

Winter 2011

Wild Goose Poetry Review, Winter 2011

One of the things I enjoy about editing *Wild Goose Poetry Review* is seeing the connections between poems that arrive from poets who have no knowledge of what each other is submitting, or writing. In most cases, these poets don't even know each other, but similarities in theme, style, imagery, and setting always seem to arise from the poems I find most appealing. As I consider the placement of the poems for each issue, I try to take advantage of these similarities to create a sort of dialogue. Thus, in this issue, for example, you will find a sequence of poems dealing with our relationships with our parents. Each of the poems in this issue, in fact, is intentionally placed to relate to the poems that come before and after it. I hope as you read through them, you'll look for, enjoy, and even comment on what their juxtaposition says about the theme or style they share.

Conversely, another characteristic of this issue is its diversity. There are poems from writers who have been published in *Wild Goose* before: Jessie Carty, Helen Losse, Doug McHargue, Ann Chandonnet. There are poems from well-established "local" writers whose work will be easily recognized by poetry aficionados in the Southeast: Joseph Milford, Scott Douglass, Richard Allen Taylor, Gail Peck, Ralph Earle, Ron Moran, Mary Ricketson. There are poems from writers who are relatively new to publication or who write in parts of the country more distant from our home base in NC: R. Keane, Tyler Bigney, MJ DeAngelis, David LaBounty, Eric Luft, Lisa Zaran. And among the preponderance of free verse poems, there are also a few that are decidedly more traditional in form. But new or familiar, local or distant, formal or organic, they all provide a fresh and deeper perspective on themes and situations that are familiar to us all because they are based in the world we all share, and this is what keeps them relevant.

Finally, the diversity of this issue is apparent in the 8 reviews included at the end. The authors of the work reviewed range from the very young Annalee Kwochka to the more experienced Al Maginnes, from area writers like Sara Claytor and Bill Griffin to those from farther away, like Connie Post and John Morgan. Similarly, there is great range in the style of the work being reviewed as well, including everything from free verse to traditional forms to haiku.

I hope that you will read each of the poems and each of the reviews, that you will join the dialogue by leaving a comment for the author and for other readers, that you will share the experience

by posting links to help others find *Wild Goose*, and most of all, that you will enjoy the work collected here.

CONTENTS

M. Scott Douglass, [To the Drama Queen in Room 218](#)

M. Scott Douglass, [Bobby McMullen Died Last Night](#)

Jessie Carty, [What I Thought after Fabio was Hit in the Fact by a Bird at Busch Gardens](#)

Doug McHargue, [Denim Sky](#)

Doug McHargue, [Flimsy Green](#)

Lisa Zaran, [Nothing Abiding](#)

David LaBounty, [A Collection of Frost](#)

David LaBounty, [in the image of](#)

M.J. DeAngelis, [I Hate Vacuum Cleaners](#)

Ann Fox Chandonnet, [My Mother's Poems & My Father's Poems](#)

Joseph Milford, [Pissing with My Dad](#)

Joseph Milford, [An Education Acquired](#)

Ron Moran, [November](#)

Ron Moran, [The Doctrine of Fair](#)

Eric Luft, [Epistemology](#)

Eric Luft, [Hairy Samson](#)

Eric Luft, [Immortality](#)

Helen Lose, [After Reading Enough to Jump-Start My Muse on a Cold Day near the End of January](#)

Ralph Earle, [Red Sun Reflecting](#)

Ralph Earle, [Haiku](#)

Tyler Bigney, [Afternoon](#)

R. Keane, [Serenity](#)

Gail Peck, [Prayer](#)

Mary Ricketson, [Done In](#)

Richard Allen Taylor, [I Want to Live Like Hemingway](#)

REVIEWS

Scott Owens, [Review of Connie Post's *Trip Wires*](#)

Scott Owens, [Review of Sara Claytor's *Memory Bones*](#)

Scott Owens, [Review of Al Maginnes' *Greatest Hits*](#)

Scott Owens, [Review of Steven Sherrill's *Ersatz Anatomy*](#)

Scott Owens, [Review of Annalee Kwochka's *Seventeen*](#)

Ann Fox Chandonnet, [Ann Chandonnet Reviews John Morgan's *Spear Fishing on the Chatanika*](#)

Stan Absher, [Review of Stan Absher's *Night Weather*](#)

Bud Caywood, [Bud Caywood Reviews Bill Griffin's *little mouse*](#)

M. Scott Douglass
TO THE DRAMA QUEEN IN ROOM 218
Portland, Oregon

First: Happy Birthday!

Everyone needs a raucous celebration
every three hundred and sixty-five days
to help them feel alive. It was only my
misfortune that you chose to party
in the room adjacent to mine. I hope
this one was as memorable for you
as it was for me. After all,
since I live in a house I'm not
accustomed to dormitory behavior.
Yes, we occasionally slam doors,
but rarely at 3 a.m. And that cackle
of yours, someone should patent it
for fire alarms. I'll bet your friends
entertain themselves trying to mimic it.
I'm sorry that your boyfriend thought
you were being childish and said so
in front of others, then left
without permission. Broken glasses
are one thing, but when light fixtures
start tumbling through the air, it's time
to cut your losses. He was probably
cutting his before the adventure
wound up on his credit card bill.
But you're probably right: he'll surely miss
your sexual energy, the wildness of your
needs, your expression of satisfaction
(not everyone can reach that note, you know).
If it's any consolation, I have several
unmarried friends who are dying

to meet a girl just like you.
I left my number below in case
you are interested. In the meantime,
have you considered a career
in Hollywood? The paparazzi
are crazy for fresh faces to follow.
You'd be a hit in no time.

Author's Comment: We were in Portland, Oregon for a pair of book release parties followed by a rental car tour of the state. While there, we stayed in a hotel in the Lloyd Center, just a few blocks away from one of their entertainment pavillions. You don't pay a lot of attention to those things or who might be playing while you are visiting when you book hotels. As it turned out, there was a big concert our first night in town. I want to say it was Bryan Adams, but I just don't remember. Anyway, we were already jet lagged and jazzed up because we're at the start of an adventure and the first place we went when we hit town was a micro brewery. We were tired and almost asleep when the couple next door returned from the concert with a group of friends at the start of what ended up being an all-night party. It wouldn't have felt right not to immortalize the moment(s) in a poem.

M. Scott Douglass

BOBBY MCMULLEN DIED LAST NIGHT

Or the night before,
or last week,
or maybe it was years ago
when his wife left him
or his only son succumbed
to leukemia.

A lifetime of reasons
to cuddle a bottle of Jim Beam.

We could forecast the workday
by the way he walked through the door:

quiet and sullen meant hungover,
hungover meant irritable, outright mean,
loud and talkative meant still drunk,
hangover to follow at eleven.

Even drunk he was a better
finisher than most, and after
some lunchtime refueling, he
was good for the rest of the day.

But it caught up with him.

First he totaled his car,
then the state revoked his license,
liver failing, emphysema and
tuberculosis choking him —
two years ago he retired.

Paper said they found him
face-down in his double-wide.
He'd been dead awhile,
but he went the way he wanted,
the way we always knew he would.

Author's Comment: I spent 22 years as a dental technician. It's a business that has a high rate of drug and alcohol abuse. Bobby is a conglomeration of former co-workers, but mostly one guy who was just one of those people who couldn't shake his demons. He's one of the main reasons why I decided I needed to get out of that business. No one who worked that hard should have had to live like that. Or die like that. He was one of a handful of people who worked arm's length away from me who died within a few years of each other. Another survived a shooting when a drug deal went bad. I guess we'd all become numb to it after awhile. It was no secret. We could all see it coming, but we couldn't do anything about it.

Bio: M. Scott Douglass lives in Charlotte, North Carolina, but is originally from Pittsburgh. His poetry has appeared in the Asheville Poetry Review, Southern Poetry Review, Sundog, and Iodine Poetry Review among others. He's a Pushcart Prize nominee and was the recipient of a NC Arts & Science Council grant which published his first full length poetry book, *Auditioning for Heaven*. Other books include *Steel Womb Revisited*, *Balancing on Two Wheels* and *Dip Says Hi*. His next book, *Hard to Love*, will be available in the Fall of 2011.

