

THE ALEMBIC

Providence College 2018



Providence College

the alembic

alembic

noun | **alem·bic** | / əˈlembik/

an obsolete distilling apparatus. for our purposes, a figurative “distillation” of the collective talents of a literary community. just as an **alembic** distilled each season’s yield of grapes to produce fine wine, we also gather and distill the year’s yield of creativity, in hopes of producing a palatable artistic vinatge.

2018

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THE ALEMBIC Spring 2018

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“A word after a word after a word is power”

-Margaret Atwood

I was struck by this quote from Margaret Atwood because it speaks to the simplicity of the power of writing. Language is one of the most accessible and impactful forms of power. The power of words is in the details, that when these simple statements are strung together they are able to proclaim and to celebrate something greater than the individual, the task to which all great literature aspires. *The Alembic* is unique because it not only pulls together the diverse voices of Providence College but reaches out to the world beyond the campus gates to include the voices of a greater global literary community. We have the privilege of bringing these creative endeavors together to create a new piece of art, which speaks with its own voice, reflecting the tone of a community of artists.

This year's journal takes the reader on a journey through the world, from Petra, Jordan to Rue de Lille, Paris, to distant planets, and back home to the minute observations of everyday life in our experiences of love, family and grief. Whether it is a voice shouting across the globe or a voice whispering from our own backyard, we are united by the same human emotions and desire to have a voice. It is in this spirit that I present to you the 2018 *Alembic* in the hopes that you see new places through new eyes, and that you embrace the power of these words.

Megan Manning
Editor-in-Chief

The Corner of Monmouth and Broad Streets

Jeffrey Alfier

Aunt Bernadette kept a newsagent store,
narrow-aisled and poorly lit,
full of what the world called sundries once,
and all those bright magazines
in opaque wraps she forbade me to touch.

I lingered there mornings before school
to watch the regulars who never varied
in their greetings or purchases.
'They'd hurry off to double-parked cars,
buses, bosses rumored cruel —

the working world racing a stopwatch.
Even a classmate, who'd grab
the morning paper, rush back to his sick
mom, a brimming hot cup of my aunt's
coffee sloshing over his fist.

Eighth Winter in Kraków

Jeffrey Alfier

In Sunday's false dawn you leave the flat
on Paulińska, drift down to the gray
waters of the Vistula, abide
there with the solitude of a potter's field.
It is not what you wanted. That was coffee
before the carafe was found cracked
in the kitchen sink. Here, the hour held its quiet
until sleet whispered over fishing boats
and a morning paper blew past,
sounding like wings. On a bench
by the bridge you find the cold fills your pockets
like a thief. A bundled woman pauses in front
of you, swears she's seen you before,
claims you both worked a foundry
east of Breslau. You know the foundry,
but not her, and doubt the clarity
of her mind, a face aged beyond recall.
But why does she remind you of Gdansk?
Your shrug comes with an honest smile
she returns before walking up the embankment
where a woman cleans a spot from a window
with the fog of her breath before
turning away, her silk robe flaring
in sunlight that breaks deeply in her room,
touching the radio she left playing all night.

Lorenzo's

David Sapp

November, on our way to lunch,
finally our gray heads certain,
we idly muse, giddy, red states turning blue,
foolishly convinced of eager chameleons.

All the tables at Lorenzo's are quaint,
wobbly, jerking, everything rickety,
tired, loose-jointed roller-coaster rides.
Hang on! We're thrilled. We scream.

Plates and pizza slide and crash,
a very little disaster for our waitress.
Unnerving my wife, playfully,
too cocky, I exaggerate the quake.

We recall a time when nothing seemed precarious,
indulging naiveté, romanticized nostalgia,
when table legs were sturdy, fixed to tile
(though we didn't care for the pattern).

Abruptly, the amusement gone, a roar,
terrifying tremors, like too many stomping
jackboots, we're straddling a fault,
a gaping crevice, a hideous maw.

Table, floor, foundation, the earth rips
in half, this fissure swallowing us up,
rising magma oozing about our knees.
The culmination of our meal apocryphal,
too shaken, we forget the tip.

The Arrival on Europa

Marisa DelFarno

Another space race had begun. It was not against the Russians this time. Instead, it was against China. Predictable. One world power against another. We probably could have foreseen this. After being shelved decades prior, Human Outer Planets Exploration, also known by its corny acronym, HOPE, was no longer something purely conceptualized. It was now a reality, with a slight change in destination. Instead of traveling to Callisto, our actual safest bet, we were traveling to Europa.

NASA had finally received the proper funding they needed, and a small crew of six were plopped onto a ship, isolated deep in the fabrics of nothing but the dark abyss, traveling to Europa, one of the Galilean moons that is always rumored in the Popular Science written articles to be habitable for human life. A moon named after one of Zeus' bazillion mistresses.

It would take six full years to get to Europa, and another six years back to Earth—a 12 year road trip. The whole purpose of our journey was simply to explore, and to be the first to reach uncharted territory.

We already established ourselves to be sung about in future textbooks by going the further from Earth than any humans in history, but that was not enough. We had to push the envelope one more time. One of us had to get out of the ship, and Frank was our guy. He was about to go on a moon with a temperature of -200 degree Celsius. Antarctica is a lot warmer than that. Like a lot warmer.

