

Third Wednesday

Vol. XII, No. 4



Third Wednesday is a literary arts magazine published by Gravity Presses (lest we all float away) Inc., offered in the traditions of several Michigan artists, writers, publishers, and editors. Although we manage the publication from Michigan, we welcome submissions (and certainly subscriptions) from all over the world. Financial assistance is gratefully appreciated at: *Third Wednesday*, 11316 Farley, Redford, MI 48239.

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Editor's Note for Fall, 2019.

Each quarterly issue of 3rd Wednesday requires that our editors find around 70 good poems. We have six editors reading each of the submissions that come in, 5 who read them blindly before the poems get to the final editor, who has the last vote and the final say about what makes it into an issue. I won't complain, but my associate editors don't always make that final decision easy. Sure when 3 or 4 editors all agree that a poem merits publication my job is simple, but when 3 editors like a submission and I open up the comments and find each one of them favors a different poem, what then?

It that case, I'm on my own, which isn't as bad as it seems. In fact, it may be the best part of the job, that and sending out acceptance letters to the 50 or so poets who have made the cut.

The worst part of the job is sending out decline letters. I send a lot of them, and they are necessarily a form letter that explains, in part, why I can't send a personal letter explaining why a poet's babies didn't make it into print. So here are a few of the reasons you may have suffered rejection from us:

Six people read your poems and not enough editors liked them because:

They were more interesting to the poet than the reader (didn't pass the "so what" test).

They didn't fit into our vision of the magazine.

They showed a lack of skill or craft.

They didn't seem fresh or offer anything new.

They were over-written or melodramatic.

They weren't edited carefully before they were sent (typos, grammar, etc.).

They were pretty good, but there's just not room on the couch for everyone.

This issue features the results of our third annual George Dila Memorial Flash Fiction Contest, three winners chosen for us by Jeremy Griffin, author, teacher and faculty fiction advisor/editor of The Waccamaw Journal of Coastal Carolina University.

New on our website, <https://thirdwednesdaymagazine.org/>, are contributor book listings. If you have a poem or story that was published in T.W., we will promote your book. You can follow us on Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr and now on Wordpress.

David Jibson, Co-editor

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Watching my Dad Clean Fish, Age Six

Pearls of intestine
and scale and bone
cover the newspaper
on the picnic table.

The pile grows while he
maneuvers the filet knife
under fin, along spine,
again and again.

I am amazed at his gentleness
and efficiency and how much
I love these fish.

I have felt this kind of loss
many times since:
open eyes, open mouths,
all the unused heads.

Alicia Salzmann
Buda, Texas

Blessingway

I can believe it if you say it long enough,
that we are golden, that all is well, that
things turn out ok, that this doesn't have

to happen, that it is happening: my father,
all bones & tufts of hair & loosening skin,
uneven, staggering, making his way across

the room as though his body were parts only,
strung, the beads we wove into a necklace
for the birth of my daughter, each one clacking

against the last as a woman told me something
beautiful that would happen for my baby & me
back when her body was still enslaved to my body,

before I knew her or her strength or that soft skin
I would tear someone's eyes out to protect.
But now my father's bones click apart while hers grow together

and it becomes a circle, as if he is about to jump off
the string to make room for her small body to exist,
as if there isn't enough room on this earth in my heart

for both.

Meghan Sterling
Portland, Maine

A Crystal Prism

dangles in my kitchen window,
a carved and faceted snowflake
that trembles like windblown water.
Transparent glass on a fine thread,
it shimmers in sunlight, spreads
rainbows across the tile floor.
On dark evenings when no light
seems possible, I find traces
of moonbeams and stars.

Stella Nesanovich
Lake Charles, Louisiana

The Good Shoes

1

Olaf, Marta, and Nils
watch their mother pack
dried beef, dried fish,
and thin, hard bread
in a wooden box. “What
is America?” Nils asks her.
The box is 12 ½ inches deep,
24 inches long, 15 inches
wide, its iron hinges handmade.
In America Elvera keeps
the box to use as a coffee table.

2

You’re the child with your thumb
in your mouth. Your fingers
comb wool in another century.
You are Maret; you are Emma,
hand carding and spinning.

3

Winter. Nils carries
a lantern with a sooty
glass chimney.
You watch it glow
orange in snow
by the barn.

4

See how large your father’s shoes
are? Boats you can almost climb
into, logs your house stands up on.

5

Elvera washes the separator,
cream clogged in its gears, soured

smell. Do it for the Lord she writes
on the wall of the cowshed.

6
Nicholas sells one-cent stamps,
tillage implements, threshing
rigs, ladies' hats, binding twine.

7
You wear hand-me-down
underclothes, mittens, shoes,
aprons made from flour sacks.
Elvera makes a bright blue coat
with a fur collar for your doll.

8
“Do you see Jesus?” the family asks
as Nils is dying. “Yes, I see Jesus
now,” he answers. Three years
in a row hail strips all
the small trees Emma plants.

9
You wrap a hot flat iron
in newspaper
and take it upstairs
to warm the bed
you share with Elvera.

10
The soft slippers your mother wears
slip slip when she comes to see
that you're breathing.

11
What Nils leaves when he
dies—a pair of trousers,
an old hat, a frying pan.

12

You brush your teeth with salt.
You work as a waitress
in a coffee shop in St. Paul.
Elvera sleeps in the narrow
bed by day, you at night.
You buy your own good shoes.

Barbara Daniels
Sicklerville, New Jersey

Last Dance

Abrázame, I said.
Your arms round my neck,
mine round your back,

I hauled you up
to move you to a chair
and change your sheets.

On the dance floor you always led
and I failed you, murdering merengue
with cloddish hoedown steps.

Now I said *baila conmigo*
and we swayed a little,
you smiled a little.

It was our last dance
and our best dance,

no impatient instructions,
no trampled toes,
no rhythm but our own.

Cary Barney
Madrid, Spain



Schooner, Gumsluk, Turkey

Photograph

Diane Martin

Bangor, Maine

Heaven

for Cindy

Like that hummingbird stuck upside down in a crack in the eaves. Like marigolds, pretty and yellow, nipped by an early frost. Like hope in these times. Broken. A slow irreparable leak. Life's undersole in solemn tones. See those lines in the sand? Carved with a crooked cane. An old man wobbled at an ocean's edge and gaped at relentless waves pounding, gaped and waited, gaped and waited. Seasons that rise then acquiesce. The sun itself daily hidden and humbled. (*Are we greater than the sun?*) It's no carousel of horses, dear, no cotton candy on a stick. Like love's last thrust, a flame throbbing out. And there, there, that thin shaft of light, which we'll do well to call heaven.

Chila Woychik
Shellsburg, Iowa

Dogs is Dogs

Dogs is dogs,
Is vile, is vicious.
Dogs is nothing
Like the fishes.

Dogs will make you
Toe the mark,
Drive you mad with
Endless bark.

Dogs is to a cur
Suspicious.
Dogs is even, well,
Pernicious.

How to drive one
Mad and more?
Accidents upon
The floor.

Even when you
Plead and carp, it
Does its thing and
Soils the carpet.

Dogs is evil.
Kids' best friend?
For a biscuit
They pretend.

Fred Yannantuono
Bronxville, New York

Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

here a miracle. here a circle of playground daisies
peek above the soil rust. here a plastic slide,
lolling. here a thistle sun, boiling. too hot to go
down. here a chain-link fence encloses nothing.
here PHELAN, CALIFORNIA and a road map,
tracing veins of erosion. here a highway town
(drive-through). here a stoplight town (just two).
here amazon doesn't deliver. laundry fray hanging
from the joshua trees. here the gravel lawns
remember. here the flesh is lily-livered. inside,
air conditioned wheezing. here the daisies crumple
before the shadows are long. here your land.
here my land. here loveless life land, begging:
how much? blood inside the soil rust. bones
collecting motel dust. how much? here conquest
not coveted. here empty so big, thistle sun sets
behind the desert brush and the joshua trees.

Hannah Wang
Clyde Hill, Washington

The Encore

--for my Brother

The guitarist leans into the microphone, sings over
the dim space made of the plastic tray's jangle of glasses
a bar back lifts onto a counter. A woman laughs at the man
in a business suit whispering in her ear. The guitarist
catches a girl near his amp, keeps glancing her way
to say, *I'm watching, leave that alone.* And when the song
is done, he thanks the drunken crowd, cradles the guitar
neck in its stand. She scampers away while he checks
the plugs, makes sure the settings are as he left them.
At the bar, a man he doesn't know, nods toward the girl
where she sits in silence. "She's deaf," he says.
"She was feeling the music." Only then does the guitarist
see her hands, the short distinct gestures she makes
to her friends, a strange world he cannot hear. He goes
to her, takes her hand, leads her to the edge of the stage
where the two sit in the half-light between the dark audience
and his microphone. He places her fingers on the speaker,
plays a riff, and with his palm over her hand, lets the vibration
echo through her into him, this translation that sinks into his skin.

Ivan Young
Omaha, Nebraska

Summer Rain

I wouldn't say that the rusted Oldsmobile
at the end of your driveway,
or the grimy couch topped with plastic
that I pass on the way to the corner market
aren't praiseworthy —

there's something about the shine of plastic
after rain and I've always been a fan of rust —
it's just that I wonder about them, and the way
everything seems to be going to hell
all around you.