Jessie Carty

WHAT I THOUGHT AFTER FABIO WAS HIT IN THE FACE BY A BIRD AT BUSCH GARDENS

I was never interested in romance novels. I wanted to be excited by women clinging on muscular men, but I, instead, pined for suits of armor, elven women who worked magic and fantasies that did not involve engagements rings. Although fantasy novels aren't always kind to women, they still seem more real than mechanics who behave like princes or soccer stars who fall for the four-eyed chubby girl from math class. No, those guys seem unreal. A water nymph, a dragon, a spot of magic, however, is something I at least can imagine.

Author's Comment: In October of 2010, I had a note on my idea sheet that just said: Fabio. I have no idea why I thought, ya know? I need to write a poem about Fabio, but apparently I did. And this is what happened. By the way, he really did get hit in the face by a bird during a promotional event at Busch Gardens Tampa.

BIO: Jessie Carty's writing has appeared in publications such as, MARGIE, decomP and Connotation Press. She is the author of two poetry chapbooks At the A & P Meridiem (Pudding House 2009) and The Wait of Atom (Folded Word 2009) as well as a full length poetry collection, Paper House (Folded Word 2010). Jessie teaches at RCCC in Concord, NC. She is also the photographer and editor for Referential Magazine. She can be found around the web, especially at <http://jessiecarty.com> where she blogs about everything from housework to the act of blogging itself.

Doug McHargue

DENIM SKY

On the trail you wear blue jeans
and a deep yellow tee
the color of fall leaving.

Ahead of us a yellow leaf
floats against the denim sky
and you say it's you
if you'd been thrown to heaven
but were spiraling back down
and I say I didn't know
you were so poetic
and neither did I know
you love would always be
a leaf, mid-air.

Doug McHargue

FLIMSY GREEN

I push the grocery cart past
lettuce and leafy greens,
my favorite color,
the color of my blouse
a little too slinky for church
but what I wore when you left.

Falling in love, I knew
the gods had sent you
with your green eyes
that sacred color
used in spring to balance the sky.

I thought your eyes
would balance me like the grass
keeps us grounded,
keeps us from floating away
into all that blueness.

We lay beneath that sky
your eyes looking up, away from me
seeing clouds I couldn't.

And when you turned your head
I saw your spring eyes,
a sweet light leaving
with the darkness
the night I wore the blouse.

Somehow I forgot to do
the things that keep me alive
eat,
sleep,
breathe,
still wrapped in this

filmy female web,
body trap.

Worn now to pick through spoiled fruit
my blouse clings to me
like a cast-off lover,
reluctant shopper of what's out there.

Lisa Zaran

NOTHING ABIDING

and like your father you beat your wife
until she ran away, leaving you her bruises
and broken bones in food storage containers
in the freezer along with a note on the door which read:

here is your dinner for the week, after that you're on your own.

monday: one black eye and two chipped teeth

tuesday: a fat lip, swollen left cheek and lump on the back of the head for dessert

wednesday: two cracked ribs and a bruise a mile wide

thursday: another black eye, broken nose

friday: a piece of bitten off tongue, more teeth, a few handfuls of torn out hair

saturday: sunglasses (i won't need them anymore), one inch scar from chin

sunday: this is supposed to be a day of rest. guess you'll have to starve.

Author's Comment: This is one of those poems that come to you unexpectedly. I'd stolen the day off work because I woke up in such a mood to write. Most of the poems I began that day were somewhat systematic in that they were beginning from my mood or a previous idea I'd had. I've known women who were abused in their relationships. They always came across as so meek and mild and I remember I used to wonder: why doesn't she just leave? I know it isn't that easy, especially looking in from the outside. Somewhat unrelated but definitely a correlation, a dear friend of my son's recently entered rehab, successfully completed the program and moved to another city to protect herself from the people she used to "use" with, namely her boyfriend. I heard from her via the telephone and she sounded so great and alive, actually very happy. In a way, she was on my mind when this poem came to me.

Bio: Lisa Zaran was born in 1969 in Los Angeles, California. She is an American poet, essayist and the author of six collections including *The Blondes Lay Content* and *the sometimes girl*. Lisa is founder and editor of *Contemporary American Voices*, an online collection of poetry by American poets. She is also the author of *Dear Bob Dylan*, a collection of letters to her muse. She lives and writes in Arizona.

David LaBounty

A COLLECTION OF FROST

you decide to leave it all,
mostly because the bad
outweighs the good and so
your sons watch you drive
away though you will return
the next day and the day
after that but that doesn't matter
that doesn't matter and you
don't seem to mind leaving
this image, you
with your suitcase and a handful
of books, as if to say
the books mean more than love
though it is hard to explain
that love is air and books
are water and so you drive
away you don't seem to mind
the hole you've left behind,
a hole too big for a needle
and thread yet a hole
not the size of a grave
the days turn to months
and the hole remains
like the scab on a wound
you do your best to fill
the hole, you fill it with gestures
promises of a utopian someday,
gestures like a quick messing

of your sons' still soft
and placid hair it's all we know
how to do
this is how we do it
this is how we leave our mark
this is how the past is set on the mantle
this is how we leave the past all but frozen shut

Author's Comment: Sadly, this is a true poem. My wife and I are divorcing after 13 years of marriage and we have two young boys. At the time of our separation I never really took the time to consider the point of view of our sons, what it must have felt like to watch their dad leave. It was a year ago, I've thought about it a lot since, about the nature of jarring memories and how they stay sealed inside forever.

David LaBounty

IN THE IMAGE OF

the color of our cloth
makes no difference as we stand,
curbside watching the church
we built burn on top
of the earth this earth
once so warm and green
and undivided

Author's Comment: Obvious symbolism here... The church being my marriage and the color of the cloth means there is no absolute right or wrong, and the earth always reclaims everything as its own, eventually, and the earth doesn't care about right or wrong either.

Bio: I write poetry and fiction. My writing has appeared in Rattle, the Los Angeles Review, Night Train, SmokeLong Quarterly and others. I am the author of the novel *Affluenza*. I have held jobs as a miner, a mechanic, a reporter and a salesman. I live in Michigan.

M.J. DeAngelis

I HATE VACUUM CLEANERS

I hate the way they tangle me up.

The cord wraps around everything and gets stuck.

When I tell it to suck itself back in, it just lies there.

It won't disappear.

And the sound reminds me of my mother.

Before my father finally cut the cord with her,

she'd vacuum, vacuum, vacuum.

She didn't want me to hear her crying

(even though I was standing right there and she didn't notice).

She'd mouth words in an imaginary conversation.

Tears streamed down her swollen face.

She'd stop for a moment.

And I'd think maybe this is the end.

But then she'd explode into sobbing again.

And the angry vacuum cleaner

was roaring and lunging

this way and that way

beating the rug

over and over.

I hate vacuum cleaners.

I hate the way they tangle me up.

Author's Comment: I'm usually surprised by my next piece. It comes from somewhere I wasn't expecting and then insists on being uncovered. With this piece, my wife started vacuuming the downstairs and I noticed my uneasiness and I remembered how it was before my parents were divorced many years ago. So, I went along with it – I let it take me to my office. There, I let it out – put it out where I could see it.

Bio: M.J. De Angelis lives on the Lamprey River in Durham, New Hampshire and enjoys fly fishing. His pieces have appeared in: Penwood Review, Third Wednesday, and

Sonnetwriters.com. Other work will be appearing in Chiron Review, and Lit Magazine.
Although his first passion is writing poetry, he pays the bills writing software.

