

Winter 2017

Being Assistant Editors for the past six months has allowed us to push ourselves in ways we had never thought we would be pushed. In the previous two issues, we had to learn how Wild Goose works as a magazine, how to connect with writers and lift their work up, and of course how to send rejections – not a very fun thing to do. The collaborative nature of editing is like nothing we have ever experienced before, and we have found that helping to shine the spotlight on other writers' wonderful work is a truly joyful experience.

This issue takes our experiences a step further. In the time since our last issue was released, a new federal administration has begun, and significant, sometimes scary, changes are already taking place. But with those changes have come those who are standing up and using their First Amendment right to have their voices heard. Whether it is words exchanged between people, written on a protest sign, or added as a Facebook post, individuals and groups are using the power of words to make sure their message gets across. And so we come to the poetry of our Winter 2017 issue. Many of these poems are written from the perspective of women, and many of them are also written by women. Women are taking words and using them to create poetry both beautiful and powerful, and the effect is palpable. Just as they have always done, words are resisting negative change, paving the path to positive change, and touching the lives of any who have the privilege to read them.

It is with great pleasure and honor that we introduce you to the Winter 2017 issue of Wild Goose. May these words impact you as much as they have us.

Katelyn Vause, Assistant Editor

Jordan Makant, Assistant Editor

Contents

Maria Roupail, Mary Magdalene Theorizes

Jane Andrews, Diagnosis

Jane Andrews, Amy's Ghazal

Joyce Brown, Broken

Joyce Brown, Binary Studies

Tammy Daniel, Frying Bacon

Tammy Daniel, One-Way Dandelion

Lisa Ezzard, The Scattering

Maren O. Mitchell, Lois Hampton, Striptease Artiste, Expatriate, Paris

Maren O. Mitchell, Lois Hampton, Homesick Striptease Artiste

Joseph Milford, Morphnacular III.: Bus-ride Peripeteia

Joseph Milford, Community Service: Sentenced to 10 Days: D.U.I.

David Sermersheim, Homunculus

Jim Zola, In the Sim's World I'm Widowed

Jim Zola, This Much is Certain

Patricia L Goodman, Loss

Patricia L Goodman, Blue

Mary Ricketson, The Ritual of Tea

John Robinson, Homeplace

Richard Dinges, At City's Edge

Reviews

Kati Waldrop, Review of Reginald Dwayne Betts' Bastards of the Reagan Era

Jordan Makant, Review of Solmaz Sharif's Look

Katelyn Vause, Review of Shelby Stephenson's Elegies for Small Game

Maria Roupail

MARY MAGDALENE THEORIZES

He said *Don't*
when I reached to touch him.
I didn't quite get it, but I didn't press him, either.
I had to remember
I wasn't his mother or aunt,
His wife, sister, or somebody's mother-in-law.
I wasn't a man, like the ones who followed him around for three years.
Perhaps he was naked and he saw my embarrassment.
Perhaps the holes in his body still hurt.
His skin might have been hot and tight from the light
that blasted away the stone.
He might have been, somehow, wet and sticky from the afterbirth of his new body.
Hadn't he been a corpse for nearly three days?
Now he was clean, gleaming.
It was five in the morning, the sky was black and purple,
the sun was just breaking over the hilltops.
I had been weeping for hours.
Imagine the shock I felt when I heard someone call my name!
Of course, I wanted to touch him.
Or maybe he didn't say anything.
Maybe I strode right up to his face, and he didn't object.
Maybe he kissed my hair without saying a word.
Maybe I kissed him back.
Maybe the story changed, after I told it, and I was made to fail
at knowing the difference between daring and propriety, fear and faith.
I was clingy and possessive, it was said for a very long time,
the way a woman is in these situations.
Lot's wife, for example.
She was that way, they say,
mourning the walls where her children left their handprints,
her lovely loom.
She couldn't move on, and now
that's what they say about me.
How do they know I didn't simply love him,
was happy he was alive,
my whole self ringing like a bell.

Author's Comment: "Mary Magdalene Theorizes" reflects my indebtedness to Wislawa Szymborska's persona poem, "Lot's Wife," and it experiments with some of the latter's strategies of subversion and irony. My poem makes no attempt at theology, per se. After Szymborska (and

Louise Glück in “Circe’s Power”), I’m attempting principally to en flesh a character that has been traditionally and somewhat ambiguously allegorized.

Bio: Maria Rouphail is the author of *Apertures*, and *Second Skin*. Her poem, “Crater at Popocatepetl,” won Honorable Mention in the 2016 Randall Jarrell Poetry Competition. Her poem, “It’s OK to Say These Things” has been anthologized in *Red Sky* (Sable Books, 2016). She is currently at work on her third poetry collection.

