

Winter 2012

Wild Goose Poetry Review
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I have heard it claimed that North Carolina is “the writingest state.” A bold claim, no doubt, but without any intention of doing so, this issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review bears witness to at least some truth in that claim. Of the 29 poems published in this issue, 16 of them are by North Carolinians. Of the 8 books reviewed, 6 of them are by North Carolinians. And all but one of the reviewers are from North Carolina.

It is always gratifying to see continued good work from those I’ve published before, and 14 of the poets herein are repeat contributors. It is also gratifying to see poems written by those I have met in workshops find a good home, and 6 of these poets have taken one of my workshops through the NC Writers’ Network, Glenda Beall’s The Writers’ Circle, Catawba Valley Community College, or other such supportive organizations.

Of course, the most gratifying aspect of this issue is the quality of the work. These poems are strong and diverse, including everything from heartfelt narratives to lighthearted glimpses of human foibles. And I am very happy to guest reviewers like Helen Losse, Nancy Posey, Tim Peeler, and Ami Kaye helping me bring a little light to some of the best books of poetry being published today.

This first issue of 2012 will make my Pushcart nominations at the end of the year some of the most difficult decisions I’ve ever had to make. Please enjoy the poems and reviews you find here and leave a comment for the authors and others to read. Such dialogue about poetry deepens everyone’s experience of the poem. You can also subscribe to the comments on any of the poems or reviews you would like to so that you receive notice whenever a new comment on that one is made.

For those reminding me to stay on task or even just for those who are interested, I will add the fall 2011 issue to the archives and update the index (yes, I am now 2 issues behind) within the next few weeks.

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BILL GRIFFIN
OF SORROWS AND ACQUAINTED WITH

First Day

Forgive me, Father, for I
struggle. Did you have to make self
the first syllable of selflessness?
But truthfully, what soul
borne in bone and blood would welcome
this grinding? This heaviness? Like hell
they know not what they do. Even the stones
cry out for my surrender. Why?

Yesterday I walked through the garden
with my friends. They laughed.
Have you heard the one about the soldier,
the rabbi, and the carpenter?
Anyone who's not depressed
just doesn't really know what's going on.
Why resist? There is an hour at the end
of night when the eastern fields turn grey and yet
it is still possible to imagine
this morning there will be no sun.

I prayed for you to take it from me,
this cup. I still don't know
if I can drink.

Second Day

The voices are almost quiet here.
Like sleep, but without the need
to awaken. An old man who can't summon up
an image of the hour he's just spent, is he
a captive of his past or freed
to live in the moment? And a young man
who can't imagine his next hour?

The voices are almost quiet here.
I add my own voice to that thrum,
a single indeterminate bee
in a distant honey tree. Oneness.
Distance. Warm, golden, sweet,
and who can remember the stings?

Have you abandoned me
or is emptiness my fulness?

The voices are almost quiet here.
How is it done? Are stones and darkness
enough to shut them out? When a man denies
the need for food because he desires
never again to feel hunger, when he breaks
the knife because it has cut him,
when he closes his eyes
because he fears darkness, then

the voices are almost quiet. Here
there is no need to discover
my voice. Oneness, or nothingness?
A mother draws her newborn son
to her breast, her own blood still warm
on his face. The pain, she doesn't forget it,
but her heart is all thanks. The voices
are almost quiet here. But only almost.

Third Day

What door opens
when it's closed?

The man with no arms
catches the bird.

Does the barrow dream it rolls
itself uphill?

Escape
frees no one.

My friends don't know me
until I know them. They can't
call my name until I call theirs.
Today we will eat together and be full;
tomorrow we'll be hungry again.

Some say you created hunger so that we
might appreciate bread,
but even the fat man likes to eat,
and no want of bread ever drew
a dead man from his tomb.
There is no point to hunger.

No point at all except that we
must all be hungry together.

On the leafless branch,
a ripe fig.

Who gives it all away
becomes rich.

Cry, mouth. Drink, throat.
Reach, arms.

In the end, it is not my power
to roll this rock away. My friends
won't know me until they know I
know them. None of them ask,
Three days? What took you so long?
Their blood is warm on my face. They
draw me to their breast.

Bless me, Father, for I
will struggle, and my heart is all pain
and all thanks.

Lynn Ciesielski

HOW TO LET GO OF A GROWN CHILD

1

Don't call her every night just to check in.

2

Don't cancel plans waiting for her to call.

3

Don't drive past her apartment at midnight to see if her car is in the driveway.

4

Paint over purple walls in her old bedroom.
Use primer, three thick coats in a neutral color.

5

Peel plastic "starry night" off bedroom ceiling.

6

Remove school photos from wall and mantel.
Put them in box with dance award certificates.

7

Eat the ice cream sundaes with caramel topping and whipped cream you've avoided for twenty years of setting good examples.

8

Give up thinking each time you decide on a date, I wonder how my daughter would feel about it.

9

Avoid Junior's Departments in clothing stores.
Ignore second pair half off sales on low rise jeans.

10

Write down your regrets. Fold into an airplane.
Throw it off a bridge.

Author's comment: I raised my daughter, an only child, by myself. We enjoyed an extremely close relationship although she did rebel a fair amount. When she moved out three years ago, I had a terrible case of "empty nest syndrome". Until I met the man who is now my husband, I was very lonely without her. I am embarrassed to admit that a few points I made in the poem were real. My daughter and I still talk on the phone nearly every day.

Lynn Ciesielski

NOTES

“You’ll go to hell for liking boys”, says the message that comes to Andy’s email inbox.

At thirteen, peonies burst from my chest.
In the girls’ dressing room, other eighth graders
accuse me when I hide in private stalls,
They call me a fake, a fraud, say I stuff my bra,
nickname me “Cotton Queen”, “C.Q.”, for short.

Thirty years later in a nearby town:
Andy and his friends, all girls, giggle,
“Isn’t Joe hot? That tight end has a tight ass” .
He passes on dating, football, wrestle mania,
but plays cello and chess.
Boys call him fag, spray him with perfume,
punch him when teachers aren’t looking.

When I tell mom, “Kids at school harrass me,”
she says, “Ignore them. They want attention.
They probably don’t get it from their parents” .
Coming home from school, I hide behind trees
to avoid boys who poke me like fresh bread.

Andy types his cries to a virtual world,
“I want my gram and my friend up in heaven” .
A response reads, “Take your life if you want.
We’ll all be better off” .

Wine goes down like cocoa. Warmth rises into
my ears and soothes the icy taunts.
Mom throws the bottles out, sends me to therapy.
In technology class, I build boxes to hide away
echoes of schoolmates’ voices.

Andy can’t box the voices in his head.
One day, notes from his cello melody
swing from the backyard clothesline
In the studio his teacher waits alone.
Broken music drifts along the breeze.

Author’s Comment: Feeling a sense of acceptance or “fitting in” is so important to many schoolchildren. It can play a big role in developing a strong self-esteem. In many scenarios, children who are considered different or don’t fit the norm in some way are ostracized or, at

worst, bullied. For some, this can be devastating. In the case of a local teenager recently, it led to a very unfortunate suicide. When I heard the news, I was brought face to face with my own difficult memories of being bullied as a teenager. It moved me to write this.

Bio: Lynn Ciesielski is a former Special Education Teacher from Western New York. She taught in city schools for eighteen years before she retired three years ago. Since she left her career, she has turned most of her energy to poetry. Her work has appeared in *Avocet*, *Buffalo News*, *Maple Leaf Rag IV*, *Transparent Words (UK)*, *Speed Poets Zine (Australia)* and is upcoming in *Iodine*. She has performed in Western New York, Toronto, New Orleans and several cities in England.

Paul Hostovsky
ONE-AND-TWENTY

When I was fifty-one with that kind of insomnia
where you wake up earlier and earlier
and drink lots of coffee and write
lots of poetry, my son was just nineteen
with that home-from-college-for-the-summer
kind of mania, where you go to bed later
and later, and sleep until two in the afternoon.
The drinking age in America was one-and-twenty.
A.E. Housman was a classical scholar
who wrote lots of poetry about doomed youth
in the English countryside. No use talking
to a lad of nineteen about waiting two years
before starting to drink, especially when
he's already learned how up in college. Housman
taught at a college in London, and later at a college
in Cambridge. One night we passed each other—me
and the lad—like two sleepless ship captains in a dark
kitchen at four in the morning. I was heading
for the coffee. He was heading for the toilet.
I could smell the booze on his breath from across
the ages. "Dad," he said, "I can't believe you
get up this early—what time is it, anyway?"
"Son," I said, like a refrain, "I can't believe you
are getting home this late. It's four o'clock in the morning!"
Then we both sailed silently on in our opposite
directions, with our opposite wakes. But a few
minutes later, sipping my coffee and scratching
out a line, then putting it back again, I sensed him
hovering tipsily in the doorway, steeply rocking.
"I love you, man," he said, a little drunkenly.
And I knew enough of love, and I knew enough
of poetry, and I knew enough of sobriety to know
he meant it more than he could say sober. "I love you, too,
man," I said, gave the boy a kiss, and put him to bed.

Author's Comment: I could say, "It happened, and I put it in a poem." But I'm not sure how Housman got in there. I kicked him out, but he snuck back in. Personally, I don't drink. I used to. A lot. A drunk is an unlovely creature. Now I'm sober over twenty years, and my son is just getting started. Maybe, in making this poem, I was looking for the lesson in all of that;

some closing line like Housman's: "And oh, 'tis true, 'tis true." But there is no easy lesson. I hate that he drinks. But I love him so much that it hurts.