Even the weeds that have grown up
around the walk are failing.
I will say this: those two concrete hens
on the porch with the moth-eaten geraniums
look like they once had a good time of it.

Jerome Gagnon
Hayward, California

At a Crossing

The dead with automotive retinues
led by a sleek black limousine
always have the right of way
and I'm as stuck

as I'd be by a long freight train
at a railroad crossing. I kill my motor,
close my eyes and doze and soon
I'm counting boxcars, timing intervals

between them as they clank across their tracks
then pick up speed
behind the engine's drawn-out, echoed shriek
that drains all other sound from miles around

until the last boxcar shrinks
into invisibility, leaving me in absolute
absence of sound
and motion, numbed and mute

until the barrier rises and I feel
my motor throb with stubborn life,
unready to join autos in the wake
of that black limousine, antennae

ribboned with deep purple as they pass,
paced to pay respect
to someone gone ahead of them,
a Mr. or Ms. X

lidded and boxed in velvet. On and on
more cars roll smoothly, hushed, unhurried
through the crossing—Cadillacs, Lincolns,
BMW's, Mercedes and, finally,

the poor relation and caboose,
a Beetle which, like an Egyptian scarab,
will be the last one through the dead one's
final gated settlement in earth.

Here and now
the crossroad empties. Autos
lined up blocks behind me,
start honking. Yet I wait,

caught again in utter vacancy
while sensing I must leave the intersection,
not through streets the rich cortege is clogging
but in the same direction.

John Miller
Lexington, Virginia



Xstop

Photograph

J. Ray Paradiso
Chicago, Illinois

On The Death Of Mary Oliver

And now she will lie
entwined
bone to root
with the Earth
she celebrated.
She was its surest seer,
its tenderest daughter,
its truest lover.
Lay your head down
on the good ground,
gentle woman;
we will strive
to remember
the prayer of your poems.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

The Art Of Silence

The art of silence speaks to the soul...

—Marcel (Mangel) Marceau

He walks against the wind,
bent forward as he struggles
against the invisible force,
taking great, slow-running steps,
his painted face contorted with the strain of it.
Then suddenly, he arches backward—
the wind winning,
pushing him back, step by step as he
grasps futilely at the air,
until with all the strength he seems to have,
he leans into the wind once again, and
presses his way forward.

We laugh.
But I cannot help wondering what wind he imagines
as he crafts the illusion.
Whether it smells of lupine and scrub pine.

Or as his hands become butterflies,
does he think of the white shimmer of the apollo
fluttering in the alpine clover?
And what of the invisible flowers
he picks with a flourish of his long, tapered fingers?
Are they edelweiss?

Does he conjure the mountains where he
created these silent gestures,
invented as a game to entertain the children,
to hush them, to give them silent play,
as he led them, trip after trip,
across the Alps to safety?

And the shrinking box,
his flat hands pressing against
the imaginary walls
as they close in on all sides.
Does he imagine his father, the boxcar, the ovens?

I think he must.
Such gentle grace.
Such cavernous sadness.
Such comic relief.
These can only come from
love and loss and remembrance.

Laura Schulkind
Berkeley, California

Silent Night

It's past midnight
and I'm shoveling snow with my father.

I'm glad of it, too, because I get to be up
at this late hour.

My arms get heavier with each shove and lift,
but I don't complain-
I'm outside in the dark with my father.

We stop at the end of the driveway,
lean on shovels like farmers on pitchforks,
watch our breath become short stories.

The snow my father and I cleared
is back good as new;
scrape our shovels behind us, start again.

The yellow porch light
is just enough to throw our shadows;
mine buried in my father's.

We've not said a word for an hour or two.

Fifty years go by before I understand
what my father didn't say.

Lenny DellaRocca
Delray Beach, Florida

The Zoo

The zoo was crowded that day
and I hadn't shaved.
I was watching the seals who lay
looking like two old men in bed
when our eyes met.
I stared too long and scared
the glance away and
the brown seal barked
in anger at not being able
to rest his head on the tan seal.

I looked again and there it was
but more shy, wary of eagerness
and more interested in the
spider monkeys. The bison smelled.
The deer smelled.
The hippopotamus smelled
and lay half submerged
in dirty water.
Only one sad-eyed bird
sat still and the bird house
smelled and was crowded that day
and I hadn't shaved.

Laurence W. Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

A Message Home

found the neighbour's calico
one spring morning,
lying on the road's cold shoulder
stiff as a two-by-four, with the frost
riming her fur
a harsh fate for one so small—

and though I didn't see
exactly how it all went down,
I imagine she must have slipped from the house
to nose around all the remembered places,
maybe even tried the ditch across the road
where carefree mice sometimes danced in the moonlight

with the ditch empty
and the first faint whiskers of morning light
showing to the east,
she'd have turned for home, unconcerned

by the whine of a car's engine
as it crested the hill—she knew she had time,
having made the crossing before

there's a certain spot,
where the south field begins, right before
the last scattered handful of houses
on our small town's outskirts—the driver
must have sensed the open road ahead,
and the car accelerated, the way a work horse,
nearing the barn at the end of the day,
picks up the pace

Lisa Timpf
Simcoe, Ontario

West Texas Sestina

In this east coast restaurant, a dust
covered radio spills “Because the Wind”
by Joe Ely, and I'm sitting alone
wondering how someone can mess up flat
enchiladas, cheese burnt, the sauce too plain,
and I can't get my head out of the sky.

Not the one here, but the West Texas sky
that changes from blue to red, not with dust,
but dirt, an earthen wall crossing the plains,
laws of gravity undone by the wind
that roams untamed on that open and flat
expanse of land, the horizon on loan

from past or future times. I have stood alone
in cotton fields, been closer to the sky
than anything for miles. Inside that flat
circle of horizon, thoughts turn to dust-
bowl farmers and how they lost to the wind.
There's a sky here; yet it's hard to explain

to someone who isn't from the South Plains:
some evenings, it looks like heaven has blown
its colors to the edge of earth, the wind
has rustled the sun, set aflame the sky
that holds both day and night, and stars like dust
clouds swirl like they were kicked up by God's flat-

bed pickup truck with a "Keep Lubbock Flat"
bumper sticker, a new proverb in plain
English. When Solomon wrote about dust,
I bet he and his hi-fi were alone
in the desert; "That'll Be the Day" filled the sky.
Rave on, Texas sky! Rave on, Texas and wind!

I long to see you from behind my wind-
shield, speeding down a road that stretches flat-
out to New Mexico. This east coast sky
is nice enough, and I shouldn't complain
but listening to Joe sing of the Lone
Star State, I'd almost rather eat that dust.

And now, I recall the last crowded plane
I traveled on, how close I was to sky,
so empty, a window divided us.

Ryan Bonner
Lubbock, Texas

Breakfast Poem

Why do you wake up so late in the morning,
only when rush-hour traffic has split the doves'
chatter to industrial screeching, and all I can
turn to is the rhythm of your heart?

I wish we could talk over scrambled eggs and
hazelnut coffee, when the road is tongue-tied,
and the grass out back is awash in orange under
the sunrse.

Just a half-hour meal would feel like days, we'd
talk about your beautiful dreams and what to do
with ourselves on hot Saturday nights when
comforters don't.

For once the sky wouldn't be so melancholy,
like when the clouds come low and smother
us, soaking up our aspirations for a pretty day
in pastel fog.

When it's chilly, my pillows are cold as marble
countertops. The bedside lamp radiates a
mellow glow, but the fog chokes it out and I
move by your siren song.

Your voice is crisp and sweet. When the birds
are gone I think of how you said my surname
that first time. Oh, I don't remember who I was
before we met.

Samuel Swauger
Baltimore, Maryland

Inevitable

A girl crosses a busy street, five lanes,
one shoe untied, long brown hair gently loose,
pretending art is not dead, art is not
a dead language in spite of what we hear
or see, art still speaks to interested hearts;
she has given up her coronet but
will return to it when her friend returns
to his cello, his composition like
Sunday, like rain falling on grass or
even on sand.

Shanda Blue Easterday
Sturgis, Michigan

Roost

A cloud of blackbirds
perches on the crooked tree.

They launch into the air, hover,
before landing once more.

I watch them late into the evening,
trying to understand
their near constant movement.

It isn't until the sky darkens
that I leave them to their folly,
and they leave me to mine.

Tiffany Babb
New York, New York

Faces of Track and Bomb

*From a photograph by Laszlo Balogh
3 September, 2015*

Homs, Syria

You hear the helicopter first, rotors beating
humph-humphs of air, of breath, of oxygen,
and if you look up—if you are outside, if you
are in the street—and if you see the barrel falling,
maybe you see the men who have
pushed it out, though hopefully, you are not
that close. It wobbles and flails
as it falls, then disappears among
the broken walls and roofs. A pause,
a heartbeat, a blink, then a burst and flame,

then smoke—gray brown black—all at once,
and you watch it drift, and soon
you smell the bomb, the dust, the bodies.
And later, in a basement room, its door levered
shut with twisted rebar, a candle wavers
on a box, sleeping mats curl on the floor,
a shawl hangs on a nail. And children cry,
pull at their mothers' clothes. *Let us
out, they say, let us out. Let us play. Please.*

William Snyder
Fargo, North Dakota

Song

“He has no one to blame but himself,”
she murmured,
in the rhythmic cadence of grief—
a patter as old as life on earth.
She sang softly,
yet her voice filled the pale green room
and hung in the acrid air.
We waited
for a surgeon to appear—
his consecrated hands
signing thumbs up,
thumbs down.

