

Spring 2014

I bought a coffee shop.

There is so much more I want to say than that, but I need to keep it short and sweet.

I thought I knew what busy was before I bought a coffee shop.

I was wrong.

11 hours a day; 6 days a weeks; working the seventh day to prepare for the other 6; working nights to prepare for the next day.

It's fun. It's Taste Full Beans in downtown Hickory, NC, the shop where I started and have coordinated Poetry Hickory for 7 years now.

But it is also all-consuming.

I have given up many of the other things I was doing, but I have resisted giving up *Wild Goose Poetry Review*. Of course, I did give up the winter 2014 issue, and I'm giving up any pretense of being a quarterly journal, or even a regularly published journal for now. I'll aim for biannual and hope it doesn't turn out to be annual. Either way, I want to say thank you to the poets and readers who have remained patient and interested.

I think it is worth the wait. I hope you agree. I also hope that anytime you're in the Hickory area, you'll stop by and see me at the shop. I'll make sure there is lots of good coffee and good poetry for you.

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Ronald Moran

ON A SUMMER NIGHT, 1957

It is never the same, is it? The moment when
you fall
in love, the instant when you know nothing else
matters,
only how you feel about her, whether or not
she

reciprocates. Perhaps she will, if not now, then
maybe
in the fixed future, and if she does you will have
the moment
stored in your memory box, though you will
notice

others, perhaps—even think they are interested
in you;
but that first moment will never disappear while
locked
in your mind. I remember my first date with Jane
in 1957:

it was on a summer night when her brother, Dick
(my best friend),
and Roger, another friend of ours, and I were just
hanging
around the rec room of Dick and Jane's house—
Jane and I

knowing each other for nine years but never dating—
but that day
her cousin and a friend were spending an overnight
with Jane,
so, with all of us in the rec room, all six unconnected,
Dick said,

Let's hit the road, go somewhere fun. We did,
to The Cabin,
a teenage roadhouse in Cromwell, Connecticut.
That night,

I asked Jane to dance with me to the song Tammy,
during which

I fell in love with her, that quickly. And I never
stopped,
even though we had to conquer some obstacles,
and we did,
lived as man and wife for 50 years, until death
did us part.

Chris Beshara

MY FATHER'S WAR

It is cold in Korea.
The sergeant told me
My father has died.
I'm going home on emergency leave.

I sold my car
To bury my father.
My mother was sad and alone.
It is cold at home.

It is cold in Korea.
The only warm thing is my rifle.
The sergeant just told me my mother has died.
He says I've been a good soldier.

I'm being discharged,
Going home to bury my mother.
It is cold in Korea.
It is cold at home.

Malaika Albrecht

WHY THE GHOST CALLS YOUR NAME

You cannot name the ghost
or he will own a place in your home—
the one you bought after—but the ghost
will call your name over and over,
hoping you forget, hoping you
say, “Yes, dear.”

Malaika Albrecht

WHAT SOUNDS WILL YOU LEAN CLOSER TO HEAR?

I trailed the ghost down the stairs
on his nightly hauntings.
Instead of turning back to bed
when he slipped through
the front door, I followed him.

He walked into the woods
where it's easy to be lost shadowing a ghost.
I snuck along the deer path behind him
thinking perhaps he knew I would.

I listened to each familiar foot fall
and worried about disappearing
and only existing in shadows and reflections.

He walked for a while not looking back
and then stopped at the creek bed.
Without a sound he crossed and left me
once again on the other side.

It was quiet until the rush
of an owl's wings taking flight
emptied my mind of all other noise.
I stood there alone
and let the wind take my breath away.

Malaika Albrecht

HOW TO BE HAUNTED

Drink dandelion tea at night
and dream of the wind
that sends seeds too far away to gather again.
Braid snakes into your hair,
throw rose petals into the river,
and watch how all things are lost to water.
The ghost says, Here are the keys
to your new life. Open the door.
See how each room's the same
but different. The light all wrong,
too bright. Try to hold onto a corner,
a slightly darker place to paint yourself in.

