

WILD GOOSE POETRY REVIEW
FALL 2013

This is a big issue of Wild Goose Poetry Review. Big because it has more poems than I usually select. Big because of the remarkable essay on contemporary poetic theory by Paul Nelson. Big because of Harry Youtt's equally remarkable critical essay on Seamus Heaney's Nobel Prize lecture. And big because of the quality and range of the poetry it contains. As always, I have manipulated the order of the poems to create what I hope you will find to be some interesting juxtapositions. As always, the journal features a mix of new and familiar voices. And as always the reviews will broaden and deepen your experience of poetry. But I think I may have taken more chances this time than I typically do. I hope those chances, along with the essays and reviews, stimulate a broad and meaningful discussion of these poems and of poetry in general. I hope you'll join the discussion by leaving meaningful comments for the authors and readers to consider and enjoy.

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Kelly DeMaegd
SHAPING THE UNIVERSE

In the beginning the creator
assembles his tools: pliers, hammer,
his own callused hands. Grunts an immense
sheet of tin onto his workbench,
begins to sketch. Genius of design,
all elements are related,

interdependent. Deft and sure,
the creator imagines order,
meaning, knows that if a connection
is broken, a tree burns, hills erode,
rivers flood, cattle drown, children starve.
Once the plan is complete, he cuts,

snips, folds until the universe
emerges, elaborate, fragile,
whimsical. Surveying his work,
the creator brushes dust to the ground,
bows his head, whispers a blessing,
bestows dominion. And it was so.

Author's Comment: This is an ekphrastic poem inspired by the metal sculptures of Larry Heath. Heath sketches, cuts and folds a flat sheet of tin until an entire scene emerges. Viewing his work, I imagined a more universal Creation story.

Kelly DeMaegd
ASSONANCE

You can wish in one hand, spit
in the other, see which one fills
up first. This was her stock reply,

usually in response to my brother's
request for a tree house, speed boat,
snowmobile. Her eyes focused

on the page of a Perry Mason
mystery, cup of coffee in hand;
wisdom buried in cliché.

I listened closely to her voice;
loved the repetition of sound
in the words wish, spit, fills.

Author's Comment: When I was a kid, I loved to hear people talk. I counted syllables, listened to the timing and rhythm of speech and admired words that rhymed. All this before I discovered my love of poetry!

Bio: Kelly DeMaegd is a Pushcart-nominated poet living in Sherrills Ford, NC. She has been published in *Wild Goose Poetry Review*, *Vox Poetica* and *Your Daily Poem*. She is also a regular contributor to Art of Poetry at the Hickory Museum of Art.

Ellae Lawton

EXISTENTIAL CRISIS AT AGE SIX

When Mother double-parked in Waukegan
and went to renew her driver's license
I could read the sign FISH down the hill
just before the dark blue of the Big Lake
stretched out farther than I could see.
I clutched the hanger strap of the gray
pre-war Plymouth as hard as I could,
hoping if I held tight it might not roll.
Watching the whitecaps churning in,
I wondered—if it rolled me down, down,
plunged me into the lake, would a big
fish come and swallow me like Jonah
in the story my grandmother told? Did
God want me to do something I hadn't?
Did I forget to say prayers last night?
Forget to pick up my crayons and paper
dolls? Did He hear me call Sharry
a dummy? What if my mother came back
and the car was gone and me with it,
how would she get home? And
what would she tell my dog?

Ellae Lawton

FOR MALALA, ELIZABETH, ASHLEY, THE CLEVELAND THREE, AND ALL THE
OTHER GALS WHO WILL ASCEND TO THE REAL PARADISE SOME DAY

We're told men who throw bombs,
wear bombs, blow God's people
into agonizing pieces
believe they'll go to a paradise
and enjoy a host of virgins.

It seems rather adolescent,
this equating paradise with sex,
reducing God's high habitation
to a flat world of mattresses
like some frat-house basement.
Men with gun-courage who
want to subjugate women
can't think above the waist.
They shot Malala in the head
to prevent her learning more
because she can. They want her
to be a dumb virgin in paradise.
At least they didn't rape her
to gain their elysium. Rape's
a less spectacular way
to shoot a female in the head;
just ask Elizabeth Smart
and a host of other ex-virgins
taken far from paradise.

A phoenix rising from her ashes
shines far brighter than a bomb,
ignites more people than a bomb
but with healing light, not harm—

Herbert Woodward Martin
AFTER THE SHOOTING

I am not sure where the conversation began, but I do know that a reporter for a national news organization thoughtfully wrote: *The grandfather began the evening prayers with: We should remember the pain the killer's family must now live with. We all have absorbed some portion of their pain into our presence. It was not a portion of the harvest we expected to gather today. But it is a part nevertheless. Still we must hold steady to forgive because it what our Heavenly Father commanded and what He would have us do. We must be innocent in our accepting of the pain others perpetuate upon us. We must be cognizant of our own guilt, in this matter just as the Second thief was in realizing his own failure.* His words rolled steadily from his heart and he uttered them from his mouth like the turning of the wheels on their buggy as it was often to take them into town. He further said: *We will not allow this particular pain to deprive us of our dignity as we grieve this erasure. We will meet this horror face to face and it will serve us as an honorable people.* He said all of this to the rapt attention of the children while his oldest daughter made careful preparation with her tears. Her duty had brought her to this burial point of saying farewell to her first and third daughters. She would wrap them in white winding cloth as the community required. She would take a memento of hair from each offspring. There would be no photographs left to testify that they were ever alive. She would keep the hair in a locket around her neck. This would be her only private remembrance. She would kiss each sterile face goodbye. Her husband would make two graves as duty required even though the earth resisted each stroke of his shovel. So grandfather, daughter, mother, father, husband and wife each turned according to the wheels of duty. After the preparations were all accomplished, the minutes, hours, days and months would turn themselves into years of snow. Nothing of this day would be left the reporter wrote. An eradicating whiteness would infect even the memory.

Bio: Herbert Woodward Martin's newest collection is titled *On The Flyleaf* published by Bottom Dog Press in Huron Ohio. He has taught for three decades at The University of Dayton and was that institution's Poet-In-Residence. He is retired now and spends his time writing, revising and giving readings of his work and that of Paul Laurence Dunbar. His selected poems is titled *Inscribing My Name*.

Donna Engel
CONVERSATIONS WITH ISAAC

You see, I did understand –
it happens all the time. One day
a beautiful child disappears from camp
and no one says a word
until the rains come, and only then
will the women
let themselves weep.

When he told me “God
will provide the sacrifice,” I knew
the jig was up – it’s always somebody’s blood,
and he wouldn’t meet Mother’s eyes
when we left, fiddling with his belt
and dropping the firewood
three times.

And then the long hot questioning walk,
the binding and rough cloth blindfold,
terror whetting my lips, and yellow spit
gagging my throat, my heart already cut
by betrayal, ribs crushed by the long glimpse
into what remained of my empty future
clenching my jaw on the hard cold stone,
the only lover’s kiss I would ever know
lying there, waiting for death.

You know the rest of the story,
he being as surprised as I
by the shocking hand of deliverance –
and it should be happily-ever-after
except he cannot look me in the eyes
for the shame of what almost came to pass.

Now he disappears off to reverie
in the romantic clutches of a new god
who promised him generations and stars,
while I am left not knowing who I am,
truly saved or thoroughly damned –
a pivotal character
living on the dividing line
between old and new ways.