“He brought it on himself,”
she sang once more.
They had brought him in at 2 AM
shot twice—
belly and lung—
and rushed him to surgery.

“It’s his own damn fault,”
she crooned in a voice
a cantor would kill for.
It was 8 now
Saturday Services had just begun
at the synagogue down the block—
the old, the young, and the damaged
chanted in an ancient dying tongue
for the world to heal itself.

“No, no,”
she began to chant
just as the door to the operating room
opened with a pneumatic hiss.
The sounds—
alien and human
mixed for a moment
in the pale green anteroom
between life and death.

Steven Deutsch
State College, Pennsylvania

A New Hive

I have the queen in my hand.
The workers have no choice
but to follow.

They are each small
but there is no each.
Only all together.

They cover me
in one curious swarm.

Where am I headed?
What am I doing
with their mistress?

I have a new hive built,
the crown jewel
with an abundance
of flowery gems.

Nature, instinct,
have not been made over,
merely postponed.

It's a clear day
in the heat of summer.
We will make honey soon enough.

John Grey
Johnston, Rhode Island

The Decade We Won't Discuss

how your laughter first slapped my face—too Black
for your father, not Black enough for you.
breaking into my gym locker, leaving
flowers and a suicide note. faking
seizures at 3 am so i'd hold you
shaking in emergency rooms. the fist-
holes you placed in the wall. the smashed teapot.
swearing i'd move across the country and
marry a lesbian i'd never met.
the caffeine pills. the confessions. the shard
of glass still in my hand. the ring. that night
in the Burger King parking lot. the day
you threatened to kill yourself if i left.
the faked pregnancy. the morning after.

Matthew Henry
Quincy, Massachusetts



Belleza abandonada Parte II (Tenerife)

Photograph

SEIGAR

Provincia Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain

Vacancies

We long to know the emptiness. To stand
on tiptoe peeking through splits in boarded

windows, to crack open the tall blue Victorian
heavy with shutters, to stroll beneath the sagging

portico along the path toward a weedy garden,
reaching for the scorched back door opening to air.

What happened, the old busker with missing teeth
doesn't know. But the star on a pole behind the house

marked the bus station, first place he fell in love –
fine girl with a 'fro like they did, rosebud lips, sweet ass

who don't remember him no more. If we nestle these
hatchlings, hearts still beating, beneath our shirts, would

a ragtime rise above a ballroom and catch on a beaded
chandelier? Could fresh-love snag forever in our chests,

woven with gold-brown eyes, transistor crackling James
Brown, Greyhounds growling into the street? One day,

won't memory come for us, to know the empty glasses,
ghost-whispered promises, this poem on a table?

Dawn Terpstra
Lynnville, Iowa

I Sing

the body Selectric
the Royal portable and the Olivetti

their beauty and efficiency
balking account

I SING the Underwood Universal
the platen and the platen knob

poets pecking the keyboard
their necks curved, their heads bent

the words defeating paraphrase
the words per minute whereby hangs a job

the carriage release lever
the feed roller, the ribbon spool

TODAY we are naming
the parts and poems

the smell of machine oil
the clean slap of typeslug

against ribbon and white
twenty-pound paper

against onion skin, against
thicker cream-colored resume stock

dearly bought by the unemployed
the watermark of their desperation

O OPTIMA, o Smith-Corona
o Remington Noiseless Portable in Duotone Green

who knew your day would be so brief
where is the strength

of our finger-joints and our fingers
the vowels typed sweet and clean

the rapidly moving carriage
the bell at the margin

the cramping hands, the jammed keys
of Hermes Baby, of Olympia?

J. S. Absher
Raleigh, North Carolina

Touching The Truth

In this version the woman in the gray Burberry suit overslept/
barely time for a shower/didn't leave home till ten/

In this version she forgot her phone/left it on the counter/
couldn't text while driving and drinking coconut water/

In this version she was living weeks away from the red light/
from the man in the crosswalk/swinging a racquet

after playing three sets of tennis/chasing down every ball
to win the Contra Costa Championship/

I see him limping toward me/cane tapping/trying on a smile/
his body a black arrow pointing to the truth//

Claire Scott
Oakland, California

Pleasures to Come

In all of my dreams it is summer.
A story our grandmother told us:
life begins as a watermelon seed.
We devoured the cool pink smiles.

A story our grandmother told us
began with magic seeds
we devoured in cool pink smiles
through the length of our childhood.

Beginning with magic seeds
a life unfolds around us
through the length of our childhood.
We are sure and know the way.

A life unfolds around us
from the womb, alive and waking.
We are sure and know the way
out of the marble skin.

From the womb, alive and waking,
life begins as a watermelon seed.
Out of the marble skin,
all of my dreams are of summer.

David Chaudoir
Granger, Indiana

The First American in Space

We watched the story you've been told
unfold live on a snowy black and white TV
balanced on an unused desk in the corner
of the classroom where other days we watched
the World Series or later a president's funeral.
The official word was that the awesome rocket
had just carried him beyond the limits
of the Earth and squarely into history
splashing down in the sea of possibility,
and surely that was so. But that day too
millions of kids on thousands of playgrounds
transformed their jungle gyms into awesome
rockets as well and traveled into space. They said
he was the first American to venture into space
but as I remember that day I'm certain that
the first American in space was me.

Kenneth Salzmann
Laredo, Texas

Contained There

When she moved to South Carolina
it all seemed so magical: slugs working
their way up the screen, giant tree frogs
resting on the window. Her hunting dogs
lying at her feet while she spent long days
in her workshop repairing violins.
Strange looking ducks, tadpoles,
birdhouses. Boiled lobster with lemon.
Toasted saffron. A military husband.

Heaps of Celeriac on the counter, coins
on a gravestone, hydrangea leaves in the sun.
Homemade herbed vinegars. Her, singing
on the front porch swing. Mallards perched
on the railing. Moonflower vines, mossy
knotted trees, and hanging wisps of leaves.
Bread cooling. Her happiness displayed
in glass jars on the sill.

Alicia Salzmann
Buda, Texas

Annie Lennox

In health you hid the gray
in a hardwood forest of tints,
walnut, chestnut, mahogany,

and had your thinning hair
puffed out in curls and waves
that never lasted anyhow.

Why did it take chemotherapy
for you to find your style?
It grew back short, white,

modern, androgynous.
Nothing to hide now
under cancer hats or wigs.

You rocked it. Ángeles lit up
with delight at the resemblance
and who was I to disagree?

You wore it defiantly,
finally indifferent
to strangers' opinions

and the cruel acceleration
time and tumors forced on you.
The savage cost of beauty

you wrote off to fate,
pacing with affectless poise
toward the great whatever.

Cary Barney
Madrid, Spain

Girl as Moon

I.
The water is dark where it reflects the sky and empty
where it reflects you. In a dream, you had fallen.
In another, your neck was shaped like melon slices,
and my teeth chattered to taste you. I bathe my face
in your drowned light, watch it sigh before my touch,
watch it burst into a swarm of a thousand silver moths.

II.
My body has tides. It's a constant state of unspooling.
My body crashing upon my body cresting my shores
flooding before you rising. This skin belongs to your bones

more than it belongs to mine, and I belong at the barycenter,
where I can lasso your eccentricity closer to me.
I dance, even if you don't see that you're leading.

III.

Gorged on the sunset, you hang heavy in the boughs
of the autumnal skeletons that the trees left behind.
A honey drop held still. Swelling like gold in a forge.
Only the clouds blushing apricot are soft enough
to kiss you. Only the glowing fields of wheat. Help me
round my lips the right way, so I can pray to you.

Hannah Wang
Clyde Hill, Washington

Driftwood

Not knowing that you would arrive in this house,
on this table, even less that you're a "you" —
chunk of redwood burl —

you set off down the San Lorenzo River,
finding yourself on a sandbar, miles from home,
licking salt.

Not knowing yourself as an object of beauty,
either,
something to be stroked, polished with paste wax,
set on a high shelf, and then, years later,

in the back of a closet with boxes of photos
of the long-departed, sunning on blankets
and posed with cars —

paused, now, on a stack of books
like a small, curled wave,
the old dreams pouring through.