Ann Fox Chandonnet
MY MOTHER'S POEMS

were cakes,
delicious tomato soup from scratch
and puffy souffles.
Occasionally she played the piano.
She sang over dish washing,
and taught us to leaven chores with song.
She has a deep laugh.
And she made beautiful things
from paper and cloth.
When she scratched your back,
you were required to scratch hers.
She also ran away, and ran
and ran,
until finally she was gone.

I make those cakes
and souffles.
I laugh that laugh.
And now and then I want to run.
But I also sing.

MY FATHER'S POEMS
by Ann Fox Chandonnet

were calloused hands,
and sweat.
Hard work was his craft and art.
He never hugged or told us he loved us;
he was practically wordless.
I saw him communicate with my brothers
with chuckles, gestures and grunts.
But when he wed a second time,
to a second Barbara, no less,

he began to write her poems.

She kept them in a wooden box
atop her bureau.

They were just four lines.

But he was trying to speak.

I like to dig and delve and sweat—
but I also hug.

Author's Comment: I have written poems about my parents before, but never as a pair. I wrote "My Father's Poems" in a burst one morning. It came to me almost whole—a rare occurrence. Later in the day I realized my Mother had poems, too—but they had little to do with writing down words. I don't want to go into the family history behind these except to say that my Mother divorced my Father shortly after I turned 14. She re-married soon after.

Bio: Ann Fox Chandonnet is a poet and non-fiction writer who lives in Vale, N.C. Her latest books are *The Pioneer Village Cookbook* and "Write Quick": *War and a Woman's Life in Letters, 1835-1867*. She also has a poem in the new Salmon Press Ltd. anthology, *Dogs Singing*.

Joseph Milford

PISSING WITH MY DAD

My dad left his cigarette butts
Floating in the toilet, and I would
“Torpedo” them — piss as hard
As I could to shred them —

Spent tobacco leaves
And urine building
My cock-strength
And this was my memory.

I’d piss on anything later
In my twenties; I’d piss
Gasoline on burning napalm
And let the fire burn the ground

Back into me just to feel
My father — to feel what he felt.
The burning in the bathroom
By his bed, looking in the mirror
Throwing his ember into toilet
Bowl, thinking of his impending
Life of quitting smoking after a stroke.
He knew death was rust in his razors.

Still, when I piss in public urinals,
I think of homes I will never have
As the guitar and bass rattle the walls
And vibrate my feet under me.

My father did quit smoking;
I never stopped being pissed off.
I remember once we pissed together
Both of us — I was 5 or 6, and I followed him

Into the bathroom. He tossed
His cigarette into the toilet, and we both pissed on it
As it broke apart; I knew this was something—
Like how a father says goodbye or divorce
To himself, to you, to all, to me.
Being a man is not a rite of passage—
It's discarding burning things unto the paths
Of those who need to learn how to burn.

Author's Comment: This poem, for better or worse, came out of me in one pen to page moment. It has seen some editing, but I wanted to keep it close to the viscera it originated with. There is really no rite of passage here—I am sure there could be an huge Freudian analysis of this poem, but this is simply a memory I had fed through the tumultuous relationship of a father and son. Learning to burn becomes important in transformation, and this poem hopes to learn from a past that's not quite understandable yet.

Joseph Milford

AN EDUCATION ACQUIRED

When I first learned how to fly,
I was amazed it had nothing to do with wings.
I was sitting in that school desk,
Its top like a wooden semicolon.
When I learned I was acne on life's crust,

I thought things would be better
If I kept my high-flying to myself.
Gospel music made me think of fried food.
Sermons made me think of detectives.
Bible-school made me crave Kool-Aid, butter cookies.

When I learned how to cut off wings,
I was astute but had crude tools.
I was taught by toys that said be aloof.
I was present in my excision of the damnedest
Wings—feathers are evidence of gravity defied. Defined.

When I forgot flying and learned diving,
I shot straight from your tongue and from
Then on you never forgot or forgave me.
No matter how heavy the fog, I was
A scar on your arm or a circular said omen.

When I resurfaced, I brought up
A demon's wing from a deep locker.
It was an oddity—I lied about it.
It was not a devil wing; it was a devil
Ray—its perfect skate form—my aerodynamic idol now.

Author's Comment: This is a poem of indoctrinations and a poem of identity crisis. Still, I think there is merit in the exploration of imagination giving way to categorization and then finding itself again through method. The pathos of the poem, for me anyway, lies in the gap

between myth and science, and the innocence lost in the process of trying to meld the two into a system of living.

BIO: Joseph Victor Milford is an Associate Professor of English at Georgia Military College and has just published his first book, *Cracked Altimeter*, with BlazeVox Books. He is the host of the Joe Milford Poetry Show (<http://joemilfordpoetryshow.com>), and the co-editor of the literary journal, with his wife, SCYTHE (<http://www.scytheliteraryjournal.com/>). He makes a mean crockpot of beans with a hamhock, brown sugar, and chipotle peppers.

Ron Moran

NOVEMBER

Not the month to give our thanks;

it is

the undertaker for our year's losses,

as in

the sickbays of our public schools;

it is

the month when old and poor dread

the day

their utility companies send a 30 day

notice

to pay up now or your service will be

interrupted.

That is the word they use; and retailers

are

in a another state of panic, scrambling

as heretofore

not witnessed, some offering to give

away

the store, or worse, their lives during

this season,

different from others as the media often

crowds.

Meanwhile the unemployment rate

reaches

a 27 year high this November, while

in mid-Florida,

this guy who lost his job as an engineer

owes 90K

and now makes 30K at a sandwich shop,

so he shoots

six people, killing one, and Jesus, I ask,
What good

does that do anyone, I mean, killing
like that?

Here and there, an off-year election
brings,
maybe, up to 10 percent to the polls,
if the day
is as clear and hard as bedrock, but not
on one

cool and rainy, blamed by the media
as the
forerunner of the next flu strain. So be it.

I like November
anyway, the afterglow of October sunsets
lingering
like the last, congenial guest to leave
before

the lights turn off, and not only because
of Thanksgiving;
and, hey, the truth of how the pilgrims
named

Thanksgiving would have, yes, caused
any
President to reconsider the holiday,
at least

renaming it, if he could, but, whoa,
when
a tradition is lionized, few ask and fewer
know.

All given, we dress for the weather,
trying

to steel our hearts, whatever comes
our way.

Author's comment: This ironic poem is a sort of litany of reasons why in November, perhaps, we ought not to give "thanks," as in "Thanksgiving," since, among other things, November is the month when the year is dying, when sickness reaches one of its peaks in public schools, when, often, the swell of buying for the season's holidays is only somewhat higher than an average wave, and the like; but, still, the speaker finds beauty in the month, and well, we all do what we can do, what we have to do, whatever the day, month, year.

Ron Moran

THE DOCTRINE OF FAIR

One word that lives on the rim is fair,
as in

That's not fair, the first poster child
of
the teenage years, and whether right
or not—

whether they may be right or not—
Well,

what and how does fair really mean?

The fairness
of this or that act to a teenager, such as,
Son

You're grounded for a month. No car,
no cell phone,
no computer time, except at school;
and so

the doctrine obtains throughout one's life,
when he says

to her, after she lands the big promotion,
Well, dear,

I'm glad for you, but really it's not fair
that

I have to (and you make your own list
of items

constituting the unfairness of her action,
or his

during the NFL season or whatever seasonal
addiction

holds him.) Does fair figure in this formula?

Is it

always the one feeling slighted while circling
the board

and landing on Go to jail? Is it always unfair
if you are

snubbed, left out, rejected, denied? Why?

What about

your role in this panoply of responses?

I am trying

to be fair, but to be fair I must understand,

I must.

Author's comment: This is one of my poems where I take a word, "fair," and work with it, so to speak, letting one association lead to another and another, which is also a technique I like to use in my poems. In this case, the poem turns back into itself at the end. The poem is ironic, too, as is "November," but irony is a device I use only on occasion.