Kalela Williams
BRAIDING HAIR

Sunday nights, my mother braided hair
when I was a girl. We'd sit in front of the television,
she on the sofa, I on the carpet; beside me
a brush, a jar of water, a wide-toothed comb.
I would pull my head away, she would tilt it
back into place, her fingers moving patiently;
lengths of tight curls crossing over themselves.
My grandmother once did the same, and her mother, too,
on a hardwood floor, by the dim light of a candle.
Someday a woman I have yet to know will braid
my thin, white hair gently with crumpled-skin hands.
She will be my daughter, so much older then,
but who once sat between my knees, my hands
like weaver's in the thick, black fabric of her hair.
It does not end, nor change, this line of women
braiding hair, quickly but carefully, nimbly,
like women quilting—ours of cornrows, plaits,
twists, an art as brief to complete as girlhood.

Author's Comment: I wrote this poem at a point when I felt very disconnected from my family and friends, and disappointed with where I felt my life was going. I wanted to comfort myself with the idea of family and heritage, but most importantly, continuity. Braiding hair is an act that endures from one generation to the next, a skill passed from mother to daughter. It directly and specifically connects me to my mother, my grandmothers, and my foremothers—a chain stretching hundreds of years, maybe longer. It's remarkable when I think of it. Writing this poem served as a mooring for me, which is exactly what I hoped.

Bio: Kalela Williams teaches creative writing at James Madison University in Virginia, where she also serves as assistant director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center, organizing literary readings, conferences, and workshops that promote African American poetry. She is originally from Atlanta, Georgia, but she has traded a city life for the quiet pace of a small Shenandoah Valley town. Her work has appeared in *Quay: A Journal of the Literary Arts*, the *Broome Review*, *Lone Star Legacy*, and other literary journals. She received her M.F.A. from Goddard College and she is currently working on a novel.

Al Ortolani

ANIMALS WE KEPT

Nonna kept parakeets. She slipped
thimbles of beer into their water, and they
spoke Italian to her. Cages
hung across the porch on metal hooks
until birds swayed in the wind like lamps.
One Friday, my brother
bulldozed a tree next to Mango's Market.
A nest of squirrels flipped from the branches.
Mother raised the babies in a box
that smelled of peaches. Two died
the first night. Two nursed,
sucking on a scrap of cloth soaked in sugar-milk.

One grew to live in the house,
climbing into Mother's blankets,
burrowing as if to heartwood.
The dog belonged to me.
The old man said the Mutt was a turd eater.
I found him tied to a mail box next to the YMCA.
He ran off once after a garbage truck,
and I chased him
until the streets turned dim
and the faces on the porches grew curious
about the lost boy with the lost dog.
I curled up next to Familia's Boxing Club,
my hand twisted in the dog's collar.

Some nights, the old man
would hike with Uncle Sal to the city dump
to hunt rats with the twelve gauge,
bagging a bottle of wine, maybe some bread.
I'd wake when they stumbled through the door,
smelled their clothes thick with wine and trash smoke,
dragging their heavy boots
across the porch, batting
the cages like speed bags, cursing
the squirrels, my dog, the rats
as big as a dog, the rats
as big as a boy.

Author's Comment: The poem "Animals We Kept" has taken many forms. It's based on a number of stories which my father used to tell about the Depression. Dad's stories were usually humorous. But I decided to add an edge to the poem. One with a touch of sadness and misplaced anger. My grandmother, on the other hand, did keep squirrels and parakeets. As a child, I remember her showing me a "flying squirrel" which slept in her bed at nights. I thought it interesting that a family which had to struggle to keep food on the table could find it in their hearts to raise birds, keep squirrels, and bring home strays.

Al Ortolani
LEGACY

During the night, the wind picks up.
First in the high branches of the walnut
and then in the hanging geraniums.
The neighbor's porch light appears
to move against the screen, swaying,
flickering behind the limbs. The man

in the green house has been up and down
all night. The lights flashing
from room to room; he searches the kitchen
for ibuprofen, then the bathroom. He gives up
and returns to bed. Later, he steps out onto
the porch and digs through his tool bags.

A small job like painting the garage
has turned his knees into battlegrounds.
He listens for thunder in the distance,
rain that will keep him indoors tomorrow,
a respite that doesn't require him to quit
or to give in to pain. He never once

remembers his father quitting,
even at the end, the family gathered,
the cancer stretching into winter.

Author's Comment: "Legacy" is primarily a poem about what is passed down from fathers to sons. Among the males in many families, a certain stoicism is expected. I've noticed this particularly among the children of the Depression Era generation. This became particularly poignant when my father was fighting pancreatic cancer. He had to "tough it out". The poem "Legacy" is the result of free writing and journaling during this difficult period. I kept it around in a very rough form. One day I was glancing back over some old lines and stumbled upon it. I thought to myself that maybe there is something of a poem in this. I began editing.

Bio: Al Ortolani is a teacher from Kansas. His poetry has appeared in a number of periodicals, both print and online across the United States: The New York Quarterly, The English Journal, The Midwest Quarterly and others. He has two books of poetry, The Last Hippie of Camp 50 and Finding the Edge, published by Woodley Press at Washburn University. His third book, Wren's House, is due to be released this winter from Coal City Review Press in Lawrence, Kansas. He is an editor with The Little Balkans Review.

Jessie Carty

I Was 36

before I had a pedicure and it wasn't until after my 6th that I thought of my grandmother – of her white, ice cube-esque heels in open toed white slippers – of the blue handled device she scraped against her feet while she watched her stories. I'd volunteer to scrub her feet because I just liked the feel of it – the tool – like stone – like a curved white rock picked from the dirt driveway – as white as the cylindrical and smooth item I found in my mother's bottom drawer on which – like every child – I could easily find the power switch for. I wrapped my hair around the tube saying, "Mom, let's curl my hair." Laughter – a lesson in not going through other people's personal affects because sometimes when you touch someone else's things you find yourself flaking off the dead skin from your grandmother's feet or – you hope – reflecting 30 years later – that the other "it" was clean. I'm – therefore – thankful for the small, wet Asian hands sanding my big toe's callus into beige bits like bars of soap slivering in the shower. I wonder – and I doubt – that this is another moment my mother and I would have shared – she of no make-up, straight hair – Family Dollar wardrobe.

Author's Comment: "I was 36" began while I was receiving a particularly rigorous pedicure. As I worked on it I thought back to an old abandoned poem dealing with a certain item found in a mother's dresser. The images finally worked together. They say you never really abandon a poem. Well, at least for me, you never completely abandon an image.

Jessie Carty

Maid

You had never touched a condom
until you spent a summer cleaning
rental cottages at the beach. 16,
but you didn't drive. The management
company brought van loads of girls –
always maids never the male equivalent
(janitor, butler, run of the mill cleaner?).
Girls from nearby small towns
where the adults had all of the fast food
and retail jobs which left the teenagers,
for three seasons, cruising the one
four lane road or hanging out
at the mall until summer when they napped
on morning drives to the coast
where they'd vacuum, dust, take note
of any damage because the owners
needed to be properly reimbursed
and – of course – so you wouldn't
be blamed even if, maybe, you did
block up the toilet because you didn't
want to put the yellowish not-a-balloon
in the garbage. Why did all the boys
get to deliver pizzas instead of –
this? You'd seen condoms in health class
but you'd let your perky class partner
roll the "thing" down the cucumber. You
tried to avoid turning the same shade
of faded green that the vegetable
showed through the sheath. The smell
in class too much like the scent
of the yellow kitchen gloves you wear
to scrub, to hide that you don't fill out
the finger parts, to disguise your still unlined palm.

Author's Comment: "Maid" came about as I started working on a series of poems titled "Jobs You've Never Had" and during a free-write I decided to reflect on all the girls I knew who went to the beach to work during the summer as maids. The poem took off on its own into unexpected areas as poems tend to love to do.

Bio: Jessie Carty's writing has appeared in publications such as, MARGIE, decomP and Connotation Press. She is the author of five poetry collections which include Fat Girl (Sibling Rivalry, 2011) as well as the award winning full length poetry collection, Paper House (Folded Word 2010). Jessie teaches at RCCC in Concord, NC. She is also the managing editor of Referential Magazine. She can be found around the web, especially at <http://jessiecarty.com>.

Glenn Cassidy

WHAT NOT TO WEAR

Abercrombie and Fitch Will Pay Situation
to Stop Wearing Its Clothes – US Magazine

I've been actively not wearing A&F
\$70 t-shirts and not wearing A&F \$70
sweatpants, as well as \$50 Hollisters
that are curiously similar. As for the
jeans slung over the shoulder of the
naked model in the A&F catalog, I especially
like to not wear those while getting paid
by the government to not grow corn
while not carrying an A&F moose print
Cute Preppy Tote. I've been not wearing
A&F for decades, will forgive old arrears
for one years' payment at The Situation's rate.

Bio: Glenn Cassidy is a previous contributor to Wild Goose Poetry Review. He lives in
Raleigh, NC, where he coordinates a local reading series.