Jane Andrews

DIAGNOSIS

It's like the time
you hit the dog on the highway
late at night, driving back
from the beach.

She turned her head
toward us,
eyes reflecting green
in the beams.

One lane coming,
one lane going,
through a marsh
of hidden peepers

and a shudder
passed through the car
into my chest.
Our daughter woke.

"What's going on?"
"Nothing."
We did not look at the road
behind us. Or at each other.

We never stopped moving.

Jane Andrews

AMY'S GHAZAL

Who is the one you don't talk about? Before I knew you, she was there.
And still, when you are on the phone listening, I read her in your face.

It is a long story, I think. You have a certain look, a downward tilt
of your head, left arm folded across your chest, cell phone against your face.

Her voice lays a yoke on your shoulders, you listen and listen.
I remember penitents dragging a cross to Rome, and recognize the guilt in your face.

If I love you, must I love your mystery? Is that the kind of story she is?
I see memory move in your eyes like a turning page. I memorize your face

because you cannot see me stare, your vision focused on the past.
Who do you think I am? Someone who won't tell you to your face,

"Be with me now. Tell me a story. I will listen and listen."?
Do you remember sitting in your car one winter, rain shadows on your face

when you took your glasses off to kiss me, but kept your eyes open,
calling me by name, as I moved to meet your face.

Joyce Brown

BROKEN

Pearl cries at the sight of us.
"I thought you was mad at me."
A battered soul, ninety-nine,
finally downed with a broken hip,
finally driven to dutiful daughter's bed,
homesick for a hill two miles away.

"It's the prettiest place.
If Arville hadn't dragged
them old camp shacks
down there for our house,
if we'd just a had a nice house
on it. But we didn't starve.
We always ate good and we
always shared with everbody."

Margie asks if we
could use a few cucumbers
and a head of cabbage. We
could. Margie goes to the
garden and cuts the freshest for us,
her kitchen laden with harvest.
"We always shared," Pearl says.

"The roof started leaking
where them two camp houses
was put together. And we paid
the man five hundred dollars
to fix it. But where he walked
he musta broke in the roof
so we had to move my bed
into the other side with the table
and the living room. And there ain't
hardly any room to move around
with everthing on one side.
And still I'd rather be up there
right this minute than sitting here
in Margie's house. And I don't reckon
I'll ever get to go back home."

Pearl's legs are wrapped in white,
her eyes shut tight against the light
of a well-windowed house. Her pieced
together home of timber shacks,
her own dark shelter,
shines bright in her heart.

Author's Comment: Sometimes we find poetry by listening. In this case, an old woman's longing for her mountain home seemed to me a sort of sorrowful poem. All I had to do was capture the words and provide some context without destroying the beauty of Pearl's words.

Joyce Brown

BINARY STUDIES

I am learning how to balance
the bright new hip against the old.
The new one's bigger better.
The old one tends to slouch.

I am learning to balance on a bike.
The new one lets my feet land flat.
The old one threw me to the ground.
I am trying to form a creed

balancing the feel of wind on face,
when it was easy to believe in balance,
against this fear of smooth soft asphalt
which tricks the senses with its tarry hands.

I am riding on joy and fear, balancing
old illusion against new aggression,
daughter's dimpled belly button against
gash and scar of cancer's tubes and knives.

Author's Comment: We all know that our lives can be changed in seconds. In my case, a silly fall from a bike on my birthday which left me debilitated for months and my daughter's concurrent battle with cancer forced me into a sudden and shaky reminder of that old truism. What once was clashes suddenly with the new what is. Inconvenience rubs up against tragedy's gateway and sends the mind on its own shaky journey.

Bio: After completing degrees in English Language and Literature, Joyce Compton Brown studied Appalachian culture and literature at Berea College and creative writing at Appalachian State and Hindman School in Kentucky. She taught at Gardner-Webb University, publishing scholarly articles and reviews on Southern and Appalachian culture and literature and writing a column for *The Shelby Star*. She currently lives in her former home town of Troutman, NC, publishing in journals such as *Kakalak*, *Now and Then*, and *PineSong*. Her chapbook, *Bequest*, was published by Finishing Line Press in 2015, and she was featured poet at the Doris Betts Literary Festival in 2016. She also enjoys painting and maintains her interest in old-time banjo and ancient balladry.

Tammy Daniel

FRYING BACON

He likes his bacon crisp.
Cadaverous. Yardstick stiff.
Twenty years of Sunday morning
sameness.

She turns the radio on. Oldies.
My, how the bacon swoons! Snaps
its fingers against the rendering
of heat and memory.

He'll never approve the way tongues
now curl into a kiss, how edges
gather like pintucks in a prom dress.
Or that boy in the blue tux

stepping from song to stove
swaying behind her, the warm dance
of hands pressing her satin robe.
Never mind the wrinkles.