Bio: Ronald Moran retired from Clemson University where he served as professor/dean. Moran's poems have been published in *Commonweal*, *Emrys Journal*, *Louisiana Review*, *Meadowland Review*, *North American Review*, *Northwest Review*, *The Orange Room Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Southern Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and in ten books/chapbooks of poetry. His newest book of poetry, *The Jane Poems*, will be published by Clemson University Digital Press in late winter/early spring. Moran lives in Simpsonville, SC.

Eric Luft

EPISTEMOLOGY

(for GLK)

“The future does not exist to be known!”

On that most dread, most sure, and solid reef

Of sound epistemology alone

Must founder all pretense and false belief

In the assurance of the coming world.

It brings the whole occult fast down to grief.

Each i-ching thrown, tarot dealt, tea leaf whirled,

Palm read, die tossed, vague mystical manure

To permanent oblivion is hurled.

Each seer, diviner, medium *du jour*

Is mocked; and Nietzschean recurrence dies.

We learn that any declaration sure

About the future is a pack of lies.

Yet hope remains, and dreams, to make you wise.

Author’s Comment: The first line is a frequent slogan of one of my favorite former professors. The rest of the poem is not a rebuttal or even a modification of this concept, but an exploration of it, to see what its practical ramifications might be.

Eric Luft

HAIRY SAMSON

Free teenage punks declare themselves mature
And cease to be themselves. They have the itch
To be adults, prefer unfree to poor.

They let Delilah cut their hair and switch
Their friends and choose their clothes and write their book.
So old before their time, broke down, but rich,

They meekly fade because they let her rook
Their individuality for clone.
Just once before I die I want to look

Like seventeen again, feel strong, full-blown,
Escape my Bartleby and Babbitt shroud.
Bricks bouncing off my unharmed head, alone,
I'd bring that temple down and stand unbowed,
As radiant as Zeus, entire and proud.

Author's Comment: I wrote this poem in my mid-fifties on a particularly bad day of pining for my lost — or at least misplaced — youth. It could have come out despondent and whiny, but instead it emerged rather defiant, optimistic, and cathartic.

Eric Luft

IMMORTALITY

I want to live forever, only just
On my own terms. I want my health, my fists,
My wits, my perfect youthful life, robust.

Pretentious jaded existentialists
Think they've done all there is to do. They're bored!
They welcome death as freedom from life's twists.

They've never wished they could enough time hoard
To read each book they'd ever seen. They're blind!
But we Socratic heirs are never bored,

Because our minds can always make or find
New things to do. We read, sing, reason why,
Have endless fun. As long as to my mind

Are thoughts unthought; as long as to my eye
Are books unread, I do not want to die.

Author's Comment: This poem may seem to be about megalomania or hubris, but it is really about the love of reading, and about how retreating into books can make you happy, great, and inspired, while immersing yourself in the world's phenomena would make you miserable, small, and moribund.

Bio: Eric Luft, after a lifetime of teaching philosophy and curating rare books, has become "gainfully unemployed." He is listed in Who's Who in America.

Helen Losse

AFTER READING ENOUGH TO JUMP-START MY MUSE ON A COLD DAY NEAR THE
END OF JANUARY

I begin to write
and hope to create
that which I do not see.

The words come slowly
as though partially frozen,
the world being January-cold.

The sun tries but mostly fails
to make a difference
in a world that is gray and brown.

The winter world doesn't impress
my faithful muse, Helena,
who believes in the blue jay
and the peeking tips of bulbs
but will never endorse
faith in Groundhog Day.

Author's Comment: I know that a poet (or any writer, for that matter) should read more than write, but I felt as though I was doing little of either, so I started reading poems by Tim Peeler in a couple of his books that I picked up at one of his readings. Peeler is so comfortable being a poet; his language is unpretentious, so Helena—that's my muse, who has appeared in a few other poems—felt comfortable joining us. This morning I figured it was time to write, and the words came quickly, so quickly in fact, I think I probably lifted—although unconsciously—the line, “who believes in the jay” from Jane Mead. Much of the poem fell into place, and the part that didn't was tweaked into line by Scott Owens. So with a bit of help from Helena and my support staff, I think I ended up with a nice little poem.

Bio: Helen Lose 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*.

Ralph Earle

RED SUN REFLECTING

Images on my living room wall,
village, harbor, innocent angel,
their protective glass reflects
the morning resurrection
spreading like fire.

My familiar world vanishes
in the sustaining flames,
the horizon a molten river.

In my living room,
images and speculation.
Out there, red songbirds
and the seeds they long for.

Author's Comment: The poem "reflects" the contrast between the familiar world inside my living room and the unlimited outdoors where anything can happen. The pictures on the wall suggest images that shape my interior life. As the sun rises they are swept away by flames from the world beyond. Perhaps the flame-colored birds feed a longing for that vision to return. What seeds will provide nourishment now?

Ralph Earle

HAIKU

dark lake of sky
nets of naked branches
fish for invisible day

Author's Comment: At one point I pared the central image to "naked nets fish for day." This struck a friend as "sound for sound's sake" and a certain semantic coyness. I was puzzled until I recognized that if the branches are not explicitly mentioned, readers have no idea of the nets' physical reality. While I was seeing nets of branches, my friend was simply hearing a fanciful piscine metaphor. In this case the briefest expression of the image is not the best.

Bio: Ralph Earle's poems have been published in *The Sun*, *Carolina Quarterly*, *Sufi Magazine*, *Kakalak*, *Cardinal*, *Main Street Rag*, *The Independent*, *Independence Boulevard*, *Hampden-Sydney Review*, *Pembroke Review*, *Davidson Miscellany*, *East West Journal*, *Sandpaper*, *The Guide*, *Gravida*, *Public Occurrence*, and *Back Roads*. He lives and works in Chatham County, North Carolina, south of Chapel Hill.

Tyler Bigney

AFTERNOON

Spent the morning chopping
and piling wood and then fished
the dusty afternoon alone.
Fished as the sun dipped
behind the trees.
Fished as the dark came on.
I didn't catch a damn thing,
but looking up from the river
now and then,
seeing those blue mountains
and hearing the faint, distant sounds
from the road, a few miles back,
I realized how nice it was to be
far away from everything – and myself.

Author's Comment: I wrote this piece in Moscow, Russia. I was lying in bed listening to the traffic outside, and wishing I was back in Nova Scotia. I longed for the simplicity of piling wood, fishing, and being far from everything. Knowing I couldn't go home, I sat down and jotted this out before going to bed. In the morning I read my sleepy eyed scribbles over, and liked it enough to call it a "poem".

Bio: Tyler Bigney was born in 1984. He lives, and writes in Nova Scotia, Canada. He writes short stories, travelogues, and poetry. He is currently working on a novel.

R. Keane

SERENITY

A most uncommon light
Where other people "stray"
And spend an hour selectively;
Beyond the foolish day.

Nothing does it own
Or lightly give away
And asks that you extend it,
In intermittent fee.

No fit or enemy
Nor memory of sound
Or cunning that distract the mind.
Beloved, underground.

Author's Comment: This poem came to me out of nowhere, and simply, as they often do. One of those pleasant moments occasionally that makes a day just a little nicer, and worthwhile.

Bio: R. Keane is a previously unpublished poet from California, and is happy to share a poem first on Wild Goose Poetry Review.

Gail Peck

PRAYER

Please let me see

the cow's big eyes

the goldenrod

the coffee in my cup

turning color with cream

all that the painters have made

stone sculpture in a field

family photographs

old letters

poems and stories

that funny looking bug

I can't catch

how to read the clouds

if there's a bee in the flower

I lean to

color of fruit

sheen of silk

what time it is

my bright painted toes

label on the wine bottle

I like to study

how full to pour my glass

words and words and words

and faces of those I love

yes mostly those

Author's Comment: In the pastoral setting of the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts I wrote "Prayer." Each morning I'd walk through a pasture of cows and goldenrod. I was thinking of my mother who has macular degeneration and can no longer see to read or write. I know how the visual world feeds all artists. I don't write many "list" poems, but this one asserted itself and seemed right. I wrote of what I love, fear, and hope for, all with a sense of gratitude for the present.