Maren Mitchell

COCKROACH AS BALBOA

In the light of night, validated, he stands triumphant,
soaking up azure with sailor eyes,

(as though still scanning thin blue ink horizons
for land signs, breathing salt under merciless suns)

feet widely planted on the shimmering slope,
lean chest out-thrust,

sinewy shoulders braced,
belt cinched against the threat of starvation,

willing to eat anything,
smaller, more vulnerable than relatives left

behind in the sultry metropolis on the other side of the world.
The new-found surf beats furiously up the cliffs.

Spray almost wets his dark, parched face.
In a revealing flash the Heavens open; night is gone.

He is naked. In his remaining fraction
he relives gains, losses, regrets.

Fate descends.

Author's Comment: One night I clicked on the bathroom light, and perched on an upgrade slope of a white facial tissue was one of the more elegantly shaped cockroaches, strikingly proud in its stance, overlooking the wash basin. Although I squashed him, I could not forget him.

Maren Mitchell

COMPARE & CONTRAST: SEX, LUST & LOVE vs WRITING POEMS

Sex: whether with self or with another,
essential to the full range of human experience.

Poems: whether with self or with others,
essential to the full range of human experience.

Unlike the first stumble across sex,
the reach for our missing link, gamble on confirmation,
the first poem delivers only pleasure and fulfillment –
no retreat, misgiving, disappointment, retrial.

Lust: whether in mind or in practice, buttered popcorn for a box office hit,
essential to the full range of human feelings.

Poems: a prolific, never-ending urge
to hunt for and never receive full satisfaction,
promiscuous indulgence,
always wanting just one more new one.

Love: whether in mind or actions,
essential to growth of the human heart & soul,
rejuvenating twin to writing poems, objects of our permanent attention
about which we aspire to open and wrap all our senses.

Author's Comment: What began as a light-hearted idea of comparing sex with writing poems,
to show which was more enjoyable, developed into a point-by-point, calculated comparison
with little humor. Not the poem I had envisioned.

Bio: Maren O. Mitchell's poems have appeared in Southern Humanities Review, The Classical
Outlook, Pirene's Fountain, The Journal of Kentucky Studies, Appalachian Journal, The Arts
Journal, and elsewhere. Poems are forthcoming in The Journal of Kentucky Studies, Sunrise
from Blue Thunder, Japan Anthology and The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume V:
Georgia.

Philip Dacey

AGAINST TRAVEL BAGS WITH WHEELS

Let me bring with me
only what I can sling
over my shoulder
or lug in one hand.

Let people say, "Why is that old man
carrying his bag like that? Is he
simple-minded? Too poor or too cheap
to buy a bag with wheels?"

And let my belongings not skim
the walkways and ramps but bump
against my hip, reassuringly intimate,
whispering with the sound of cloth
rubbing on cloth about the lesson
of gravity, how the earth loves us,
and that without wheels my two legs
are enough, the rolling bag so close a cousin
to wheelchairs and rolling walkers
as to scare me into a scarcity
of carried items, only what's necessary
for the journey, the extras jettisoned,
for this bag is my brother, the shoulder strap
his arm around my neck, the two of us
comrades for the road, this bag
my camerado, this bag I name Walt.

Author's Comment: Once, when I was discarding from my life some object, practice, or person, my daughter said, "Dad, you're having another minimalist living frenzy." So the poem reflects a consistent tendency of mine. No extra baggage. It also reflects a consistent interest in Walt Whitman, about whom I've written and published enough poems to fill a book, for which I'm currently seeking a publisher. I do think it'll be a sad day if I'm ever reduced—because of diminishing strength, not a surfeit of stuff—to needing a bag with wheels.

Bio: Philip Dacey is the author of eleven books of poetry, most recently *Mosquito Operas: New and Selected Short Poems* (Rain Mountain Press, 2010) and *Vertebrae Rosaries: 50 Sonnets* (Red Dragonfly Press, 2009), as well as entire collections about Gerard Manley Hopkins, Thomas Eakins, and New York City. His awards include three Pushcart Prizes, a Fulbright to Yugoslavia, a Woodrow Wilson to Stanford, and two from the NEA. With David

Jauss, he co-edited *Strong Measures: Contemporary American Poetry in Traditional Forms* (Harper & Row, 1986).

Karen Douglass
A Man and His Tiger

A man and his tiger
walk on water.
Tiger says, Nice day.
The man says, Life
is complicated.

Tiger lies down half way
across the river.
Come here, says the man
from the far shore.
No, I want to rest. Life
is tiring.

But, Tiger, if I leave you
someone will steal you
or you'll drown.

My friend, tigers can swim,
and I am too fierce
to be stolen. You go on.
We will meet again.

Oh, Tiger, I am weeping.
You were my idea. Now look
at what you've become.
Sobbing the man stumbles
along the far shore.

Tiger yawns, rests his head
on his massive paws and
naps in the sun. When he wakes
the world is dim, and he knows
that the man is forgetting him.
Tiger feels too weak to rise
and the river murmurs,
Dear Tiger, welcome home.

Karen Douglass

A Loose Screw

There's something devilish about the screw
dropped and embedded in the carpet,
found by my bare foot. I curse

the origin of the screw and
its impact on civilization.

Desert nomads didn't need screws.

Finding one in the sand, dropped from
a lorry lumbering through the desert,
a child would wonder, take it

to his father, uncle, older brother,
who smiles, examines the thing,
tests the point against a calloused thumb,

says it might harm the boy,
who still has tender hands.

The man knits his brow. Now

he must decide: if he throws it away,
this small, sharp worry will someday
bruise the foot of his camel.

He slips it into a pocket, where
he can pretend it does not exist.

He was happy until the boy came

to him with the thing. He searches
the horizon for what comes roaring
down on them from Bethlehem.

Ronald Moran

BACKWARD FROM MIDNIGHT

I am trying to flutter my syllables, like wings
of nervous moths
at street lamps on intersections, but, maybe,
I should

try arranging my lines differently, so as
to give
them more room to breath hypnotically
before

my alarm commences its litany of beeps,
while
I count backward from midnight, and, O,
how the rails

on this old (and nearly) condemned bridge
on State 123
will burst into harmony, as if a bow from
the spheres

crossed rails, and if not celestial sounds, then
crepuscular,
to stir our black bears into a dance of frenzy
and delight.

Ronald Moran

A LIFE NOT YET LED

So now it is official, the last quarter, no doubt
to be
abbreviated, has begun in a flourish of notices
in my mail,
offering clinics in hearing loss, urgent care,
as well as

package deals for funerals, cemetery discounts,
and, yes,
mostly ads for retirement villages, where
a couple,
tanned and healthy, are smiling to a visual
backdrop

of a white gazebo on a lawn sloping toward
water,
a peaceful blue, the hint of a sailboat distantly,
and, O yes,
the good life still before you, if you can afford
to pay,

which I cannot, or else I would be there. And,
why not?

I am living alone, and maybe now I should
check out
the bargain basement villages, with one meal
two rooms,

700 square feet, one closet, a microwave,
hot plate,
and all the water you can drink, inclusive,
as if
on a vacation to St. Lucia after the seas rose
on a tide

of global warming, leaving patches of dirt,
some sand,
and all the guests huddling on high ground,
waiting
for a helicopter, rowboat, trained dolphins,
anything

to get them back to where they came from,
and refunds
for the life never led, but always promised
in the mail,
on the phone, online, and drawn in the sky
like clouds.

Ronald Moran

YOUNG DEATH IN CHINA

A two-year old girl was hit by a van in China;
and while
the van stopped, no one got out, the van started
up, running
over her again, and more people noticed the girl
lying
in the street, but did nothing to remove her before
another

vehicle swerved but still hit her and did not stop,
nonetheless;
and I am trying to think, in the safe comfort
of my den,
how could this happen, and where else could
it happen—
raw, insensitive—and whatever adjectives I can
conjure up,

anywhere, and how can anyone leave a toddler,
now dead,
in the middle of road and the people pass by her,
and I think
of why my late Jane never wanted to drive after
witnessing,
close up, when she was ten, a three-year old girl
run over

on Black Rock Avenue in New Britain, near home;
and like Jane
I will never forget what I saw distributed by Chinese
TV,
and I know Jane would have run out to the street,
picked
her up, and carried her, just carried her, wherever
she had to go.

Bio: Ronald Moran is the author of a dozen collections of poetry and several volumes of literary criticism. Professor Emeritus at Clemson University, he lives in Simpsonville, SC.

Addy Robinson McCulloch
Double-Talking the Ferryman*

And part of you leaves Tartarus,
But part stays there to dwell—

The first time he tried to claim me for his own,
I was three, my frail lungs paralyzed by infection.
The myths fail to mention his strange good looks
or that he reads books by Danielle Steele.

He took pity on me, accepting the bone
I'd brought for his three-headed friend
in exchange for my return – in one piece –
to the world of machines and medicines.

By fourteen, my asthmatic lungs were weary of it all.
So was he. He waived aside my practiced
arguments, offered my life for another's,
and I left with all but my womb.

When I was thirty, he shook his head and laughed,
I don't know why I like you so much.
But he took my tongue all the same,
that I might not sweet talk him again.

*Title and opening lines taken from "Song for the Women Poets" by A. E. Stallings

Author's Comment: This poem is one of several I'm working on about living with a life-threatening illness for a lifetime and, for this poem in particular, the struggle to make as few concessions as possible to the disease itself.