Jerome Gagnon
Hayward, California

The Panhandler And Me

The closest he ever comes
to asking for help
is a sidelong glance as I pass him
and his hand-lettered sign
while exiting the Wal-Mart parking lot.
The closest I ever come
to refusing his unspoken plea
is a nervous glance downward
to avoid his eyes as I drive past
with my groceries for the week.
Neither of us knows
the truth of the other.
Parsing sin is a subtle art.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Coin-Operated Dharma

...before
the cycling back, reversing...*la de da de de, la de da de da*

a man's cuffing socks beside the triple loader,
the cranky toddler's napping while the woman's
tagging blankets at the pickup laundry counter,
the couple's do-si-do-ing, touching corners
of the top sheet...and me, my clothes like shanghai acrobats,
somersaulting with the Arm & Hammer...I hate to ask:
What more than this small happiness? despite the extra
shifts, the vigil for the co-worker's surgery for cancer,
my karma folded up, stacked and warm like bath
towels, fragrant as the extract of bananas...everything
all skittles in the vending, Coca Cola...*the beat goes on...*is playing
chuck norris in the grainy infomercial still looks good

Kathleen Hellen
Baltimore, Maryland



Ducks

Photograph

Gary Wadley

Louisville, Kentucky

Introduction by the guest judge of the 2019 George Dila Memorial Fiction Contest

Each of these winners takes its own unique approach to the craft of flash fiction. "Hiding Lessons" offers us a simple yet disarming glimpse into the unspoken tumult that often characterizes the American family. The fact that the characters reveal themselves to us primarily through dialogue and action lets us know that the author has complete confidence in them, and it is this confidence that makes this such a remarkable piece of writing. "An Incomplete List of Things I've Cut My Mouth On" takes a wholly different approach, telling a story in the form of a list. The author relies on humor and sharp wit to hold our attention, but there is a vulnerability here too that speaks to the richness of these characters' lives. And finally, there's "How It's Done," in which the imperative mood underscores the tragedy of the story, an element that the author approaches with just the right degree of sentiment. While all three pieces chart their own trajectories, they are joined by a desire to create meaning and beauty out of chaos.

Jeremy Griffin, Lecturer of English
Coastal Carolina University

CONTEST WINNER
Hiding Lessons

The Easter Rabbit was particularly proud of his work when it inspired complaints from his two oldest girls, Patty and Kate.

“Come on, this is hard,” Kate said.

That made him grin, which made his daughters complain more. “You’ve been helping Shelley,” Patty whined.

“You haven’t been looking very hard,” he said. “I’d say you haven’t been looking hard at all.” This three-bedroom ranch with the 30-year fixed, built-in appliances, and above-ground pool was full of Easter eggs. For instance, there was the purple egg under the mug, behind the toaster in the kitchen, and there was the blue one in the bag of dog food behind the bag of charcoal in the garage. He’d been forced by his wife to confine himself to eye level and below this year, but he had nonetheless managed to be masterful. Case in point: at this very moment Patty was standing near the fireplace, where, if she had any initiative, she’d find a violet one in the ashes.

“This isn’t any fun,” she whimpered.

“You’re wrong. It’s the easy things that aren’t fun.”

But Kate agreed with her younger sister. “It’s been two hours. I only got five eggs.”

“That’s not bad.”

“We colored 24 *of them*.”

It was a blessing the youngest couldn’t count. Shelley was so pleased with her first find—a pale green egg—that she’d sat down on the floor and played with it. Then she’d followed him around so devotedly that he showed her the pink egg hidden in the empty toilet paper roll.

“You helped her,” Patty said.

“I didn’t.”

“You did!”

When he raised his hand to swat the little hellion, Patty flinched appropriately and sank into herself.

“Get ready for Mass,” he said. He didn’t ask much of life, except order; without it, life swerved, humiliation threatened. “Now!”

When they emerged an hour later, the girls were undeniably precious: perfect in pink socks and crinoline. Allison had put their hair in ponytails with bows. She was in all white, and her hair was swept up into an elegant knot.

When she was younger and they were courting, Allison let her hair swing free, and he remembered the feel of it whipping his face that one time she took him sailing. Since then she'd become everything he'd envisioned, an exquisite mother of three fine children (if you didn't try to reason with them) and a suitable conversationalist with friends and associates.

Occasionally he worried that she'd turn into her mother. In late age, the old gal had demanded a divorce with an unthinkable settlement. Then she began nursing injured animals—deer, birds, even a fox—in an expensive suburb that frequently tried to shut her down. The girls adored Allison's mother, but if they spent too much time with her, they came back smelling of wet fur and brimming with stories of Allison's wild youth, stories he'd never heard before and Allison denied. There was one about Allison's fling with a rodeo cowboy and another about time flying airplanes. Also: dating a bullfighter and dealing Blackjack. This winter, the girls had somehow gotten the idea that Allison had jumped horses as a girl, and for months they'd begged for riding lessons.

"Riding lessons?" he'd scoffed. "Where are we going to keep the horse?"

"Grandma said she would."

Knowing the old kook, she probably would, another thing for him to manage. So he took the girls—Allison, too—to a sway-backed place where the people smelled of manure and the horses took a dislike to him. Allison galloped and the girls went giddy, exactly the opposite effect he'd planned.

Now Allison and the girls lined up on the porch for the annual Easter picture. "What about the baskets?" Allison asked. "We usually take the picture with the baskets."

No point in answering. He continued setting up the camera. It had a timer that would enable him to leap over the rhododendron and join them for the picture.

Allison went inside and retrieved the baskets. "My goodness, where are all the eggs?" she asked.

"You tell me," said Kate.

"That's enough," he said.

"What happened to the Easter egg hunt?"

“Shelley got help,” Patty whispered.

“Stop it,” he said. “All of you, stop it.”

Allison glanced at him, then handed each girl her nearly empty basket.

“Is that absolutely necessary?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “It’s tradition.”

“But is it necessary?”

“It’s tradition.”

This was new, this petty resistance. Ever since the riding lessons. What was she doing? He tried to catch her eye, but she avoided him. Hair escaped her knot and danced in the breeze, which would ruin the picture.

“Do you want to fix your hair?” he asked.

“No thanks.”

“It’s messy.”

“It’s fine. Everyone, smile!”

Obviously she didn’t understand. This was a picture for life. They would look at it in 30 years and know that their lives had been perfect. Disgruntled, he set the timer, leapt over the bushes, and joined the picture, reaching for Allison’s hand. She gave it to him.

The photo session was over in seconds, as the girls started gobbling chocolate while Allison laughed. Then she picked up a basket and walked away.

Annoyed—they knew he always shot a second picture—he called out. But only little Shelley returned.

He knelt, packed his equipment. He was losing grip, like his parents, who regularly lost jobs, jumped rent, hid the couch before the repossessors came: not disciplined, not watchful. What could he be doing wrong here? He was a reasonable man, and he forthrightly reviewed himself for fault.

But the cause was obvious. “There will be no more riding lessons,” he told Shelley.

It was then he felt a hard-boiled egg hit his back.

He turned. The little urchin couldn’t have thrown it, he decided, watching his youngest walk away.

She wouldn’t dare, would she?

But—what if she did? Damn brave. Damn special. He dampened a smile.

Later, with Florence asleep, he smiled again.

Lee Reilly
Chicago, Illinois

CONTEST WINNER

How It's Done

This is how it's done.

Only talk about it once. You want it peaceful, she wants a casanova. You're 14, so you suggest maybe she can get casanova and peaceful, like if she becomes famous. If she's famous, she can die in her sleep and the world would blow up with tears. *Being famous is hard work, though.* Nod. *I mean, getting there.* Nod again. She thinks the easiest route is dying an original or crazy or gratuitously tragic way. *Or write a book or something, I mean...*

You're both now college freshmen. In state because you both wanted to go where people stay and there's no place more like that than your Wyoming town. Undergo the hazing the band kids put you through. Ask what her dance team does and interrupt with examples when she begins to explain ballet positions and their hip-hop modifications. *Filling freshmen lockers with JELL-O. Making them swallow goldfish. Taking them to a rager and requiring them to confess some absurd sin that they have to draw out of a hat to the bouncer.*

What even is a rager?

You have no idea. *When someone gets really mad and starts yelling and burning things unprovoked?* Okay, you have some idea: *it's not that, of course.*

I'm Catholic.

So you're above ragers? Keep from rolling your eyes. Her religious stuff is just getting more entrenched the more time goes by. Thornier, too, now that you think about it.

It would have to be a Catholic rager.

What would that even be, like, purgatory?

I'm not really still Catholic that much. I'm just an introvert.

That's its own kind of purgatory I would think.

Don't grow apart like everyone accepts middle-school friends to do in college. Go to her dance performances - they're the halftime show at school basketball games. And they're good. When they're kick-ass routine is done, clap, loudly woot, think: *that is how it's done.* Give her a front-row bleacher seat for your band shows at the football games. Wave at her when the saxes have eight bars of rest.

Go with her to the dance team's first party of the year. Smell the earth in the air throughout the captain's sorority house, thicker and thicker. Hold onto a railing or something when dizziness comes. Find some fresh air if you have to. Go out back - there are ping pong balls floating in beer cups and red-faced girls clapping at nothing in particular - no impossible movement of the human form, no horn flash or formation

you can only see from above - and laughing sloppily - so pick your way through a tipsy crowd to the front where a parked car's radio playing "Saturday in the Park" is louder than whatever base-dominated car buster was slamming through the house. It's not like you fit in any better with the band geeks - they throw much wilder ragers than this.

Hopefully, all this is just purgatory.