Author's Comments: These poems are from a manuscript I'm still working on. Almost two years ago, we moved onto a 14 acre farm, and in the woods, we created horse paths for trail rides. In doing so, we discovered a small cemetery with grave markers from the mid-1800's and a barred owl's favorite roost above these graves. My daughters and I started making up stories about the lives of those buried there, and I thought I would write about that. However, with the recent deaths of my mom, former father-in-law, and a divorce, the poems had other ideas about ghosts, hauntings and visitations.

Bio: Malaika King Albrecht is the author of three poetry books. Her most recent book *What the Trapeze Artist Trusts* (Press 53) won honorable mention in the Oscar Arnold Young Award and was a finalist in 2012 Next Generation Indie Book Awards. Her chapbook *Lessons in Forgetting* was published by Main Street Rag and was a finalist in the 2011 Next Generation Indie Book Awards and received honorable mention in the Brockman Campbell Award. Main Street Rag also published her second book *Spill* in 2011. Her poems have been published in many literary magazines and anthologies and nominated for Pushcarts. Her poems have won awards in several contests, including at Poetry Southeast, the North Carolina Poetry Council, Salem College and Press 53. She's the founding editor of *Redheaded Stepchild*, an online magazine that only accepts poems that have been rejected elsewhere. She lives in Ayden, N.C. with her family and is a therapeutic riding instructor.

Barbara Conrad

WHAT I REMEMBER MOST ABOUT GOD

is that spark in her eye when she'd say
Cut yourself some slack there girl,
how she'd set her mouth all crooked
and lean into my face like she knew something I didn't
but was about to find out. What I remember most about God
is that her neck had wrinkles, her breasts sagged
and her breath smelled like Blenheim ginger ale. And the tales
she told of her misadventures, OMG, that's what I remember
most: Days lying in a feather hammock — no
sunscreen, polka dots stippling her nose. Travels
untraveled. Souls unsaved. Shelves of books, not even
dog-eared. (I'm not sure how she got the job.)
And the hours she spent crafting poems, even a novel once,
that flickered into mist by morning.

What I remember most about God is her lush garden
by the gate — lavender and hydrangeas made blue
out of missed wishes (her words), and the way
she could look me up and down and ask,
Now what were you saying, Sweetheart?

Bio: Barbara Conrad is author of *Wild Plums*, published by FutureCycle Press in 2013 and *The Gravity of Color*, published by Main Street Rag in 2007 and editor of *Waiting for Soup* (2004), a collection of art and poetry from her weekly workshops with homeless neighbors in Charlotte, NC. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies such as *Tar River Poetry*, *Sow's Ear*, *Southern Women's Review*, *Icarus* and *Kakalak*, and have won awards, honorable mentions and a Pushcart nomination. Her writing focuses on personal exploration, nature and social justice issues.

Arlene Neal

WORLD SERIES 1966

Daddy lay still on the couch
Cigarette smoke blue and thin
In television light, half-way
Watching Walter Kronkite
Forgetting the Dodgers and
Don Drysdale and Sandy Koufax
Drifting into his Philippine dreams,
When the boy came that night

We left without speaking, not
To stir the sleeping slugger
Mama's hands in dishwater
Never lifted to wave, her eyes
On my fishnet hose thin, flimsy
And cold in late October dark
Jade East wafted heavy in his wake
Blonde breath short and white

I tugged my wool jumper down,
The one like Twiggy's, trying to
Stretch to my knees but hopeless
In the bucket seat too far too deep
I didn't know him or his friends
From Up North, his hair ruffled
Like John Lennon's partly covering
Pimples red and raw pitiful clawed.

At the drive-in movie, he talked
Of big schools, God being dead,
Weed, acid music, and the Stupid War,
Biting his nails between topics
But he was free enough not to
Wear socks in winter and talk
Even when no one listened so
I startled when he showed intentions.

I shut my eyes and ears ashamed
Hating his breath and clumsy hands
Sick of the war and freaks and beaded
Potheads and dishonest politicians

All there in fogged up windows
But, to this day, try as I might, I just
Can't remember what the movie
Was about or who won the game.

Pris Campbell

SLEET

Rare nights when sleet
fingerpainted our windows,
sent dogs skittering home
early to pant by the fire,
my superintendent father
drove our Chevy over roads
fortressing our town before
calling principals, teachers,
and bus drivers to cancel
the coming day's classes.