Here's the secret: It is impossible
to love him anymore, god or no,
because he will forever be the hand
behind the knife, and I do not know
next time
if he will heed the angel sent
to save me.

Donna Engel
FIGURES OF SPEECH

The strength of my feeling
takes me aback – I soldier you
to the nines, marching
to the beat of a different
drummer, because money
doesn't grow on trees, you know,
and I'll take my apples
wherever I can lay my hands on them.
A penny saved
is one you'll never have to earn
again, those golden coins of hours
where I linger, in mi casa su casa,
a miser's hoard, Midas touch
turning my dross
into silver. Well hush
my mouth, cantankerous willful child
of tongue – don't you know
you're not supposed to speak
unless spoken to? And I
was supposed to be seen and not
heard, until I walked in beauty,
like the rose opening
under the raining
cats and dogs, the lush
cuddly waterfall of your
love.

Bio: Donna Engel is a poet and pianist who lives in Jordan , Minnesota with her husband and two teenage children. She has a BA in English from the University of Minnesota . Her first publication appeared in the Spring 2013 issue of *Wild Goose Review*.

Larry Schug
AN ACCORDION, I THINK
(a poem of privilege on a good day)

I've got all the sunrise my eyes can gather.
Every time I need a breath of air,
it's there;
and every time I need to exhale a stale breath
I just do it
and there's a place for it to go.
When I am thirsty, there is water,
all manner and mixture of foods for when I hunger;
black-eyed susans, blue-eyed grass
swaying in a puff of wind
when nothing else will soothe me.
I hear you downstairs;
you don't sing or shuffle your feet,
but I hear music,
an accordion, I think.

Larry Schug

A SPECULATION ON SPIDERS

A great spider spins an invisible thread,
weaves an invisible web,
ties together every thing, every where, every when.
No one knows the entirety of this web,
where it hangs, what lies between its threads.
We perceive ourselves existing
in one time, in one place, on one strand,
but if we pay attention we feel a vibration,
music in the humming string to which we cling.
Some seek the spider,
some hide from her,
but no one can escape this web,
these shining, singing, silver strands.

Mike James
MY FATHER COULD

tell stories
so miraculous
their veracity
could not
be trusted
but so funny
so goddamn
funny
you thought
for a clear
second
the world was
that place
where
happiness
came easy—
stayed—
you forgot
holding joy
longer
than a
moment
is as difficult
as licking
honey
off a rusty
razor blade

Bio: Mike James was born and raised in rural South Carolina. After many years in various parts of the country, he now makes his home in Douglasville, GA, with his wife and five children. Mike's work has been published in more than a hundred magazines throughout the country. His sixth book, *Past Due Notices: Poems 1991-2011*, was published last year by Main Street Rag. His next book, *Elegy in Reverse*, will be published next year by Kelsay Books.

Tim Peeler
OLD MAN POEMS

*I was running a joint
When I was forty-five,
Sipping whiskey all evening,
Tending the bar
And talking to the drunks,
And what I said
Began to make sense to me
So that I soon thought that
My intelligence might be more
Than my job required,
That I might be too good
For what I was doing.
Next thing you know,
I started to resent
The time I spent
In the service of other drunks,
And I neglected them
Or talked down to them
Or only thought of them
As sounding boards
For my brilliant ideas
Till one night, a sailor
In town on leave
Had enough of my opinions
And punched me hard
In the face
And I crumpled like a spider
In the floor behind the bar.
When I was forty-five
I ran a joint
Out by the river.
It was the year that I got smart.*

Tim Peeler
OLD MAN POEMS

I'd lay my pipe on the table beside the chair
And get on the exercise bike
That had belonged to one of the Clydes.
It was the best thing for the cancer,
The doctor told me. After a while
I could go five miles, sometimes
Twice in one day, and I'd watch
A Braves game while I pedaled
Or listen to music on the headphones
Cause otherwise my wife'd try to talk
And a man with cancer hasn't got time
To talk while he's riding a bicycle
That is taking him nowhere.

Julianne Palumbo

LIKE OLD MEN IN MUSTY GREY OVERCOATS

they shuffle across the road
in front of me.

But, when they reach
the snow-covered curb, they stop,

as if it isn't what they expected,
as if it isn't what they want it to be.

Now, they turn around and cross back over,
their double chins flapping,

their coats fluttering,
their cataracts staring.

Who cares they came from snowy woods,
down a bank as deep as this one.

One geezer stands center, like a crossing guard,
flailing his wings and craning his neck

and honking at any car
that dares to move.

They try again,
But each time their skinny legs meet the snow,

they turn around, squawking about the way things were,
about the way things still should be.

Author's Comment: I was driving on a back road near my home in Rhode Island when a small rafter of turkeys crossed in front of me. It was a winter day, and there was much snow on the ground. The turkeys had come through the snowy woods on one side of the road but appeared bewildered and angry when they tried to climb the snowy curb on the other. One turkey stood in the road, stopping the cars until the rest had made it over the curb. I sat for quite a few minutes feeling thankful for this skit from nature.

Bio: A writer of short stories, poetry, and young adult novels, Julianne Palumbo's poetry and short stories have been published in *The MacGuffin*, *The Listening Eye*, *Poetry East* (forthcoming), *Ibbetson Street Press*, and others. Her poetry chapbook, *Into Your Light*, was recently released by Flutter Press.

Douglas Anne McHargue
SUGAR

I get in my car,
day after Christmas
budget blown
but leaving Happy Dollar,
woman parked
by the drink machine,
Oh ma'am
Do you have a dollar.
She's not young,
the man beside her
old, in a suit
maybe can't walk
so I go over
they need a soda
and do I have a cup.

I have no cup
but spare change
and desire to get
back on the road
go home, anywhere
but here
and she asks
Do you have sugar.

Packets of sugar, you mean
I ask. *Oh, no, your feet...*
they looked swollen,
straps on my shoes
cutting into my arch
she said like her sister's,
She got sugar.

Sugar, oldtimers' for diabetes.
I say *No*, head for my car
making time.
She goes to the machine
wearing a dress and slow shoes,
sweetness freefalling
through her veins,
not mine.

William Rayst
DESIGNATED SMOKING AREA

It's the scent of rebellion
wafting low across the concrete
slab outside Locker Room B
that draws them in
to puff and gawk
at the smokeless and hurried
conformists they'll never become.

You smoke, or you don't –
there's no middle ground
for squatters at the
gates of nicotine Heaven
or the architects of lipstick-ringed
filters seeding the grass beneath
the butt caddy.

Take a breath that others forfeit,
feel it coat your plumbing like a blue flame shower.
And what doesn't go in glides
through the labyrinth of fibers in your
shirt, your sweater, and your hair.

Your dues paid with a rosy pink lung,
you can stand or lean with the kool kids,
kin to the infamous, the ones
who never play sports, but kiss the tar-lined lips of the
very bad girl. Lips you'd kiss too, if you were kool.

Bio: William Rayst is a Columbus, Ohio writer who creates poetry, fiction, and practical non-fiction. He is an active member of the Columbus writing group, Creative Minds Collective, and transforms himself into a writing juggernaut each November for NaNoWriMo. His work has appeared on Smashwords and in Stepping Stones Magazine.

Russell Rowland
NEWSPAPER OBITUARY

...died Saturday, surrounded by...

You had me surrounded. Oh my god:
no opening in the circle, no escape
back into health. For the death of me,
I'm not convinced that even a segment
of your lachrymose circumference
loved me as much as the obituary claims.

...after a brave battle with...