BIO: Addy Robinson McCulloch is a freelance writer and editor who lives in Wilmington, NC. In addition to poetry and writing, her passions include being happily married, dogs, sarcasm, and Italian wines. Her poetry has appeared in online and print journals, including Redheaded Stepchild and The Dead Mule.

John DesCamp
FREE ADVICE

Out of the wrinkled grey afternoon
into the desperate chatter of the wake
for a last look where he lay

in his coffin. I heard him say:
"It's the bleak virtues that are the measure—
loyalty, persistence, joy in the small things;
most of all, that you keep on smiling
when all the idiot romance is burned away
by the endless days of just getting by,
and you finally own the despair you saw
around the edges of your parents' eyes,
when you could bring yourself to look."

Author's Comment: My uncle was CIA (Catholic Irish Alcoholic) for years, then got sober. Somehow his and my aunt's marriage endured to the end, and equal compound of refusal to countenance divorce as a solution and a deep belief that marriage really was for better or for worse. Their persistence in what was, for a long time, an arid union seemed to me, standing there looking at him, like a bleak good example.

Bio: John DesCamp is the author of *Along the Way*, his debut collection of poetry, and of numerous legal and business papers that will never be read by anyone except his clients and professional colleagues. He is a recovering attorney and investment banker who hopes to emulate Wallace Stevens' ability to succeed in both the world of finance and the world of poetry.

Tim Peeler

DRIVE-IN 40

After he shot the cab driver in the face,
He drove out Molly's Backbone Road,
Slung the body over the bridge rail
And headed for the drive-in where
He watched the first half of a
Clint Eastwood double feature.
He'd cut the radio off when the
Dispatcher's voice kept crackling
His request for a twenty and settled
In on the six pack he'd picked up
On the way back from the river.
A couple drunks stumbling by the cab
Saw the blood and bits of skull sprayed
Across the seat and the cops soon came
Charging in by the ticket booth
Across the lot blocking his exit.
He had just popped the last beer
When the commands sounded
From either side and he turned
His pistol on himself.

Tim Peeler

DRIVE-IN 50

He had taken so much speed
And had Tourette's so bad
That his eyes fluttered
When exposed to the faintest
Amount of sunlight, which
Is why he wore heavy shades
Ninety per cent of the time,
Even as the gloaming painted
The sky behind the screen
With grays and pinks and oranges,
Yellow teeth clenched hard
On a Pall Mall Red,
The nasty green John Deere hat
Pushing his greasy white hair
Behind wide-set ears.
He could show the movies
Half the night, deliver two routes
For the Charlotte Observer,
Then glug down black coffee
For a couple hours in the diner,
Where he laughed awkwardly
To cover his vocal tics,
Scouring the sports pages
For tidbits of info before
He stopped by the Gulf station
To call his bets into the runner
At the downtown arcade. Some
People said he slept in his car
In the afternoon at the back
Of the drive-in; some people
Said he slept while the films played;
Some folks said he never slept,
Never at all.

Author's Comment: These poems are part of a manuscript loosely based on Catawba County drive-in theaters. The work is a companion piece to my motel book though in this case the narratives are more fiction than auto-biography.

Bio: Tim Peeler is an educator from Hickory, NC. His most recent poetry books are *Waiting for Charlie Brown*, a collaboration with performance poet Ted Pope from Rank Stranger Press and *Checking Out* from Hub City Press, a finalist for the 2011 SIBA poetry award.

Anna Weaver

A FLATLANDER EXPLAINS BIG SKY

Here in hill country where trees come on stilts
in a conspiracy against clouds and starlight,
the natives are brainwashed by a life under shade.
They never ask outright, but when talk turns to sky,
I try to explain.

I tell them a late afternoon drive under a flatland sunset
is a long sigh of orange into purple.
Back home, I say, the mesquite and the buildings
are scrub-short, letting the wind blow on by
without asking for her number.

Here the weather is genteel,
rains come and go quietly,
barely rumpling the sheets.
Back home, when thunder pounds the headboard
lightning has room to spread her legs.

At night, a flatland sky backdrops
a full-frontal moon
with museum-quality immodesty.
No hills to censor her,
no branches to make a peepshow of her.

Sometimes I try to explain big sky
by naming every naked thing that fits underneath
until I am flushed and breathless,
and the natives pull the trees around their shoulders
the hills up to their waists
and we all light a cigarette in the dark shade.

Author's Comment: I've been living in North Carolina since 1998 and, lovely as it is here, I still miss a big sky, long sunsets, and the enormity of a rising moon before it clears the treeline. In this poem, I make an attempt to share the beauty I knew for 20 years in Oklahoma. What is made visible by the flatness of the landscape there will take your breath, just like good sex.

Bio: Raised in Oklahoma, Anna Weaver lives in Cary, NC, with her two daughters. An active member of the Triangle's Living Poetry community, her poems have appeared in two anthologies of the best of Raleigh-area open mic venues, as well as Star*Line.

Jeremy Deal

ADOLESCENT PSYCH: A PUBLIC EDUCATION

Marbled clouds crust over the last of the autumn sun.

I huddle in my hoodie

and watch the ward loom in the windshield.

At first, it's small, and separates

the shadows of me and Mom in the glass.

Once we pull into the lot,

it consumes us both.

Mom's car spits me out

before the beast

set to swallow me for 5-12 days.

I count: 3 stories high, 30 windows across –

but I can't quantify my nausea,

can't cage my trembling

via transitive property.

I am property of the state, temporarily.

But schizophrenia is the schism

between space and time – right, doc?

So what could 'temporary' mean to schizos?

Or dogs.

"Poor Sandy," I say, "He'll be all alone."

"He'll be fine," Mom says.

"He's just a puppy, he won't understand."

"He won't be alone," she says, "He'll have his family."

Then she rolls up her window,

the ghost of me rising up between us in the glass,

and she grips the wheel and faces forward.

I face forward too, toward my new home,

my ward, my kennel – whatever they call it.

That towering monstrous mirror

rises with all its glittering eyes

like some Hindu horror-god –

but behind the reflected trees

shedding swirls and swoops of color,

I imagine the tenants,

the thousand disordered faces,

ingeniously misshapen –

those subhuman superimpositions
that taint our reflection.

And as I watch, the mirror reveals
a towering monstrous me,
a thousand-faced Krishna,
fists jammed into its unwashed hoodie,
hydra-heads rising up, terrible.
Caught in one set of jaws: a dove;
an angel squirms in another;
a star-spangled tatter;
a dollar bill lanced on a tooth;
Christ nailed fast to four fangs –
I am the god that eats Gods.

This is what my family must see
when they beg the doctors,
“slay this beast with thine tablets,
thine conjurers’ tongues,
and thou shalt have a bounty of gold
and the love of a kingdom!”
This is what they need –
a monster – a force of furious nature
to conquer – a mirror in which
to see themselves as heroes.

Like Perseus, they hold a shiny shield
to my face and bid me to look,
but the shield is warped
and a monster looks back,
so I shield my face with my hands,
feeling the shape of it –
human enough –
and I try to tell them,
“You’re wrong!
Just put down that shield
and look at me.
See me.”
But Perseus’ courage has limits.

Jilted, I feel myself turning to stone.
My eyelids harden like shields.
I raise my hood against the cold.

An orderly opens the doors and waves me in,
and when Mom finds the courage
to roll down her window and wish me luck,
all that remains of the sun is stone.

Bio: Jeremy Deal is a previous contributor to Wild Goose Poetry Review. Sometimes from Hickory, NC, he is currently a student at UNC Wilmington.

Bethea Buchanan

UNCLE LEE

Uncle Lee eats downstairs at Christmas.
Refuses to share a table with that goddamn nigger-
the reason for the oreo baby
dark skin and blue eyes.
"It just ain't right!"
But a four year old can't understand.
Uncle Lee and Daddy are both men,
two eyes, hands, and feet-
each have mouths and noses,
stand so tall his elementary brain
can't fathom ever growing so big.
He doesn't know that he's...
different.
Doesn't see his skin as brown-
draws his family black crayon stick figures
... like everyone else's.
Doesn't know about segregation,
degradation, a lynch mob nation,
the great doctor's assassination-
or what he stood for, marched for
died for.
Doesn't know what a "nigger" is, why it's bad
or why his whole family seems to hate his dad.
All he knows is that for some reason-
Uncle Lee eats downstairs at Christmas.

Bio: Bethea Buchanan's poetry has been published in Catawba, Wild Goose Poetry Review, and Dead Mule. She lives in Hickory, NC

Dennis Lovelace

COLLATERAL DAMAGE

Vacant, lifeless, bloodshot eyes stare back at me
Day old stubble flecked gray
Hands trembling, head splitting
Fighting the urge to heave
I hate my life

Truth is, I don't know
The horrors of war
I'm one of the men back here
Delivering the dreaded telegram
Seeing strong fathers become broken men
The tears of the mothers, wives'
Screams of anguish
Fuck me, I need a drink
I really hate my job.

Bio: Dennis Lovelace lives in Hickory, NC

Doug McHargue
Nights at the Dance Club

You flat out left me
on this flat plane of earth
so I went dancing.
He danced light and easy
with witty repartee
and asked me out,
but cutting into filet mignon
no vodka in hand
his throat went to gravel
smothering all words,
feet turning to clay.

I went out with another,
his dancing intense
as his love for an ex,
seeing her
while seeing me,
platitudes slipping
from each side of his mouth.