Tammy Daniel

ONE-WAY DANDELION

Years before anyone knew a driver
could be designated, there was always
someone to steady my father into the house
the next morning, deposit him on the couch
like loose change.

Then mom would do what she always
did—send my brother, sister and me out
into the wild imagination of our backyard
to golden our faces under the warm, yellow rays
of forsythia, play hide and seek among redwood
groves of spirea, float for hours on a tide
of crimson clover until lunch or supper
called us ashore.

But sometimes the sound of heavy boots
on the porch or slam of a car door
would banish me to the dead end of a ditch;
a culvert cliff where a one-way dandelion,
rising like a hot air balloon, would some day
carry me adrift, all helium and fire crackling
against the crumbling asphalt.

Bio: Tammy Daniel was selected as one of New Voices of 2015 by The Writers Place in Kansas City, Mo. Her work has appeared in *I-70 Review*, *Touch: The Journal of Healing*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Red River Review*, *Rusty Truck*, *Ink Sweat and Tears*, and the Johnson County Library.

Lisa Ezzard

THE SCATTERING

the ashes are from a woman
named Maureen –
my husband's lost wife
who I only meet
as I pour her
into my pottery urn

who I only feel
when I scoop my hand in
to hold small hunks
of her bone

her white sparkling dust
clings to me
as I scatter her
into the lake
where the dog
laps her up

what's left of her
we rub on our pant legs
while we circle around each other
in silence, wondering

how could we be so bold?
to reach in
to grab a messy handful
that spills
like all the sand and gravel
we'd picked up as children
sifting all sorts of remnants
of life, not knowing

until this dust of a wife
I breath into me
until her death resounds
in the song that I sing
which is heard
before it comes out
of my mouth

until I begin to sparkle
with aging white borders
like one's body
once it is cast into the air

we sit in silence
with the lake
and the forest
saying *Maureen, Maureen.*

Author's Comment: This poem embodies my first encounter with touching and holding the remnants of a human form turned to white ash and bone particles. I was scattering the ashes of a woman I had never met, but a woman whose soul/being was now dwelling inside my husband and his community of friends.

Bio: Lisa Ezzard, a long-time poet, is a member of the Squaw Valley Community of Writers and has received grants to write at Casa Don Miguel in Patzcuaro, Mexico, and at Hambidge Art Center in the Smoky Mountains. Her poetry book, *Vintage*, published by Native Press, chronicles a year of growing wine grapes and making wine in the Appalachians of North Georgia, where she is 6th generation on a family farm. She has spent her adult life teaching, editing, and performing poetry in a wide variety of venues throughout California, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Maren O. Mitchell

LOIS HAMPTON, STRIPTEASE ARTISTE, EXPATRIATE, PARIS

1.

Clothes help us be seen as we want to be seen—
not as we are; they lie for us;
I use them.
Everyone dresses for someone, self or others, or both,
but I dress in reverse for myself—please myself;
others enjoy my motivated movements, my pleasure.

The seen is known; the unseen, only imagined—
never disappoints,
decade into decade, tantalizing for what cannot be had.

Not beautiful, never even pretty, I have the elusive,
what the French call *Je ne sais quoi*:
I put it down to loving life, having no quarrel with the world.
Those who don't have it—see and want.
My mother had it; she turned on like a spotlight
and anyone within reach was caught, until she turned away.

2.

Straight hair, pallid skin that wouldn't tan,
teased by boys in school, insecure,
I roamed my California coast in the company of wind and surf.
Through hatha yoga I found my spotlight—
each position brought me to and placed me where I was—
breathing controlled, strengthening.

Movements learned equality, filled with themselves:
significant putting on of shoes in the morning,
deliberate walk from one classroom to the next,

raising of my hand and arm to offer question
or answer—a motion away from gravity and into the universe,
dividing stillness from a second purpose.

I am exactly where I am supposed to be,
aware of myself at the same time
aware of others.

3.

I hear Gypsy is taking cues from me—
she will be unique,
she will be remembered.

To bring them in, closer to me, I wear a favorite perfume:
if I like my aura, so will they,
but by morning what I've shown is passé,

what they don't see remains with them.
Here at the Moulin Rouge I molt to my own music.
As I slide each piece of clothing I feel my skin applaud,

freed in my reciprocal touching of the world.
They're silent until I have left the stage—
en masse they witnessed private joy.