I did not battle, and I was not brave.
I submitted, in fear and trembling, to
all the incomprehensible, polysyllabic
diagnoses, the poisonings, irradiations.
You just assumed it was heroism—so
you wouldn't need to be strong for me.

...predeceased by...

Fine word. The bastard beat me to it.
He left me without important papers,
without any chance to forgive and be
forgiven—left me bodily, having left
ages ago in spirit. His legacy includes
a dent in sofa cushions. A hair stain.

In lieu of flowers...

Don't mock me with flowers. Give
to The Society for the Prevention of
Upstaging the Corpse. Flowers betrayed
me all my life into believing there is joy
forever, eternal renewal. Don't you dare
contact the florist. Let me rot in peace.

Author's Comment: The poem imagines a woman of strong character, reacting posthumously (and with bitterness) to the sugarcoated obituary her survivors have prepared.

Russell Rowland
ASKING ORAL OF THEM

A Yale seminarian was invited in
to tell us hormonal boys and girls
what our own pastor was too red

of face to say: "Never do anything
you'd be ashamed to do with Jesus
watching you." Blusher's morality.

But grace shames the Decalogue:
Ask, and it shall be given.
It shall be opened: Knock.

To the mouse's-nest brunette,
it was the swallowing of a camel
after straining out a gnat.

To the corn-silk blonde, it was:
Let this pass me by; and yet
not my will be done, but his.

To her of many-colored hair,
it was a simple case of Taste
and see that my lord is good.

Offer bread to all. It's worth
your while if only one receives.
To find one Lillith, ask ten Eves.

Author's Comment: The perennial dichotomy between commandment and grace may be sensed in the poem. It is also to some extent about growing up, as we both reject and recycle our upbringing. Lillith was the mythological first wife of Adam, reputed to have a mind of her own.

Bio: New Hampshire poet Russell Rowland is widely published in small journals. A Best of the Net nominee and six-time Pushcart Prize nominee, he is a winner of the Plainsongs Award and Old Red Kimono's Paris Lake Poetry Contest, and twice winner of Descant's Baskerville Publishers Poetry Prize. Recent work appears in *Rattle*, *Poem*, and *California Quarterly*. His recent chapbook, "Train of All Cabooses," is available from Finishing Line Press.

Alarie Tennille
PICASSO'S SISTER
Lola, 1899

No matter how carefully I dress,
he will change me. Everything
serves the art Pablo tells me.
I own nothing like this blouse,
ice blue (a plaid!). See how
he sweeps my skirt
into the tobacco background,
turns me into a floating torso.

Why can't he hurry?
My neck throbs, and guitar music
wafts through the window. I want
to run to the plaza and see
who is playing. And oh the smell
of paella, calling to me
from the kitchen!

But here I sit. Still. Time drags
while Pablo's brush dances.
In this house we all serve Pablo
the genius. Any way, at only 18,
how could he afford a real model?
At least he'll make me beautiful
and seductive, not like a sister.
He'll make other men want me.

He hides one hard-to-paint hand
under a gauzy waterfall of scarf,
lets loose a tendril of hair. He
takes me apart, pieces me together.

Author's Comment: Before I could write "see the cat," I wanted to be an artist. I spent many happy hours with famous paintings in the encyclopedia. Not surprisingly, I love to write ekphrastic poems. Over the past year I've put together a workshop, "Art-Felt Words," on using art as an inspiration. I wrote this poem to test the tips I was passing along to my class. The more I gazed at *Lola*, the more I became her and wanted to let her speak. Having a genius brother myself, I understand the mix of pride and jealousy she may have felt.

Bio: Alarie Tennille serves on the Emeritus Board of The Writers Place in Kansas City, Missouri. Her poetry collection, *Running Counterclockwise*, will be published by Kelsay Books in summer 2014; her chapbook, *Spiraling into Control*, is currently available at Amazon.com.

Barbara Crooker

MARCH

lines 1 and 2 are quotes by Garrison Keillor

March, the month God designed to show those
who don't drink what a hangover is like.
In my garden, the purple verb of crocus
shoulder their way up, despite the layer
of gravel thrown by the salt truck, despite
the thick mat of dried leaves— This is the
month that finds me talking to the dead,
whose numbers increase like corms
the older I grow. Here, in the bleakness
of March, the grass is thatchy, patched
burlap. Bare witchy trees. The body's
slow decline. The right and the left
are at it again, jabber, jabber, jabber.
But into this month of drab, here comes
the crocus, sticking out its plum tongue,
inciting the woods to riot.

Barbara Crooker
SPRING

Right now, just before green,
there's a blush on the branches
as buds flush out red, and April
holds her breath, not sure
if she wants to open the door.
The budget isn't balanced;
we teeter from crisis
to crisis. But the finches
are in their yellow slickers,
flitting from twig to twig,
and the bees are humming
quietly to themselves. The buzz
is, it's happening, whether
we're ready, or not. So strip
off your sweater. Polish
your patent leather shoes.
Butter yourself with the sun.

Author's Comment: These two poems come from my usual way of working, which is to pay close attention to what's around me (even the thatch of dead leaves, even the grit from the salt truck.). And what isn't, the dead, all the ones I'm missing. Claude Monet, the painter, said that there were only two things he knew how to do, gardening and painting, and if you substitute writing for painting, then that's me. There's nothing better than getting your hands dirty, or getting a poem "right."

Bio: Barbara Crooker's fourth poetry collection is *Gold* (Cascade Books). Her numerous awards include the Paterson Award for Literary Excellence, the Word Press First Book Award, and three Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Creative Writing Fellowships. She lives and writes in rural northeastern Pennsylvania, where she occasionally leads writing workshops.

Ronald Moran

FLYING OVER THE CATSKILLS

Nearly 50 years ago I was flying southeast
out of Buffalo, on a French jet whose name
I cannot remember, where I sat up front
on a flight so smooth and quiet I felt
I entered a dreamscape, looking out
over the Catskills in January, white
as rapture, trees like fingers beckoning.

So taken was I with this enticement
from a world that was discovering me,
I thought, Should I answer it now
or cling forever to this calling out to me?
But I failed to act, holding within myself,
too distant and deep, what held me then.

Ronald Moran
EARLY SUMMER

My friend writes that he hopes *I am staying cool*
during
the worst heat spell in the recorded history of
South Carolina,
known for, among other things, its hot, muggy
summers,

the air thick enough to take away the breath
of our
elderly and very young in July and August, but
not on
our beaches or high up in the Blue Ridge Range;
and while

I may not be staying as cool as I want, I am cool
enough
and thankful I do not have to worry about floods,
grassfires,
blizzards, ice storms, tornadoes, and earthquakes
here,

in my corner of our state, between mountains
and flatlands,
the Piedmont, where I admit to the possibility
of nature
exercising its bad temper but I will not admit to
its probability.

Kathy Nelson
LETTER TO MOTHER, AUGUST, 2013

Mother, it won't stop raining. A gray wall hangs
just beyond the nearest trees. Water stands
in emerald grass no one has cut, waiting for a dry day.
Damp clothes mildew over chairs on the covered porch.
Soon, I'll have to wash them again, unworn. Sodden,
blighted vines droop in the garden.

Your heart beats like mine, wants what mine wants:
the small white butterflies lighting on the curved fingers
of leaves, the fat tomato gleaming in the sun,
the bright end of summer. We want mystery made flesh.

Instead, this deluge. The earth has forgotten shadows.