Curled warm into wool blankets
we half slept as branches
creaked out ghost stories
to blackened stars and
shivering pines.

By dawn, the phone rang
constantly until word spread
that we could throw on warm pants
and sweaters, crunch out over
frozen grass to a friend's
house for hot chocolate, Elvis
loving us tender on the record
player, and dream about futures
still far beyond frozen fingertips.

Author's Comment: I grew up in a tiny one stoplight town in South Carolina in the late forties and fifties. We usually had around two or three sleet storms a year and, if we were lucky, one snowfall. There was no tv or radio announcement about school closings. In fact, many people didn't have tv's until well into the fifties.. As superintendant, my father made the final decision about whether the roads were safe enough, especially for people who had to be bused in from the countryside surrounding our town. After he'd taken his ride out in the dark, he first called the bus drivers and principals to cancel, then the word was spread by his calls to a pre-set group of teachers who each had their own list of other teachers or key people to call. Of course, not everybody in town could be called, so our phone rang nonstop as the sun rose with 'Will there be school today?'. After the business was done, my friends and I always rushed out for a glorious day of freedom.

Bio: The poetry of Pris Campbell has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies, including PoetsArtists, Bicycle Review, Wild Goose Review, The Dead Mule, Outlaw Poetry Network and others. She has published seven books/chaps, two in collaboration with Scott Owens. Her most recent book is *Shadows Trail Them Home*, from Clemson University Digital Press (with Scott Owens). Her most successful individual book remains *Sea Trails*, from LummoX Press, an accounting in poems, log notes, comments, and photos of her trip down the east coast in a 22 foot sailboat in 1977. Her books can be seen as this link: <http://www.poeticinspire.com/booksbypris.html> . Formerly a Clinical Psychologist, she was sidelined by ME/CFS in 1990. She lives in the greater West Palm Beach, Florida, with her husband and still enjoys trips to sit by the sea.

Diana Pinckney

SONGLINES

for the animal shall not be measured by man Henry Beston

In Alaska, searching the wolf by day
and longing by dark for his howl,
I spot a body, gray fur sunk into bone
beside the rails as the train speeds deeper
into Denali, a wilderness where
all things move with the seasons. The pink
of fireweed dies to floating cotton

as August lengthens. *Canis lupus* —
science named him — will plow snow to tear
the white weasel and hare, nuzzle
young in the camouflage of a den. And over
summer's green-gold tundra, trail
caribou, mile after tangled mile, plunging
streams that redden and twist with salmon.

This mythic, hunted animal — the Pawnee's
Spirit Talker, the west's Lobo — listens
for raven to call from a sky
not yet stolen. When the same sky
streaks with twilight, somewhere
voices rise to it and to each other,
a wild harmony haunting the unknown.

Author's Comments: "Songlines" evolved from a trip to Alaska and from reading Barry Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men*. I will never forget hearing Lopez speak at CPCC a few years ago. I bought his book and it was so heart-breaking that I had to put it down. Then I finished the book on the flight home from Alaska, crying as I read on the plane. Since then, the decimation of the wolf population at the hand of man, both in the Rocky Mountain states and here in our own state of N.C., has led me to write other poems about wolves.

Bio: Diana Pinckney's work has appeared in *Cave Wall*, *Green Mountains Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Connotations.com*, *Cream City Review*, *RHINO*, *Main Street Rag*, *Iodine*, *The Pedestal Magazine* and numerous other journals and anthologies. She has 4 collections of poetry, including *Green Daughters*. Diana is the winner of The 2010 EKPHRASIS Prize and Atlanta Review's 2012 International Poetry Prize.

Mary Ricketson

LUNAR MAGIC

Watch this winter wolf moon.
Here, grab a coat, sit with me on my deck.
Sky colors, pink, yellow, violet-
light up bright beneath this lunar face.

Watch, spellbound next to me,
quiet, no distraction. There is power
in the moon. Look, how the stars know their place,
let the moon howl at center stage.
Full brilliant light rules the night.
Emotion speaks on its own accord. Listen.
Watch till clouds cover the face of the moon.