But I'd go every Friday
even dancing with a young Elvis,
his scarves wrinkled as the women
who caught them, flying
over the dance hall like little
flower-colored parachutes of hope.

Soft lights and shoulders to lean against,
music live and loud,
giant revolving ball glittering
on middle-aged sallowness
like sequined make-up
we'd wear on a carousel
going round and round the room
hanging on to each other
so we don't fall off the earth.

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

Brenda Kay Ledford
ART QUILTING

after Gary Snyder's
"Axe Handles"

One afternoon the first week of October,
Zoe Scroggs shows me how to make
an art quilt. Choose the background fabrics,
cut each piece to the correct length:
blue for sky, purple mountains,
lime-green grass. Dye materials for correct colors.
We use a free motion on the sewing machine,
applique pieces to the batting.
The model is near at hand:
her artwork hangs beside the mandolins,
guitars, banjos, keyboards, and mountain dulcimers
in the Appalachian Sound music store.
I choose the foreground fabrics:
the forest, a rabbit, a rushing stream.
There I begin to piece the art quilt
and the words of Mrs. Bunea Hedden
in my home economics class resound!
"Now girls, match the corners, use tiny stitches."
And I say to Zoe, "Am I doing this right?"
She nods and I hear it again:
"Use colors that complement each other,"
my teacher said in art appreciation.
The blood of my Cherokee fifth great-grandmother speaks:
"The Native Americans designed the morning star
on hides and in their bead work."
By stitching the fabrics together, my quilt takes shape.
Now I see:
"Mrs. Hedden was a quilt,
my art teacher was a quilt,
my Cherokee fifth great-grandmother was a quilt,
Zoe Scroggs is a quilt,
and I am a work, a craft taking shape,
a product of my Appalachian culture.

Author's Comment: In October of 2011 I took Scott Owens' workshop at the Writers Circle in Hayesville, NC. In his lesson he included examples of poems about a moment in writing. We studied Gary Snyder's poem, "Axe Handles". I was inspired by this poet to write my poem

"Art Quilting". I had interviewed an artist, Zoe Scroggs, the first week of October in her husband's music store. She showed me how to make an art quilt from fabrics. This reminded me of Snyder's poem about a father teaching his son how to make an ax handle. I incorporated in my poem others who had influenced my life, including previous teachers, and my Cherokee fifth-great grandmother. I am still in the process of developing as a person, and I am a product of my Appalachian culture because quilting is very much a part of my heritage.

Bio: I am a member of North Carolina Poetry Society, North Carolina Writers' Network and listed with "A Directory of American Poets and Fiction Writers." My work has appeared in "Wild Goose Poetry Review," "Pembroke Magazine," "Asheville Poetry Review," "Main Street Rag," "Dead Mule School of Southern Literature," "Journal of Kentucky Studies," and other journals. I received the Paul Green Award from North Carolina Society of Historians for my poetry chapbooks: PATCHWORK MEMORIES, SHEW BIRD MOUNTIAN, and SACRE FIRE.

Steve Roberts

TIME ONCE, AGAIN

The sun turns the creek-bed's sand silver,
Reflects off a silver key, half-buried.
Here is where riding bikes the summer
Before ninth grade, ready to pedal back home
Before noon to meet Dad to go buy the three-speed
We'd decided on, having asked my friend Dan
Over and over what time it was before
Realizing his wristwatch had to be going
Backward, I turned my outgrown Sears Best one-speed
Around and high-tailed it home. But
By the time I got there Dad had already left,
Returned with one of the bikes I'd said
I rather not have, but that he made me keep anyway
To teach me a lesson never to be late.
A prickly cockspur pulled from the bottom
Of my bare foot, onto my shin I wipe the muck off
The retrieved-from-the-weeds Titleist golf ball,
Its smile cut deep revealed. The rickety old footbridge
Replaced by an asphalt cart path, a red spider's
Spindly black legs mimic the red-clay mud's
Black tire-tread imprint. The ground
Underneath my parents' driveway's cracked concrete
Washed out, the golf ball bounces hollow.
Pine needles blanket the steep, ivy-laced bank,
And two trees need to come down.
Around a silver gossamer spins a silver leaf,
And the silver key warm inside my shirt pocket journeys.

Bio: Steve Roberts is a previous contributor to Wild Goose Poetry Review. He is the author of two collections of poetry and lives in Wilmington, NC

Review

by Scott Owens

IF WORDS COULD SAVE US

Anthony Abbott

Lorimer Press

ISBN: 9780982617199

The poetry of Tony Abbott has always resonated with me. That may not be a surprise. He and I are both contemporary white male Southern poets after all. Besides, the simplest criteria for good poetry is that it resonates with the reader, that it has an effect — else, why would we choose to read it?

Because Abbott's work, like the man himself, is always sincere, approachable, and carefully and intentionally crafted, I suspect I am not alone in having been moved by his previous collections, especially *The Girl in the Yellow Raincoat* and *The Man Who*. Abbott, thankfully, after all, is no solipsist of poetry, no self-infatuated post-avant, no obscurist drawing pleasure from his own cleverness. No, Abbott is about finer, more significant things, poetry with purpose, art as a mirror that helps us examine our own lives, passions, thoughts, and reactions, and deepens our experience of the world we occupy.

As such, Abbott wants to be read and understood. Fortunately for all of us, he possesses the drive and the skill with language, imagery, and observation necessary to insure that he will produce, we will read, and everyone will be richer for the experience. And in his most recent collection, *If Words Could Save Us*, there is another quality that rewards the reader, something I first glimpsed in his 2009 collection, *New & Selected Poems*, and see has come to full fruition in his new work: a quiet calm, patient maturity, reassuring balance, perspective, and tolerance that could only be called wisdom.

Abbott has long been a mentor of mine as well as numerous other younger poets who have worked with him at Davidson College, Catawba College or through the NC Writers' Network or NC Poetry Society. The poems in *If Words Could Save Us* suggest that he has accepted the mantle of a further-expanded sphere of influence, that he has deservedly become what might best be called Sage to all who are fortunate enough to read, meet, or work with him.

These poems range in subject from the innocence of youth to the reflections of age, from striving to acceptance, and at the center of it all there are the oxymoronic truths that while we know we will make mistakes, we must try anyway; that while we accept the ravages of aging as a part of the process, we must never give into them; and that while we understand the limitations of language, we continue to use it as the best tool we have for reaching into and out to the world and life and all there is and might be.

Such wisdom is conveyed throughout the length of this collection, appearing in the first poem, "The Hat," as a light-hearted lament of the opportunities lost in the innocence of youth:

I wish I had known, known how to make
a game of the stealing, the reaching,
the recovery. Had I known, I might
have kissed you in the barn, deep
in the bales of hay, where we played
our innocent games of hide-and-seek.

Similar wisdom is apparent in "At the Window" which finds in the insomnia of a twelve-year-old the quintessential human quest for answers:

He is looking
always looking
for something he
cannot name.

Later, in "The Man Who Didn't Believe In Luck," we discover a statement of purpose reminiscent of my favorite line ever from a movie: Tom Hanks' "Earn this" from "Saving Private Ryan." Abbott's version of that sentiment is "We deserve nothing. We / earn nothing, but we are loved just the same. / Nothing to be done except to give it back."

Abbott as sage is at his best in the remarkable "Knife Blade of the New Moon," where he reminds us to recognize the daily miracles of life:

He wakes one day astonished
to the burgeoning spring.
The white azaleas
.....
in full profusion
on the front lawn
Even the light green
of the coming leaves.
.....
For a long time he had forgotten
such things. He had walked
with his head down, eyes askance.
Now he stands in the rain,
mouth open
tasting the wetness.
He kneels on the willing earth
places his face
in the long spring grass

and smells earthsmell,
greensmell, Godsmell.
He looks up.

He remembers.

Of course, none of the aforementioned appreciation of Abbott's poetry is uncommon. He is widely read and frequently awarded for his work. What is, perhaps, somewhat less common in my relationship to Abbott's work is just how often his poems inspire poems of my own. It happened with *The Girl in the Yellow Raincoat*; it happened with *The Man Who*; it happened with *New & Selected Poems*; and it has happened again with *If Words Could Save Us*; in fact, it has happened five times so far with this book. Could there be any greater statement of appreciation for a poem than to say it lead me to write a poem of my own? Such is the inspiration to be found in Tony Abbott's *if words could save us*.

Review

Ami Kaye

THE BOOK OF MEN

Dorianne Laux

Norton, 2011

ISBN: 978-0-393-07955-5

In her newest collection, *The Book of Men*, Dorianne Laux solidifies her standing as one of the most gifted poets writing today. Fans of her previous work will find an even greater range in this new book as she exposes the reader to fresh terrain with her unmistakable charm and genius. The scope of the book is expansive, from its clever and intricately rendered cover art to each of the poems within, reflecting a world in which the author unravels the mystery and splendor of men, and by extension, mankind itself.

Dorianne Laux orchestrates this poetry ensemble in the key signature of the “Y” chromosome. She wields her baton expertly to produce a varied mix of voices, styles and moods. The dynamics of her music result from a fine metrical balance and precise diction. She is a poet who takes chances, one who wants to “regret nothing.” In “Antlamentation” the speaker asserts “You’ve traveled this far on the back of every mistake,” and encourages us to embrace our mistakes as an inevitable part of life without dwelling on the past. Laux is a versatile writer with a strong poetic repertoire, her skill with language and pacing, impressive. The exuberance and wit in her work facilitates intimacy between the reader and writer as in the poem “Late Night TV, where the speaker ponders the mysteries of life: “We know nothing of how it all works,/ how we end up in one bed or another,/ speak one language instead of the others, what heat draws us to our life’s work.”