We speak in asides, tell each other nothing.
And time grows short. The paper says the question
is not whether but when this year will break
the rainfall record. All night, the fret of rain,
the steady drone erasing sleep.

Author's Comment: As everyone who lives in Western North Carolina knows, it rained relentlessly in August this year. I began searching for the metaphor. Coincidentally, during that period, each time I sat down to write, my mother appeared on the page. Finally, I accepted the metaphor as it was given and "Letter to Mother" presented itself.

Bio: Kathy Nelson spent her early childhood in Texas and visited extended family there well into adulthood. She has worked as a non-denominational healthcare chaplain in both nursing home and hospice environments. She began to write poetry seriously during this experience. Her first chapbook, *Cattails*, was published by Main Street Rag earlier this year.

Mary Kratt
WHERE IT STANDS

There,
that one tree
anchors the whole island
by its sturdy slant.
Were it not exactly
where it stands
on the green slope
across the water,
would not
the precarious world
slide into the sea?

Mary Kratt
IN PRAISE OF

Trails
walked or yet to
gather in
by eyes,
climbing
footsore,
how joy surrounds this
tree, boulder, and
startle vista.

Leave fingernails
of worry,
froth
of fret way down
the mountain, go
daughter, son where
you've not been
try danger
green silence
blatant color
the call
to courage
up ahead.

Bio: Mary Kratt has seventeen published books of poetry, history, and biography and lives in Charlotte, North Carolina. She is a fellow of the MacDowell, twice winner of the Blumenthal Writers and Readers Series, she won the Fortner Writer and Community Award from St. Andrews College in 1994. In 2000, her book, *Small Potatoes*, won the Brockman/Campbell Book Award for poetry, and *Spirit Going Barefoot* won the Oscar Arnold Young poetry book award.

Helen Losse
BEFORE PHOTOSHOP
—after a photo by Robert Canipe

“The wire behind the house
kept the photo from being perfect,”
said the photographer, though he didn’t
put it quite like that; he mumbled
something about a “damn wire,”
but that’s what he meant.

Above the trees in the foreground,
blackened to sacred by time of day,
a small touch of blue sky,
yellow & gray above that—
in clouds that gently roll—
then other clouds like billowing fire:
red-orange & charred black.

Below the awning of the window
through which the photo was
obviously taken, the color of sky itself
had become reason enough to live,
even before Photoshop.

Bio: Helen Losse is the author of two full length poetry books, *Seriously Dangerous* (Main Street Rag, 2011), *Better With Friends* (Rank Stranger Press, 2009), and three chapbooks. Her third book *Facing a Lonely West: Poems About Loss* will be released from Main Street Rag in 2014.

Mary Ricketson
WET EXIT

Finally my chance came in a rush.
Borrowed boat and supplies,
teacher in tow, I headed to white water,
class one rapids of the Tellico River.
Rhododendron blooms flanked the bank,
invited me near.

I had to learn to turn over, me inside
the kayak, release a rubber skirt
from the edges, exit the boat underwater,
and come up for air before drowning.

Three times I tried. Three times my mind
left my body. Both my arms froze up,
legs flailing in desperation.
Fears of a lifetime shot
through my mind in one second.
I knew I would drown.
I grabbed at the legs of my buddy,
a man I met only minutes before,
a man who did not foresee need for a rescue.

My run on the river promised
a wild carefree day
free from worries and stress,
escaping collapsed personal bonds.
I ignored the irony. I found safety
in the hands of a stranger.

Finally I did it, paddled and laughed
my way downstream, one new buddy
or another nearby for the save.
One high stress jaunt, first and last,
one less item on my bucket list.

Author's Comment: Wet Exit is a memoir of my one and only kayak trip. For 30 years I imagined myself in a kayak, running the rapids, admiring the grace and skill of folks I saw on the Nantanala River near Bryson City NC. But I never made the opportunity happen. Finally a friend arranged it all for me. But something unexpected happened inside me, a profound fear that only left me when I put this poem on paper.

Bio: Mary Ricketson, Murphy, NC, has been writing 20 years to satisfy a hunger. She is inspired by nature and her work as a counselor. Her poetry has been published in *Wild Goose Poetry*

Review, Future Cycle Press, Journal of Kentucky Studies, Lights in the Mountains, Echoes Across the Blue Ridge, Freeing Jonah, and her chapbook I Hear the River Call My Name. She is a member of North Carolina Writers Network and is president of Ridgeline Literary Alliance.

Sandra Rokoff-Lizut
THEY FELL LIKE RAIN

China 1958: as part of the Great Leap Forward campaign to preserve grain by destroying pests, four million sparrows were killed. Two years later, when locusts invaded, thirty million people starved to death.

A peoples' farm collective in a country
rich with jade is the setting for this picture,
an unsettling act of war. A multitude
of peasants who are absent
from this scene toil endlessly in umber fields
of grain: tilling, hoeing, picking, packing
bags of treasure: sacks of precious rice.

In the background of the painting, strung
all across the scene, tree-sized heaps
resembling hills— lifeless
lumps of clay. With deft
exquisite brush strokes, hues of blue
and black, the artist has depicted hills
of dead and dying birds.

Children in the foreground
armed with dim grey pots and pans,
caught banging clanging
running wildly
in a screaming screeching frenzy,
chasing sparrows, breaking eggs,
destroying pests for Chairman Mao.

Pigtails drooping, one small child looks out from
darkly solemn eyes, with hands outstretched
her body bent above
that of a dying bird.
But, on her shoulder, firmly planted,
an older sibling's grim command
—*Continue with your task.*

Ann Fox Chandonnet
CIRCLE OF STONES

Mules and hens settle.
Too dark now for chores,
and everyone drifts to his circle of stones.
Even the spider pauses in her weaving.
Leaves spiral down,
but the oaks will hold tight their crop
until The Big Times—
when top-hatted goblin hands out coppers
in the quarter.
Most ever thin goes in the firelight:
Brer Fox capers in riding boots that gleam
with reflected firelight.
Miz Possum shucks roasting ears,
passing them over her shoulder
to her young'uns.
Ghosts and buried gold,
good harvests and ham gravy—
any story, no matter how far-fetched.

A bucket of cool water circles,
drinking gourd tied to the bail.
Sissy hands out cold corn cakes
smeared with the grace of grease.

The oldest hand hears lions
prowling the cane next the river.
Bare toes sift cooled ash into red dirt.
In the mossy dark, urgency dissolves,
tired backs relax.
Melancholy slips into the shadows
like a cat homing in on a mouse.
Anything goes around this hearth—
any tale to hold off another morning.

Author's Comment: "Circle of Stones" was inspired by seeing a row of slave houses at a rice plantation in South Carolina. In front of one "cabin" was a circle of stones, the remnant of a fire kindled in the open.

Bio: Ann Chandonnet is a poet, nonfiction writer and food historian. She spent 34 years in Alaska and has now retired to Vale, North Carolina. In fall she plants tulips and picks up thousands of horse chestnuts.

Harry Youtt
HOW TO READ A SEAMUS HEANEY POEM

You can't just walk up
and slide one of them
into your pocket
when nobody else is looking.

It's never as easy as
cracking a nut,
flicking away the pieces of shell,
and eating the meat.

You've got to use
only the tips of your fingers.
Unroll the poem gently,
layer by layer,
like a wet scroll
when the ink might run.

Smooth it onto a flat plate
beneath a bright bulb
that gives you plenty of light.

Whatever you do,
be sure to keep the poem
a little moist.
There isn't a chance
it will ever turn to dust.