Jim Zola

SORROW

I read this book explaining the machineries
of sorrow, list the tools I lack.
Earlier my wife poked and pinched the spots
on my back. Monkey love. Now she's sleeping
without me. I still feel her nail marks
in flesh I cannot see. I can see,
out the kitchen window, lamplight
from the house next door, a neighbor
I barely know. By the time I get up
to take a closer look, his house is dark,
each window x'ed out. My wife tosses
in bed dreaming of Wuji Gong,
how her medicines of trust will save me.
Or she dreams of the guy at her work
with wild and young hair. He gives her a ride
when the van is in the shop for new brakes.
She wears an anklet and hopes he notices.
He sneaks his hand up her dress while they wait
for the light to turn green. They are kids playing
Red Rover, Red Rover let lovers come
over. I'm the gravel in the playground
dirt that skins her knee. I want to kiss it,
to staunch the flow. But this is her dream.
I have no arms or legs. I'm stuck
in this smooth machinery of sorrow.

Author's Comment: I have always resisted writing dream poems, but when the dream belongs to someone else, I figure it is ok

Bio: Jim Zola lives in Greensboro NC and heads children's services at a public library. His new book of poetry, *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press) is available through Amazon or from the author.

Devona Wyant

DOING THE TIME WARP WITH MY QUANTUM MECHANIC

Someone has been playing cat's cradle
with the cosmic strings
because various life characters
are jumping ship to do the time warp.
I saw myself on the street yesterday
and wished I looked that good.
When I glimpsed myself in the grocery store,
looking like death warmed over,
I knew it was time to call for a reunion of sorts.
All twenty-six of me met at the Taste Full Beans
to discuss the state of things in a congenial atmosphere.
As we sorted out our histories, understanding came.
The me that looked so good, never married my first husband,
never spent a month in a bus station living on catsup soup.
Instead, I took that job in Paris and married a professor there.
The me with one foot in the grave, not only married our first husband,
but married our first sweetheart as well.
Not to mention a third who was a stranger to this me.
The professional me spent years getting a degree
and never married at all.
Some of me had children. Most did not.
On one plane of existence, I even had religion.
Some still had our mother. A few had a father who wasn't a disaster.
I lived everywhere, every when. Often happily, sometimes not.
Each me saw how each decision,
each choice, leads to the next choice,
a road difficult to leave with few exits,
where only the bravest will leave the road entirely
to drive across the land itself.
I liked some of myself.
I wanted to scream at others.
But just as we started to make sense
of what was, what is, and what could still be,
our various friends and lovers,
siblings and spouses, and family arrived.
Too many for the coffee shop to hold.
When each started to compare their lives, it was chaos.
But that's another theory.

Author's Comment: Some poems just come naturally. Take one part interest in Chaos Theory, one part interest in String Theory, add a healthy helping of Rocky Horror Picture Show and you have this poem.

Bio: Devona Wyant is the senior founder of Poetry Lincolnton and has been published in five anthologies, various on line journals and Ellery Queen Mystery Magazine. She has also been part of "100 Thousand Poets for Change".

Debra Kaufman

BURTON AND CROWS

When those feathered tricksters,
aware of their rough beauty,
called in their ragged voices
Watch us ascend,
Burton stood, steady
in the prairie wind,
feet planted in the corn-stubbed field,
and cawed right back:
he knew he'd soon enough
till and plant,
harvest and lie fallow,
so he laughed as they rose
pleased with themselves,
some part of him lifting
to the blue illusion.

Bio: Poet and playwright Debra Kaufman is the author of two full-length poetry collections—*The Next Moment* (Jacar 2010) and *A Certain Light* (Emrys 1996)—and three chapbooks—*Family of Strangers*, *Still Life Burning*, and *Moon Mirror Whiskey Wind*. Her poems have appeared in many anthologies and magazines, including *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Virginia Quarterly Review*, *Poetry East*, and *North Carolina Literary Review*.

Tim Peeler

OLD MAN POEMS

Jazz gathering in darkness over the farm,
Waiting for morning's icy mirror.
Looking for the moon, you only find
A cloudy glow like a death shining back through,
Tranquility's price, and you dig
How the horns hover around the melody,
Your heartbeat, death's dance.
You look one more time for the moon
And find it in the paint thinner finish
Of peaty scotch, an icy amber mirror,
Jazzy death's dance, tranquility's price.