Laux’s agility with the narrative is evident in poems like “Middle Name.” In this poignant piece, the speaker wonders about the woman in a black and white photograph, “the one my mother loved enough to give me her name,/ to find a camera and take this photograph, Louise, keeper of my mother’s secrets and dreams.” The finely nuanced emotion in Laux’s work causes her creations to take on a life of their own. The impact of her poems is a result of crafting which she achieves through careful, precise language, as in the line from “Staff Sgt. Metz,” where he does not sip, but slurps the coffee. In the opening poem, Laux presents a vivid snapshot of the testosterone-laden army man. “His hands are thick-veined” she tells us, “The good blood/ still flows through,/ given an extra surge/ when he slurps his latte,”

The lyrical heft of her lines clearly takes on center stage in poems such as “Dark Charms.” “Eventually the future shows up everywhere” she says of time and its ravages. The echoes of emotion weave inevitably with music in this gem. The reader is aware of a haunting beauty, a mystical awareness riding fluidly on the arc of the poem:

“We continue to speak, if only in whispers,
to something inside us that longs to be named.
We name it the past and drag it behind us,

bag like a lung filled with shadow and song,
dreams of running, the key to lost names.”

In the “The Secret of Backs” the speaker shares the thrill of ordinary moments. She creates a tension by building sensuous images and then into that silence drops a phrase that takes your breath. Her words create a compact and powerful lyric expression and pulse with libidinal energy, while meaning and content are layered and build from sentence to sentence:

“The up-swept oh my
nape of the neck. I could walk behind anyone and fall in love.”

In “Late-Night TV,” Laux draws an arresting image by combining the violence of birth with the tenderness of parental love:

“What cup of love poured him into this world?
Did his mother touch her lips
to his womb-battered crown
and inhale his scent?”

Some of the poems such as “The Rising” reverberate with power. There is something palpable about the poem, its raw urgency and warmth is compelling. We can feel the beating heart of this poem as the mare struggles to give birth, we can see the action, pitch and roll. We are with her on this rollercoaster of pain and glory—the intensity of this poem builds with its motion, gait, and rhythm:

“and by a willful rump and switch of tail hauled up,
flank and fetlock, her beastly burden, seized
and rolled and wrenched and winched the wave...”

Perhaps the signature virtue of Laux’s writing is integrity; we know she says what she means. That is why she connects with readers so easily. Laux has always been an accessible poet whose poems blend sensuality with candor. She writes those poems in a straightforward manner that belies the complexity of human experience. Equally apparent is her ability to paint vivid images that draw the reader in. You would think a poet who has published a book entitled Facts About the Moon would be fresh out of “moon” visuals, but that is clearly not the case:

“Moon a manhole cover sunk in the boulevard
of night, monocle on a chain, well of light,
a frozen pond lifted and thrown like a discus
onto the sky.”

In the delightful, unexpected poem “Lighter,” the speaker tells us to be free spirits occasionally, to step out of the self-imposed boxes we’ve made. The poem speaks of living and taking chances, for trying out something we haven’t done, even if it means skirting the danger line. “Steal something worthless, / something small, every once in a while.” The poem progresses through a series of possibilities to finally pronounce:

“Sit on a stone bench and dig deep for it,
touch your thumb to the greased metal wheel.
Call it a gift from the gods of fire.
Call it your due.”

Laux excels as a narrative poet. Her themes are rooted in the twenty-first century. It is the here and now on which the poet focuses. She portrays the uneven, complex human condition, the business of our everyday lives. Her attention to detail creates an atmosphere that is highly effective. In “Homicide Detective: A Film Noir,” she is able to sharpen our focus by using a variety of elements, a syncopated enjambment among others, to bring a brittle darkness to the poem, deepening its ambiance:

“We got loose ends, we got
dead ends, we got split ends,
hair in the drains, fingerprints
on glass. This is where I stand,
my hat glittery with rain,
casting my restless shadow.”

Another poem where her superbly chosen words bond with the reader’s imagination to create tangential shifts within the theme is “A Short History of the Apple.” This poem, rich in illusion as she speaks of the “winter banana,” and where mythical and historical figures like Eve, Newton and Snow White make a cameo appearance, is delectable, sumptuous. Further in the book, from “To Kiss Frank...” she speaks of death’s suddenness, and how the awareness of death’s inevitability can make each moment infinitely precious:

“That’s how it is with death.
Those you love come at you like lightning,
crackle for an instant—so kissable—
and then lips and all, they’re gone.”

Laux is a master of aural sensation. Whereas in poems like “The Rising” one hears obvious rhythms, “Monks in the Grande Chartreuse” is infused with a reverent quietude; the air here is still and sacred. Laux uses precise imagery and well placed punctuation to emphasize the quiet and sparseness of the atmosphere. Not only is this the art, but the craft of writing. As “they chant/ with closed eyes” and eat their meager soup:

“Nothing enters or leaves this quiet.
No bird. No squirrel. Cold white,
every branch still.”

Aside from lyricism and musical structure, poetry is carried through imagery. Laux, with the clarity of a keen poetic intelligence, has a knack for striking just the right note, setting the scene, and creating atmosphere with a few, well-chosen words, “I walked home slow under Orion, his starry belt/heavy beneath the cold, carved moon.”

"Mine Own Phil Levine" shows her literary inheritance, an even deeper source of inspiration to endow the future. Every writer can relate to the lines below:

"He said If you don't write, it won't
Get written. No tricks. No magic
About it. He gave me his gold pen
He said What's mine is yours."

Upon reading this book, Geoffrey Chaucer springs to mind. The same kind of sly portraiture, tongue-in-cheek humor and the laser, spot-on observations in his Canterbury Tales characterize Laux's deft caricatures. We experience Mick Jagger "yowling with his rubber mouth," Superman reading Fortune with Lois on the cover as he smokes pot, and Staff Sgt. Metz downing his java while we zoom down:

"...a narrow darkness spiraling deep inside his head
toward the place of dreaming..."

Laux encompasses those dreams and hopes. She welcomes dreams but refrains from romanticizing them, instead, she writes poems in a grounded reality that brim over with life. She closes the collection with a stellar piece "Roots." The sensuousness and empathy of "Who among us/ wouldn't give a year or more to lean against/the wind and gaze down into the void?" demonstrates her rapport with humanity at large. Women are not left out of the equation as she writes about them with insight and compelling depth. Laux is an accomplished story teller who does not believe in predetermined boundaries but rather in finding pathways that have a timeless relevance. Her beautiful layered and honest language continues to yield surprises, and in a well-modulated, pitch perfect voice, she show us the magic a master poet can conjure with a scattering of words. She says in "Late-Night TV," "Somewhere in the universe is a palace/where each of us is imprinted with a map." In The Book of Men, Dorianne locks her unerring GPS on our psyches and homes in to all we share together as humans.

Bio:

Ami Kaye is the author of What Hands Can Hold, and the forthcoming Singer of the Ragas. Ami's poems, reviews and articles have appeared in various publications including Cartier Street Review, Peony Moon, The Argotist Online, Luciole Press, Diode Poetry Journal and Scottish Poetry Review. Her work was nominated for the James B. Baker award, and included in the Soul Feathers anthology from Indigo Dreams Publishing and the Rising in Hope anthology from Tinfoildresses. Ami Kaye publishes Pirene's Fountain, and is the editor of the anthology Sunrise from Blue Thunder, a Pirene's Fountain project for the Japan 2011 disaster relief fund.

Review

by Tim Peeler

PLAYING DEAD

Shelby Stephenson

Finishing Line Press, 2011

ISBN: 9781599248776

Shelby Stephenson has long been one of North Carolina's finest poets. And though he has spent a lifetime as a university professor, literary magazine editor, and writer, playing and singing traditional country and bluegrass music is perhaps his greatest love. Several years ago, I spent a lucky afternoon at the Stephenson home place where he, his brothers, his wife Linda and several neighbors performed world class renditions of traditional American songs on the front porch of the plank house where the boys were raised. The huge yard was wet at the beginning of the afternoon, but the sun (and perhaps the music) made quick work of drying it while emphasizing the beauty and lushness of the "place" that pervades if not haunts this volume of poetry as well as most of Stephenson's work.

Yet even as I watched Shelby on that sunny day, his head thrown back in the throes of a Hank Williams lyric, exultant in the exclusive company of his overachieving brothers, I could not help but sense the otherness, and the insecurities that have driven him and given voice to such outsider characters as the protagonist of *Playing Dead* and recently, the slave girl, July in *Family Matters*.

One cannot help but read the poet, especially the underappreciated variety, into the character of the possum, *Playing Dead*. Ever since Pound dubbed Eliot with the moniker, poets have been fascinated with this curious nocturnal creature. As Robert Morgan notes in his jacket blurb, in *Playing Dead*, there are echoes of Appalachian poet, Jim Wayne Miller, and Stephenson has himself employed this narrator as device in a previous volume, the simply titled *Possum*. In fact, *Playing Dead* could easily be seen as an extension of the prior work, and as the author's attempt to further explore much of the same territory; hence "Possum Lovecall" might now be "Playing Dead's Love Song," just as Big Hunter who haunted the first volume haunts this one as well.