Also, Europa has enough radiation suitable for your run-of-the-mill, post-nuclear apocalypse film, though its sister, Callisto, has the least radiation out of all Jupiter's moons. We wondered

why we even chose Europa, a moon clearly hostile for human life, but I realized our sole endeavor was to triumph in this space race.

To top everything off, we lost connection to Earth four months ago. We tried everything to get communication back, from digging like dogs through the wiring in the walls to dissecting computers delicately with tweezers, but all we received was radio silence. Considering the advancement in technology, and the importance of the mission, we thought NASA would provide a solution from their end, but no. We got nothing.

Since at the time, we were four months away from Europa, there was no way we were going to stop and steer our way back home. We did not want to waste a total of 12 years of space travel. We had to reach our destination, and eventually we found ourselves parked in a spacecraft on the jagged surface of Europa, six years away from human civilization.

Aaron, the crew's pilot, would always joke that a Chinese flag would be planted there when we arrived, much to the dismay of the perpetually serious Thomas and Patrick, who were navigator and commander, respectively. Brooke and I, the crew's technicians, would lighten up and laugh, but ultimately we could not fully immerse ourselves in humor.

Instead, we shared the same sense of unease and worry. Either my nerves or the freeze-dried stuff we were subsisting on, with its endless expiration date, made my stomach feel hollow. We arrived, and we had to make sure protocol, procedures, etc. were all set. In fact, we were nearly four hundred million miles from Earth, or in other words, four hundred million miles from any source of help.

However, despite the stress and tension, we still could not help but soak in our surroundings. It was like being in one of those stunning, space themed screen-savers, or watching a sci-fi film with topnotch, realistic CGI on a mountainous screen. Seeing

Jupiter, so massive, so close to little Europa, was something so indescribable that words did not do any justice.

Back on Earth, we have all seen that strawberry moon that appears around June, and we were easily astonished by that, but our view of Jupiter surpassed that coolness by millions. The scariest fact was that Jupiter's beauty mark, that colossal hurricanic spot, could easily fit two Earth sized planets. One Earth alone can comfortably fit in it like a baseball in a glove and here we were, compacted like some old sardines, getting the full perfect view of it, between swallowed by Jupiter's magnitude. When confronted by such immensity, it's like being an ant crawling on the sidewalk in front of the Empire State Building.

It was showtime. Frank was fully equipped, his suit almost cumbersome due to all its gadgets and padding. He was so rigid and compressed by the EMU that he looked like the Michelin Man. But he was ready...I think. His ever-so quiet and mysterious demeanor was haunting. He stood there stoic like a statue, waiting to be released from the ship.

Brooke placed her hand on the door latch, a concerned look in her doe eyes directed towards Frank, easily conveying the two words "Good luck." Thomas placed his hands on Frank's padded shoulders, another expression of good luck. Patrick was adjusting Frank's suit like a mom adjusting a kid's winter coat. And Aaron just had to shout out, "break a leg!"

Frank and I exchanged looks. I smiled and wished him luck. Frank was still quiet, but he sheepishly smiled back. He held his bulky helmet in his hands like a pumpkin, took a quick gaze at it before he plopped it on his head. Only our own reflections were seen, our anxious faces, almost on par with Munch's *Scream* painting. Frank's face could not be seen beneath his murky helmet.

Brooke released the latch and Frank, in his clunky suit, went through the narrow, cramped hallway, shutting the door that

separated us from him, and opened another one to free himself from the ship. For a moment, my anxiety almost switched to jealousy, seeing Frank released from the ship while we looked on like caged animals, but then again, given the weight of the current situation, I was glad that all I got to do was watch.

He was out. Quickly, we all glided towards the monitor to watch Frank take the Armstrong step out of the ship. He raised his right foot and lodged it onto the icy, eerily pristine, ground before the amazement could hit us, and he did the same with his left foot. His leap was, of course, slightly inelegant and clumsy, but he slowly familiarized himself to the gravity, making little leaps and jumps to get himself around. The cabin, though brimming with apprehension, roared with cheers.

Frank hopped around for a little, but still was silent. I could not envision the awe he must have been experiencing, the surreal sensation of treading on the raw, unexplored grounds of Europa. It was like his whole life was building up to this moment, to be the first man to lay a foot on Europa. In the monitor, he started to camouflage himself along the icy rocks, his body slowly fading as he walked away like a cowboy in an old, black and white, gritty western.

The cabin was silent now. I could almost hear the glimmer of sweat dripping from everyone's forehead, in addition to the sounds of our hearts pounding so heavily. We had the dial on max. Thomas shot me a slight grimace, and Patrick had his shaky hand on the radio, ready to adjust it, when the awaited beep came through. Everyone's muscles froze, with our ears giving full attention. We hovered over the radio like a child hovering over an unopened present. The already mousey Frank was almost voiceless. My gut clenched. His response was nothing more than two repeated sentences.

Man's first words on Europa: "My God. My God."

Brooke, hastily plucking the mouthpiece of her headset, immediately started to shout, “What?! What is it!?”

Frank, taking a long, almost unnecessary pause, quivered back, “We lost.”