Is she still afraid of death? If you knew her answer was no, you could probably share the fleeting thoughts you have of it, images, mostly. You going over a high railing of some kind. Being chased by a predator man with a rope and a trash bag, turning to face him and backing up off a cliff as he inches closer. Turn to the house, look for her. There's a weird feeling about your stomach that you should find her, see her, just to see. She believes, or used to, in all that stuff from above stuff; she might like purgatory. Still, just see.

But you don't on first glance around the living room. And your vision is churning as bad as your stomach now and, though there's something pleasant about the disorientation tingling in your brain, you mostly need to get out. *Not another course of that shit again.* But yes: *get out of everything.*

Get in Daisy, your 1986 banana-yellow Volkswagen, and, though you'll have to drive carefully around the construction zone on campus with its wobbly cranes and funky scaffolding that you strive to avoid, take the winding route out of town, not the straight one. It's one of those nights. Question why you thought you wanted to go to the place where people stay - don't you just want to get the hell out? But also, one of those nights: so clear you can see more stars than sky. How are some of them not just falling out? Earth maybe isn't a place you want to fall all over yourself to get. Stop that. Shake your head. Keep driving - is this how it's done? Maybe you should see someone.

Drive one direction until first light falls on your windshield. Have no idea what day it is. A frantic voice scratches over Daisy's speakers. Death of a freshman on campus? Walking home from a large party? Wind storm? Slam the volume dial, even though you know it won't improve the signal, all the way to the right. Sick the heel of your hand on the display. It won't become clear till national newspapers hit the next day:

Your childhood friend saw you looking for her across the room, then saw you leave and followed your trail in her car until the construction site, when a crane toppled in the wind you didn't notice at all, fell on her windshield and killed her instantly.**

And that is how it's done.

Megan Wildhood
Seattle, Washington

***This is based on the true story of a freshman at Seattle Pacific University who was killed by a falling crane in Seattle in April 2019.*

CONTEST WINNER

An Incomplete List of Things I've Cut My Mouth On

1. Halls cough candies, cherry flavour
2. over-toasted toast
3. a fence post tripped into trying to get away from a dead possum by the creek at Laura's place when we were looking for crayfish, eight years old, dazzled by the sight of so much blood
4. the counter at Dairy Queen, cause I slipped when I first saw you
5. my brother's class ring, heavy, silver, stolen off of another kid in his grade, because my brother didn't actually graduate high school that year with his friends, just told people he did, told people he skipped the ceremony cause he didn't give a shit, but actually spent the night getting drunk in our Uncle Ed's John Deer tractor, and winding up like a pitcher aiming for the home plate of my face when I came to tell him mom had said "get your useless, shit brother to come back inside before he upchucks in there, that rig's new and he isn't on the job until tomorrow."
6. plastic straws, cracked at the top between my teeth, pretending I liked milkshakes to excuse why I was there so often, waiting for glimpses of a girl in an apron
7. dreams
8. winter
9. communion wafers
10. my own teeth, by accident, chewing half my damn face off from nervousness the first time we spoke
11. the edge of a chip bag, cause you thought it was hot when I opened them with my teeth
12. your mouth
13. your mouth, because mentioning it once isn't enough for me
14. your teeth, too many times to count
15. your fingernails, when you reached down to guide my mouth to the right spot on your cunt, misjudged the distance and hooked a hangnail at the corner of my top lip, tugged, added the taste of metal and red to the taste of you

16. diary pages, shoved in and eaten because my brother was yellin he'd tell our Uncle Ed what I was and then I'd "be the fuckup, would you like that, you prissy little bitch?" and I panicked, panicked,

17. prayers

18. lies

19. Uncle Ed, my lips too chapped to open that wide without pain

20. salt

21. Laura's necklace

22. Laura's bracelet

23. Laura's fingers, trying to push me off of her because she called you something I would only call you tenderly while we were in the middle of some other, private, naked universe, and I didn't care that we were in class when I lunged at her, or that you were yelling at me to stop, or that Sister Ruth was calling the principal, because I'd been needing to bite bite bite for days

24. your ambition

25. the big cross above your mother's bed that fell on me that last time we fucked, cheap, spray-painted to look like old metal

26. my own teeth, on purpose

27. gobstoppers

28. secrets

29. gravel, when I fell open-mouthed on my driveway, legs still trying to run even when stunned horizontal, kicking like a dying baby rabbit, yelling your name through the gash on my lip

30. words said

31. words unsaid

32. the shape of a goodbye and an unspoken "stay"

Alexandra Jones
Toronto, Ontario

HONORABLE MENTION
An August Monday Morning

In which one looks pretty good in the bathroom mirror. Really pretty good, if one stands up a bit straighter and throws one's shoulders back, grins knowingly. Maybe squints a little. After showering, two doses of mouthwash are swished and spat. Then a third, just in case. Fresh, clean pants are selected for today, along with a newer shirt.

In which one fills a medium-sized plastic container with a bunch of that prewashed spinach bought yesterday. One had originally gone to the store just to pick up some more beer, but the liquor department was right next to the organic produce department, and what if Maureen had been there shopping at the same time? Wouldn't she have been impressed to see such newfound attention paid to one's health? Disregarding the beer, of course. She probably would've been very, very impressed, if she had been there. She wasn't, though. No matter. Also purchased were pumpkin seeds, multi-colored baby carrots, bleu cheese crumbles, and raspberry vinaigrette, all of which are now combined with the spinach in the plastic container. Plus a hard-boiled egg. Five eggs were boiled in a pot late last night, one ovaloid orb of low-calorie protein for each lunch of the work week. And while they were cooking, the counters were scrubbed free of dried spills, the refrigerator was finally purged of all the old to-go food, and the empty bottles and cans and the stack of flattened six-packs were collected and taken out to the recycling bin in the garage. And then, on the walk back to the house from the garage, there was the moon! Bright white and full in the sky! And the smell of the sprinkler, so fresh upon the backyard grass! All of that happened last night, and this morning the vague remembrance of that impromptu productivity and of the wet evening air inspires one to sing along with the '90s hits streaming through the speaker system, which had been left on overnight at what now seems like a remarkably high volume.

In which it is discovered that the sprinkler has been running all night, as well. Through the kitchen window, one can see its thin rays of water slowly arcing back and forth, back and forth. It is no big deal, however. It probably makes up for the times when the lawn might have been neglected over the summer. One has never much enjoyed yardwork. That had been Maureen's thing; she spent so much time out there.

In which the open laptop on the kitchen table reminds one that Serious Writing had been undertaken last night. One turns the computer back on and skims through

the document. About a quarter of the new material might eventually make it into a piece that somebody might someday finally want to publish, maybe even a third of it. That's not too bad of a ratio; in fact, that's much better than usual. Because usually, when read in the light of day, it's one hundred percent shit. The laptop is put to sleep for now. The story can be revisited tonight after work, perhaps.

In which one's wallet is not on the counter with one's cellphone and keys! Nor is it on the floor mat in the car, nor in the cup holder! Nor is it under the car! It's back at the grocery store, thank god. Somebody had found it in the parking lot yesterday. How could one not have realized it was missing until just now? But, no bother. One will simply retrieve it on the way to the office. After hanging up with the person at the store, a scroll through one's most recent text messages engenders some mild regret. Oh boy. Oh well.

In which Joseph says, "Hey, you sure are chipper today!" after the beginning-of-the-week meeting. One doesn't hear the word chipper very often. Eleven phone calls are handled before lunch, along with fifteen emails. That's usually how a Monday morning goes, with first the meeting and then trying to catch up on all the correspondence backed up from the previous week. But fifteen emails before lunch is impressive. Eight or nine is more typical. After the ninth email, one recognizes that something really special is happening, so another six emails are plowed through and sent out, without even proofreading them, really, and with only two short bathroom breaks.

Fifteen emails. Unprecedented. As a sort of reward, instead of eating the salad that was prepared earlier, one accepts an invitation to do lunch at The Boiler Room. There, as Joseph goes on about the ways he outsmarts his wife when she tries to control his weekend free time, the television above the bar replays yesterday's baseball highlights. There is a fattish man on the screen, a fan in the stands, who catches a foul ball in his oversized, plastic souvenir cup. It comes down out of the black sky right to him and beer splashes up onto his t-shirt and then he chugs the rest of the beer from the cup with the baseball still in it. The crowd around him laughs and cheers. The man holds the ball and the now empty cup up over his head and waves them side to side for the cameras, an enormous smile on his wet face. The woman next to him is laughing, but also she must be proud, because she hugs him around the armpits and gives him a big kiss on his cheek. And that all happened last night in Tampa. And Tampa went on to win that game.

Rich Bartel
Albuquerque, New Mexico

HONORABLE MENTION
We Can't Save What We Keep

Homer has shipwrecked again. His mother knows this, even as she blind-searches her passenger-seated purse. The light changes: green. Her fingers curl around the buzzing rectangle, but the fluttering dies against her palm. *One new voicemail.* She lets the phone go and merges, waving to the car scuttling up behind her. On the radio, the crisp colonial BBC male anchor offers up the Aegean's body count: *Sixty-three people confirmed drown over the weekend.* Homer's mom pushes the worn cd in and Wilco is back in their old neighborhood. She rocks slightly to the chorus, lulled in this momentary peace.

What does the ocean eat?