It's just that you'll
want things to
undulate a little,
into their own flexibility.
You'll even begin to see
some bubbles beginning
to form at the edges.

And then in the silence,
first extract the lines that shine
like caught fish, wriggling,
each of them — glinting —
one line at a time.

Hold them steady in the light,
and after a while

when you come to feel
they almost belong to you,
release them back,
into the frothing
the stream of the poem alone
is beginning to make.

Its pulse will throb,
and you'll feel it
begin to breathe easy
into itself, as it draws you there
to follow the glinting in,
down closer
to where the lines were born.

A Heaney poem lives and thrives
by tasting itself and then by forming
into fuller flavor.

Common words
from common roots.
Potato words,
but exotically seasoned.

Somewhere in that hover,
between what is
and what he shows you
there might really be,
is the place you'll find
where the poet went
and where he wanted to meet you.

SEAMUS HEANEY'S 1995 NOBEL LECTURE

by Harry Youtt

Seamus Heaney was a living legend. He seemed somehow indestructible, a fixture, the unofficial permanent poet laureate of the English-speaking world. I don't know why we all expected that he'd go on forever. Maybe it was his approachable affability. His patina of simplicity. Everything seemed so solid.

He passed away in August. Suddenly he's gone, and we're left searching for ways to connect, to fully discover the depth and breadth of what we have lost. It turns out he wasn't nearly as simple and accessible as initial appearances might have indicated.

In 1995, Heaney was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The inscription on the award read: "for works of lyrical beauty and ethical depth." He gave the obligatory Nobel Lecture, but most of us didn't pay too much attention to any of that at the time.

The Lecture takes us back to the basics of Heaney, in his own words. It becomes an instantly useful resource. You can try to buy a copy in hard or soft cover, if you like, although it's no longer in print (*Crediting Poetry: The Nobel Lecture* [Loughcrew, Oldcastle, Co. Meath, Ireland: Gallery Press (1995)]). But it is also available online, for free, and with an option of actually listening to Heaney as he delivered it.

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1995/heaney-lecture.html

Reading or listening to it will give the easy sense of being with Heaney as he recounts what got him started in poetry and what kept him going, even through the most troubled and violent times of Ireland and Northern Ireland's recent history. Seeing him tell simple stories from his past, recounting myths, and in the process manifesting truly complex concepts will yield a deeper understanding of Heaney's particular style, and the ways he evolved into it.

The Lecture will also provide a fair amount of insight into the art of poetry in general. *We want the surprise [of poetry], he said, to be . . . like the impatient thump which unexpectedly restores the picture to the television set, or the electric shock which sets the fibrillating heart back to its proper rhythm.* What more can any of us who strive at poetry aspire to?

I wish to suggest, he said, that images and stories of the kind I am invoking here do function as bearers of value. In the face of poetry's need, especially in times of extreme crisis, not to shrink from *hard and retributive truth*, he emphasized *the need not to harden the mind to a point where it denies its own yearnings for sweetness and trust.*

What the necessary poetry always does, he said, is to touch the base of our sympathetic nature while taking in at the same time the unsympathetic reality of the world to which that nature is constantly exposed.

Some classify Heaney's poetry as 'plain-spoken.' At times that's right. Yes, in one of his poems, he could tell us of a *home-based man at home*, living in his *Night after nightness*, and we all can easily comprehend. But this was only sometimes. Unfortunately, that casual phrase: "plain

speech” puts us somewhat off the trail that Heaney was following. The true quest to reach the core of him requires us to proceed much farther.

It turns out that frequently, access to him isn’t so easy. Partly it is the framing of his unique memories, the way he extracts his images out of darkened cellars and attics, then holds them up into light and air of his poems, into purpose and meaning they might not have had before he got to them and brought them to us. We find ourselves having to reach for the contexts, in order to set them in place. In the Lecture he referred to this as: *manifesting that order of poetry where we can at last grow up to that which we stored up as we grew.*

I credit poetry, he said, both for being itself and for being a help, for making possible a fluid and restorative relationship between the mind’s centre and its circumference . . . for its truth to life, in every sense of that phrase.

Heaney’s departure from plain speech accessibility stems from his devotion to the rhythms and forms of his poetry, the wild and unique phrasings that rise from simple words. In the lecture, he called it the *temple inside our hearing that has as much to do with the energy released by linguistic fission and fusion, with the buoyancy generated by cadence and tone and rhyme and stanza, as it has to do with the poem’s concerns or the poet’s truthfulness. This, he said, is what keeps the poet’s ear straining to hear the totally persuasive voice beyond all the other informing voices.* This is what Heaney strived for, finding that *persuasive voice beyond.* And he was able to accomplish it. It is what not only keeps his voice unique; it is what elevates the experience of reading him, up to a level he wanted his poetry to rise.

The goal of his poetry, he said, was *to be not only pleurably right but compellingly wise, not only a surprising variation played upon the world, but a re-tuning of the world itself.*

In noting the influences of other poets upon him, Heaney credited Gerard Manley Hopkins with the *intensity of his exclamations which were also equations for a rapture and an ache I didn’t fully know I knew until I read him.* Hearing that line, I couldn’t help thinking that it could easily apply to my own reaction to reading Heaney himself for the first time.

In one of his poems, Crossings, he wrote: *You drive into a meaning of trees, a sense . . . / Of glimpse and dapple. A life all trace and skim / The car has vanished out of.*

And in another, (Eeling), about the common experience of fishing for eels, he described his prey as: *not the utter / Flip-stream frolic fish / But a foot-long/Slither of a fellow,/ . . . rightly wriggle-spined.*

In another he described the banked residue of a coal fire as *The cindery skull / Formed when its tarry / Coral cooled.*

With such turnings, Heaney throughout his poetic career was able to use the power of his own nostalgic exploration to accomplish the lift of the poetically resonant phrase, the breath of the poet’s purpose. *His gift like a slingstone / Whirled for the desperate.*

During the lecture, Heaney talked about St. Kevin. He recounted the myth he'd covered in one of his earlier poems. When Kevin was meditating and prayerful, with arms outstretched, a bird nested and laid its eggs into Kevin's hand, which kept him patiently at his devotion while the new birds hatched and grew, and were 'flocked and fledged and flown.' In the lecture, Heaney referred to St Kevin *at the intersection of natural process and the glimpsed ideal* . . . That line made me imagine Heaney himself as a kind of St. Kevin figure. We know his natural process. What must have been his *glimpsed ideal*? And when we begin to read his poetry, that *glimpsed ideal* becomes near-apparent in most of what he writes. We just have to dig a little to find it, and it is the elevation of the resonance that provides the energy and the beacon for that search.

He referred to the *diamond absolutes* of poetry, and he counted as one of them *the sufficiency* of that which is absolutely imagined. Savor that phrase: *the sufficiency* of that which is absolutely imagined. And with this in mind, note his acknowledgment that he'd evolved to attain a *space in my reckoning and imagining for the marvelous as well as the murderous*.

In some ways, Heaney was more of a formalist than otherwise might be assumed. Poetic form, he said in the lecture, is *both the ship and the anchor — at once a buoyancy and a holding* [steadying]. Poetic form. Unfortunately not enough attention is paid in the current culture to poetic form as a permanent value. We should pay attention to his words.

