment:** I love the contrast between the natural world and the world of steel rails and wooden ties. I wanted to present unique snapshots of the three regions of our state in a balanced triptych, so that each could stand alone, but I also wanted the three to be connected (as they are,) and I wanted to create a sense of motion (unevenness of the rail path, both in vertical and horizontal directions). I attempted this by indenting some of the lines. When I consider the number of variables, I'm not surprised as to how many revisions it took to get this poem "right." I use the word "right," as most poets do, to show that's where I left it at my last revision.

**Bio:** Helen Losse is a Winston-Salem poet, the author of two full length books, *Seriously Dangerous* and *Better With Friends* and two chapbooks, *Gathering the Broken Pieces* and *Paper Snowflakes*. Helen's poems have been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and twice for a Best of the Net award, one of which was a finalist. She is the Poetry Editor for online literary magazine *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*.

Aaron Poller

THE CHICKEN SLAUGHTERHOUSE OF DOBSON

O holy cow of the Blue Ridge  
sweetly churn your new mown hay  
as I speed by eighty with an eye on  
the virgin dew another scanning for  
the patrol car a ritual to keep us safe  
and American as pie a la mode  
the piney woods line the road  
to Dobson where I teach  
the college and the highest structure  
on campus the water tower painted  
light blue with large block letters  
spell out D-O-B-S-O-N if town  
smells polluted like toxic chicken  
shit it's ok getting here before  
the poultry trucks begin their eerie  
hell-bent apostasies if it's Monday  
I may find time to scribble a brief  
poem or two before I have to lecture  
the ins and outs of schizophrenia  
today NPR interviews a man  
with both legs blown off in Iraq  
working fulltime in California  
sounds sane, braver than I can imagine.

**Author's Comment:** I began working on this poem several years ago while I was teaching nursing at Surry Community College in Dobson, North Carolina. The poem reflects my interest and concern for the contemporary landscape and its effects on human awareness and

behavior. I believe that all human beings are engaged in a daily struggle to survive and to develop and that struggle connects us in many ways. As in much of my poetry, this poem feels like an opportunity for both self growth and the encouragement of growth (hopefully) in its readers.

**Bio:** Aaron Poller currently works as a psychotherapist in Winston-Salem and teaches Mental Health Nursing at Winston-Salem State University. He has been writing since the 1960's when he studied poetry with Robert Mezey, Jean Garrigue and Daniel Hoffman. He is hoping to publish a book or chapbook of his work in the future and has recently had poems published or accepted for publication in Barnwood Poetry Magazine, Eunoia Review, Muddy River Poetry Review, Cherry Blossom Review, Poetry Quarterly, Poetic Medicine and The Yale Journal of Humanities in Medicine.

Review

by Scott Owens

ABANDONED QUARRY: NEW AND SELECTED POEMS

by John Lane

Mercer University Press, 2010

ISBN: 9780881462418

You really can't judge a book by its cover . . . front or back. All four blurbs on the back of John Lane's *Abandoned Quarry: New and Selected Poems* mention "nature" or "landscape. So, of course, as I started reading these poems I was predisposed towards finding environmental themes. Now, I admire Gregory Orr, Ron Rash, Kate Daniels, and David Lee, the authors of those four blurbs, a great deal, and certainly nature plays a vital role in Lane's poems, but it's not exactly the primary thing I experienced or reflected upon as I read them. I may be splitting hairs to some degree, but they're important hairs to me, and what comes out most strongly from *Abandoned Quarry* are revelations not about nature per se but rather about human nature and about the relationship of human nature and the larger concept of nature in general. The reader is introduced, for example, to a very empathetic and later ironic understanding of the human proclivity for destruction in "Quarries," an early poem about what the speaker of Lane's more mature poems might consider "childish" desires:

Even as a boy I begged to be drunk  
on immense stretches of emptiness—

.....

I longed to grow into a man and work  
to quarry the emptiness outward  
until all was level again.

Such revelations of human nature continue in what is, perhaps surprisingly given the early nature of these poems, the most memorable section of the book: "Early Uncollected Poems." The poems in this section are uniquely sharp, each speaker's perception wide open, uncalculated, unabashed, unrehearsed, and the tone is as much "in the moment" as any poems I've ever read. The effect, of course, is that wonderful transportation of the reader that only really good poems can manage, as in the Marxist "Sugar Cane":

. . . You, the one with no shirt.