Dirty Water

Kendall Cairolì

And with my own eyes I see her,
breast teasing the orange creek,
head cocked backwards,
anchoring it softly
into the water
that Sam calls shit water,
that my dad calls golden river.
Toes pressed against the rusting dock,
little moles sitting on her legs like flies,
she hums.
I shake,
tossing gravel into the empty ginger ale can beside me,
knees in the wet dirt.
I steady myself
to the rhythm of the train.
She can not feel it
the throbbing beat
pulsating underneath,
balancing on the tracks that once carried
Franklin D Roosevelt
and Billy, whose needle went too far up his arm
so they took him to Earnshaw,
no more spots in the yard.
They sit in leather seats
that smell like pink erasers and cigarettes
and stare out those windows
with uneasy eyes and packed lunches,
thanking god they don't have to stop
and stay in Littleton, West Virginia.
But they don't get to watch her

with their own eyes,
this heaven at 6pm,
this dying, bird like creature,
kicking,
teaching herself to swim
in the dirty water.

*

* 2nd Place Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

My Mind Wanders

Samuel Ward

My mind wanders...

while the rain makes puddles at my feet,
wet socks breach my comfort. The stars I am trying to reach,
unattainable.

That's when the skyline catches focus:
city lights, clear clustered skyscrapers near. I fear the past
more than the present, more than the future.

My heart spasms at the potential contained in my brain chasms,
the skyline at my feet and wet socks in the rearview,
and you, sitting here next to me.

Precious,
untouched,
preserved not wet.

The illumination in my peripheral cannot distract from the beauty
I perceive.
I even forget, for a minute, that I am caught in the rain:
my brain, for a minute, admires the quirks of its insanity, the perks
of what it demands from me.

You've perfected the art of changing perspective with a smile, and
with a smile
you say,
Look ahead.

When my eyes shift forward,
I watch the city disperse into a thousand pieces:

scenes of children chasing school buses, morning traffic
 mundane routines
 of wake-work-sleep-repeat nine to fives, lives
 all intertwining, connected,
 a community breathing
 and me.

Somewhere between weathering the storm and bracing myself for
 the next one, ho hum.

And you,
 miles away,
 carrying your strength like a flagship dons its colors.

It stops precipitating and the clouds part
 a divine interjection,
cease fire.

Gathering my thoughts

Where are you, my love?

Probably miles away wondering if I am wearing the shirt you
 bought me
 or if I have tested my blood sugar,
 probably miles away wondering

Why can't the stars align like the chalk lines we drew onto asphalt?

The testimony reads of something caught between realism and
 optimism.

An account that refuses to differentiate dreams from reality,
 a dissociative response,
 independent and uncaring of our situation.
 An answer.

The rain would have washed away the ideal blueprint of a perfect life.

I can feel myself sinking into the earth, euphorically
dopamine rushing,
lucidity waning,
darkness encompassing.
The dreamscape is vanishing.

I can feel myself choking on the final words uttered moments,
perhaps eons, ago.

My eyes reopen and I am laying, caught in your glare
the warm embrace of the sun pushes through the blinds engaging
with your hair.

As I read the parade in your eyes,
you lean down,
kiss me,

My feet are dry and I am happy.

Waking After A Dream

Matthew J. Spireng

You know how in the middle of the night
you wake from a dream that was interesting
and pleasant but the moment you are awake
everything about the dream escapes you

except the impression that it was interesting
and pleasant and you wish you could remember
just one detail because then the whole dream
would come rushing back and you could feel

as good as you felt moments earlier during
the dream, but, try as you do to remember
something about the dream, sensing it
right there at the edge of your consciousness,
you just can't remember anything

and so you lie back and allow yourself
to drift back to sleep, hoping as you do
that you'll return to the dream, though, of course,
you never do, or not that you ever remember.

Urban

Elisabeth Murawski

The museum is closing. Patrons
storm the exits, buttoning
coats, many forever changed

by a brush with a controlled
oil-spill, the epiphany
of a perfectly deployed

hunch. On the heels of the mob
chasing down art, enter
the night watchmen, a crew

happiest when nothing moves
indoors. Now the only sounds
are theirs — coughs and yawns,

footsteps on marble, sporadic
two-way radio squawks.
They make their rounds

until morning grays the skylights
and every objet d'art,
rendered speechless by the dark,

revives. They shuffle off, weary,
used to beauty staring back
like a familiar spouse,

though some may pause
before a masterpiece
as if seeing it for the first time.

Solace

Elisabeth Murawski

there's a poem I turn to
from the Tang

about a temple
long abandoned

the courts silent
the gates decayed

a scene so desolate
it's hard to see

why it comforts me
as it does

for something else
I can't identify

rushes in
like a fool will

cancels out everything
but the way

the light falls
on an empty room

You Let it Wash Over You

Ryan Charland

Late June felt like someone was holding an ocean in his hands over Tokyo, trying and failing to keep the waves from pouring through the cracks in his fingers.

On Sundays, I had coffee with Toru. We'd cradle the half-globes of porcelain in our palms as we sat above the Uniqlo off Yasukuni Dori, watching the puddle-worlds explode and reform under the weight of marching feet. The dings and clacks of cash registers downstairs mingled with the little jingles that chimed when a sale was announced, all set to a backdrop of the café's endless supply of Coltrane or Art Blakey and the Jazz Messengers.

This week, Toru and I had the same conversation as always. We were reading from some unwritten script that we had co-authored months ago.

"Are you ready for another week?" he asked me.

"Oh, ready as I'll ever be," I responded.

"I will see you in class early tomorrow," he said as he put a handful of coins on the counter before the cashier. "You are doing great, for an American." He always said the last part with a wink.