Two hours later, between her own classes, *Welcome back to Physical Anthropology 101! Today we'll open our textbook to....* Homer's mom steps out of the air conditioning and is enveloped by the muggy faculty parking lot. Pungent. Fungal.

She can see how this artificial space will be easily reclaimed in *Life After People*; the kudzu and scrub oaks paused momentarily at the lot's edge, just breathing. She listens to the voicemail:

Mrs. Fitzgerald, this is Allison Steward, nurse practitioner at Rogers Elementary. Mrs. Fitzgerald, Homer had another shipwreck this morning, during recess. You'll need to come pick him up. Our number is 270-812-5729. Thank you!

What does the ocean eat?

Homer's mom, ducks inside her office, types a quick email to the division assistant, and grabs the sign taped above her desk:

Family Emergency!
Today's class 3/4 4/12 4-28 cancelled.
Check Blackboard!

She presses a fresh piece of scotch tape to her locked classroom door; leaves the sign flapping in a damp breeze. More truthfully, she thinks the sign should've said:

High Seas!
Rocks Ahead. Keep Left.
Check Blackboard!

Everything. The ocean eats everything it wants.

The nurse's office is through the main office, which is immediately off to the right, after the school's wide set of front doors. Homer's mom is not unfamiliar with her destination. She maps her path from the parents' parking lot past the fewest windows, then turns to enter the school.

Air conditioning pimples her skin with the smell of burnt coffee. Homer has described an invisible sign: *There Be Monsters Here* in glowing green letters above the principal's, Dr. Gene's, office. His door, *always, always open!*

Today, Dr. Gene is otherwise occupied by his telephone, and Homer's mom makes no effort to wave as she sails past at full mast. Eyes on the prize. She gently opens the last door, then steps into the warm blue glow of the Nurses' suite.

Color and other theories are at work here. There is a background sound, recorded bubbling waterfalls; this makes Homer's mom less comfortable than intended. Nurse Allison emerges from the First Aid cubby, where all the bandages and ice packs wait to be broken open.

Mrs. Fitzgerald, thank you for coming!

Of course. Of course.

They go over what happened. This time. A tricycle, sand toys, three first grade girls and the janitor's curly garden hose are implicated. The shipwreck was, as always, carefully staged. The girls sprayed with just enough water to be dripping, the buckets and sieves tossed as debris, the tricycle sent down the 3rd grade slide—no one aboard at this point, just a ship rocked between waves in a storm. Then Homer, washed ashore, half naked under the monkey bars. Nonverbal, but muttering and with only one eye open.

All of this at recess? Who's out there? Who was on duty?

He created a diversion. Stopped up the drinking fountain and dumped Trixie and Bella, the class fish, in for a swim. Everyone was over there...

This is when she can hear Homer groaning for water. He's laying on a cot in the Quiet Space; not wearing his own clothes, but some mismatched outfit of gym shorts and a red shirt that says LIFEGAURD across the back. Homer lies on his belly, fingers grazing the floor.

Everywhere and not a drop to drink, she thinks and doesn't say. Homer's mom gathers him up, as much as possible. Homer is small for a 4th grader, but he makes his body stiff and then lists from side to side as they walk out.

Thank you, Nurse Allison!

Nurse Allison who has written the names and numbers of three psychologists on a hall pass. Nurse Allison, who hands this off, rolled up as Homer's mom swells past the First Aid cubby and out of the blue.

Homer's mom stuffs the note into her bag, as she navigates the outer office. The coast is clear: Dr. Gene is not in his office. The front door open and Homer's mom guides him by the shoulder out into the humid bright.

This is his third, known shipwreck this semester. She thinks there are probably smaller scale wrecks—pencils stranded, paper boats that disappear in toilet bowl tidal waves, Lego people who meet untimely nautical ends on distant shores, under the azaleas next to the kindergarten windows.

And then they're back in her car. Wilco has a drummer, a black eye and a mirror...and Homer's mom gets that salt in her eye feeling. Homer's face, freckled and stormy, observes her from the rearview.

Hey kiddo. Swim lessons start Friday. Maybe let's look forward to that.

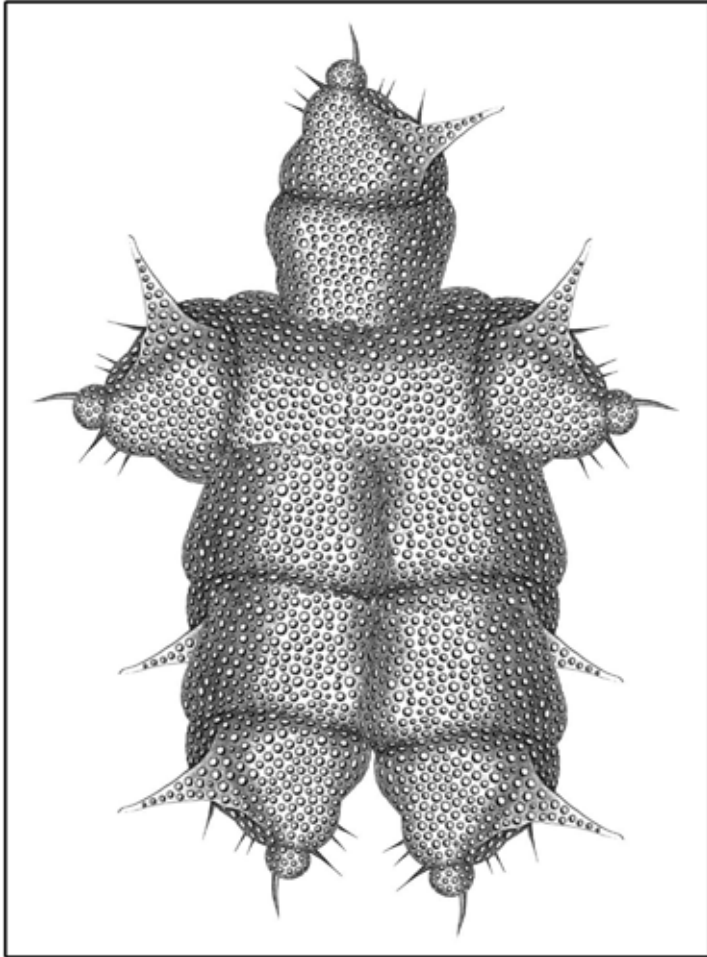
Anything it wants; the ocean just eats it up.

Homer's mom sighs. Her mind is overcrowded with children drowning. With her son staging shipwrecks at every turn. With the feeling that she is missing it. Something, a part of the rudder that should make her be able to turn. Turn everything just enough to matter. She smiles into the mirror.

Is this the face that wrecked a thousand ships?

Probably not all on the same elementary school shore. The wind pushes their vessel along. They are adrift, in a sea of cars, in a city of strangers, under an oppressively blue sky.

Amelia Martens
Paducah, Kentucky



Tickled by the Bell's Tongue

Digital Collage

Bill Wolak

Bogota, New Jersey

Play

The people gather lightly gossiping.
Seats are taken and the curtain rises.
The play begins with slaughters and surprises.
What is real when the play's the thing?

Lines are spoken, lines forgotten.
The hero steps down stage soliloquizes
on the evils of the villain he despises
and dies on stage. Something's rotten,

The villain wins; the play is short.
Antagonists allow no compromises.
Protagonists must bow to god's surmises
and know they kill us for their sport.

The widowed heroine argues with her friends.
The question of the paradox arises.
She accepts her fate when she advises
there's a divinity that shapes our ends.

Laurence W. Thomas
Ypsilanti, Michigan

An Ordinary Order of Things

*And if there had been more of the world,
they would have reached it.*

Camões

She stands two footfalls from the counter
where last night's crockpot still sits
soaking with once-sudsy warm water.

She thinks back to the pot roast (paprika from Hungary, Sicilian serving platter and cutlery from Sheffield in north England).

The coffee cup in her hand is winter rain gray with an Eiffel Tower and the name of the city spread out in cursive.

A glass and stainless sugar bowl on the counter came from a WMF store in some city along the German Danube.

So how would Vermeer paint these bits and pieces of her domestic life, she wonders, recalling the ordinary

order the artist found in things? Here, scattered around her, sits the world at large, and her past life,

not the chosen moment illuminated by the eager light of Vermeer whose world was the one sun-filled room.

Maybe more like his “The Geographer,” a painting of a man surrounded by maps and books, and, behind him on a high

armoire, a globe showing the Indian Ocean. He’s holding some cartographic device and is stopped in thought. Anyone

seeing the painting might imagine he’s pondering how far and where to go, or what, of many things, to bring back.

Some say this studious man on the canvas is Anton van Leeuwenhoek, also of Delft, whose hobby of grinding lenses led him

to his looking at the condensed world
through his microscope lens.
Yes, she admits, admiring this

approach: acknowledge the large,
wide-open world with all its tokens
but keep an eye on what lies within.