Maren O. Mitchell

Lois Hampton, Homesick Striptease Artiste

Life lived without obvious purpose
can still be meaningful—I miss
California, Shaw's Cove, where I worshiped gods
of light, warmth, water and wind. I remember
clasping coves guarded by cliffs, garnished
by challenging waves—my time
without time, without ambition.
I remember recharged days of yoga,
hidden from the cliffs above,
naked time, clothes superfluous,
as gulls inscribed their circular dances
punctuated by diving,
as breezes brushed my hair
and sea bathed and held me.
Supported by sand grains while sun
molded my surfaces, my mistakes untangled:
even now I taste salt on my lips,
feel the tide enfold, pulling me toward the East.

Bio: Maren O. Mitchell's poems appear in *Poetry East*, *Tar River Poetry*, *POEM*, *The Lake (UK)*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Chiron Review*, *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Town Creek Poetry*, *The South Carolina Review*, *Skive (AU)*, *Wild Goose Poetry Review* and *Southern Humanities Review*. Work is forthcoming in *Slant: A Journal of Poetry*, *Poetry East*, *Appalachian Heritage*, *Chiron Review* and *Hotel Amerika*.

Joseph Milford

MORPHNACULAR III.: BUS-RIDE PERIPETEIA

lullabies plucked spear-chucked into moonlanding
old bike tied to an oak in front of the methadone clinic
obese tie-dye boards transit by fleetfox anorexic all designer
soundtracked your whole life was heretofore a dollar store
dooby druthers song a caravan of ants tours the vista next
Japanese cameras exploding with indie rock all over the plaza
still-life's: "sky with unpaid bill" "wheelchair in carwreck"
"turban fights skullcap by beehive near mohawk"
following art-school girls to the commissary applying
for the job at the Band-Aid factory naval officer
in movie threatened the top gun that he'd end up flying rubber shit
cargo planes sounds like gainful aeronautics to me
drangstrum paronomasia of textslang like eoliths, we once
thought our poems were on purpose it's been un-erfed
like eoliths that these rhymes you be stealing is naturally-occurring
boregasm ensues at the stop pull the cable's nerve
revengicide on this citadel tonight gonna show the heart I got left

Joseph Milford

COMMUNITY SERVICE: SENTENCED TO 10 DAYS: D.U.I.:

I.

Shirts must remain tucked-in at all times.
No cell phones. No jewelry. Grab an orange
Vest. Sit still until called. No talking.

II.

Picking up trash at the Public Works.
Go inside to take a piss—find some old leather gloves
Marked TERRY. Put them on. Water fountain.
Back to the trash. We are picking up debris
Inside a fenced in junkyard. Making smaller piles into
Larger piles for our sins.

III.

On bus, I sit on the front seat.
Huge black buck with prison tats says,
“That’s my seat.” I see all the potential
Ways this could end. “You are gonna have to
Move me then.” Thundering silent pause.
He punches me in the arm, sits down, says,
“I was just fuckin’ with ya.” Van deflates.

IV.

Cleaning the stadiums after Friday night games.
On the bank in front of the field house—used condoms,
Plastic nacho containers, ant-infested candy apples,
A bloody tampon, a ten dollar bill,
pieces of pompom, a sock, an ear ring.
I love these youngsters I will never meet. May they never
Drink and drive and climb the banks of futures
Of the next generation with a sunburned neck, gloves
Named TERRY, and black plastic bags shimmering
With dew and post-touchdown American filth.

V.

Crystal meth, “pussy,” drinking, cars and engines.
On the van with the crew heading to Taco Bell
For the lunch break—the Mexicans talk of mucho
Mota—three other guys know each other—talk

About another guy in jail. I'm a professor, quiet,
For once, during drug deals as the van rides the projects.

VI.

Behind a building on a grounds we were cleaning,
I found a cooler full of assorted sodas. Stayed back there
A while—drinking a Mountain Dew, thinking
About that night. The blue lights of life acid.

VII.

I got pulled over in a parking lot—at Bubba Doo's.
Don't ask. I had a tail-light out. Don't ask.
I was wearing flip-flops. Did a field sobriety test
Barefoot in late January. Passed it. Failed the rest.
Slept on the cold hard slab in the holding cell.

VIII.

Weed-eating an elementary school parking lot,
I remember Amanda Brown—she gave me
Def Leppard's Pyromania for my birthday
In fourth grade. She must've become a good woman.

IX.

I am using a chainsaw on Polk Salad and kudzu.
I may lose a kneecap.
I pay my debt.

X.

Landscaping and drug deals.
County lock-ups and football fields
Illegal aliens and ex-con theologians.
My probation academy—the beer
Sweated out of me—my flesh, my juice, for the crime.
Service gave me new honor. I learned
The consequence of living like chainsaws.
I found a place in the bleachers.
I never had a place there in my life
Until the arrest, until standing there
in the middle of a game I could still win.