Glenda Beall

TWO BUTTERMILKS FOR PAMELA

I knock but know she can't hear me.
The TV blasts through the door. I turn the knob,
walk into the kitchen calling
Meals on Wheels.

I set her institutional lunch
on the counter. In the other room,
like a gray mourning dove,
she's perched before the screen.

I approach gingerly, afraid I'll startle her.
She looks up with a wide smile.
Don't get up, I say. I brought your lunch.

Ninety-four years old she lives alone,
in a mobile home on a twisting mountain trail,
her son a stone's throw down the road.

Struggling to her feet, she pushes
her walker toward me,
Oh, thank you. A hundred times thank you.
I enjoy so much the buttermilk. It keeps me going.
I get two, you know.

We inch our way to the door.
Hope you enjoy it, Mrs. Lawrence.
She takes my hand, speaks to me
as if we were dear friends,
Call me Pamela.

Author's Comment: For several years, here in the mountains of western NC, my husband and I delivered Meals on Wheels to people who were disabled or elderly and could no longer cook for themselves. I was struck by the loneliness of many of them, like Pamela, who often saw no one all day except the one who brought him or her a hot meal. We encountered some emergency situations. A woman had fallen, and she could not reach her phone to call for help. She said she didn't panic because she knew a "Meals on Wheels" volunteer would be by before too long. By donating a couple of hours of our time one day a month, our own lives were enriched when we saw their faces as we gave hugs, smiles and some conversation that brightened the days of folks like Pamela.

Bio: Glenda Council Beall published a poetry chapbook, *Now Might as Well be Then*, in 2009. Her poems and stories have been published in numerous journals, including *Wild Goose Poetry Review* and *Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*. Beall is the owner and director of *Writers Circle Around the Table*, a studio for writers in Hayesville, NC. She serves as the Clay County Representative for NCWN-West and is a member of the NC Poetry Society. She manages two blog sites, <http://www.glendacouncilbeall.blogspot.com> and <http://www.profilesandpedigrees.blogspot.com>

Review
by Anthony S. Abbott

ON THE BEVEL
Janice Moore Fuller
Cinnamon Press, 2014
ISBN: 9781909077263

Janice Moore Fuller, who is Writer-in-Residence and Professor of English at Catawba College, is one of North Carolina's finest poets. In her fourth book of poems, *On the Bevel*, she extends the range of her first three books—*Archeology is a Destructive Science*(1997), *Sex Education*(2004), and *Séance*(2007). While *Séance* moved beyond the first two books with its remarkable range of forms, including forms invented by Fuller herself, *On the Bevel* seems to me the richest, the deepest, the most fully human of Fuller's books.

There are two dominant sets of images in *On the Bevel*. One is the image of the bevel itself from the title poem, and the other is the ongoing tension between light and gravity laid out in the epigraph by Simon Weil: "Two forces rule the universe: light and gravity."

It is clear that the two are interrelated. In "On the Bevel" the bevel seems associated with light and life, and the right angle with death. "Yesterday the Virginia creeper/beveled into red and gold," Fuller writes. But the father seems unable to comprehend the bevel, able to think only in terms of right angles. Fuller quotes from Faulkner's *Cash Bundren* in *As I Lay Dying*, a novel she adapted for the stage at Catawba College: "A body is not square like a crosstie...." The father, throughout this book of poems, is associated with gravity, with darkness, with basements. The bevel, the light are both beyond his reach.

Always it is the mother who is associated with light. In the marvelous early poem, "What's Left," an osprey "sits erect,/her wings outstretched." The mother, like the osprey, "arms spread wide," calls the child from the "ditch at the bottom /of the hill where I was hiding." Gravity is always there, pulling the child into darkness, into fear. In "Insomnia" the memory of the narrator's cousin hanging upside down, "her long rush of hair/brushing against the weeds" pulls against the dark as does the memory of "the soft sheet Mother/covered me with" and the "undulating screen to let in the breeze/but keep out what churned in the dark."

In the opening poem, "The Question I Would Ask" the light is associated with fertility, the dark with drought. That fertility is most beautifully presented in that extraordinary poem, "Mother of the Bride" in which Fuller's twin daughters, to whom the book is dedicated, appear as bride and as "honor guard," both of them hovering above the page, transformed by the exquisite character of the moment into creatures of pure light.