Heaney's reference to poetry as both ship and anchor harks back to Heaney's poem: *Lightenings* viii, in which the anchor of a ship, floating in the heavens, became tangled as it dragged on our earth. A sailor from the heavens climbed down to free it and was helped by monks, so that

. . . the freed ship sailed, and the man climbed back / Out of the marvelous as he had known it.

And as a kind of epitaph-image, I am imagining Seamus' recent departure as the long climb of the sailor, up the anchor rope, *climbing back/Out of the marvelous* as we all have known it, up to a mystic ship, sailing beyond.

Now gone. But not far.

Paul Nelson

THE LINE IS STRONG AND THE ESCAPE IS THIN

-Arnaud Lefebvre

For some of us, the word “civilization” professes our sometimes sophisticated habit of living by revisable laws and questionable customs, all the while disbelieving, individually, in the fruitful eventuality of reason. Given our history of slaughter and environmental degradation, reason has never prevailed. In our failure lies a tenuous life for poetry and painting to express fear within love of being. I think of Goya’s “black period.” They say so, but he was not mad.

When asked “What are you painting?” one painter answered “paint.” A poet is stuck with words, usually black on white. But writing is mixing, nonetheless, evoking colors, touch, scent, visuals, sounds ... music. Interpretation of poetry emerges from the way words expose or suggest images in the writer’s and reader’s subconscious. A fine poem can elicit a life’s mimetic narrative. Or a book of poems can. Jacques Derrida’s basic ideas about interpretation of poetry mime the way my mind works, not linearly, but elliptically, eclectically, with revised narrative, if any. As I suppose Goya’s later mind pulled stuff together, with such incredible compression: his “Three Fates” with the escapee running toward you, predicts Surrealism that never matched his. Or think of his “Drowning Dog.” Memory, visions of things past and therefore present, is fiction making. For this poet, there is no past. The movie in my head is running.

If I seriously play, language as image leads me to form an intuition of a poem. A false faith maybe, but one that works. The process is Aristotelian. No muse from on high, but a kinesis, as if a poem were an undirected afterthought to the delight of physically laying down the words, not with intent to expose foregone ideas of what I might mean at any moment. I like the word “gist,” from the Old French, “gesir,” to lie. Often taken to mean the essence of a consideration. I lie all the time in order to field an experience made of words. I can’t work from ideas. Perhaps I should, but others can decide that. I don’t know clearly what I feel and mean until I have sorted out a body of words that make images to express my new awareness of a gist. Of which I have always, perhaps, had inklings of feeling and ideation. Lying myself into and from the image I begin with.

The image is there, or comes, as it might with the application of color one happens to mix with some fine intuition or emotion, or the waft of charcoal on handmade paper, or the incisiveness of a pencil line as one draws in modest confusion. One image can lead to another in what seems disparate relation, to invent an expanded, excited context or metaphor coming to a surprising wholeness, which I hope leaves the experience open, however leading. Like a fabulous lie. Robert Frost said, “No surprise for the writer, none for the reader.”

If I say that the bark of a tree feels gray to the whorls of my finger tips a reader might take it to mean that the tree’s bark is dead, or a beech tree. That is the fineness of a reader’s freedom. That a writer feels the bark is gray may imply that he is feeling gray....worn, sick, quieter, less sanguine, say, than “blue.” One can live by fine images. Eventually, a good poem or painting has told the artist what it wants to be. It goes free of the artist. A whole poem may be generated by the word “whorls.” A coiled sensibility. A gyre? A rhyme with “world.” Almost anything goes.

William Carlo William's "...red wheelbarrow glazed with rain water beside the white chickens" does more than sit there; it lets me feel that the poet loves vivacity even more than ideas about or suggested by experience. He doesn't need to say anything. I look for that dynamic in paintings as well. Poetry for me is not "about" anything, at least right away. It remains more experience than about it. If it is a vital experience it should cause reflection. WCW's homely images put aside "loveliness." A fine image can feel like a gist, an interesting lie that trails or blooms into reverie, redolent as the finish in a mouthful of fine wine.

One way poets lie is to exaggerate. Homer turned water to wine to blood with his "wine dark sea." Doesn't this work even out of his context? Poets are in love with exaggeration. Plath's "Daddy, Daddy, old black shoe ..." in which she felt like a foot. I wrote: "A lame raven, black pickaxe, shatters ceramic apples." The music came with the visuals. Poets can feel like lame ravens. Or pickaxes. Or see poems as ceramic apples. Interpretations are merely plausible. Kierkegaard wrote: "truth is a snare; you cannot have it, without being caught." Seamus Heaney advises "keep at a tangent." And Emily Dickinson said to write it "slant." There is a tradition for indirection.

Art, poetry, is a luxury human beings must let live. It is not a luxury for those who make it. We live vicariously. More positive than theology, which it ultimately entropic, poetry and painting are peculiarly willful in any pragmatic social structure, an alert state of determined half consciousness, careful about hope, leery of the uplifting or of sincerity, and any sentimentality (which Wallace Stevens called "a failure of feeling). I indulge in a serious, playful experiment with the disparate. Poetry does not elicit perfection. Hence "negative capability." Poets, to remain vulnerable, often choose the barely known to see what happens, given an inkling. Or use the usual unusually, separate from conventional manners and formal aesthetics, with intuitively realized insights and outsights, expanding fields one is re-born to work with. I write poetry, at least, to find out what I am really feeling, maybe believing. The ending of a poem, for me, should not clarify but fly open with vital implication, a release from depression and perfection, those cramps, though "... the escape is thin."

*Arnaud Lefebvre is an important gallery director in Paris.

Scott Owens

ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE POET AS ONE-PERCENTER

If you know anything about poetry in the 21st century, then you know that due to low book sales and other forms of waning popular support, including deep cuts in public sponsorship of the arts, most poets live very moderately, sometimes even desperately. The lucky ones hold down other jobs as teachers, technical writers, editors, “pr-hacks,” whatever they can find, and pursue their writing in narrow corners of time they squeeze out of their “real” lives.

Not surprisingly, then, Hickory poet and Catawba Valley Community College professor, Tim Peeler, despite being the celebrated author of 11 books, is very familiar with how 99 percent of the population lives. Recently, however, he was fortunate enough to experience the nature of life for the other one percent, at least for one day.

On August 15th, Peeler was flown to Boston by the Boston Red Sox. He was feted that evening at the posh Eastern Standard Restaurant inside the equally posh Hotel Commonwealth, two blocks from Fenway Park. The guests in his party included a former Connecticut governor, the public address announcer at Fenway, and Ted Williams’ biographer. The next day he spoke and read his poetry before a room full of Red Sox dignitaries and their guests and was then given a personal tour of Fenway that included encounters with team president, Larry Luchino; Red Sox Poet Laureate, Dick Flavin; renowned former major league pitcher, Bill “Spaceman” Lee; and sportswriter, analyst, and ESPN regular, Peter Gammons. Finally, he watched the Red Sox play the Yankees alongside the Sox owners in their private, full-service suite.

All of this came to be because journalist and coordinator of the Great Fenway Writers’ Series, George Mitrovich, read, enjoyed, and republished one of Peeler’s poems in his weekly baseball newsletter. CBS sports analyst, Dick Enberg’s enthusiastic response to Peeler’s poem prompted Mitrovich to invite Peeler to join him for an outing at Fenway. While Peeler’s poetry spans a wide range of experience, he has published two books of poems about baseball, *Touching All the Bases* and *Waiting for Godot’s First Pitch*, as well as several books of local baseball history.

Here is one of the poems he read at Fenway.