Mary Ricketson

DONE IN

Weeds take over.

Grass grows

mid mint stalks,

zinnia and hollyhock.

Air breathes heavy

after sunshine

displaces the early mist.

Morning glory vines

declare ambush against

blueberries and okra.

Squash and beans are gone,

claimed by the dank

dog-days of late summer.

Potatoes are laid by.

Empty corn stalks,

slashed at the base,

cover the garden floor.

Tomatoes still thrive red

among the weeds,

vines bent by heavy fruit

in an untended space.

Out front

one violet gladiola

rises above the mess.

Author's Comment: It was too hot this summer, and I complained too much. The typical end of season mess in my garden was worse than usual. At least there was a harvest, but the day I wrote this I was totally done in. The solo gladiola, standing straight in vibrant color inspired me to smile.

Bio: Mary Ricketson is a mental health counselor and an organic blueberry farmer. Her poems reflect her connections with a wealth of people and her close bond with the earth. Her poetry has been published in *Lights in the Mountains*, *Freeing Jonah IV*, *Freeing Jonah V*, *Echoes in the Mountains*, and her chapbook, *I Hear the River Call My Name*, Finishing Line Press, 2007. She writes a monthly newspaper column, *Woman to Woman*, for *The Cherokee Scout*, Murphy NC. She is a member of North Carolina Writers Network.

Richard Allen Taylor

I WANT TO LIVE LIKE HEMINGWAY

for a year or two, at least. So I go with you to Spain ,
we see a pretty senorita dance on the table, we drink sangria,
hear the clatter of the lady's heels, the raucous
strumming of guitars, old men clapping the rhythm.

Or we take a boat from Lauderdale, go sailing in the Keys,
drink a toast to the moonlit wake behind us, sing a song
to the sea. The night wind balloons us. We search
the islands for the world's best margarita.

Feeling historic, we pan for gold in California ,
in floppy hats and khakis, faces muddy as boots.
We find 24-karat April sky, earth the color of salmon,
purple shadows below the mountains.

The Appalachians entice us. We follow ancient footpaths,
high above the fog rising from the hollows. My foot slips,
you catch my hand and keep me from falling,
as you always have.

Now you refuse to let me die like Hemingway. You sit
by me for this modern hospital death with needles and tubes,
machines recording my last breath, final heartbeat,
electronic obituary. Forgive me for waiting

until now, today, this very moment, to go with you to Spain ,
explore the Keys, walk the mountains or pan for gold, but I am proud
to say, I trusted you with my life, and here you are again,
catching my hand as I fall, still holding on.

Author's Commentary: is a confluence of several ideas that have significance for me:
adventure, love, and death. The yearning for adventure is symbolized by Hemingway, a

romantic figure who did all kinds of things that “normal” people only dream of. I’d love to go to Spain , or any number of faraway places, but seem to have sacrificed that notion in order to stay home and save for retirement. I definitely do not want to die like Hemingway, and the alternative—the second idea—is the “modern hospital death” both my parents had. The third is the love story we all want, and I’ve been fortunate in that regard. So, I guess the message is, take your sweetie on that dream trip before it’s too late. When I read this poem in public, I like to ham it up a bit, reading the last stanza in the faltering voice of a dying man.

Bio: RICHARD ALLEN TAYLOR (Charlotte , NC), former co-editor of Kakalak Anthology of Carolina Poets, is the author of *Something to Read on the Plane* (Main Street Rag 2004) and *Punching Through the Egg of Space* (Main Street Rag 2010). His poems have appeared in *Rattle*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Ibbetson Street*, *South Carolina Review*, *Referential Magazine*, *Redheaded Stepchild*, *The Powhatan Review*, and *The Main Street Rag*, among others.

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

TRIP WIRES

by Connie Post

Finishing Line Press, 2010

ISBN: 1599246252

Good poems often remind us of what we already know and help us look at the essential points of our lives more deeply. Because they often look at things with brutal honesty, good poems also have the ability to scare us. Such is the case with Connie Post's new book, *Trip Wires*, in which the best poems are also the most terrifying in their focus on loss and absence. The poem "It Won't Be Long," for example, makes clear why no matter how well prepared we think we are for loss, it is never as we expect. Made aware of the pending reality of a loved one's loss to cancer, the speaker prepares herself:

I find myself on this transient road
.....
thinking I might know
what it will be like
when you are gone
.....
but when the phone rings
and all the purple vases crash to the floor
I realize I should have known
.....
the resounding difference between
the end of dusk
and total darkness

The understated devastation expressed in the concluding contrast of expectation and reality is one of the more harrowing moments I've read in poetry in quite some time, and it makes clear that preparation and imagination can never negate the absence that results from loss.

Another sort of devastation is addressed when the speaker of "Undoing a Poem" imagines going backwards to the nothing that existed in the place a poem now exists before the poem was, or perhaps all poems were, written.

Start from the end and peel back meaning
word by word, line by line
undress each stanza
.....
until you are alone in a room
.....
fall to your knees
grope the fallible floor . . .
until you fall back onto one rusty nail
then bleed backwards into the placenta
to the place where you found yourself
absent of all language
again

Again, it is absence, in this case the imagined absence of language, that sends a shiver up the readers' spine.

Perhaps what is most revelatory and frightening about these poems is that they suggest we live amidst loss and absence all the time, not just when someone dies, or when words fail, but every day. The very lifestyles we have chosen to subject ourselves to are fraught with felt but unrecognized, and unaddressed absence. The poem, "One Monthly Donation," for example, speaks of "the endemic solitude / built by a steady and proportioned life" and suggests "you plow steadily into the tyranny of your days // your needs surround you like a well built fence // enclose the backyards of self made urgencies."

Poet and critic, Edwin Honig, has commented that, "In a large, mobile industrial society people tend to become indifferent about their ability to think or feel for themselves." Isolated by the busyness of our daily lives, we need poems like those found in *Trip Wires* to remind us to be humble, to recognize that we don't have it all under control, that, in fact, control is largely beside the point and that we are surrounded by the trip wires of loneliness and desolation. We need poems like these to shake us out of our comfort and complacency, to scare us into remembering the primacy of connection with self and others.

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

MEMORY BONES

by Sara Claytor

Big Table, 2011, 32 pages, \$12

ISBN: 9780984573356

Sara Claytor is simply a joy to read, although her poems are neither simple nor naively always joyful. Rather, Claytor's work consistently demonstrates that she knows what makes poetry a pleasure to read. One of the most enjoyable characteristics of a good book of poetry is a strong and clear sense of place that involves the capturing of idiosyncratic language, regional details of landscape, material, manners, and means, as well as characteristic tensions, issues, and concerns.

Nearly all of these elements of a deeply engaging sense of place are illustrated with just 9 lines from "Julia's Soul Food," the first poem in her new collection, *Memory Bones*:

You child's have to pray, praise, pardon.
the white mother taught me
a Southern woman needs stability,
depends on men, the family King Lear.
My black mother Julia
taught me when the ground turns,
trees cast no shadows,
all young child's be
a gift from God.

The use of the Southern Black idiom in dialogue; the subtly suggested issues of racism, tradition, women's roles, and religion; and the tensions inherent in the contrast of the white patriarchy's demands for propriety and the more forgiving nature of Southern Black spirituality born from generations of enforced failure and frustration, all establish a sure and authentic sense of time and place. This sense of place is further established in subsequent poems through greater physical detail, as in these lines from "Motor Moseying:"

. . . We'd ride down
main thoroughfares, turn on badly paved country roads
which turned into red dirt roads where sad, tin-roof shacks

punctuated farmlands with fields of dried cotton stems,
leaning gray barns, horse lots, hog pens, henhouses,
thin-ribbed dogs barking beside woodpiles.