The one who shits where he works,  
whose machete like a part of your arm

hacks the cane three times. It falls,  
stripped of leaves and halved.  
You move on. Again, the same motion.  
And again the same. Then the gathering and loading.  
This all day until the sun drops.  
You've been at it since dawn.  
For your work there is six dollars Belize.

An even more extreme transportation, one not just of place but also perspective, takes place in "Reptiles Teach Him About Hunting: Notes on Catching Crocodiles in Belize," where the reader sees first from the perspective of the human hunter, "He fixes the croc's red eyes in his lamp, / whispers, 'It's still up,'" and then from that of the reptilean hunter:

. . . you  
are the croc hunting for pond turtles.

.....  
You spark red, stay up,  
until the light in you blinks out as buck shot  
cracks the tight bone of your skull.

Very different in subject matter, location, and technique, but equally about presence, in fact bringing conscious attention to our tendency to pretend or substitute presence through intellectualization and the denial of difference or uniqueness is "Along the Little Betsie":

If you are somehow here, so full of joy to have lost  
the Little Betsie, you have learned a new skill, to clear  
things up, the difference between what is  
and what is not, like the river, far from you  
which in your indifference you have allowed to be.

Finally, in "Shopping," the poem from this section that comes closest to fulfilling the expectations established by Orr and the others, Lane grieves the presence that is lost through our submission to the endless cycle of consumerism, the loss of natural man. Even here, though, it is not simply the loss of nature that is grieved, but also the loss of nature within us: "Every purchase a little wildness / goes out of us / and the world gets smaller."

To some extent, the issue of presence becomes the central issue of the entire book. It shows up quite clearly, for example, in "Seeing Wild Horses":

If only I could tell you how wildness shows  
the space between us and the green world;  
how an island is the same island with our  
presence, but with that presence we lose  
some hope of seeing . . . .

What are the consequences of human presence on the natural world and subsequently on  
human being? How can the needs of human nature and nature be reconciled? How can the  
human need for nature continue to be met without resulting in the destruction of nature and  
the eventual destruction of man? Absent from nature, man suffers. Present in nature, nature,  
and eventually man, suffer. After seeing a wild horse for the first time, the speaker continues,  
. . . I fight  
some need to call it from that animal world,  
then lose it in the shock of its leaving;  
I call this the greed of human caring,  
and count all my losses among its history.

As all of these comments indicate, it is not at all the case that Abandoned Quarry's blurb  
writers are wrong. They are, in fact, to a large extent quite correct in their characterization of  
the poems. After all, the environmental manifesto expressed in "Allegiance" is as unarguably  
clear as that of the Lorax: "I pledge allegiance to the trees- / the green republic of roots, limbs,  
/ and leaves under which I stand." And in what may be my favorite of the poems collected  
here, "This Morning You Wake in the City," the speaker reveals the animus of the natural  
world in the most urban of settings:

the city isn't simply city but built-up resins  
actions of enzymes, castings of human desire.  
so you wake to streets running to water  
(still water, mountains across the inlet (still stone).  
  
the yellow taxis are easy to call coyotes.  
the signs on tall buildings no more  
than the raised tail of a mule deer.

The problem with the prominent and repeated use of terms like "landscape" and "nature" in  
each of the blurbs is that it invites limited perception of the poems, invites thinking in clichés,  
and these are not beautiful tree poems or magical-mystical nature poems. Rather, they are

poems that look at our relationship with nature and with our own natures honestly, deeply, and complexly, challenging the easy answers to our lives which fail to admit the frequently contradictory, illogical, tragic and plainly ugly sides of human nature and existence. Like the boy in "My Dead Father's Bypass," these poems tell deeper, more complicated truths than clichés, platitudes, or generalizations could possibly convey. And on a very practical level, the marketing of these poems as nature poems, wilderness poems, or environmental poems insures that they will be read only by those who least need to read them, those who already find themselves struggling with the challenges of environmental concerns.

Besides, the simple truth is no review, much less a 40-word blurb, stands a chance in hell of fairly suggesting the range, depth, power, vitality, and importance of these poems. Because of those qualities, among the thousands of books of poems I own, there is not a single one I will more often take from the shelf to reread.