Right away *Playing Dead* addresses the most important question that faces man, that of identity: "Who am I inching down this bark of lichens,/ A rattle to the creek's edge,/ Washing my feet to creep no more." In the same poem, "Playing Dead Ponders His Epic," the narrator, now nearing the end of his life, answers his own question as he finally understands his role in Nature's bigger picture,

The epics all written, the heroes dead or killed in imitation of perils
Carvings cannot depict, since my first father, O Cliff-face,
Still crawls through love's knot, leaving a surfeit of his future everywhere.

In a country where poets are valued at about the same level as rodents, it would seem appropriate that Stephenson's choice as a mouthpiece is a seemingly worthless nocturnal creature, though as we discover, "North America's only marsupial." His naming it, Playing Dead, a survival technique, holds a significance which would not be lost on most career minor American poets, or artists for that matter. Just let me do my work and leave me alone, he seems to say. The beauty in these poems, however, is what Stephenson achieves by juxtaposing the idea of the lowly creature with the gorgeous lyric commentaries that he produces on subjects ranging from politics to religion. From "PD Contemplates Religion":

'Ah,' said Playing Dead. 'Could I be chosen?'
Big Hunter, burnt out with creating a game-plan, nodded.
'Is this a sign?' Asked Playing Dead, 'How will I know?'
Big Hunter's arm was the tree in which Playing Dead made his den.
'Wake up,' said Playing Dead, 'Let's talk turkey.'
Big Hunter turned on his side, like Orion with no ears.

Topical or not, many of the poems soar because of Stephenson's ability to bring his musical acumen to the poetic line. Even the ones with shorter lines are enhanced by their rhythmic sense:

I climbed a bough of air
from a limb
that was swinging through clouds
drawing a big picture from the sun
O charming shawl I said
and wearing it on my shoulders
took it for my den
O cozy corner I said
and chewed on a blackgum twig
The sap running down my chin
and I kicked my calves
yes I said
this is it
from "In His Own Voice Once More PD Takes the Stand."

The marsupial narrator not only grants Stephenson the freedom to comment openly on controversial subjects, but it also grants him a license to playfully experiment with form and tone. The volume includes faux-recipes such as "Hunters and Taters," hip-hop rhythms and rhymes, and a long poem consisting of twenty-five couplets.

These sad and wonderful poems will not disappoint the fans of well-wrought poetry. I leave you with this musical image from "Playing Dead's Universe" because it reminds me of the afternoon I spent at the Stephenson farm:

He improvised a vehicle and took to the road, the moon light on his shoulder.
A lightning strike danced him beyond his lineage
And he became a star, singing with his guitar,
Pooching out his lips to beat the band.
Dust snuffed out his melody; yellow drags of smoke rose from his heels.

Review

by Scott Owens

A LITTLE IN LOVE A LOT

Paul Hostovsky

Main Street Rag, 2011

ISBN: 9781599483030

I think anyone who doesn't love Paul Hostovsky must not know Paul Hostovsky. I said once that "he always finds a way to make me happy." Having just read his third book of poems, *A Little in Love a Lot*, that statement remains every bit as true as it was when I first said it. What makes me happy in this book is the way his poems remind me of all the loves I've had — brief ones, long ones, foolish ones, serious ones, deep ones, simple lusty ones — and how in the end all of these loves, even the failed ones, are part of the same love, the human love for life, for human life, an appreciation of the familiar, of sharing, of recognizing the possibilities of joy and the never-ending quest to attain it.

One of the qualities that makes reading Hostovsky's poems so enjoyable is the lack of pretension. Mostly what we find here is just honest, entertaining poetry about things we've all thought but never had the wisdom, passion, chutzpah, or facility with language to put into words. One of my favorites, "The Debate at Duffy's," illustrates this point well:

She said that sex was a yearning of the soul.
He said it was a very compelling argument
of the body, a compulsion. She said it was
a spiritual compulsion. He said it was nothing
if not carnal, carni, meat. This conversation
took place in a bar. The background music was
so loud it was in the foreground. The bodies
on the dance floor were moving in ways that
would interest even the dead if they could only
remember how to live. There was a baseball game
playing on television. On the table were two
empty glasses, and the bottle's green phallus
which she took in her hand and pulled toward her,
pulling him toward her as she poured them both
another drink. he drank deeply, felt the spirit
filling his cup. Then he looked into her eyes and saw
that she was beautiful, sexy, and at the bottom
of the 9th, suddenly, surprisingly, irrevocably, right.

Not only is the language and imagery of these poems smooth and approachable, but there is a decided absence of unnecessarily complex academic language and obtuse imagery. Nor is there excessive allusiveness. It is almost as if (Gasp!) Hostovsky wants to be understood.

What allusiveness there is exists on a level where it doesn't bring distracting attention (Hey! Look how clever I am!) to itself. Rather, it is like a subtle sauce added to an already delectable dessert, not entirely necessary to enjoy the experience, but a deepening and enriching element for those with a more discriminating palette. Such is the case in "The Affair in the Office," where the reader need not recognize the echo of Roethke's "Dolor" in the line, "full of the inexorable sadness / of cubicles" to enjoy both the communal gloom of office life and the shared guilty pleasures of gossip and forbidden love "among the ruins."

Perhaps the quality that most endears Hostovsky's work to the reader is that he more than any other poet I've read in the past decade truly "gets" the necessary duality of human existence. He is neither glib nor morose. He takes life seriously but simultaneously recognizes the near absurdity of it all. He wants things his way but readily laughs at himself and moves ahead when he doesn't get it. The self-mocking tone in the opening lines of "Battling the Wind and Everything Else" show his ability to exist within this duality of gravity and levity:

My neighbor — the one with the flagpole
and the flag, and the pickup truck
and the patriotic bumper sticker and the perfect
lawn, and the leaf-blower with the power pack

As this poem about contentious neighbors continues to unfold, one can't help but recall the neighbors in Frost's "Mending Wall" as well as Frost's similar ability to poke fun at himself while criticizing others. Even the title of this collection tells us the speaker of these poems is a man who not only reads Hikmet ("you must live with great seriousness / like a squirrel, for example") but knows how, and can help us learn how, to live those lines.

Usually, when I read a writer as remarkable as Paul Hostovsky, I can't help but dislike them a little. Jealousy, envy, fear of my own inadequacy combine to create an irrepressible sliver of animosity towards them. However, something about Hostovsky's grace with language, willing self-effacement, charitable spirit, and clear grasp of the paradox of human life and the negative capability necessary for the daily survival of it make even the most illogical ill-feelings towards him almost impossible. "Almost," because any writer reading A Little in Love a Lot will experience some jealousy, will wish at least a little that they had managed to write these poems first.

Review

by Scott Owens

AN INNOCENT IN THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD

Joanna Catherine Scott with John Lee Conaway

Main Street Rag, 2011

ISBN: 9781599483184

Joanna Catherine Scott possesses a certainty that few of us can readily share. She knows that John Lee Conaway, a NC man who spent 16 years on Death Row following a double murder conviction before recently being granted a new trial which he still awaits, is innocent. She knows this and she knows Conaway with such conviction that she has legally adopted Conaway as her own son. As with all knowledge, hers is a knowledge born of belief, a belief the NC criminal justice system does not currently share.

In Scott's amazing new collection of poems, *An Innocent in the House of the Dead*, she invites the reader into the experience of her coming to belief and peripherally into the experience of John Lee Conaway's development into accused, prisoner, condemned, and loved one. No one else could have written this book, and regardless of one's belief, no one should forgo the opportunity this book offers to share in the depth of emotion conjured by the very real and very human circumstances recorded here.

One of the charges often leveled at poetry today is that it is irrelevant, that it is written only for academes and other poets, that it is neither concerned with nor can play any role in the real world of the vast majority of people. Surely, *An Innocent in the House of the Dead* clearly and strongly refutes that claim. What could be more relevant to all of us than an examination of our criminal justice system through which our communal expectations are enforced and our own standards of behavior and ethics are tested? When not reminding us of the humanity of those involved in the incidents of Conaway's life and her own progress towards belief, Scott's poetry takes on a more activist stance, presenting a strong indictment of the cruelty, unfairness, and unreliability of a racist justice system, the institution of capital punishment, and a corrections industry centered on the issue of profit.

More than relevant, these poems are also accessible, but they go beyond mere accessibility as well. Due to their relevance, immediacy, and reality, as well as to the skill with which Scott has crafted these poems, they practically leap from the page into one's heart and mind. They resonate with our appreciation of life and fairness and freedom and love, and with our discomfort with the standards of justice. They are as real as our realest moments. They will not leave us alone; they are both relevant and impactful.

I offer no excerpts from Joanna Catherine Scott's *An Innocent in the House of the Dead* because the vitality of the book, the realness of the story it tells, would make any excerpting a form of mutilation. This is a book that needs to be read whole, in its entirety. Relevant, accessible, important and powerful — Joanna Catherine Scott's *An Innocent in the House of the Dead* is poetry that will make a difference, but only if it is read.