After he'd left, I sat a bit longer on the polished oak barstool in the window, metering out the rest of my pour as I scribbled a quick tally on my napkin: seven more months. "My Foolish Heart" gave rhythm to the raindrops that pounded against the glass.

* * *

I accepted the offer to teach English in Tokyo during my senior year of college. My friends had their med-school interviews and their financial internships; I had my year of teaching. If it went well, I could renew my contract for up to another four years. It didn't bother me, not having a plan for afterwards. How many others had the opportunity to live in a new world?

The others in the program had a laundry list of reasons for signing up. A good number of them were drawn to the insanity they had tasted in the games or T.V. shows they'd grown up with. Some were caught by a calm poise that could be seen in the old postwar flicks, where black-and-white businessmen and gangsters alike dressed in crisp suits and polished leather shoes. Others longed to drown in a sea of neon.

And then there was jazz.

An ocean apart from the smoky, untamed freedom of its American fathers, Japanese jazz is meticulous. It has its act together. It knows where it's going.

It was this composure that had been my lure.

My school didn't have a Japanese program, so it fell on me to take the initiative. In the six months between my acceptance and the flight out of JFK, I had the following nailed down:

"Where is the toilet?" (*Toire wa doku desu ka?*)

"Nice to meet you." (*Hajimemashite.*)

"I like sushi." (*Watashi wa sushi ga suki desu.*)

"The girl reads the book." (*Onnanoko wa hon o yonde imasu.*)

The hiring company put me in touch with Toru, in whose classroom I was to be an assistant. During our first phone call, when I recited my list of phrases and told him I was sure it wouldn't be enough, he assured me that I would pick the rest up through immersion.

Toru was waiting at the airport when I landed back in January. He'd told me I'd have no trouble finding him, and he was right. In the undulating crowd of ink spot heads, one blond figure towered over his countrymen. He must've been a good bit over six feet tall. He wore a black sport coat over a white tee, with dark jeans and shoes much nicer than my decrepit Chuck Taylors. The opaque lenses in his small round frames made me think he could've been the long-lost Asian John Lennon.

"It is such a pleasure, Ken," he said, taking my hand in both of his. "Welcome! You will come to love this city, my friend.

It will capture your heart.”

The apartment they set me up with was about half the size of my last dorm room. For a kitchen, I had a mini fridge with a built-in microwave, a rice cooker, and a strange little cutting board that folded down over a steel sink. The bathroom was the size of a coat closet, with the sink built into the top of the toilet; you could wash your hands and flush the toilet at the same time. Efficient.

After Toru had finished running me through the basics of operating all of the Japanese appliances, he leant against the wall and looked out the only window, watching the evening’s plum sky over a distant Tokyo.

“Toru-san,” I said while unpacking the few books I’d brought from my suitcase, “how will I communicate? These kids won’t get a word I say, unless I pick up Japanese.”

“Do not worry about it,” he said. “You let it wash over you.”

* * *

The Japanese subway is a catacomb. Or, rather, it must be a shrine to some Shinto god of noiseless order. Lines form on the platform in single-filed throngs, patiently awaiting the lullaby that signaled the opening of the car doors. A torrent of bodies floods out, and a new tide rushes in. Any stragglers get crammed in by the gentle push of detached and white-gloved hands.

The doors hiss shut and then: nothing.

The thirty-minute ride from my apartment in Nerima to the station near Shinjuku East Academy always passed in deathly silence, as if we were all of us on our way to some stranger’s funeral. Some fat “must-read” usually lay untouched on my lap as I spent the trip watching the faces of the other passengers.

“Did he have a family?” I wondered about the black-suited salaryman that would sit opposite me, his eyes closed and his head resting on the cold metal of the handrail.

“Is she learning English to leave this island?” I would think of the schoolgirl standing nearby, always pressed right up

against the glass of the door's window, ready to flow out of the car at the first sign of braking. She always kept her eyes locked on the miniscule font of the purse-sized English novels she held.

In the evenings, after days spent regurgitating everything I'd ever learned of conjugation and participles and pronouns, I would spend the ride home whirling in the eddies of my daydreams. Some days, a woman in an emerald dress would dance from one rooftop to the next as the train blurred past the concrete fields of high-rises. Others, I would float beneath a glass lake, watching the muddied sky overhead for a hand that would crack the surface. Sometimes, I just thought of my parents' living room.

I was in the middle of one of these fantasies when she sat next to me.

"White boy headin' to the 'burbs?" she asked. "Oh man, you must be one of *those*. Ya know, soul searchers."

An exhausted salaryman with grey bags under his eyes glared at her from across the chasm of the aisle, but she paid no mind.

Her English was free and easy, with only the barest hint of an accent on "'burbs." The black leather jacket she wore had patches stitched up one sleeve that read, "The Ramones" and "The White Stripes." Her pitch hair was half-crammed in a sea foam beanie, but I could make out one thick pink streak that ran through it. In her hand was a plastic bag stuffed with vinyl records.

"Excuse me?" I said.

"Awh, don't be so offended," she replied. "I'm just joshing you."

We were pulling into one of the dimly lit stations before my stop. The hiss of the brakes was soon drowned out by a familiar tune.

"*Sakuradai desu*," a gentle woman's voice said overhead. "This is Sakuradai."

"No worries, I wasn't offended," I said, but the woman was already halfway to the opening doors.