Review

by Scott Owens

HOW LANGUAGE IS LOST

Celisa Steele

Emrys Press, 2011

ISBN: 9780977351640

Sometimes funny, sometimes profound, the poems in Celisa Steele's debut collection, *How Language Is Lost*, are always full of surprises. Who, after all, would expect a villanelle on the words we use for men and women ("Consider the Chickens and Other Lessons on Sex and Sin"), or a prose poem on the creation of a national grammar police ("Sin Tax on Syntax Passes House by Narrow Margin"), or a metaphysical conceit that ends in either post-dinner or post-coital satiety ("She Loves the Sushi Chef Whose Name She Does Not Know"), or an ode comparing ping-pong to poetry: "most like a poem / this onomatopoetic game / with its spondaic name"?

Just as these poems demonstrate that Steele is comfortable and effective in both formal and free verse, they also demonstrate that she is equally comfortable with either humor or seriousness. In fact, she masterfully exhibits an insightful understanding of the coexistence of humor and gravity in many of the same situations, making it clear that vital truth often exists in the most mundane of human experiences, even those we primarily think of as funny. Such is the case in one of my favorite of these poems, "AI Considers the Fucking Holy Spirit," where the surprising (given the topic of consideration) profanity of the speaker belies the profundity of his thinking:

You got to go at it slant . . .

. . . It's like cursive, or some shit –

no block letters, can't be too plain or obvious,

got to trust your instincts,

your sub-fucking-conscious.

While this poem apparently deals with the quest for religious faith, the same lines could be written about poetry or love or luck. Anything worthwhile will always be somewhat ineffable.

Equally ineffable, or perhaps irreducible to any sort of simple statement, is the sense throughout these poems of the presence of loss and the importance of language in our daily

lives. The brilliant title poem, for example, tells us of the indigenous Argentinean Abipon people who, succumbing to European/Christian influences and diseases “gave way to farming, kneeling in naves” and discovered “their own shamans couldn’t shape shift anymore.” And when the last speaker of the Abipon language lies dying, no one understands “her articulation of the world to come, / the world lost.” Thus, Steele demonstrates that the tragedy of the death of a language, of lost words, is the loss of a perspective, the loss of an expression of an understanding of the world, which is finally what any language consists of.

The lost language this speaker mourns, however, is not just language of the cultural or anthropological sort. It is also the language that is lost when one loses a loved one, and the wasted or terminated opportunities for further meaningful emotional exchange that accompany such loss. This sort of lost language is addressed in “Emily Confesses, to the Pedicurist,” in which the speaker, asked to cut her mother’s nails, “quit”, “failed. At the end, / just knelt beside her chair, too tired to pretend.” And the sense of loss is further addressed in “Elegy for a Scarf Borrowed from a Mother Now Dead and Left on a Trolley Car in Budapest at Christmastime” and in “I Bought a New Car the Year My Mother Died.”

Celisa Steele has indeed made a wonderful debut. These poems possess all of the qualities a reader could hope for in a book of poems: lyricism, humor, compression, depth of feeling and meaning, memorable imagery, precise language, and perhaps most importantly, one surprise after another. A very enjoyable read that leaves the reader wanting more.

Review

by Scott Owens

WAKING

Ron Rash

Hub City Press, 2011

ISBN: 9781891885822

Just as “Resolution,” the epigraph poem of Ron Rash’s new collection, *Waking*, calls us back to the clarity of innocence (“Come here / where the water is slow, and clear”), so all of the poems in this collection are truly “waking” poems, calling us to one moment of clarity or another. The poems begin with the end of taking things for granted, with a child waking to a meaningful awareness of his surroundings, the sort of awareness that makes clear for the speaker that this is where he belongs and what belongs to him, that these things, this place, have value because it is where and what he is from. In “The Trout in the Springhouse,” this young speaker expresses an acute awareness of the symbolism of drinking water filtered through the gills of a trout

guarding that spring-gush,  
brushing my fingers  
as I swirled the water  
up in my palm cup  
tasted its quickness  
swimming inside me.

The carefully chosen word, “quickness”, refers not only to the movement of the trout but to life and wildness and the spirit of the place the speaker takes inside him.