Curt Flood

Try to tell ‘em Curt,
how you crowned their wallets,
climbed courtroom steps for them,
swallowed that black ball,
a scapegoat out to pasture.
They don’t remember,
can’t remember
the trash you ate,
your greedy headlines,
the slope of your career.

You are a ghost at barterer's wing,
your smoky gray eyes
are two extra zeroes
on every contract.

Curtis Flood was a celebrated center fielder mostly for the St. Louis Cardinals in the sixties. On the field he was a defensive nonpareil, winning a Gold Glove 7 times and leading the National League in putouts four times. He also hit for better than a .300 average 6 times. Off the field he became one of the game's most pivotal players' rights figures when he refused to accept a trade following the '69 season, paving the way for free agency. Peeler alludes to this legacy in the poem.

And here is another of the poems he read. This one provides a glimpse into the nature of much of the rest of Peeler's work with its refreshingly accessible Southern everyman tone, perspective, and voice.

WHEN THE FORTY-NINE SERIES WENT CROSSTOWN

Dodgers vs. Yanks,
Cooke Mull knew he had to be there.

First to convince his buddy, George Poovey
to freight him on his furniture delivery to Philly;
from there a night train to NYC.

With Poovey thus ensnared,
they proceeded from quiet Catawba County,
first stop, the liquor store,
second somewhere in Philly
to ditch the truck—then make for the city.

Huckleberries that they were,
they bee lined for the Empire,
becoming separated in the upper twenty—
and Poovey after an hour of wandering,
located Cooke in a bar,
tumultous, in story-telling high gear,
being fed and given drinks
to keep the comedy rolling.

In the Bronx they managed seats,
but Ebbet's was SRO,
and the boys were packed in the back
of a horrible throng near the roof.

But Poovey who was a man of action,
reached the limit of his affability,
and along with an exaggerated
scratch of his privates,
he moaned like Wolfe's Gant,
a most heartrending redneck truck driver moan,
calling aloud to the very gods of baseball,
"These crabs are about to drive
me completely nuts!"
And as Cooke always told it,
the crowd around them
parted like the Red Sea,
and they went forward
to a righteous view
of the remainder of the game.

I have been a devoted reader of Peeler's poetry since the early 90s, when I first encountered his poem "Carolina Trailer Park Take 5: Danny's Read Dad" in an issue of the now defunct *Charlotte Poetry Review* that also included a poem of mine. Because of his comfort and skill in writing about the world I come from, I list Peeler as one of the 5 most influential writers on my own work. While his baseball poems may better serve his reputation, popularity, and ascendancy to the one-percent (one can dream), I'm still drawn more strongly to his brutally honest portrayals of working-class Southern life, so my favorite of his books will probably always be the much less well-known and practically impossible to find, *Don't Take Me Alive*. More work in that vein can be read in his selected volume, *Blood River*, or in what I consider his second best collection, *Fresh Horses*, or, on a more tightly-drawn stage in his more recent *Checking Out*. I had the great fortune recently to preview his newest manuscript, called *Rough Beast*, which will be published by FutureCycle next year, and I was impressed enough that I asked to use four of the poems in *Wild Goose Poetry Review*. One of them had already been published, but he let me use the other three. Once that book comes out, I suspect it may supplant *Don't Take Me Alive* as my favorite of Peeler's books. Regardless, the quality, quantity, voice, sense of place, honesty, and irresistible impact of Peeler's work marks him as undeniably one of the early 21st century South's most significant poets, and as a member of a much more meaningful one-percent than any determined by money could be.

Review
by Patricia Deaton

HEART OF THE LIGHT
by Lisa Zerkle
Finishing Line Press, 2013
ISBN: 978-1622291885

Lisa Zerkle's poetry is, at once, enjoyable and easily understood, you think. Then, you go back through randomly-selected poems, re-read and find you didn't get it all on the first go round.

That's what I like about the poetry in Heart of the Light. It's accessible and beyond. The first poem "Keeper of the Web" and the last, title poem, "Heart of the Light" both bear similarities in the casting of lines for rescue (whether spider web or ropes down a well) and suggest to me, resignation to the futility we all feel in life at times.

The poem within a poem, "Second Chances" is creative, meaningful and heartbreakingly-honest. But Lisa Zerkle's poems stand you up against a wall with their honesty.

The best example of this, for me, is the poem about a mother and daughter's relationship and the lasting effects (good or bad) throughout the life of both. It's titled "When You Go, What Will You Leave?" This one left me slapped with guilt over my own personal history. But what good is any literature, if it doesn't cause us to think or reflect?

I love "Chipmunk Sex," but it would almost be better without the last line, "We both do what it takes," because the poem shows us that, already and seems to wrap it up a little too much...for me, anyway.

Zerkle's prose poems are fantastic. The first line of "Above One Hundred Feet," draws us in right off the bat as all excellent prose should do: "The summer I teach my brother to kill, we sit on our driveway in triple-digit Texas heat, cement pebbling our sticky thighs while we watch centipedes traffic below." In "Ritual," a lonely, alcoholic woman's happy hour packs a lot of emotional heft into just thirteen lines.

"How to Hold a Grudge" describes perfectly the qualities embodied in a grudge and is so creatively-graphic in drawing us in to experience (as if we didn't know) how holding a grudge feels and then letting it go. I love this poem...a funhouse trip that moves fast, clutches and slings you around, then offers you freedom.

Poems in "Heart of the Light" are like that...different carnival rides that spin, entangle, drop and grab, and leave you wanting more. At the end of this book, you'll want to buy another ticket.

Review
by Douglas McHargue

SOLVING THE WORLD'S PROBLEMS

Robert Lee Brewer
Press 53, 2013
ISBN: 978-1935708902

Solving the World's Problems is Robert Lee Brewer's first full-length collection of poems. As Senior Content Editor of *Writer's Digest*, Brewer is a veteran at examining life through the world of poetry.

In these poems we see a man caught in modern life needing clues on how to live it. "10:15 in a kroger parking lot" finds a customer sitting in the midst of America's cornucopia "overwhelmed as choreographed cars" come and go without him, leaving him unable to move, take action, lost in plenty. Perhaps it's this same man in "self portrait" who disappears into the kitchen "lost in the hum/ of these machines," where "there are / times i feel i don't / exist."

In "dream" a man reaches out for an answer by literally reaching for his wife, but is not sure if he's in a barn filled with junk, his empty house, or even in a car, suggesting how uncertain we can be of the framework of life, even in the midst of familiarity.

These couples extend themselves, even though in "worried about ourselves" they're at the point where "we cast spells on ourselves" and in words heavy as the hearts involved, the moon has become "a rock surrounded by darkness."

In "discovery" words are not as weighty, the moon now "a deflated balloon," but equally significant, as the man comes to see his lover and their relationship as transitory as "a sweater left by accident."

Still, the reaching continues in "when we write about love" where "there are no/ other eyes/ other hands that travel / the way yours travel." Hope for love's powers conclude with the final lines, "scream for help / in my dreams/ i'll save you."

Things primal, love and nature, coexist in this collection, maybe answers for problems as in "the noises that scare us" with this striking imagery, "we want / reminded of who we were when the birds / first spoke," for beware, later in life "our wings dissolve as we age."

Brewer offers wisdom for our frantic, plastic powered society in "some day i may find my life reflected in a mirror" where "the answers are / crickets chirping / in the breeze," if we will just take time to hear them.