As the train picked up speed, I saw her stand on the platform as she untangled a pair of earbuds from her pocket and put them in.

* * *

Toru and I had planned to go for a walk through the National Garden after class one evening later that week, but a downpour postponed that. Instead, we stayed dry in a coffin-sized alley bar, sipping Sapporos with the grinning bartender and his crooked and wrinkled mother. Between the cracks in the curtain that hung over a doorway behind the bar, I saw milk crates stacked beside casks of whiskey and plum wine. The twelve-inch Mitsubishi TV overhead was playing an old tape of an Earth, Wind, & Fire show.

We were on the third beer (and second glass of sake) when I laid my head on the counter.

“Toru-san, I’m not sure how much more I can take,” I said. “It’s been the same day in and day out. What the hell am I doing here?”

“*Iie, iie,*” the bartender said to Toru, pointing at me, “no, no.”

“Ken, pick up your head please,” Toru said. “He finds it impolite.” I did as he asked.

“Your English is perfect, why do they even need me?” I said. “All I’ve done is sit in the back, fielding questions on how to swear like a proper American.”

“You have been a great asset to our class! The kids love you, and I cannot tell you how much of a help you have been to me,” he replied, placing a hand on my shoulder.

“I haven’t seen my family in months,” I said, “and I’ve barely even met a handful of English-speakers, let alone an American.” I buried my head in my hands so that he wouldn’t hear the next bit:

“And I’m so sick of the goddamn *silence.*”

My cheeks felt like embers in my hands. Outside, the rain drummed a beat on the entryway’s small maroon awning.

“This city and I, we’re outta tune with each other,” I continued.

“Are you thinking of leaving?” Toru said. “You signed on for one year, please try to give it the chance it needs... that *you* need.” He took his hand from my back to pull a handful of crumpled yen from his pocket and laid it on the counter. “It is the biggest city in the world, my friend, it can take some time to find your home in it, to get... *in tune*.”

The rain began to relent as he took me by the arm and led me to Shinjuku Station to catch my train home. The sky overhead still loomed indigo. Toru waved goodbye from the behind the green and gray turnstile. I was nearly sober by the time the six o’clock train pulled in.

She got on just before the doors closed. Today, she wore torn jeans and a blink-182 tee, and her hair was freely falling over the list of dates and cities that ran down her back. She sat down next to me on the spotless bench and removed one of the earbuds she had in, slinging it over the top of her left ear.

“Lookin’ a little green around the grills, there, Yankee,” she greeted me.

“*Hajimemashite*,” I replied.

“Oh, this one’s knows a bit of the local tongue!” she said, a devilish grin creeping along the lines traced by her headphones. Extending a porcelain hand, she said,

“I’m Dizzy, and you?”

“I’m a bit dizzy too, I guess,” I replied, bewildered.

“*Lie*, that’s not how I’m feelin’, it’s my *name*.”

She couldn’t have meant *that* Dizzy, could she? As in the same Dizzy Gillespie whose trumpet siren songs played every Sunday above Uniqlo?

“Like the singer?” I said.

“No, like the cat,” she replied.

“I’m Ken,” I said, shaking her hand.

“Ya know, Ken, you don’t have the usual giddiness you see on Westerners when they get here,” she said. “My guess is you’ve

got the monsoon blues. Always comes after the cherry blossoms fall.”

“No, just... tired’s all,” I said. My head had begun to thump like a kick drum. “Long couple months.”

“Couple months! Bet you’ve seen all of Tokyo by now, eh?”

“A good chunk.”

“There’s a whole ‘nother world,” Dizzy said, grabbing the handrail to stand as we pulled into her station, “away from all this fucking *normalcy*. Take care of yourself, keep those eyes and ears open.”

This time, as the train began to pick up pace towards Nerima, she tossed a peace sign over her shoulder after she replaced her earbud in its cradle.

* * *

No rain fell on that Saturday. I had the day off from school, and I usually woke up early to put in a call home before my parents would be going to bed in the States. My mother picked up after the second ring.

“Ken, baby, how’ve you been? How are the kids?” she said.

“They’re great, Mom. They’re sharp as always,” I replied.

“Oh, they must be so excited for their summer break,” she said. “Speaking of which, only a month until I get to see my boy again!”

The contract for my position included a two-week break between the end of one term and the preparatory period before the start of the next one. I’d made plans to fly home for a visit. My ticket lay on the lid of the portable turntable that doubled as my nightstand.

“Hey Mom, I was thinking,” I said, “what if I came home to stay?”

“But, what about the kids? You’ve gotten so close with them, especially that little guy you always mention,” she replied.

She was referring to Ikki, one of the boys who would cling

to my leg during class time, calling me “Ken-san” and asking me about *Amerika*.

“Ikki? I’m sure he can manage without me,” I said, “Toru’s so wonderful with him.” “Oh honey, he’ll be heartbroken,” she said. “But, if it’s what you want...”

We dropped the subject and exchanged the question-and-answer routine we’d practiced weekly since I left. With the rest of the free day, I decided to ride into the city and find someplace new.

Since I’d arrived, I had been meaning to visit the massive Tower Records store in Shibuya, a short subway trip away from the Academy. Japan was one of the last havens of that chain of musical meccas that once dotted America. My destination was nine floors of uncharted waters.