As the poems continue, that child become man, in a familiar but still seemingly contrary motion, reaches increasingly farther back as he moves forward in age, progressively waking to the values of history and genealogy, to the interwovenness of people and place, and to an understanding of similar waking of his ancestors to these same truths he has begun to know. And then, that man become poet reaches increasingly farther out to understand the waking of all those who “in-habit” the places he writes of: farmers and veterinarians, preachers and town drunks, miners and drowned girls. This revaluing of place, this reintegration of people and place, becomes the central theme of the collection as a whole. It is, as Robert Penn Warren taught us, and as Wendell Berry continues to teach us, an important element of our ability to value our selves, our lives and our world. It is an element that becomes increasingly

important as fewer and fewer of us seem able to remember it. Perhaps Rash's lyricism and mastery of the narrative will help him achieve greater and longer-lasting success in reminding us of these values than have others.

From a slightly different point of view, these poems, always wonderfully attentive to detail and richness in sound, are equally a waking to life and language and the close relationship of the two. If it's true, after all, that we think in words, shouldn't all our best memories, all our greatest epiphanies, be alliterative, consonant, assonant, internally and eternally rhymed? Rash knows what many contemporary poets forget or ignore: that the pleasure and effectiveness, even the sense of a poem, are as much in the sound as they are in the image and story. Perhaps he knows this better than most because of the resonant and resident music of the worlds he writes about: Dismal Gorge, Watauga County, Appalachia, the wilderness that still lives in the lover's eye. In "Waterdogs" he tells us:

You can live a life without  
knowing they exist if sky  
is something glanced out windows,  
clouds are spread out scrolls written  
in a lost tongue.

Just so, the common separations of people and place, language and experience, self and source often deaden our perceptions to such lyrical observations, expressed through repeated s's, long o's, and long e's as we see in "First Memory":

A green smell simmers shallows,  
where tadpoles flow like black tears.  
Minnows lengthen their shadows.  
Something unseen stirs in the reeds.

What a joy exists in these poems — a joy in the childlike timelessness of attentive perception, such that light "leaking in the one window" of a "Woodshed in Watauga County" becomes "moments / unmoored from time, and the world and sun" align and grow still; a joy in the practiced poet's pleasure of language ("Dragonflies dip, rise. Their backs / catch light, purple like church glass"); a joy in place and detail and people and all the joy and tragedy inherent in living with the eyes and mind open and the hands reaching back and reaching out to cup more of life, and like the boy in the springhouse, taste "its quickness / swimming inside."

Review

by Scott Owens

NAMING THE CONSTELLATIONS

John Thomas York

Spring Street Editions

ISBN: 9780971204638

I was drawn to John Thomas York's book of poems by its title, *Naming the Constellations*. That title suggested to me an activity I had participated in during my childhood, one that helped me connect with my grandfather and through him with some part of a world that had previously seemed inaccessible, fearful, alien, to me.

In the title poem of his collection, York tells us, "When I was a country boy, before I read / about Orion, I saw his limbs and belt / and called it all 'The Great Box Kite'." I didn't know anything about constellations until the summer I turned twelve. I was staying at my grandfather's house one weekend, and, suffering from insomnia, I got up in the middle of the night only to discover that he too was awake and standing on his front porch looking up at the stars. He pointed out how connecting the stars made shapes called constellations: spider, sparrowhawk, bobwhite. You see, my grandfather didn't know the names commonly used for constellations, so like a youthful York, he made them up. I thought the idea was brilliantly empowering and adopted the practice as my own from that day forward. York clearly understands the illuminating nature of such self-naming, as he continues in his poem:

I held its string as I stood in the alfalfa stubble,  
and a strong breeze kept it aloft  
long after I went to bed — and it flies

in me still . . .

when I remember . . .

the tug of the string, the letting go,  
the silence where everything is born.

This metaphor of the world being "born" through the practice of individual naming is central to *Naming the Constellations* and central to what every artist, every creator, understands and undertakes.

Such naming, whether one uses received names or invented ones, makes the unknown familiar, and the brings the forgotten back into being. Familiarity is comforting, even

meaningful. In “I Dream of Driving a 1949 Two-Ton Chevy Flatbed,” York describes a country drive with such clarity that I become convinced I have been on the very road he portrays:

we took a road northwest  
from the city . . .  
the hills rolling like long waves.

And reaching a crest, we saw Pilot Mountain  
peeking over a ridge, then lowering its round head,  
sinking down among the sycamores  
to watch as we crossed the Donaha Bridge.

And in “Brains,” York takes me back to a memory of my other grandfather, on whose farm I first saw a cow slaughtered in almost exactly the way York describes:

I was there  
on that bright November morning  
when the men attached hooks  
to his rear ankles  
and hoisted his carcass toward a massive tree limb.