Review

by Scott Owens

POSTSCRIPTS TO THE DEAD

Pris Campbell

MiPOesias, 2011

Pris Campbell's new collection of poems, *Postscripts to the Dead*, is largely a book about loss, about the loss of friends and lovers, relatives and icons, certainly, but also about the loss of a dream, of a way of life, of a belief. Ultimately, these poems form an elegy to an America we used to know, an America before betrayal, betrayal of our bodies, of leadership, and of significance, an America before post-structuralism encouraged the wholesale abandonment of integrity and turned everything to surface and sensationalism.

Don't think, however, that this is the common pining for illusory better days one might encounter among sentimentalists. Despite the personal ravages of loss, Campbell participates in no romanticized Golden Age fantasies, for in the America she mourns there is infidelity and ambition, gluttony and grief, sickness and folly, but there is also innocence, an absence of malice, and a belief that things will work out, that there is, after all, permanence and meaning and good intentions.

Thus, in these poems, we find Elvis "Lost in Graceland," unable to comprehend that everything, even the sanctuaries of love, home and memory, can be lost to the insatiable lust for celebrity:

Elvis wanders through Graceland,
wonders why the rooms are roped off,
why strange women in Elvis tees,
scarves over their curlers, walk
through his house weeping.

.....

He wonders where Priscilla is,
why Lisa Marie looks right through him

.....

Most of his sequins have fallen.
They leave a starry trail
to trace and retrace each night but
he trembles when a new one tumbles.
If they're gone before the Colonel returns,
how will he find his way?

Gone is the land of opportunity where a boy can rise up from nothing and become a king. Gone is the land of dreams where everyone believes they have a chance to kiss Paul Newman ("Blue Eyes in my Dream"). Gone is the land of heroes. Instead, we find "Hemingway's Ghost" revisiting a changed Key West where "Ten plump older men, bearded like him," but

who “have never run / with the bulls, hooked marlin, / bedded exotic women,” “stand on the bar” so that “one of them will be him tonight.” Gone is integrity and dignity such that we encounter Marilyn Monroe (“M.M.”) regretting not only that “Jack and Bobby only wanted / the sex vamp, notches in their belts, / their face in her cleavage” but also that “the hullabaloo [may not] even outsell stories / about Charlie Sheen and Justin Beiber.”

On a more personal level, in poems like “Consolation,” we also encounter the poet herself, painfully aware of what she has lost to her own body’s betrayal:

You’ve only known me
with my body slain and
curled deep into soft spaces

.....

You’ve only seen me with my brain
in under-drive, thoughts short-circuited.

And in poems like “My Father’s Many Funerals” and “Undertow,” we see the emptiness left by the loss of loved ones: “She slipped quietly into that undertow / and I was left alone on the beach, a girl again, / weeping.”

Through a breadth of imagery that ranges from the personal to the cultural, Priz Campbell helps the reader begin to understand that it is not simply our losses that have exacted a heavy toll on our way of life but also our failure to meaningfully fill the vacuums left in the wake of such loss. Thus, these poems of unrecovered loss become a collective image of a waning personal, cultural, and political life, an idea reflected in the presence of a waning crescent moon at the top of each page of the book.

Review

by Nancy Posey

SPILL

Malaika King Albrecht

Main Street Rag, 2011

ISBN: 978-1-59948-320-7

The poems in Malaika King Albrecht's new collection *Spill* pay homage—or at least attention—to all the elements—the earth in the soil where wildflowers grow in “Ode to Weeds,” the wind giving breath or lifting “feather-light ashes” or a flock of starlings before they are thrown to the ground, fire of hot coals or fireflies in “Lucifer Is Another Name for Venus,” but throughout this collection, the balance shifts toward water, as the title implies.

In two sections entitled “Tributaries and Rapids” and “Waterfall and Ocean,” her poems are literally awash in images as tangible as the Mississippi overflowing her banks in New Orleans, leading the speaker in “Kneel” to walk down Bourbon Street, “[wading] farther down the slant of cement into deeper water [as] A riverboat's wake washes [her] skinned knees.” In her opening poem, “We Can't Step into the Same River Twice (New Orleans, 2005)” Albrecht flashes TV images of the city's “filthy, slow moving water / [as] a man and a pregnant woman paddle an air mattress / with brooms to anyplace else.”

Together, though, the poems take the watery images to a metaphorical level, giving glimpses sometimes harsh, sometimes, tender, sometimes wry, into the all-consuming cycle of falling into, facing, and overcoming addiction. The speaker takes the reader along on the journey in which swimming becomes the controlling metaphor, first in the “Swimming Lesson,” as a child witnesses her mother drowning mice—“five hairless babies, explaining to her daughter, “It's hot outside. / Mice enjoy a swim. In “To the Swimmer,” a sensuous, dangerous poem, during a late night drunker swim, the speaker wonders, “Who needs to be out of the water to breathe? At last in “Survival 101”, “tossed upside down in the surf / unable to discern which way is up” finding an escape, “the natural swimmer . . . follows the bubbles to the surface.”

Through the poems, Albrecht pieces together fragments of a story of pain and addiction, of a mother's failure to love, of risk and loss and survival through a voice darkly comic at times—a go-go dancer, a stand-up comic whose clever, ironic word play serves as a hedge against her present reality, quipping, “Animals may be our friends but they won't take us to the airport” or lamenting in “Dear Holy Fool, “i'm dying up here (insert nervous laugh track.)”

Albrecht's readers are voyeurs escorted into the world of addiction, HIV, nooses, and needles, told from bar stools and park benches, but eventually from an “orange chair smelling of singed hair” in rehab at Serenity Lodge, surrounded by “angels with tongues / like flaming swords.” The poems in *spill* over in torrents, at times threatening, uplifting, cleansing, but never Albrecht never leaves the reader untouched.

Review

by Helen Losse

IN THE PALMS OF ANGELS

Terri Kirby Erickson

Press 53, 2011

ISBN: 9781935708278

In her third book, *In the Palms of Angels*, Terri Kirby Erickson uses accessible language to write about everyday subjects. Her poems, however, are in no way clichéd, and she does not back away from difficult subjects. She's a southern poet who writes tales about her extended family and unique variations on "southern tales [and characterizations]—folk myths of the Great Smokies," as Ron Powers, wrote in the "Introduction." Like others, Erickson writes about what she sees. She is a watcher of people.

Although the poems cover light and common-place, as well as heavy, serious subjects, Erickson maintains a positive tone that implies hope no matter what she writes about. In the first poem, "Topsail Beach," a flock of gulls cry, "Joy, // joy, joy," and in the final poem, "At the Drive-In," "the old man gaz[es] up at [the stars], smiling." The stars become what the gulls were—"pinpoints of light." Light symbolizes joy, and that's Erickson's way of looking at life. She finds joy everywhere. Erickson, a keen observer of life, brings to her poems a great empathy for humanity.

In "At the Nursing Home," a man sits in a wheelchair,

... smiling,

as if he'd drawn the curtains

...and the woman

he loves [is] holding a wine glass, laughing.

"Empathy" (for Felicia) contains the lines:

Close as two women crooning into the same
microphone, they sing their sorrows
to one another in a grocery store parking lot,

....

sharing sadness like a loaf of warm bread—
eyes luminous as pearls formed by her friend's

suffering.

In "After the Diagnosis," a woman "wonders what she will feel / when her breasts are gone, [knowing s]he was happy / once, without them"; in "Depression," a young mother "sees nothing but // the dull brown jar where she spend her days alone"; and in "Cling Peaches," a poem inspired by observation in her work as a Cancer Center volunteer, she deals with the

emotions of loss. On the day following the one where a spouse almost died, the “wife” or narrator says:

I want to tie you
To the bedrails, stand guard....

Instead, I feed you cling peaches....

But Erickson writes on a lighter note, too. Her fascination is with people from all walks of life and in every kind of circumstance. In “Clovis McBride” she pens a clever depiction of gluttony, as she shows a feisty old woman observing people on bar stools, “getting bigger with every pancake // they shoved into their craws.”

And in “Road Crew,” readers see an ordinary lunch-break made new with metaphor.

...[T]he road crew eat their lunch...
around this cool patch of earth like cowboys
vying for the best spot beside a campfire

...

Like irises soaking up rainwater,
these blue-jean clad laborers quench their thirst...

A man shares an apple with his granddaughter (“Granny Smith Apple”). A woman gives her mother a sponge bath (“Sponge Bath”). A tired child falls asleep on the floor, while his mother talks on the phone (“Woman on the Phone”). The boy cannot leave her side, even in sleep. As a small child, he is “a sunflower,” and his mother is “his only source of light.”

And then there is the matter of faith, which is the actual source of hope and light in Erickson’s verse. Faith is also where the titular angels fit in. In the changing light of the stained glass windows, a man “was as blue as the lapis robes of saints [or] a rosy pink, / as if he were a cherub (“Hallelujah.”) In “Springtime In Beaufort,” the reader encounters a “boat / named Angel Ray.” And in “Wayfarer,” Erickson gives readers the description of a man who seems like:

[one] you’d see walking down a long
stretch of road,

...

[who] will soon find home, that place
more sacred than communion wafers
nestled in the palms
of angels.

Just an ordinary man going through life—on his way home, which seems to him like heaven. But with that final clause, Terri Kirby Erickson hits the high note. She has written a few lines other poets envy. Her subjects are ordinary and her language accessible, but she knows how to write metaphors and make language soar in the right places, so that each character or

situation becomes unique. Erickson's other books were good, but her poetry improves with each one. In the Palms of Angels by Terri Kirby Erickson is a book both lovers of poetry and those new to reading it should consider.