The store sat like a cathedral amidst the mirrored glass skyscrapers. The sliding doors parted before me and I was swallowed by a wave of noise. Teenage boys with spray-painted mohawks laughed over the aisles with bleach-blonde girls. Westerners leaned over the counter to listen to cashiers giving listening recommendations in broken, but enthusiastic English. Ahead of me, a little boy sat on his father’s lap in a small booth, headphones askew over his raven hair. The man smiled with pride while the boy belted out the words to a song I didn’t know.

I followed the signs to the jazz section upstairs, hoping to find something new. I settled on a few standards that I had forgotten at home.

As I was leaving, a familiar pink streak flashed by the corner of my eye.

“Hey, Yank!” Dizzy yelled.

She ripped the bag from my hands and peeked inside.

“Let’s see whatchya got,” she said. “Oh man, how predictable can one guy be? This must go great with your black coffee and forlorn look.”

“How can a girl named Dizzy be so harsh on jazz?” I said.

“Jazz is wonderful, especially Saint Diz! But so is punk,

and soul, and rap, and... well, just about everything else!”

“These are classics,” I replied.

“You need some new classics. These won’t help those monsoon blues.”

“Would you like to help me with that sometime?” I said.

Her giggle wasn’t the reaction I’d been hoping for.

“Why do Americans always think they’re smooth?” she said. “But sure, I have some ideas.”

We made a plan to meet at Shinjuku Station the next Friday.

The daydreams during my ride home were almost the usual, but this time, my dancing girl sported a leather jacket over her emerald dress.

* * *

Class went quickly that week. The week’s topic was singular versus plural nouns, which was a tough concept for the kids to grasp. Japanese doesn’t have plurality.

Toru and I had just finished class on that Friday afternoon as I was collecting papers. The students were leaving for their homebound trains. Ikki was always the last to leave; he wanted me to share a secret about America with him each day before he went home.

“Ken-san, is there music in *Amerika*?” he asked.

“Ikki, it’s never quiet there,” I replied. “Just music and noise all day.”

This satisfied him, and he marched out of the class with a sly grin at having collected one more tidbit that his classmates didn’t have. I was going to miss him.

“You were excellent the past few days,” Toru said to me when the room was empty.

“Thanks, Toru-san,” I said. “But I didn’t do all that much.”

“You do yourself a disservice,” he replied. “There is real talent behind how you work with the kids.”

I thought on his words for a moment. Lately, it did seem that I was having an easier time getting the children to open up,

to be playful. We were finding a rhythm. It wouldn't be easy to say goodbye to them.

By the time I finished grading assignments and headed for the station, apricot dusk had long since settled over the neighborhood.

Dizzy was waiting.

"Alright, Ken-san, you're in for a rude awakening this time," she said. She wore the sea foam beanie I'd first met her in and a dark green tee.

She led me down Yasukuni Dori past the neon nightmare of the red-light district. Men shouted at us thickly accented English. They weren't Japanese.

"Come and see my dance club!"

"We have a new show just for you, American!"

"Don't walk away lonely tonight!"

Dizzy paid them no mind. I took her hand in mine as we turned into a side street that narrowed into an alley. Ahead, a tsunami of thumping bass, riffing guitars, and twinkling pianos began to rise over us. The walls around us thinned until we could barely walk side by side.

She brought me into a spider's web of interconnected alleyways that hid behind the skyscrapers of downtown Tokyo. The paths were lined with low-slung buildings of no more than two stories. Each one was covered in half a dozen faded signs, and a thousand styles of music swam out of the doorways and swirled about together in the evening air.

"Pick a tune," she said.

Walking through the maze, I took a look in every open door. The bars couldn't possibly fit more than a handful of drinkers, plus a bartender. One was decorated like a scene from a horror movie, the cobwebs over the entryway doing little to filter the screech of the punk music blaring within. Smoke drifted from another, whose interior was completely decorated in oak. As we passed it, I could make out the weeping saxophone of a Coltrane ballad.

Dizzy must have followed my eyes, because she yanked my arm and pulled me further down the alley. I watched her face alight at the pirouetting sound of a violin that surfaced from the bright lights shining from an opening just ahead.

“Now this must be the place,” she said, her eyes shimmering.

“You sure? Not really my style,” I said.

“Oh c’mon, you’ll love it. Just let it wash over you.”

As we walked closer, I thought of how beautiful Tokyo was going to be in autumn. The changing leaves must create such a symphony underfoot. Ikki was going into the next grade, and he’d need someone familiar to help him through the transition.

I pulled Dizzy into the white light of the bar and a woman’s voice began to soar over the violin. I wanted to dive into that music.

cleistomorphosis

Margaret C. Hughes

fiction **poetry** photography interviews

I think about butterflies
how I knew love first
as unrequited:
caterpillars and crawlies
rolling and worming
in the stomach

we offer the impotent, impudent metaphors
falling, floating, bubbles, butterflies

and how the creatures
that emerged from chrysalides
broke at once
into flies and butter
a heavy grease, a curdling dairy

and the buzzing of bugs
with hairy legs
and wings that shut like
see-through scissors

Golden Garden Spider

Sheryl L. Nelms

she is the guardian
of my front porch

hanging above
watching from her circled web

upside-down

all summer
she hangs there

catching the flies
and gnats

respinning her center
spiral of silk

each morning

oscillating those
threads when trapping

an insect

building that brown
egg sac to last thru the winter

until it's time for her spiderlings
to spin their own strands

of silk

to drift away
on a spring
breeze

Green High Flyer

Sheryl L. Nelms

fiction
poetry
photography
interviews

I buy it
rig it just right
tail of sheet blanket
torn in two inch strips
horizontal bowed back
to just before
the balsa snaps
then tied off
tight

finally my beauty
is launched
looping

lazy
circles

until the perfect
gust catches

in an updraft

and it takes off
soaring high

running out
the string
fast

He Wants Me To

Tobi Alfier

Run away with him to Greece,
catch a ferry straight to Crete
where the smell of sage intoxicates
the perfume of ancient sky.