As important as a strong sense of place is for providing the reader with a firm footing from which to experience a book of poems, perhaps an even better book will have just as strong a sense of gender and voice. While the opening poem makes it clear that one of the thematic concerns of the book will be the “place” of women, subsequent poems trace the speaker’s attempts at defining that place for herself. Poems like “Fractured Film Negative” and “All That Jazz at the Empire Theatre” demonstrate the speaker’s earliest frustrations with how girls and women are viewed. “Youth’s Dumb Dreams” illustrates the limited range of options that result from such views:

. . . Janie and I would
giggle of what’s to come. We would become actresses
with lots of lovers, smoking Viceroy’s in emerald holders.

.....

Meanwhile, Anne Louise tagged along,
first to get her driver’s license,
never jealous of our dreams, she had hers.
Her mother taught her well.
Learn to arrange roses in crystal vases; cashmere is chic.
You can love a rich man as easy as a poor man.

And “Saturday Night Yesterday” reveals that even years later those learned limitations are not easily dispensed with.

Only in the final third of the book does the reader begin to feel that the speaker has wrested control of her own life and identity from the tyranny of culture and the phantoms of her past. In “Tricked,” we hear her resistance developing as she says

rubbing my knees
with your free hand
like I’d sit patiently
an obedient pet
panting quietly
in my yellow-orange kitchen
awaiting

your whistle
quivering

Then, in "Artistic Conceptions 1 & 2," we feel the speaker's self-actualization achieved through creativity and expressed in this remarkable contrast of artistic and biological creation:

my doctor unfolds the placenta
crimsons, lapis blues
swirling through his fingers
like wet jewels

And finally, in "little girl on the street," we understand the speaker's desire to use what she has learned through this process of self-actualization to help others as well as the mature acceptance of her own limitations and the subsequent ability to protect herself. Here she encounters a former student of hers who has run away from home:

she presses my arms
a faint smell of beer, cigarettes
I want to take her home
cocoon her
.....
moving away my husband whispers
You can't save them all.
I look over my shoulder
she wiggles a jig at the curb
blonde ponytail fluttering
like frizzy feathers
yells an obscenity at
a passing car
.....
her high-pitched voice
lifting like a bit of
tissue paper
carried by the wind

This strong sense of place and gender makes *Memory Bones* unmistakably, uniquely, impressively, and transcendently the story of a Southern woman raised in the rural South of

the 40s and 50s with all the appeal and universal relevance such a designation should entail. From childbirth to different relationships to a high school reunion to killing a dog on a Mississippi highway, these poems have everything a reader needs to make them meaningful and memorable.

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

AL MAGINNES: GREATEST HITS

by Al Maginnes

Pudding House, 2010

ISBN: 1589989317

I admire Al Maginnes, his optimism, his zest for life and passion for all things human, his empathy, his lyricism, his long but still seamless and uncluttered lines, his fluid syntax, his spot-on metaphors and conceits, his ability to tell a good story and reveal the significance of it with a subtlety that lets the reader experience the poem's cathartic and epiphanous moment as if it were their own, and now his ability to be his own best editor. In his new book of poems, *Al Maginnes: Greatest Hits*, Maginnes selects from 23 years worth of poetry only 12 to be included as "greatest hits." I've written half as long as Maginnes and don't think I could do that. Somehow I'm sure all the poems I didn't select would turn against me. The amazing thing about Maginnes' selections, however, is that he got it right. I've read most of Maginnes' work over the years, and if I had to choose just 12 to keep, it would be these.

Another of the more admirable qualities of Maginnes' poems is their ability to capture the full sense of some vital human abstraction — to be the kind of poem that leaves a reader nodding his head, if not saying, "Ah, yes," in recognition and appreciation. It seems almost silly to single out poems from a collection of only 12, but singling out poems as illustration of one's points is what a reviewer does. So, four poems in particular from this collection stand out for their embodiment of longing, regret, and perspective.

The first of these is "Sharks in Kansas," a remarkable poem of romantic longing that imaginatively revisits the road not taken. The speaker of the poem tells us:

. . . For two years, she
and I tracked each other's moves,
both of us in love with other people
and happy most days, but curious
about the quick flame of sun
on water we had seen in each other.
and later

When she said "Florida. Paleontology,"
I did not move to wrap her in the thoughtless hug

I might have offered someone else, but said
"Arkansas" and "poetry." When she asked, "So, when
will I see you again?" we both knew the answer.

And all of this buried longing is sparked through a wonderful associative logic brought about
by a news story concerning the discovery of fossilized shark remains in Kansas, which the
speaker describes in a delightful conceit for that longing:

There are sharks, sharks in Kansas, still
swimming in water that has turned to stone,
bent in the memory of tides

to the exact angle I once saw her arm bend
across her lover's shoulder

Another poem rich in associative logic is "Elegy with Clifford Brown Playing Trumpet." This
beautiful revelation of perspective about the importance of the "white space" or "negative
space," the absences, loss, and ultimately, mortality that give meaning to all human endeavor
begins with a mystery the speaker is reading and ends in greater appreciation of the
contributions of both musician Clifford Brown and poet Larry Levis and in a deepened
understanding of the limitation as motivation. My favorite moment in the poem is the
breathless unfolding of something as unimaginable to us all as death. The speaker tells us that
somewhere in the laments of Larry Levis

lurked the hand that will come one day to touch us,
perhaps right when we are in the middle of things,

& lead us into a puzzle of streets
that we only understand slowly we will not
find our way out of, although that matters

less & less as the blacktop buckles and thins
to cobblestones, then to dirt, as we walk out of our shoes
until we are walking on nothing and then

we are not walking at all & the way back
to all we have left undone is forgotten.

The third truly remarkable poem is one of Maginnes' best narrative reflections, and it also about perspective. In fact, "To the One Who Stole My Lawnmower" might be called a parable of perspective. The speaker of the poem reveals that not only has his lawnmower been stolen but that he knows the person who has stolen it and is aware of that person's situation as well. The reader follows the speaker through all the usual stages: anger, guilt, blame-shifting, acceptance, and understanding to conclude:

. . . the truth is
the loss of my lawnmower has become a story
and, like most stories, gets told for laughs.
But I can laugh even when, like today,
I sweat like a rented mule, forcing
the motorless contraption I use to cut grass now
through high weeds, because my life is not yours.

The final poem that stands out for me differs from most of Maginnes' work in that the lines are shorter and essentially syllabic, as opposed to his usual predominately tetrameter or pentameter lines, but "Legend" retains Maginnes' characteristic syntactical mastery and his knack for embodying a common and vital human emotion—specifically, in this case, regret. The poem is about a lost opportunity to see and hear the folk singer Carolyn Hester in person, and the speaker concludes

Even if all she had done
was chant the famous names
of her dead husband or her
new god, even if she denied
completely or insisted
upon being defined by
her past, even if time has
done to her what it has done
to all of us, I should have gone.

In typical Al Maginnes fashion, the poems collected in his *Greatest Hits* achieve what is poetry's most important task, the deepening of our experience of the world as human beings. This thin volume is a wonderful introduction to Maginnes' lifework for those who have only now discovered it. It is also a perfectly representative selection of all that makes Maginnes'

work important for those who have been fans for years. Ultimately, it should be a standard part of any poetry lover's bookshelf.

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

ERSATZ ANATOMY

by Steven Sherrill

CW Books, 2010, 120 pages

ISBN: 9781936370153

The poems in Steven Sherrill's *Ersatz Anatomy* use the words "want," "need," "desire," "longing," and "yearn" 74 times. Those words appear at least once in 36 of the volume's 74 poems, clearly suggesting that desire is the primary subject of this poetic inquiry. As if to erase any doubt about that, Sherrill offers such individual titles as "Preamble to the Treatise of Desire," "Footnote to the Preamble," "Treatise on Desire," "First Amendment to the Treatise on Desire," "Retort to the Treatise," "Passion," and "The Want Bird." Similarly, among the many memorable lines related to desire, Sherrill writes, "It is the topography of need we traverse" ("Geese at 9000 Feet") and "I am punch drunk with want" ("Sweet Grief").