Lenny Lianne
Peoria, Arizona

Hymn of the Farmer's Daughter

Wind carries the perfume of lavender
over sun-saturated green and bright fields
of the south, where she walks barefoot
and dancing, sundress blown sideways
by gusts of breeze, drafted by trucks
doing eighty on the flat strip of highway
that breaks the ground between blossom
and flock. Many a farmer owns both.
Many a farmer's daughter is just like her:

sandals swing from one hand, other hand holds
a length of hair behind one ear. Songs from the radio
hummed under her breath happily, make dimples
deeper. No watch. No purse. A tenner
tucked inside her waist in case thirst
don't make it back home—in case
the violinist who busks on the corner of Middle
and Main is there, his pride written off
to loss, sweet sadness in his melodies,
his case open for anything given—
for a sandwich now, a bourbon later, a room
for the night even later still.

Railcars screech way yonder, mark the boundary
of this farmer's land. She has barely been farther
than that, and that's okay with her. She recalls
watching her parents slow-dance in the kitchen
on the chipped linoleum. Not bravery. Not cowardice.
She wants the same for herself. Her wish to wrap arms
'round the broken busker, bring him home to solitude,
a place she knows the wind carries no voices,
where he'll write songs just for her,
slow-dance in the kitchen just with her—
footsteps moving with vagrant grace.

Tobi Alfier
Torrance, California

Irises

Vincent Van Gogh, 1890

It was difficult to gather them in,
and to circle and squeeze enough
to fit the vase—and how
would he want them placed?
And when I bent some, broke some,
snapped three, scattered leaves
on the floor, I apologized, but,
Leave it, he said. *I might've done it
my way, and not by chance.
You're my chance. Good for that.*
He works, the canvas prepared,
the easel feet stable on the floor.
He imagines, I think, the sun,
and the iris before it—an iris
eclipse, some sun beaming still,
and the yellow vase as the moon.
The green stems, the long green
leaves, the dark blue, the yellow,
the fillets of petal-white—these iris
before me in paint, and the vase—

this bursting out of flowers will
always be iris—his iris, I know.
But remember, please—whoever
might listen—it was I who
arranged them. And by chance

William Snyder
Fargo, North Dakota

In the Colony of Aspens, We Are Derived from a Single Seedling

When I think of us,
I think of horses, their bodies
brushed, washed, their manes
braided with bright silk ribbons,
and how the golden forest
trembles with aspens.

Only the sound of hooves
clapping along the pebbles
beside the stream reminds me
that we have left one place
in search of another.

I used to think light traveled
this way but we move so slowly,
I can see the sun setting
along your sepia curls once
so blinding, I became a bird
shocked mid-flight.

This is to say that I am completely inconsolable.

The horses push
through the brambles,
and the pale bark of the trees
creates the illusion of a place
between us that no longer exists.

If only I were not your mother,
you might turn back.
Instead you become shadows,
a galloping suddenness,
and I am alone in a forest
without horses, without my fists
wrapped around reins.

Only the quivering trees
remind me that once
I was the bridge over that river
and you tethered yourself
to my bearings
until you slashed those reins
and dismounted into the world.

Maureen Daniels
Bethpage, New York

When The Detective Asked For A Statement

it was the way she arranged each item on the tabletop,
the careful alignment of fork and spoon to her left.
the knife absently spun between thumb and two fingers—
the scrape of metal on faux marble. her boyfriend
was only an outline, a voice reliving the long pass
and two-point conversions of last night's game.
over his shoulder she sees her father stumble drunk
into her room, heavy with the same cheap cologne
wafting violently before her. across the restaurant
i watch her eyes half close: she's 13 again, feigning sleep.
her fingers tightened. i didn't know how to warn him
the excitement of his hands was a threat she could not ignore.

Matthew Henry
Quincy, Massachusetts



Arbero Bello 3

Photograph

Sacco Vanzetti

Redford, Michigan

Pond

A few words about these poems: They are from a project called POND. These short poems are acrostics, part of a year-long project. Everyday, at different times, I visit our pond with notebook and camera in hand. I jot down some notes, and take a picture or two, then head home and write a four line acrostic using the letters P, O, N, & D. I began the project on November 9, 2018 and will complete it on November 9, 2019.

2.15.19 -11.06 a.m. - 42 degrees

Paltry mist, slush, gray on gray on gray, birdsong drowned out by the operose nuthatch's ratchet and ratchet from the overcast, and nymph-haze sheer as air rises from the pure melting and the ice is dressy in crystal sheets alive now with beads of tender rain.

2.16.19 - 8.15 a.m. - 29 degrees

Perfect for young skaters to play hockey or race in circles as jays screech their nosy, noisy uproar, and on the slope, long shadows deliberate in the shifting sun as they reach out, draw spring in.

2.17.19 - 9.27 a.m. - 25 degrees

Past my capacity to comprehend, I nonetheless consider the ovum in the ground all around this small pond, this natural little body of water, home to reed-grass, turtles, catfish, this decoration which will, in a few short weeks, buzz and grunt and shine with life.

John Stanizzi
Coventry, Connecticut

Searching for the Past

The past is never where we left it
for sure on the corner of Castor and Vine
next to the kiosk where *una donna anziana* smokes cigars,

sells newspapers (often yesterday's) and gives
Perugina candy to the children who stop by
buona giornata she says, patting their heads

but the kiosk is gone, a tatted man in dreads hawks hot dogs
new apartment buildings stand shoulder to shoulder
like sentinels, casting shadows over sunny streets

how can I find the six year old who cried
when the teacher said there is no such thing as a blue wolf
who cried sitting on the curb next to the kiosk

sucking a piece of lemon candy
I want to tell her about Picasso
so she will pick up her paintbrush again

Claire Scott
Oakland, California

Ferryman

How close. The head of a deer
caught in the lights, twinned by the stars
in its eyes in the moments before.

I have killed so many things with my life.

Cows, chickens, pigs, baby ducks,
a cat, a porcupine, an early fetus my body couldn't keep.
Accidents, but my hands stink of it.

Vanity. My hair curls as a eulogy for all my dead,
unspoken, a rare sunlight sound, like the breaking of eggs.
My skin grows jaundiced with it,

under the hot lights of the world's quiet end,
I wash and wear it in the cold soapy cauldron
of the machines that remove our smells.

I have killed a man, too. It was either him or me
as he tried to drown me with secrets,

force, the food he shoved down our throats
as if it could make mutual hate bearable.
How close we were to death then,

My life like Charon crossing the Styx,
only to cross back again, but not him.
He was the pole, the boat, the body with its coin
in its mouth, ready.

Meghan Sterling
Portland, Maine

The Visitor

One of the smallest insects I've ever seen
was crawling across my kitchen table
while I was eating dinner.
I was just about to crush it with my forefinger
when I realized that it meant me no harm.
That it had no intention of climbing onto my plate
and partaking of my food.
So as it crawled over the edge of the table
and out of my sight, I wished it well in spirit,

hoping it would make it to the floor,
find a worthy crumb to sustain it.
Make it feel glad it had visited my house,
of all the houses in the neighborhood.

Jeffrey Zable
San Francisco, California

The Plump White Rat That Paul and Margie Left Behind for Back Rent

in the middle of the night
taught me about tenants
slipping out, I guess.
I did not affix their faces to the rat,
though subconsciously I must have tried
after the rat bubbled up
like veneer over a cupboard drawer,
freezing its pose

and Paul and Margie's blushing
features floated over it.
Or, perhaps, due to its human
connection, thought of itself
as rat above all others.
Whichever the case,
before my wife could uncrook
her elbow to hurl a shoe,

the rat had scrambled over
the drawer and cajoled
its lumpy form down where pipes
trombone beneath a sink,
and our hearts sank to meet it
in the wet rain forest
where a pipe had sprung a leak.

Later, the rat ran its tail along the baseboard,
to stress, we thought, its domestication,
and still our dreams painted it

into a corner, but how then
to catch it? A steel-jaw trap
seemed cruel for one
who'd furred in us fuzzy feelings,
even if we'd not claim them.

We settled for a cheesy cone trap
that, once inside, the rat
would become entangled,
but checking it later,
we learned the rat had wrestled
out of it, the device now
a fat fur slipper with enough fur
on the floor to make a pair.

Then from around the bathroom
it showed itself stripped down
to its skin, up on two legs,
leaning front arms against
the woodwork in a shiny bid to be human,
the plump white rat seeking
a soft eye, not taking things
personally, just trying to fit in.

Rodney Torreson
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Of the Air

My eldest daughter loved gardens.
All around the edges
of hers, she planted
buddleia to attract
butterflies, which she
called flowers
of the air. At twilight
the night we got the call
I sat on the balcony

listening to the city
when a butterfly
landed on my forearm
and stayed there, blue wings
held together, showing
pale undersides. It stood.
You know how butterflies
flit. This one stood
for the longest time
looking at me
as I looked at her
hoping she would never go away.

Max Gutmann
Sunnyvale, California

Everyone Knows What Manna Means

the taste of sin
isn't flavored with lye
or wet wool shoved
 onto a waiting tongue but
 distance.
between words like cut
and slick and smack—violence
within my mouth, a language
you must understand
in order to wield.
I once rolled down
a hill, naked as the moon. I
once kissed a girl
in a church bathroom,
and we could see ourselves
in the mirror.
if I could absolve each word
its rumble and harsh
vibrations—I could root
out all meaning. if we shake
is that an answer?

if we tremble
is that a prayer? and justify
all our covetous teeth clicking.
I've heard that it's hard to hear
with an open mouth. I've heard
that if I light a bush
on fire it might speak.