David Sermersheim

HOMUNCULUS

you thought it would stay in one place
adopt a contented pose
lounged languidly by the fire without complaint
nor ask for more than could be given

little did you know this thing
had a mind of its own
and was after all
you call your own

soon you were working for it
meeting its capricious demands
with no compensatory gratuities
stated or implied
— an ad hoc arrangement
made on its terms
not yours —

other possibilities were pursued
to no advantage
most were closed to further inquiry

the homunculus clung to the web it wove
spun round a routine that met his demands
along with a free lunch that was not discussed

now you're out the door
on the street
looking back at a brightly-lit room
where visions of poignant scenes
fade into misty shadows

Bio: David Sermersheim taught at The Hotchkiss School (Ct.) for 33 years. His poems have been published in *The Aurorean*, *Ancient Paths*, *Sacred Journeys*, *Iodine Review*, *Poetry Pacific*, *Miller's Pond* and other journals and quarterlies. He was a MacDowell Fellow and has a book, *Meditations*, listed on Amazon. He lives in Westbrook, Connecticut.

Jim Zola

IN THE SIMS WORLD I'M WIDOWED

Or so my daughter informs me
as she creates her pixilated life
with big-headed dog, beach house
in the mountains, garden forever
in bloom. I don't tell her I too
created a life for her, one where she dons
the invisible cloak of happiness,
where she understands that darkness exists
because I gave it to her in a box
wrapped tight with colorful ribbons.
She might hold it to her ear and shake.
But I won't tell what's inside. All I promise
is that it's not my heart.

Author's Comment: My daughter was obsessed with Sims games, building a house and living a life on the computer. So she would tell me what was happening in her other life. I've written a series of daughter poems. I hope someday she grows to appreciate them.

Jim Zola

THIS MUCH IS CERTAIN

By morning I'm back on the wagon.
It's red of course, with rust around

the axles and fake chrome. Outside
the rain takes over. Not cold enough

to freeze or even ice, I long
to see my breath. By noon, I will

be in love again. And the streets
will still be black with rain.

Author's Comment: With a gentle nod to William Carlos Williams.

Bio: Jim Zola has worked in a warehouse, as a security guard, in a bookstore, as a teacher for Deaf children, as a toy designer for Fisher Price, and currently as a children's librarian. Published in many journals through the years, his publications include a chapbook — *The One Hundred Bones of Weather* (Blue Pitcher Press) — and a full length poetry collection — *What Glorious Possibilities* (Aldrich Press). He has poems coming out in *Aberration Labyrinth*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *Algebra of Owls* and *Rat's Ass Review*. He currently lives in Greensboro, NC.

Patricia L. Goodman

LOSS

Great white egret
at the pond this morning
as I approach
in rain,
his elegance stark
against rustic reeds.

I need him
to stay,
to light my dark corners,
but sure
as the sodden skies,
wide wings open,
lift him across water.

Long neck curved,
legs trailing,
slow, strong wing beats
propel him away,
as he ghosts
into heavy, grey sky.

Author's Comment: "Loss" was written during a rainy walk on my farm in the midst of intense grief after the suicide of my husband. My mood was as dark as the weather. I was thrilled to see that egret, an unusual visitor to the farm, but he didn't stay long enough to cheer me.

Patricia L. Goodman

BLUE

Eviscerated, it lay in my path, head
missing, entrails littering the walk, splendid
blue-jay feathers scattered,
fair-game victim of a hungry hawk.

On TV, videos of massacre victims in Syria,
Afghanistan. Unidentified,
bulldozed into mass graves as if never
loved or missed,
they vanish.

With tenderness I lifted
the bird's remains, gathered feathers,
carried them
to a small stream sheltered
by mulberry trees and wild cherries,

laid them
where no bulldozer can reach.

Author's Comment: "Blue" is a true narrative. I am immensely moved by birds, and by the human cruelty in the world, although I don't equate a hawk's securing a meal to our insensitivity to each other. I was more concerned that the bird be given proper, natural respect.

Bio: Patricia L. Goodman is a widowed mother and grandmother and a graduate of Wells College with a degree in Biology and membership in Phi Beta Kappa. She spent her career raising, training and showing horses with her orthodontist husband, on their farm in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania. She now lives in northern Delaware, where she enjoys writing, singing, birding, gardening and spending time with her family. Many of her poems have been published in both print and online journals and anthologies and she was the 2013 and 2014 winner of Delaware Press Association's Communications Contest in poetry. Her first full-length book of poetry, *Closer to the Ground*, was a finalist in the Dogfish Head Poetry Contest, and was published in August, 2014 by Main Street Rag Publishing Company. In 2015 she received her first Pushcart nomination. Much of her inspiration comes from the natural world she loves.

Mary Ricketson

THE RITUAL OF TEA

It starts with a thought,
choice of leaf,
choice of cup, steps to brew,
time to steep.