Such an emphasis on desire should not be surprising. After all, what emotion is more human than desire, and what desire stronger than the desire for knowledge, for certainty, for God. The earliest stories of human being(s) (Adam and Eve, the Tower of Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah, Gilgamesh, for example) make it clear that the defining characteristic of human existence is desire. Those stories tend to cast desire in a rather ambivalent light. Specifically they propose that desire to be with or like God is good and desire for all else is bad, at least in any measure exceeding the very relative term "moderation." Of course, the fact that human beings can only know God in very nebulous forms (burning bushes, pillars of cloud, thunder and lightning), heightens the sense of desire and redirects it towards things that might approximate religious rapture. It is no semantic accident that the word most often used for both religious and sexual fulfillment is the same—ecstasy—a fact not lost on the speaker of these poems.

Unable to achieve either fulfillment of the one desire that defines humanity or lasting fulfillment of desire in general, the nature of human existence is to live in uncertainty, to be subject to an "unknowable you," our "doubt" to whom we "remain devout" "with true pause" ("Latter-Day Sonnet"). The real question then becomes not whether one experiences desire or doubt, both of which are inevitable, but what one does in such a state, whether one denies it; or better, manages to exist in a state of uncertainty without "any irritable reaching after fact and reason," as Keats' negative capability would suggest; or better yet, relishes that

state, explores it, as the speaker of these poems does, inventing a capability that is neither negative nor positive but decidedly human: "Beyond hunger more hunger / Learn to eat the emptiness" ("Footnote to the Preamble"). The speaker of these poems understands that no teleological approach to human existence holds any satisfactory answers, and that the absence of such answers is inherently unsatisfying as well. What we are left with is the constantly difficult proposition that the journey is its own reward.

Sherrill signed my copy of *Ersatz Anatomy*, "For Scott, who shared my journey for many good years." Nothing could be more appropriate. When we were both younger we took many journeys together, walking every set of railroad tracks and every creek leading from Charlotte, NC, just to see what we could see, hiking nearby wooded or mountain trails, climbing Crowder's Mountain, working through classes taught by Robert Waters Grey, Robin Hemley, and Chris Davis at the University of North Carolina, Charlotte. And of course, all of this was part of our mutual journeys towards becoming writers and men.

I've seen Sherrill only once since we parted ways some 18 years ago. In the interim we have both been married, divorced, and remarried, have both raised children of our own, and have both pursued with some success our careers in teaching and writing. Through all that, however, one thing has never changed: Sherrill is still at his best when on a journey, in this case, the kind of journey afforded him in a long poem where thought, perception, emotion, and reflection all interweave to (re)create an experience as authentic as any I've read. The poem "At the Shore of the Great Lake Michigan I Come Upon the Feet of Egon Schiele in the Moonlight" is a thematic and stylistic paragon of all that Sherrill undertakes in this book.

The poem begins innocently enough: "On the bluff above, a caveat — Beach Closed. No Entry After Dark." From that, few would guess that what would follow would be a refreshing meditation on the nature of religion, faith, and humanism. "It is well after dark and I am here" the speaker defiantly proclaims in the same stanza, and we follow him as he descends to the dark beach and discovers a piece of driftwood that strikes his imagination as "the feet of Egon Schiele." A series of religious, historical, and personal associations then leads him to the poem's final remarkable epiphany:

The nature of faith is, more or less, . . .

any goddamned thing I want it to be. Here I write the doctrines.

I am the Apostle and the acolyte . . . I am the deacon and the fold.

This is my church, my church, and I believe
in the feet of Egon Schiele
in the moonlight.

This epiphany of how art, beauty, identity, and hope are all found in the interaction of nature and human memory, of philosophy, science, and religion, clarify the humanistic and aesthetic understanding that is at the thematic and emotional center of all of these poems.

As "At the Shore of the Great Lake Michigan" illustrates, there is nothing easy about reading Steven Sherrill's poetry. The poems are full of remarkable, often surreal imagery and surprising shifts in perspective, moving by an associative logic that challenges the most imaginative reader to keep up. Sherrill is not only negatively capable but very comfortable with contraries: faith and heresy; Apollonian control and Dionysian wildness; aesthetic smugness and endearing humility. None of that is easy, but anything that explores human nature without flinching at its complexity, with such unblinking honesty, can be cathartic and enlightening, and in any event, a hell of a lot of fun.

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

SEVENTEEN

Poems by Annalee Kwochka

Running Poet Press

I wrote my first short story in twelve years the other day. I didn't set out to write a story, but a scene that nearly materialized in real life refused to be dropped in my imagination, and as I began 'disburdening' myself of it, it insisted on being prose. You may wonder what any of this had to do with a review of a book of poems (I know I would). The connection is that just as I've learned through 30 years of writing that the writer often has little choice in what or how they write, young Annalee Kwochka has already, at 17, learned that the writer has even less choice in deciding to write. "Mona Lisa Muse," the opening poem of her precocious collection, *Seventeen*, makes that clear. "Poems," she says, "are the fierce and ravishing aunt / whom you revere / but shrink from . . . / Her knock is a tiny hammer on your skull, / so you'd better get that door, / . . . because this poem / has arrived." So, too, has this poet.

The poems in *Seventeen* demonstrate Kwochka's arrival in several ways, one of which is her versatility. From tankas, to ars poeticas, to typographical poems, to performances pieces, to dramatic monologues, Kwochka's poems are consistently fresh, evocative, and surprising. Her "Window Seat at the City Bakery," for example, masterfully uses spacing to control the reader's pace and create impetus just where it should be. The way "Details" appears on a line of its own three times, and the way "forward" follows the push of white space after "To bear life," and the way the parallelism of the last four lines create a satisfying sense of place ("Sitting somewhere on this planet, / This continent, this country, / This city, this street, / This seat by the window"), all work together to convey Kwochka's own understanding of Mary Oliver's imperative that, for the poet, paying attention is tantamount to prayer.

And Kwochka pays attention to the two things that are most important for a poet to pay attention to if her poems are going to be effective: imagery and language. We've already seen her attention to imagery, and in the wonderfully playful "Entry #1 from the Dictionary of Teenage Variations on the English Language, and an Example in Context," we see her attention to language as she dissects the linguistic habits of mother-daughter communication.

Kwochka's versatility is one not only of style but also of subject matter. She "pays attention" to nature in poems like "Window Seat" and "Green River Tanka," to personal issues in poems like "Advanced Placement: Psychology" and "Burning," to issues of relationships in poems

like "Storms" and "Advents," to social issues in poems like "Laws of Motion: Wake-Up Call" and "Laws of Motion: School Reform," and to political issues in poems like "Seque for My sisters in Iraq" and "Exposition and Protest."

It is through Kwochka's willingness to explore, experience, and relate such a range of topics and influences that she is able to make statements that belie her youth, statements that express a greater understanding of the complexities of human existence than one would expect from one of her age, statements like this one from "Advent" that add a third dimension to Oliver's equation of prayer and paying attention:

I need to love even though it hurts,
I need to love until it hurts
Because there is so much hurt here,
And loving is a better way to pray.

REVIEW

by Ann Chandonnet

SPEAR-FISHING ON THE CHATANIKA

New & Selected Poems

by John Morgan.

137 pages, paper, Salmon Poetry, Ireland 2010, \$19.95.

A mood of calm pervades every page of John Morgan's latest collection, *Spear-Fishing on the Chatinika* (Salmon Poetry Ltd.). This sensitive, expressive book is a perfect example of Wordsworth's idea of emotion reflected in tranquility—even at those high-tension moments when he describes being frantic about the health of a family member or recalls the frustrations and missteps of virgin sex.

I first encountered John Morgan's work in Field's 1979 anthology *A Geography of Poets*. It stood out then. Later I met Morgan (he taught at the University of Alaska Fairbanks for many years), and even participated in readings with him and other Alaskan poets in Juneau and elsewhere. He is also calm in person, and his students remember him fondly.