Evan James Sheldon
Littleton, Colorado

How to Disappear for a Little While

Prepare a farewell statement to the things
in your house, and to the ghost of those things
plead with them to forget your name.

Turn off the lights, but leave the TV
on the Weather Channel. Blue light
is good for emptiness, and forecast breeds

an air of prayer and return. Avoid mirrors
as you step through the door jamb; the world
will not let you forget your face no matter

where you go. Light finds a way to echo,
even if it has to wait all night. Leave the door
unlocked. Or locked. Remember to let go

of the doorknob, lingering is unavoidable,
just ask the afternoon. Bring some change,
quarters and dimes, to sort the way or in case

you fancy a bus or cross a jukebox
with some Patsy Cline. Wear new socks,
broken-in shoes and at least one empty pocket.

While gone, make a list of how many sounds
sound like your name, and never forget that you
can always go back. Once outside, look up once

in a while, it's okay to stare; it's not true
that a watched sky never changes.

Ryan Bonner
Lubbock, Texas

The Change

When I was a child
I didn't know one bird
from another,
could not give name
to any flower or tree
other than dandelion.

I had no time for
lakes and rivers
and I didn't see the point
in mountains.

I figured animals
were for hunting
and fish for fooling
with a worm on a hook.

And here I am,
years later,
a nature lover –
imagine.

I now know beauty
when I see it
not just when I need it.

John Grey
Johnson, Rhode Island

The Rough Edges

The waters of Boulder Creek
spin and rattle the rocks
beneath its turbulent surface.
I sit on the bank
and listen
to the muffled cries
of granite from high Kulshan
being slowly polished
into something lovely,
just as time
and the tumble of years
do for us,
wearing away the rough edges.

Jude Dippold
Concrete, Washington

Thaw

As if it never left, heat blooms
through the air, unfurling my fingertips with warmth.
I clench and unclench my fist, experiment
with the newfound sensations, the ability
to wake up in the morning
and not have to wait to thaw.

Spring comes
as a surprise each year— we scramble
to rediscover what we'd forgotten
during the days when we believed
the sun
would not return.

Tiffany Babb
New York, New York



This is for my people, my plastic people (Tenerife)

Photograph

SEIGAR

Provincia Santa Cruz de Tenerife, Spain

Homeplace

The farmhouse where, from six to eight,
my mother lived has been torn down,
and yet she still can navigate
its rooms as if they were not gone.

She leads me through it, floor by floor:
the kitchen with its coal-fired stove,
the attic's sword from the Civil War,
the upper porch whose swing she loved,

the pass-through bedroom where she slept
with Grandma, who smoked a corncob pipe
in the furnace room where coal was kept,
the hand-mown lawn of the grassy slope.

In memory, the mind still climbs
the stairways of demolished homes.

Susan McLean
Iowa City, Iowa

Eve

The man with the apple has no face.
I slink between branched arms,
fingers perched for local transgression.
I stare up at him from my easel.
He has the bite but not the inequity.
The man with the apple has no face.
The woman has the blame.

Katherine DeGilio
Newport News, Virginia

Slow

We were standing under the bright
bole of the sycamore that split into three
crooked fingers. Even in the noon glow

we could not make out our hearts. Slow,
you said, slow, and hours dissolved
into the scent of night flowers.

Look, you said. Under the alder,
their wings folded like Dürer's praying hands,
the butterflies waited for light.

J. S. Absher
Raleigh, North Carolina

Walking to Music

I walk to sounds. The three note call of
a dove, over and over, brings me Maui.
A piston aircraft far above, that's Tulsa
and boyhood boomtown days of optimism
unroped unbridled wild and windy blue as
sea on a sunny day. Then the earbuds go
in, and "Boy in a Bubble" comes on, I walk
faster and my heart rate goes up like it's
supposed to. A dog tries to earn his
BEWARE sign bona fides by barking
as I walk by but "Wabash Cannonball"
has made him puny in my rumble steam
and speed of clickety klack tracks my
ears full of leg pumping iron and steel.

Erroll Garner slows me down a bit as I
listen for his "mmfs" and "aahhs" among
the ivory poetry, so I forward to "Harlem
Shuffle" and Jagger's jagged high steps
dance through my head and bring my
shoulders back and I look up to see the

towering clouds like those on a vintage set of Prang watercolors—then that takes me back to grade school, Border Star in Brookside, and just blocks away to high school and my first illegal motorcycle, a Harley Davidson knucklehead which I can still hear go potato potato as it idles beneath me at a stoplight. “Pastures of Plenty” with Woody Guthrie’s banjo comes on, makes me think funereally and how nice that would be at a service but I’m still walking, no end in sight. My FitBit says four million steps so far.

Guinotte Wise
LaCygne, Kansas

The Darkroom

I have seen wondrous images ghost their way toward a representation of truth or something like it while they bathed in trays filled with what might have been black magic and tiny drops of time passing. I have seen the merest traces of light prophesy darkening shadows beneath the safelight and I have tasted the slow teasing impressions gathering in the chemistry like revelations. I have watched and waited and in the waiting have remembered that this is the way revelation always comes to me—not in pixelated flashes of insight but in nine zones of emerging detail witnessed under a dim red glow.

Kenneth Salzmänn
Laredo, Texas

Braid

(Industrial Schools, Canada circa 1895)

Would you cut my hair
release me from my pagan ways?
Silence the mother tongue
spoken with the first
burst of lung,
a soothing sound
like a swallow at her nest.

This is not the name I know
not the saint
to which I pray.
This braid of hair
lies limp upon the earth
when, only one hand
should touch my head.

Her mournful voice
her sad lament

Geoff Johnston
Saskatchewan, Canada

The Flow

And there is no time left
to hesitate, to wonder if you should
damp the light or heat.
No time to shut the door and say
“Tomorrow, maybe.” Through
the velvet drapes you hear your friends struggle
for breath. In dreams you see
lost loved ones and are grateful for the glimpse.
How the river runs is how
we are carried, glancing back but always
straining eyes front
to the gleaming horizon, beyond which is more horizon
for a while.

Carrie Vaccaro Nelkin
Mamaroneck, New York



Pier

Photograph

Gary Wadley

Louisville, Kentucky

INSIDE/OUT LITERARY ARTS PROJECT FEATURE

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As This Blue

As this blue I outshine in all the darkness.
As this blue I am noticeable.
As this blue I am not afraid to show my true colors.
As this blue I am myself when everyone else is the same.

KrisTiana Dove

Pantoum Elegy

Grandpa. No letter, no note.
I'm confused. I never knew what was
wrong with you.
I was too young to understand.

I'm confused. I never knew what was
the sadness eating away at your soul.
I was too young to understand.
The memories I hold will always stay with me.

The sadness eating away at your soul.
Your once warm, beating heart,
the memories I hold will always stay with me.
I visit you every year.

Your once warm, beating heart
wrong with you.
I visit you every year.
Grandpa. No letter, no note.

Alina Ramirez

Inside of Me

There are three doors.

One. Winter. A forest of white
with no warmth in sight.

Two. The sun. The flame
engulfs anything it sees.

Three. A meadow of words
desperately waiting to be picked.

Aishlyn Hernandez

A Poem Is

A poem is a way to let out.
To release the anger,
to release the stress,
to release the self doubt.

A poem is emotional.
Is shedding tears,
is laughing,
is taking a deep breath.

A poem is a paper filled with
power.
Filled with feeling,
filled with strength,
filled with words.

A poem is not just a poem.

Lily Smentkowski

Then He Ate the Sun

Billy went to the store
and there were no canned
goods.
So he ate the stop sign,
then ate the flowers.
Then he ate the sun.

Brayan Magana

Humor

This poem is not intended to be funny
If you laugh, you're missing the point completely

You better not laugh
There is nothing funny here
This is a serious poem
about serious things

This poem is not meant to appeal to your sense of
humor
or anyone's

Don't laugh

Don't laugh

Don't laugh

It's not funny

Oscar Campbell

Trees

Abraham Lincoln is swinging on the tree.
There is no signal on the phone, and all of a sudden
he smells the rotten soggy soil and is getting so dizzy.

No wonder why there are so many of them,
towering green giants, swaying leaves.

Wanting to go outside, knowing this is a dream.

Malek Shiaab

Kevin the Cube

The kids meet a box
they name Kevin
who follows them everywhere
until he disappears.
The kids look everywhere
in the night.
The sky turns purple,
and one of the kids says,
"A new sky."

Anas Alsaidi

A World without Clean Water

A world without clean water
is like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich
with no jelly.
It would be like a garden
with no plants. It would be like
a body with no bones.
It would be like a fridge
with no food. A rainbow with
no colors. It would be
like a pinata with no
candy. But a world with clean water
is like a balloon that
never pops. Is like
a party that never stops.
Is like a bear always giving honey.
Is like a dictionary
with never-ending pages.
Is like a never-ending loop
of rainbows. Is like
a galaxy of stars next to you.
Do you like water?
Would you want to live
in a world without water?

Audra Gladstone



Pottery

Photograph

Ann Privateer

Davis, California

3rd 
Wednesday