Sit, sip, taste, until
a familiar rhythm of well-being
stirs some sensuous element
into an ordinary moment.

Let the feeling steep.
Slow is the pace.
Quiet is the way,
last drop a final thought.

Re-tuned,
the end of tea time signals
start of a new hour.
Breath flows easy,
a particle of peace.

John Robinson

HOMEPLACE

This is the place of my father
where clapboard walls of the bedrooms
have collapsed over foundation stones,
where moss-covered slats
lie in a rot-drenched heap
near a tree bearing the notice: NO HUNTING.

When younger, I would
sift through dirt
or shift
configurations of boards.
I was taught history through remnants
of uncovered
onyx colored door-knobs,
glass buttons,
stoneware.

This is the place
where lives began,
years before our own,
where rains erode almost everything
as leaves are driven from the sky,
where a shadow circles above
reminding me,
one day all will be as driven leaves,
as if rain-worn earth were our last and only keep.

Bio: John Timothy Robinson is a traditional citizen and graduate of the Marshall University Creative Writing program in Huntington, West Virginia with a Regent's Degree. He has an interest in Critical Theory of poetry and American Formalism. John is also a twelve-year educator for Mason County Schools in Mason County, WV. Past and forthcoming work; *Kestrel*, *California Quarterly*, *Ship of Fools*, *Floyd County Moonshine*, *The South Carolina Review*.

Richard Dinges

AT CITY'S EDGE

Noise is an overloaded
truck, a roar that rises
and engulfs, then lowers,
absorbs distance
and wind into a dusting
of dead leaves shattered
in its wake, a rush
through dry grass,
broken limbs, my brief
brush with a world
wide commerce that
passes my by, awakens
me from dark depths,
before I return
to silence under moon's
unperturbed glow,
the music of dreams.

Bio: Richard Dinges has an MA in literary studies from University of Iowa, and after many years, he no longer manages business systems at an insurance company. *Pinyon, Nebo, The Journal, Homestead Review, and Home Planet News* most recently accepted his poems for their publications.

Review
by Kati Waldrop

BASTARDS OF THE REAGAN ERA
Reginald Dwayne Betts
Four Way Books, 2015
ISBN: 978-1935536659

I have never been a father. I have never been a black man struggling under the curse of the drug war. I have never gone anywhere near a jail, never tasted the desperation and pain of the ghetto, never seen a man die. I wasn't even alive during the Reagan era.

My world doesn't include those things.

The world, however—the one past my borders—does. And Reginald Dwayne Betts' 'Bastards of the Reagan Era' is a lens staring into the very heart of the world I don't know, throwing a light so sharp that the edges of its shadows cut for blood. Yet it's not only visual light: Betts' writing is musical, enjambment and line breaks skittering together, rhythm running under lines and diving out of hearing to let particular words soar high over it. In many ways, this is bard work: history, story, song, railing against, all in one. I almost feel as though I'm eavesdropping on a song, a ragged and ragtime elegy not meant for me.

I should make a clarification: it's good that it isn't meant for me, in my eyes. This volume asks me to make the effort, to reach out. It's bonebreaker honesty, and that may not suit everyone. This is much, much too visceral for casual reading; this is something to be read if you want to be punched in the gut. There is a foreignness to the language and a weight to the words. In some places, grief confuses meanings—it tangles the words like smoke

Bastards of the Reagan Era opens with one prologue poem, *Elephants in the Fall*, before it gets down to business. I think this is the most important poem in the book—yes, even more than the eponymous poem—not for what it says about Betts' sons, but for what it doesn't say: for the fear threaded invisibly throughout this piece, for what Betts knows of growing up a black boy in America. Even at its most confident moments, this anxiety pervades the words:

"I hear you call me daddy
in this land where my father's
name is sometimes another word
for grave, & I almost pause. It's the song

that wants to unravel me.
More crow than swan, I've always been so much cage
& caged in. & all that changes when we square
the M. This old riff on a shotgun

Bastards
of the
Reagan Era

Reginald Dwayne Betts

marriage calls us back:
your mother's hand in mine & the shotgun is
what we aim at the world that threatens..."