But gravity is never really defeated. Even in "Mother of the Bride," the father is there sending the small child wobbling on her bicycle down the hill with "one hard push." Memory is tricky. In the first part of the book, virtually all the poems arise out of a tension between past and present,

between images of childhood and adulthood. The narrator remembers wanting to be Joan of Arc at ten, "Houdini in a white chemise," but the same child discovers in her father's nightstand "dirty books and a pistol." There are no final answers. I am intrigued by the poem called "Sleepwalking" in which the narrator lists a series of lies, concluding with "Lies that say/there is one light we haven't found the switch for./ Yet." There it is. Gravity pulls us down into darkness, the "one light" will raise us up forever. But there is no switch. Still, as we see in the powerful final poem, "Gravity," even though there is something "creeping up the stairs," "Angels hover with silver tendrils/so fine nothing can keep them away." Those angels will push the gravity back down, and raise the sleeper into the realm of pure light "as weightless as my pillow," at least for the moment. "Gravity" takes us back to "Insomnia," the second poem in the book with the image of the screen through which the spirits slip, the screen that can keep out "what churned in the dark."

Here is the fullness of life in all its complexity. The dark is never fully defeated, but sometimes, as in the final line of the book, we feel "God as weightless as my pillow." These poems depict stunningly both the abiding mystery of the dark and that momentary weightlessness for which we all long.

Review
by Antonia Clark

WHAT GLORIOUS POSSIBILITIES

Jim Zola

Kelsey Books, Aldrich Press, 2014

ISBN: 9780615958354

The first poem in Jim Zola's aptly titled poetry collection, *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press, 2014), is called "Blues." And indeed, the poems in this book are studded with blue things: a sky blue Falcon, blue corn chips, a bright blue egg, a blue barn, the "night's blue sigh," "grandmother's perfect blue perm," and "blue blue flowers." Of course, most of these images do not signal sadness. But there are plenty of blues, of one sort or another, in the book. And yet, the poem ends:

"... Big Blues
eat the little Blues. Deep below,
something joyful swims out of it all."

This is a fitting preview, for indeed, though the poet leads us through confusion and melancholy, something joyful really does emerge from this collection. One cannot help but agree that every moment holds its hidden promise. Every life is a constellation of possibilities.

Many of the poems in this book deal with the realities of the everyday: home, family, the dailiness of life, its mundane preoccupations and uncertainties. At the same time, they remind us that there's another realm — that of emotion. And, too, always on the edge of consciousness, the unseen, the unknown, the unfathomable. In one poem, "you hear birds you can't see." In another, there are "dogs we never see that bark." The speaker goes about his daily routines, doing what needs to be done, but cannot forget the confusion of human experience, the threats that the dark might hold. In "The Night Still Dark," we read:

The leaves have drawn out
their dying, just as I

let myself linger.
I'm the Grumpy General,

barking orders about gloves
and hats. Putting on

a sock, my son forgets
what world he's in. I can't

forget. I keep notes
in my pockets.

The poems are about what we inherit and what we bequeath (especially from father to son) — which are often very much the same things. The collection also includes some retellings of classic fairy tales (Hansel and Gretel, The Pied Piper, The Enchanted Pig) as well as the more exotic “The Bee-Bearded Man’s Only Son.”

Zola’s poems are sometimes quirky, sometimes a bit surreal. But always honest and searching. The language is fresh, the images concrete, unexpected, and often arresting. The poet’s attention shifts and settles on one image after another, something like the sunlight that he describes moving from object to object in a room, “setting fire to a dinged lampshade, loved books, the dog mid-twitch. . . .” Because of this, it’s easy to see the world from the narrator’s point of view. And of course, this kind of seeing leads to another kind: it lets us see within. Zola gives us a house of the imagination and lets us peer through the windows.

This speaker, like all poets, is in love with words and with naming — our anchors to the real world. He names things. Children name things. In one poem (“The Ornithologist Leaves a Note”), the speaker keeps books by his bed — a book on birds, and one on trees, on plants, on stars. In another (“Last Word of the Man Who Read Dictionaries”), the speaker loses one word after another. Word matter. It’s by way of language that we understand ourselves and our relation both to our loved ones and to the rest of humanity.