Morgan grew up in New York City. His experiences working in the Peabody Museum of natural history led to the title and several poems in his first collection, *The Bone-Duster*. Bones, ash and tenderness are constants throughout this larger collection, too. When spear fishing, the fisher never knows what threatening denizen will appear through the bubbles of surf and the tremulous strands of giant kelp. Morgan repeatedly surprises the reader with his images and with the sybillant clang of many of his final lines, as well as sudden whiffs of cinnamon, damp gears or spruce.

The difficulty with reviewing a book like *Spear-Fishing on the Chatinika* is that almost every poem calls out for its fifteen minutes of fame. "The Psychoanalysis of Fire" is notable for its arresting strings of multisyllable adjectives. "Spells and Auguries," the 24-poem section for his younger son, struck with encephalitis, is freighted with medical terminology and stone-hard, one-syllable words as well as waking dreams and horrible possibilities. A teen deals with the siege of Leningrad, trying not to be overwhelmed by the gathering bodies of his family and the spectre of hunger. (Note the almost secret rhyme in these stanzas.)

Annie Dillard has written that Morgan's poems are "strong and full of carefully controlled feeling. They are tender and precise evocations of the moral and sensory life of man." Morgan reveals a human being built on a steely skeleton of responsibility, clothed in the flesh of

painful consciousness. Over and over, he feels life “going deeper” until it is “salt in [his] pores.”

Although many of Morgan’s poems deal with the landscape of Alaska, where he spent decades, these lines visit many other countries and centuries. He has memories of Robert Lowell as well as a beach in Mexico. Often, as in “The Beach Walk at Port Townsend, Wa.,” he is trying to find the space to escape grief and guilt in order to find the right details, the right metaphors for all the other things in life he wishes to record. When he writes of Anton Webern “sickened by the recent loss of his son/strafed to death on a train,” his concern for his own son—strafed to coma by a sudden illness—surfaces like an unexpected episode of vomiting. The same lurch occurs when he writes “Walking Past Midnight” for a fellow poem whose infant daughter is stricken with meningitis.

Bike riders and bones in the ditch, pizza and Phenobarb, Morgan reaches right and left, backward and forward through time and space. His poems for his wife Nancy are especially touching, love poems being the hardest poems to write without turning honey into gall. His portraits of her innocence and bravery make an indelible impression on the reader. For instance, “Then” is one of the most honest and touching poem I have ever read. In another of his poems for her, “May,” the ripples, stipples, roots, kisses and chortles of nature come to fruition in the final line: “the tune the earth is singing to itself” –a tune that expresses his happiness in their continuing relationship.

At Harvard, Morgan won the Hatch Prize for Lyric Poetry. At the University of Iowa Writers’ Workshop, he was awarded the Academy of American Poets’ Prize. His work has appeared in *The New Yorker*, *Poetry*, *The Paris Review*, *Prairie Schooner* and many other prestigious journals.

Spear-Fishing on the Chatinika is a collection to read and re-read with pleasure—watching for glass but sipping cocoa on the couch.

Morgan’s publisher, Salmon Poetry Ltd., was founded in 1981, taking its name from the salmon of knowledge in Celtic mythology. Founded by poet Jessie Lendennie, Salmon specializes in the promotion of new poets, particularly women poets, and now has published more than 200 books, including several notable anthologies, the most recent of which is *Dogs Singing* (November 2010). The press is located in County Clare, Ireland. Its US distributor is Defour Editions of Pennsylvania.

Ann Fox Chandonnet is a poet and non-fiction writer who lives in Vale, North Carolina. She is the author of *Canoeing in the Rain (Mr. Cogito)* and other poetry collections, as well as history and nonfiction such as *"Write Quick": War and a Woman's Life in Letters, 1835-1867* (Winoca Press, Wilmington, N.C.)

REVIEW

by Scott Owens

NIGHT WEATHER

by J.S. Absher; illustrations by Katie Nordt

Cynosura Press, 2010

ISBN: 9780615429540

Although I have published about 3 dozen haiku in respected haiku journals like Heron's Nest, Notes from the Gean, and Shamrock, my only training in the form has been my own reading and a few exchanges with Alice Frampton, Lenard Moore, and Curtis Dunlap. So, when I received a review copy of Stan Absher's new collection of mostly haiku entitled Night Weather, I thought about how particular some haiku purists can be and decided I wasn't really qualified or courageous enough to make any sort of statement regarding the quality of a collection of haiku. As I read through the book, however, I realized that it contains plenty of elements about which I do feel qualified to speak. The most significant of these elements is simply how enjoyable the poems are. These quiet meditations on perception are evocative, soothing, and subtly thought-provoking.

Not surprisingly given that most of the poems are haiku or similar forms, the strongest feature of these poems is their imagery. Time and again, Absher presents images that are pleasantly familiar and enviably well-stated such that I find myself constantly thinking, "Yes, that's it. He got it just right. Perhaps my favorite, being a planter of trees myself, is "sweetgum:"

in the riprap
cold saplings
burning red

This image of life, regeneration, and resistance reminds me both of Roethke's famous poem, "Cuttings," as well as my own experience planting saplings in a thick bed of mulch.

Absher demonstrates in all of these poems what is undoubtedly the poet's most important skill: keen observation. Nowhere is that more apparent than in "Ripeness Is All," which I quote in its entirety below:

Weighting the low branches, vermilion
splotted with apple green, it hands
in easy reach — not quite ready

to pick, but turn his eye away one
moment, it will bruise with neglect.

The exact moment never comes
when it falls easily to hand.
By day it holds the stem like
a hooked reed, then over night
spikes itself on the stubble.

When is my time, he wonders,
when will I, trembling with plenty,
let go into the ripe void?
When will I steer
drunkenly into the blade?

This metaphoric representation of the ceaselessly anticipatory nature of human existence resonates not only with our own perceptions of the natural world but also with our unspoken impressions of life, and of course, with all the literary and personal associations we have with the concept of forbidden fruit. Such associative richness is what makes these poems, and all good haiku, and all good imagism, work. It is this quality above all others that make such poems enjoyable.

Organized around the theme of passing seasons, Absher's poems have two vital lessons to teach us: pay attention; and be ready.

REVIEW

by Bud Caywood

little mouse

by Bill Griffin

Main Street Rag, 2011

Occasionally a book of poems comes along that is so totally refreshing that, when you arrive at its end, your first inclination is to simply start again at its beginning. Bill Griffin's newest collection of poems, *little mouse*, is an invitation to, not only read, but to listen, very closely as the poet deftly applies gentle answers to questions of life. It is an unusual collection in that, although it comprises a sequence of poems, it is essentially one long poem—detailing the journey of life. It is also unusual in that it includes the voices and wisdom of everyone we know. These voices give us the immediacy of the long poem's message. In a sense they are quite reminiscent of the power of Gibrán's *The Prophet*.

Among the many poets I've met, Bill Griffin stands out as one of the gutsiest and most creative writers I've known. His poems are bold and poignant and filled with memorable lines, keen observations, and acute wit. These precisely crafted poems touch on the very essence of life as well as spirituality. They celebrate beauty and peace, but mostly remind us of calm, as in: "If I could write my own story it would walk / the fine damp path along Roaring River / then cross your pasture, the deepworn tread, / observant beasts, enter the broken / gate of your back garden and out again". The poems meander the fractured line between harshness and reality and then settle on the pages like one-chord songs in a singular glow of spiritual living.

This collection delights and inspires, demonstrating how the poet can deliver a message of quiet illumination. Each poem is intimate with landscape and moments and attentive to the plight of life as it evolves.

If you like the work of Bill Griffin you'll most certainly like *little mouse*.

Bud Caywood is the author of one full-length collection of poems and eleven chapbooks. His poems have appeared in many anthologies and journals. He serves on the board for the Poetry Council of North Carolina and is a long-time member of the North Carolina Poetry Society. He lives and works from his studio in Alexander County, NC where he is a freelance furniture designer and artist.