It is more than his distinct sense of musicality that leads me to call Betts bardic. It's also the sense of history borne by the words, from Representative Rangel's guilt in the problem—"scourge, scourge, scourge", as Bett says, naming an engineer of the problem oft let off and left off the guilt—and the country's racial vendetta and scars left over from what Vietnam did to the nation. Betts has a gift for making the personal mythic. Turn from Ray-Ray and Black and Malik and skinny jeans and nickels and Hennessy to the very myth of America, the Jim Crow struggle that is its heart:

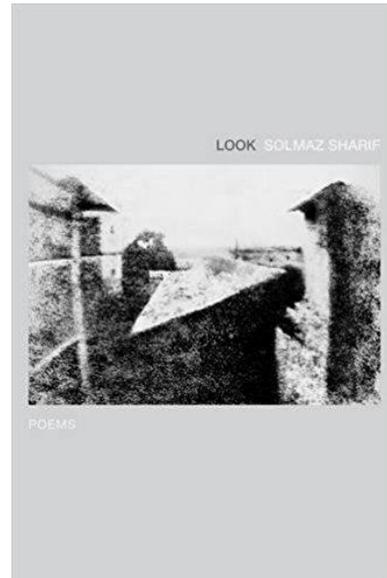
"A public defender once explained it perfect.
He told me what we all know,
Said this is the business of human tragedy."

The link between slavery, human cargo in the belly of a ship, and the continuing theft-repossession of black bodies laces every word. For me, it's heavy: the weight of a sin in my blood that hasn't yet, perhaps cannot, be expiated. Maybe for some it will feel like an accusation of a crime they think they have no part in. Betts, however, isn't attacking anyone. Like I said, this book isn't about white people. As so many of his titles allude to, 'Bastards of the Reagan Era' is a volume of elegies, caught "in a fight with God and the Devil".

I would recommend this book to anyone who lives in America's present moment. I would say that every white American should read this book and do the work it asks of us, to consider the world it reveals and break the cultural stereotypes that keep us from looking through that lens. I would say: "this book does what poetry must".

Review
by Jordan Makant

LOOK: Poems
Solmaz Sharif
Graywolf Press, 2016
ISBN: 978-1555977443



I do not know what to write in response to *Look*, Solmaz Sharif's debut collection of poems. Perhaps that is the point. After all, what is one supposed to say in the face of war? In the face of terror? In the face of violence made so familiar that words previously used only in the military have wormed their way into our vernacular with no regard whatsoever for the lives destroyed by the things those words describe? What is one supposed to say in the face of a reality one will never have to know?

I do not pretend to know the answers to these questions, and neither does *Look's* narrator. The anger, the love, the loss, the complex range of emotion is felt constantly, but Sharif never takes that passion and misshapes it into a history lesson or a how-to guide. *Look* is not a sermon, it is not a lecture, it is an elegiac reflection on the fact that we all get so accustomed to terrible situations that we learn to ignore them. This, Sharif makes clear, goes for those involved in the situations as well; one of the long poems in the collection, "Personal Effects", opens with the lines "I place a photograph of my uncle on my computer desktop, which means I learn to ignore it."

How can one ignore such violence? Throughout the collection, Sharif utilizes words and phrases from the United States Department of Defense's *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, pointing them out by noticeably altering their font, to make clear to the reader from the very beginning how easy it is to slip into military language, and how easy it is from there to forget what "collateral damage" really means. What is remarkable is the way in which, despite the fact that the reader knows right away that certain font-altered words are criticisms of the ways we dehumanize other human beings, the words still somehow become normalized after seeing them only three or four times. There is no escaping this normalization, so the narrator alters the approach: "Reaching Guantanamo" contains no military terms meant to jar the reader, instead relying on the incredibly frustrating to read partially-erased or censored letters to the narrators' love, Salim. The epistolary poems achieve their desired result, and by the conclusion of the poem, the reader is forced to acknowledge that the narrator's concerns might be right: "They all say / the same story / and none tell ours" (51).

I return to the fact that I do not know what to write in response to this collection. It is a haunting book, as cold as the dictionary it borrows from and yet as warm as the heart of the grieving narrator. Its poetry is simultaneously filled with sadness and with a sense of hope. Reading of people who died and applying the loss to my own life, I began to lose that sense of hope; even worse, I began to

fear that what little hope the opening poem provides (“Let it matter what we call a thing. / Let it be the exquisite face for at least 16 seconds. / Let me **look** at you. / Let me **look** at you in a light that takes years to get here.”) was nothing more than a projection of my hopelessly naive imagination. And perhaps it was just my imagination. This book is not about calming one’s fears and assuring oneself everything is going to be okay. It is meant to disturb. And yet, when the reader finally arrives at the closing poem, “Drones,” which may just be the finest in the entire collection, I cannot help but think that hint of hope sneaks back in:
: is this what happens to a brain born into war