One of my favorite poems in the book is “How It Happens.” It reminds us that things can change in an instant — but yes, unexpected joy can also swim out of that moment.

How It Happens

One night the world seems right
moon in place
dog snoring
lightly at the foot of our bed

By morning the faucet in the bathroom drips
it didn’t before
I resort to my usual tools
my phillips screwdriver
my red plumber’s wrench

my curses and pleas
This is the next to last straw

a broken lace on the shoe of madness
you laugh say
a cockroach can live for days

without its head
Then I'm tapping a tune on the pipes

La Cucaracha
and you are shimmying naked
down the hallway.

It's often said that a good poem teaches the reader how to read it. One poem in particular — "Under the Influence" — gave me this feeling and, moreover, taught me something about reading the collection as a whole.

Under the Influence

A blowsy woman weaves parrots
and never smiles. Or if she smiles,
it is in the dark
of her lover's hair like whiskey
and trouble, like loosely braided
love. There are gaps in this logic,
peeled back to reveal the circuits
we learn to trust, the road that curves
until we know without looking
each downshift,
until we are under it all,
the bramble of gears and blossom,
the secret maps, under the ground,
the place where all we fear turns
into water and then back
to what we believe.

These poems give us a sense of what's "under it all." Their images work together to create emotional textures that aren't easy to pin down, glimpses into those aspects of experience that perhaps don't have names — which is why the poems are so necessary.

Jim Zola's poems remind us that we're all born into one life or another. We use what we're given. We don't understand it all, but we try to honor it and find our way as well as we can. Again and again while reading this collection, I heard echoes of Henry James: "We work in the dark — we do what we can — we give what we have. Our doubt is our passion, and our passion is our task. The rest is the madness of art."

Review
by Helen Losse

ELEGY IN REVERSE

Mike James

Kelsay Books, Aldrich Press, 2014

ISBN: 9780615952444

By way of simplest definition, elegiac poetry expresses sorrow for someone who is dead. Why then, did Mike James choose the title *Elegy In Reverse* for his latest collection of poems? Answering that question is necessary to understand the book. It is also the book's subject.

In the first poem of James's eighty-page tome and in the first of three unnamed sections, he describes a memory / vision / story of his late father.* His "old man saw a stone / suddenly decide to be a bird," before making two circles and flying away ("*Anecdote In A Grassy Field*").

This happened...
before i was born
when miracles still took place.

James has set the tone. If drunks become disoriented, and his father was a drunk, then

...it only makes sense
that my father...
could forget the way back to our apartment
on Hinton street
("What's Done and Not Done")

No sorrow is expressed here. And in "*Those Were The Days*," he describes his—now departed—grandfather, sitting in his truck, drinking his "green bottled beer," throwing empty bottles at "the thousand cats / his wife kept," but "never" smoking ("*Those Were The Days*").

(These things
you think about in bed
instead of
counting sheep)

Nothing is drawn out in these poems. Nothing is overstated. Much of the time, James merely describes what happened the way he remembers it, or so it seems to the reader. These are poems about dead relatives, but there is no lament.

James's poems also offer the positive, such as, "grace can come in the harvest of wild things" ("*Wild Apples*").

In the second section, James uses more references to faith. His subject base is larger, and he looks for lost signs. "The Lost Poem" speaks to many varieties of incompleteness.

...the one you meant to write...

maps with landmarks
no longer there

Our time on earth is limited, so

think about
what's not
possible

think about
possible
too
("After A Long Winter")

Try.

But James wants the "real" — the physical.

I don't know what to make
of the language
of grace
("On Refusing To Say Grace Before Dinner With My Wife")

These poems are filled with emptiness. Even as James views a painting by Anthony DeBernardin, he notices a woman who "carries an empty wine glass / across a grassy field" where she laughs with twenty-five other women. Three of these women are "belly deep" in pond water, laughing, and, because they are subjects in a painting will continue laughing. James knows, "they are either swimming / or bathing," and his response to not knowing is "no matter" ("The Pond Bathers").