The pleasure of the familiar comes, however not simply from familiarity, nor even from the evocative language necessary to revitalize what would otherwise have fallen to mere memory, but from the importance, the renewed relevance of the familiar. Again, in the title poem, York tells us,

Even if we never wander over desert places  
nor through winter woods at night,  
we need to learn the old names,  
Ursa Major, the Great Wain, the Drinking Gourd:  
a way to walk in our ancestors’ boots.

These remembered details are essential to maintaining connections with our past and with each other.

The precise evocation of the familiar we find in these poems helps reinvest memory with meaning, reminding the reader of the continued vitality of the past and its importance in understanding the present. In “Wild Turkeys,” for example, York recalls him and his sister on a visit to the country, like “two fledglings released / from a cage . . . , / a sidewalk, a forbidden

street . . . / faces ripe with happiness." From the present he wonders "where did the little ones go?" and comments that he is "always returning, listening / for the sound of laughter." And finally, returning to the title poem yet again, York makes clear the role of the familiar:

so much of what I do  
is by dead reckoning, feeling my way  
in the dark, until I find a familiar door.

This is how we live in the world, and how we learn to live.

Review

by Scott Owens

## WHAT TO DO WITH A DYING PARAKEET

Corey Cook

Pudding House, 2009

ISBN: 1589988299

I teach a series of workshops called "Writing Momentous Poetry," by which I mean not poetry of great importance necessarily but rather poetry that explores and reveals the significance of particular moments in our individual and communal social, historical, and even fictitious lives. The workshops have produced a large number of outstanding poems from a wide range of writers. Although Corey Cook has never taken these workshops, he, like many successful poets, seems to have come to an understanding of the importance of focusing on moments without the benefit of the workshops. That understanding is wonderfully displayed in his chapbook, *What to Do with a Dying Parakeet*.

Somewhat ironically, what one is likely to remember after a first reading of Cook's collection are two poems that seem to be outside the primary thematic and narrative flow of the book. "What to Do with a Dying Parakeet" and "Resuscitation Annie" are both quirky, original, and very memorable. And neither of them seem to fit in a book dedicated to the author's grandmother and in which nearly every other poem deals with the speaker's grandparents and other family experiences. These two poems do, however, dovetail nicely with the *modus operandi* of the other poems in the way they focus tightly on the details, imagery, and experience of a single moment.

"Resuscitation Annie," the most surreal of these poems, uses the metaphor of a person trying to revive a CPR practice doll to make a comment on co-dependent relationships and how the "liveliness" of the dependent partner can only surface when the provider no longer fulfills that role:

She kept taking from me

and I kept giving.

I should have known better.

she had no lungs, no heart

to jump start. I finally gave up

and rested my sweaty cheek  
on her chest only to be woken  
by someone's breath  
on the back of my neck.

Similarly, "What to Do with a Dying Parakeet" has a bit of a surreal quality as two people consider the various ways they might euthanize their dying parakeet:

We could drop a rock on him,  
drown him in the sink, poison

him with household products, hold  
him inches from the exhaust pipe  
of Mom's running car.

Both poems focus on human incapacities and the moment of resolution.

To capture a moment in memory is to grant that moment value. To further convey that memory through words is to express a sort of reverence towards that moment. Of course, in memory a series of moments may coalesce into a single remembered event, such that instead of remembering every "Sunday Morning" individually, we construct a Sunday morning prototype that includes or represents details from years worth of Sunday mornings. This is the larger part of what Cook achieves in *What to Do with a Dying Parakeet*, where, for example, the poem "Spring" suggests not just the moment the speaker's grandfather helped birth a lamb, but in a larger sense also how it feels to be in the spring of one's life. This poem, and others, also suggest that the meaningfulness of archetypal moments such as "Spring," "Thanksgiving," and "Sunday Morning" are made not just by the cycles of nature, society or tradition, but as much or more by the particular actions of individual people: a grandmother "humming / above a sizzling pan, spatula clacking; or an aging family member who "sits and smiles, // smiles and laughs in front of the windows, the family / headstone an unyielding omen behind her bald head."

Ultimately, poems such as these remind us of the importance of paying attention to the moment before us, of how fleeting such moments can be. They remind us, as Galway Kinnell does in "Little Sleep's Head Sprouting Hair in the Moonlight," to "learn to reach deeper / into the sorrows / to come."