: a city of broken teeth

: the thuds of falling

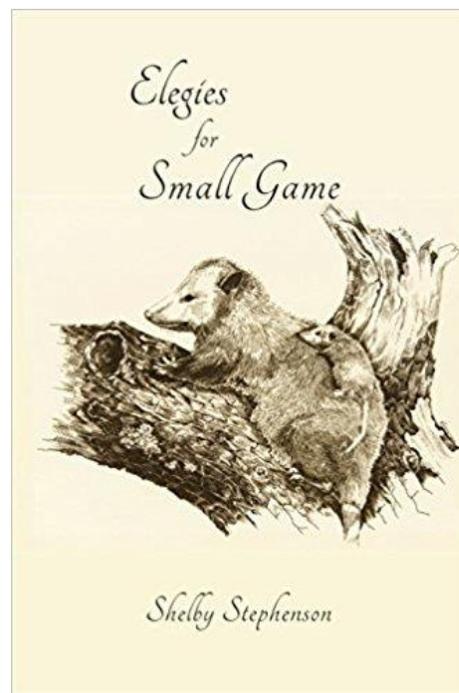
: we have learned to sing a child calm in a bomb shelter

: I am singing to her still

Let me say this one final time: I do not know what to write in response to *Look*. But I do know there are stories we are not reading or listening to. Stories of pain. Stories of trauma. Stories of violence we are all complicit in. Reading and listening to these stories hurts. But we must read. We must listen. We must learn to sing more children calm, together. Perhaps *Look* can be a starting point for those of us who have learned to fear opening our eyes.

Review
By Katelyn Vause

ELEGIES FOR SMALL GAME
Shelby Stephenson
Press 53, 2016
ISBN: 978-1941209417



Reading a Shelby Stephenson book reminds me of listening to my grandfather talk. Both love nothing more than a good story, and whether good or bad, there is always an undercurrent of fondness for the past that has been tempered by time and perspective. “Southernisms”, names of dogs and people, and places I’ve grown up around are scattered across the pages Stephenson’s latest book, weaving together small stories into the narrative that is *Elegies for Small Game*.

“Is this a dream I’ll never know,
A song words cannot tell?
There must be a way
To spin the syllables out well”

These lines from “The Song of the Small Farmer’s Son” capture the emotion of trying to remember and relate the past to those who have never known that life. My grandfather knew the scenes described in this poem: the fields, the dogs, the mules. I, on the other hand, have only ever known the picturesque scene of an open field, hunting dogs from a distance, and fell off a mule I attempted to ride. But I am a native of southeastern NC, and though the face of the land has changed, the heart has not. The small game, the opossums, martins, and foxes still roam, and Stephenson applies this to the “small game” he once was as well, shown through memories of watching his father deal with the pain of losing a hunting dog he so loved or riding with his family in their ’37 Ford. Little moments matter the most, and Stephenson shows us how we can get the most meaning from them.

Poems such as “Fledgling Purple Martins” and the subsequent “Lines for the Birds”, respectively, admire the beauty of the young birds taking flight, followed by Stephenson killing a snake to protect fledglings but leaving sneaky cowbird eggs in the nest. It’s a struggle many face: there is beauty in life and in letting youth begin their solo journeys. But there is also an urgency to not want to let them go or to attempt to make everything turn out “right” (we don’t always succeed), but in the end, we must choose our battles carefully and remember that “We last as long as pads, soles, or wheels roll!” Much like remembering things now past, there comes a taste of grief with the joy of things moving forward.

One of the most tender poems of the collection is “Boogie”, a piece written with the memory of his brother, Paul, in mind.

“And now the nobleness of Paul is gone,
Except memory of him with his dog,
Paul’s kneeling, humming, singing bits of songs.”

The poem holds a steady rhythm, and sections are held together by both imagery and internal rhyme that make you feel like you’re floating through a memory. Paul protected small game, both his dog, Boogie, and his little brother, and he did it out of love. And there is nothing quite like the bond born out of love first extended, and nothing quite like the pain that comes from losing that bond.

Stephenson also reaches beyond the borders of his hometown within these pages, as shown with his piece “Meditation on Guns”.

“Comfort makes sense possible, after a shooter goes crazy and kills elementary school children and their teachers.”

He lends his pen to memorializing not only his childhood, but commenting on the Newtown shooting. It is a difficult thing to understand, and Stephenson’s piece here is not so much written like a poem as it is an essay, working its way through an attempt to reconcile memories of hunting and a gun that he owns but never uses with the tragedy of Newtown. It is subtle; Stephenson clearly recognizes that what was before, much like the people in his hunting stories, is now gone. He doesn’t offer solutions or make a bold claim about guns, and while a part of me wishes he would just “say it”, there is also a tone of sorrow and respect throughout; the words of a man who, like many of us, doesn’t quite know what to do or say.

Shelby Stephenson’s *Elegies for Small Game* takes you on a journey through the memory and musings of a man from rural North Carolina. There is a yearning for the past that is sentimental without being sappy, and that is one of this book’s greatest strengths. Little moments filled with love and grief and the essence of what makes up life are embedded within each poem, and it is this beautiful combination that makes this collection a thought-provoking, enjoyable read.