James's lamentations are not for people; he wishes for days gone by, perhaps a second chance.

if I could only
paint as well
as when
I was three...

[when]
each mistake's
a blessing
("The Shape Of The Sun")

Then in a two line poem, James redefines "elegy" and claims his own awkwardness.

a love poem to an abstraction
once touched
("The Definition Of Elegy")

Now the readers know what James has been after all along; elegy touches. "The Definition of Elegy" serves the same purpose as a titular poem in other books. It serves as an almost climax, a touchstone of meaning.

The third section deals with loss. It begins with a knock-knock joke, ends with a lobster, and covers the spectrum of human losses. Getting lost with a friend, losing your mind, lost things, the end of summer, and the results of sex change are among James's subjects.

Elegy In Reverse does not tie things up neatly in its final poems. There is no definitive resolution. The poems seem merely to stop, which is entirely fitting considering the book's title and tone (voice.) An elegy often begins with details and builds a case for sorrow, but James has written an elegy in reverse.

If we add a bit of conjecture, we can see that life goes on elegy or no elegy, so life must go on with an elegy in reverse. James seems to take the position, we are all nuts, or at least, all poets are abnormal—walking out of step. "Say you make your living writing poems" ("As You Go Along"), he begins,

but nothing stands out
like...
a willingness to speak like a pirate...

before they take you to a quiet room
in a special hospital
for people just like you....

And then he ends with

if a lobster came up to me in the street...
we would argue...
about who should go home first
("A Lobster")

The words "home" and "first" have so many layers of meaning. And deciding who should win the argument matters. Sure, the lobster belongs in water, the poet lives somewhere other than the beach. But with respect to "elegy in reverse," perhaps those two final words indicate a longing for that place and time "when miracles still took place" ("Anecdote In A Grassy Field") and elegies were still in order. Perhaps "home" means a time before the poet's birth.

People often make jokes about things that cause them discomfort. Is James out of step, or that the sorrow speaking? *Elegy In Reverse* by Mike James is a book of poems worthy of a second reading. These are poems with truths that echo.

Review
by Kathy Nelson

MIDWESTERN MEMORIES

Nancy Scott
Aldrich Press, 2013
ISBN: 9780615923680

There is not a shred of self-pity in the very difficult material Nancy Scott (www.nancyscott.net) deals with in her latest book *Midwestern Memories*. Instead, whether she is dealing with the memory of her parents' divorce, the death of a cousin, or being a child during a time of war, there is humor and wry understanding. For a reader, it is an absorbing, fascinating read.

Ms. Scott has collected a series of vignettes that accumulate to capture a childhood. She offers reflections on family, such as the artist aunt who favored her ("Canvas"), and traces her Russian lineage with deft strokes ("Family Photos"). The brief lines of "How My Brother Got Religion" offer a glimpse not only of her brother's character but of her relationship with him as he is forced by their mother to return items stolen from a church. She recalls the drama of childhood friendships: skating on thin ice with Peter ("Wilder Lake") and, against the backdrop of playing "good guys" and "Nazis," watching Tommy being ostracized as he dreams of "shooting/a real gun, real bullets" ("Child's Play, circa 1944"). Many of the phrases describe so well. In "The Outside Rear Steps," the great-grandmothers' hands are "thin bones wrapped in/speckled skin." There is economy but also tenderness in these descriptions.

The most poignant poems of this book convey the complexities of the poet's relationship with her parents. In "Blackout," the poet conveys her fondness for her father, the safety he provided "on long scary nights when bombs never fell." She skillfully portrays the complicated dynamics of a family in which the parents demand good manners of their child while they battle fiercely with each other ("When Good Manners were not Enough"). And with amazing understatement, she reveals the impossible situation the child is in when her parents are at war ("Waiting for Her"). The groaning of the car at the end of this poem is eloquent. But the most memorable poem of the book is "Battle," which cleanly gives the whole brutal story of the parents' conflicted marriage, its unraveling, the father's death, and, after his funeral, the mother's counting the "spoils of a lifetime at war."

War, geopolitical and interpersonal, is a motif of *Midwestern Memories* and, even though the tone of many of the poems is wry and restrained, one is left after reading this captivating volume with sympathy for the child who witnessed it.