Review
by Helen Losse

Strange Angels
William Pitt Root
WingsPress, 2013
ISBN: 9781609403195

Strange Angels by William Pitt Root is a 120-page volume of new poems, dedicated to his wife Pam, his daughter Jennifer, several others, and me. Yes, Root dedicates his book to “all who’ve never had a book dedicated to them before.” Well, I haven’t, so that’s me. Thanks, Bill.

The book begins with a single poem and is then divided into five sections of varying lengths. The single poem “Night Poem in the Shawangunks” sets the scene and acts as an introduction. Saying Root loves nature is like saying the Pope is Catholic. Root is nature, the genuine article. And before the book is over he will have drawn the reader in, making a spiritual case for his radical point of view.

...and yes my own heart quickly

sympathized, first contracting
fearful as the prey’s,
then expanding
wanton as a pulsing star, ...
(“Night Poem in the Shawangunks,” p.3)

Along with the beauty and music of Root’s language, he writes to our shame on every page—details form accusations that cut this reader to the quick, to the marrow—for we all know how often we do not give our very best. We fail to listen for a “reason to remember” but rather concentrate on the accuracy of details that form memory. Root demonstrates in verse after verse why the former is a superior approach.

In the first poem of the first section “Why I Remember,” Root reminds his reader that many “explain [the miraculous] away in retrospect as chemistry,” which can easily be forgotten or dismissed as inconsistent. He prefers to ask, “And what is the true nature of the miraculous?” (“Seagrape Tree and the Miraculous”). Isn’t that what we all really want to know?

In “Misconceptions,” he explains why—too late—after years of “diverting [himself] from the main roads,” because of a word he overheard whispered by a neighbor, he learned, “[He] had no Indian blood.” And then in the titular poem “Strange Angel,” Root explains,

...we wait to be transported
By what we think we understand

From one place to another
While all we cannot comprehend

Gratuitously moves through undriven mysteries.”

So Root is part Cherokee, after all. The why of memory made him so. Then, just as Root has sobered his reader, shaming us for our lack of depth and commitment to what we say we believe, he is chosen Poet Laureate of Tucson, Arizona. And he pens his “Laureate’s Proclamation” drawing from his poetic ancestors to show the universality of poetry. Root is telling us all, we can be what he is: genuine.

Root’s next section, “At the Feast of the Last Breath,” is made up of poem’s about the deaths of several of Root’s male friends. Most of the poems are titled with the friend’s name or dedicated to him. Meeting Root under various circumstances, the men have traveled many miles together. “The years since then have rolled by in tides of wives, / ...banked against emptiness in... / quests for respite...” (“For Tim, Without Whom”). And “I remember your last lamb roast for young Hannah, / how you watched a young moon dance on ancient waters” (“At the Feast of the Last Breath.”)

And when the ones all in white wheeled you out,
the look on that bearded face of yours
reminded me of a long-eared hound
crouched in the back of a battered pickup
pulling out onto the freeway at last, face set in the rising wind.
 (“Being Moved”)

“Neither Basalt Ledge not Turnip, or: Forests and Fields” and “A Flower of Human Light” are shorter sections, made up of five and six poems respectively. The first contains some fine assumptions made from dialog with nature. “You know perfectly well / we who begin as dreamers / close our eyes in sleep” (“Query for Owl at Spring Equinox”). The reader knows we will all die, but do owls dream? And again in “Most Likely”:

It isn’t life that’s strange.
What’s strange
Is the assumption
We know enough
To know what strange would be.

“I’ve been en route to all I will become” (“Most Likely”) explains why the reason to remember matters and why the numinous matters.

“A Flower of Human Light” is a section of love poems.

How odd, how interesting, what a blessing
that skin behaves
as skin does
touching other skin....
 (“Love Runes”)

And as he eats lunch, a glimpse of the eaten—the antelope:

I have eaten
you before
and will and will
...
though the floor
will rumble with
the clatter of hooves.
("Another Note")

The reader knows by now how bold William Pitt Root can be, but he goes further, telling of how "[he] will pity those / who know [the blonde] now /only by this poem, /...they must live out / their remaining lives / tantalized...[by the possibility of meeting her]" ("Ode to a Russian Blonde Who, Before Sleeping, Wishes Someone Might Write Her a Poem Before She Wakes"). Pitt has taken us back to how we listen. If we do meet this Russian blonde, will we remember, or are we to be pitied for our lack of attention to what leads to true remembrance?

In the final section, "Among Fools, Soothsayers and Kings," Root begins, "You must change your life. So says the poet...", as if, by now, that is not obvious to the discerning reader. "...The poet's mortal eyes / saw his own immortal face / appear as fire in air" ("Classical Figures"). And if that story of Apollo is not reason enough for the change, try hearing a poet, whose "lyrics" resound with "that ruthless blood-tonged cry / drawn from a throat sheathed in rainbows of the living flame" ("Calling the World to Order").

William Pitt Root calls his reader to walk on higher ground, to summon memories that matter, to change our behavior, and to become more fully human. *Strange Angels* is a book of accessible poems to be cherished, read, marked up, and corner dog-eared. This is a book to be learned from. Get your copy soon.

Review
by Helen Losse

ORDINARY THINGS
Jenny Billings Beaver
Folded Word, 2012
ISBN: 9781610192132

Ordinary Things by Jenny Billings Beaver is a chapbook of short accessible poems about simple, ordinary events that occur in everyday life. “Ordinary,” however, does not mean trivial. Careful word and detail choice, rather than her topics, makes Beaver’s poems special. Although the reader must always remember that the poet is free to draw characters and details from anywhere, one senses that the author lives an ordinary life herself, that she does those things that are known to almost everyone within American working class society.

Beaver writes about witnessing a car accident in which a car “threw [a boy’s] upper body onto the hood / ... like a rag doll, then flung it to the pavement.” The “I” in the poem, which may or may not be Beaver, and her brother were children who had just come from art class and were riding in a van driven by their mother when they saw this (“Raggedy Ann”).

She also writes several poems concerning her mother’s cancer. “We knew something was wrong,” she writes of the ordinary day when she and her brother witnessed her parents talking, as they “walked up and down the driveway” (“cancer”). The subject of illness and hospitalization is continued in “Surgical Trauma Intensive Care Unit: Family Waiting Room #1501.” What reader has not been to an “ordinary” room like this?

This is a room of absence.

...

we sit in lines of blue
and red leather chairs
in a room split
by a vacant wooden desk
and abandoned phone.

Beaver writes about church through the eyes of a child, with “Communion’s leftover shot glasses” (“Childhood Religion”). She shows us a customer at her parents’ store, Esmeralda, who “weighs 150 pounds but hates her belly” and “after 70” gains weight “because she can’t get used to cooking for 1” (“Esmeralda”). She writes of romance, “NASCAR fast” (“Road Master”) and of dating at the movies. All ordinary, yet quite specific.

In other poems, Beaver explores a father’s relationship to his children. “Daddy” does not attend church with the mother and children. “[They] don’t fight about it— / it’s just their contract” (“Sanctuary”). The father does take his children elsewhere.

Daddy takes us to the old gas station
not far from home,...

the one with the doughnut stand
on the right, ...
(Promise not to spoil your dinner.)

...

the one with the stagnant back room...

we never told mommy about.

("Doughnuts and a Movie")

Ordinary Things by Jenny Billings Beaver gathers all the secrets, fears, and wonderings about everyday life and makes them into extra-ordinary but accessible poems. This is a slim volume of poems that can be read, enjoyed, and learned from again and again. These are poems that contain an *ah ha!*