We'll rent a small boat,
hold hands, make up stories about
the tempers of clouds crossing overhead
and the Gods who appeased them.

He wants me to:
run away with him to West Texas,
where the rain is hard, creates
its own geography.

We'll nickname the pump jacks,
drink Rebecca Creek Whiskey,
swear to never forget the smell of wet
dirt, wet road, roaring streamrivers.

He wants me to:
run away with him to Ireland,
where the moon bleeds silver
and dawn breaks bright.

I might go just for this:
the crooked boundaries
of stone—just how we are sometimes,
and here they are so beautiful.

Today, he wants me to:

run away with him to Montana,
where mountains sing green
and the distance between neighbors is long.

No buildings are plumb, they are
all abandoned and stand askew. We sleuth
down side streets of ghost towns, photograph
desiccated cars, padlocked storefronts.

For the sake of old habits
we set out on a whim.
In the clinging air of August
we run.

Jocelyn's Victory

Tobi Alfier

She tried to fix in her mind the last town that kept her awhile.
It may have been Seville, the small room near the river
that shouldered the city in halves, pistachio-colored walls
a perfect foil for bright red tomatoes and white manchego—
she ate the Italian flag most days, in her room, on her bed,
washing machine chugging on the roof playing jazz, her view
of the narrow alley from the window.

If she ever felt alone she had the blue hands of the gentle breeze
to touch her face, the bartender at the corner to chat her up
along with morning churros y chocolate and appraising eye,
the crowds of women into which she could disappear
as they ran their daily errands, or stopped into church
to light a candle. She did that too; she prayed for the echo
of the river to heal her heartbreak, for the full moon to bear

the aching beauty of what might have been, for the courage
to return to the city awaiting her like a jailor. But not today.
On this impressionist painting of an afternoon
she chose a direction and walked, time stitched
into the cobblestones of gray streets, sunlight dimmed
between narrow roads as if shrouded in crepe...
the calendar counting down with flawless measure.

The Man Who Cooks Greens While Thinking of Words

Tobi Alfier

Where is the dishtowel?
He cannot cook without it,
over one shoulder, a father
holding his baby of rainbow chard
and collards, his mind on the picture
of a building he passed, boards perfectly
held together, yet almost collapsed
in a field of fertile green.

Mortise and Tenon, he thinks,
as he open-handedly smashes garlic
with his big knife, not the small one,
the cloves split instant and fragrant
as the sky he wants to describe,
as they get thrown in the pot.

Next the onion, shallots for light
against the bitter greens. Sweetgrass
or field daisy he wonders,
counts syllables as he dices
the fibrous ribs, to be added
before delicate spinach
and multi-colored peppers.

Another word for pastel, the sky so pale
it looks like calm, a shallow sea.
His greens dark and herby, an angry ocean,
opposite of the word he needs.
He holds broth to the light, thinks tint,
thinks subtle, thinks this will be perfect
for his soup, and his poem.

He stirs and thinks. He chops
and thinks. Sound of stems
being ripped — sound of walls
falling out of square but still standing,
like stubborn drunks in angry winds.

The timer. The keyboard. The punctuation
of spice and simile. The afternoon gives him
an inch of open curtain, a little grace
and inspiration, and supper, on the homefront.

In Memoriam

Holly Day

When I die

I want you to name some sort of food after me:
a sandwich, a salad, even just a mixed drink. It can be
something that already has a regular name, like
peanut butter and jelly, Waldorf, gimlet.
Just add something different, like pomegranate seeds,
or a teeny tiny umbrella, something to set it apart,
make it look like something new.

I don't need a fancy headstone,
poems read or songs sung at my funeral.
Just make sure I find my way into someone's lunchbox
or hastily scribbled onto an unsuspecting menu
casually dropped in conversations about
exciting local cuisine or
unacceptable changes made to home-cooked standards.

An Interview with Jane Lunin Perel

Conducted By: David Quattrochio, Conner O'Neill, Katherine Mashimo, and Alexsia Patton



Professor emerita Jane Lunin Perel '15Hon. arrived to teach English and creative writing at Providence College in 1971. She has stretched students' creative capacities ever since. She also led the initiative to establish the College's Women's Studies Program in 1994, serving as its first director, and was devoted to it and the Department of English until her retirement in 2014. She is the author of five books of poetry: *Red Radio Heart: Prose Poems*, *The Lone Ranger and the Neo American Church*, *The Fishes: A Graphic Poetic Essay with Artist James Baker*, *Blowing Kisses to the Sharks*, and *The Sea is Not Full*.

Interviewers: The PC community is eternally grateful to you for all the amazing changes you helped usher in during your time at Providence College, be it the development of the Creative Writing Program, Women's Studies Program, the Poetry and Fiction Series, etc. What changes would you like to see going forward as the college enters its second century?

Jane Lunin Perel: I would like to see the Humanities revived and more emphasis placed on interdisciplinarity. It's like cross pollination when you, David, major in Poli Sci, but take Dr. Ye's Literary Journalism. You have the ability to apply your creative instincts with what you are studying in Poli Sci. More panels, more papers, more poems integrating your knowledge and creativity enrich the individual student and the entire college. Poetry is for everyone, not just poets. It encourages diversity of taste and curiosity about all subjects in the curriculum. It integrates the spiritual with the literal. This means I would like to see less segregation of disciplines and more interplay within

interdisciplinarity that will encourage not just diversity of thought but also of social networking within the college.

I: Providence College is fortunate to have such a long-standing literary journal, The Alembic, to which you were the faculty advisor for a number of years. How do you think The Alembic contributes to fostering a literary-minded student body?

JLP: Obviously, *The Alembic* fosters a “literary-mined student body” only when it’s read and appreciated. I would like to see the work in it read and evaluated not just in Creative Writing courses, but also in Intro to Lit. courses, other English courses in which the subjects of the poems are pertinent, in the American Studies, Black Studies, and Women’s Studies programs, Global Studies, Political Science, Education, Religious Studies, Sociology, and even DWC. We need to sweep the net wider in not having the editors only create the journal, but also personally direct works in it to departments, programs, and organizations that would appreciate the subject matter and style of said work. This could be achieved by having a reading with these aims in mind. It has to be an on-going intensification of sharing the work with the whole PC Community. It’s a wonderful journal, but it needs far more exposure and use on campus.

I: Some of the poems in your book, Blowing Kisses to the Sharks, reveal the tension between men and women. How does this tension manifest in poems such as “Mozart’s Sister” and “Breakfast”?

JLP: In “Breakfast,” the speaker has a frightening, surreal dream in which she says, “I beat/my breasts, which became huge/white eggs/and yolk flowed/everywhere.” The other in the poem is “already up, organizing/your correspondences.” The dream life of the speaker centers on her “breasts” and “bleeding yolk.” It’s obvious she is terrified by her own body parts and some aspect of her sexuality. This symbolizes the fear of her unknowable capacities and perhaps the huge emphasis placed on breasts by women and men. It is mysterious that “she bleeds yolk.” She fears perhaps she is an anomaly and her body form is an anomaly. So,

while the speaker is horrified and afraid “alone, bleeding yolk,” her partner lives in a world or order, “organizing correspondences, eating breakfast alone.” Their worlds are separate, and there is no sharing of her psychic pain, except the poem itself—It sounds like alienation to me.

“Mozart’s Sister,” on the other hand finds a female speaker fascinated with Mozart’s literal sister and the lack of appreciation and recognition of her talent during her lifetime, and now the speaker gives us her name “Nannerl.” Also, the poem is a series of juxtapositions from my own life. I was reading about Nannerl Mozart and considering how restrictive gender roles of her life made it impossible for her to study and become famous despite her musical talent. I imagined her dreams and massive frustration, “Jesus with her brother’s face.” I imagined Nannerl and I fighting against Nazis, the ultimate patriarchal destroyers and oppressors. Then, I juxtaposed that thought stream to my real life, in which I had to bring my car to a male mechanic whose garage was on Admiral Street. I then compare the “lifting up of the car” during its exam to a gynecological exam on a woman by a male doctor. Many women are extremely anxious about these examinations, and they in a way return to the insecurity of Nannerl. My car at that point symbolizes me being invaded by the mechanic so, of course, it is the symbol of my body. And I bring in Freud whose theory of penis envy has always seemed totally absurd and ridiculously male centered to me. Then, I have Mozart’s Sister return and comment on my imagining how she couldn’t even “touch herself.” I then state, “her quiet death makes me speak out.” And I ask my readers to invoke her name in the face of oppressive and sexist behavior and to “speak out,” which is what I literally did. I told the mechanic that his fee was ridiculous, “Go rip off somebody else.” And he literally came down on his price because I stood up to him. I then end on a positive note that, “though things are weird, they are getting better.” We have taken for granted so often the limitation of learned gendered behavior, the assumption that a woman should be polite and accept whatever male authority

expects of her. So, my small victory of not paying a high price pleased me, and the poem also asks that we honor the silent, talented, disadvantaged women who have been oppressed by patriarchal dominance. If we honor them, we also honor ourselves. Men, Women, and Trans are aspiring to experience self-expression and justice. But, the poem is not an essay. I think in it's way its droll and sardonic, and I still consider myself forty years later, "Mozart's Sister."

I: The form of "Lorenzo" from Blowing Kisses to the Sharks is quite eye-catching. When the poem displays the motion of the "diver," why are the words formatted in a zig-zag pattern? What is the significance of this form?

JLP: This question makes me think of the wonderful essay by the poet Charles Olson, named "Projected/Projective Verse," in which he states that "form is the extension of content." So since these poems are in free verse, and this one describes, enacts Lorenzo, a real cliff diver in Acapulco, Mexico while he is diving, I endeavor to use this form to emulate the act of diving and in the next stanza his rising back up and breaking the water's surface. And also, I wish to project how startling he was. I guess looking back I found him quite attractive. Please do read the Olson essay and experiment!

I: "There Will Be a Poem You Can Lie Down In" and "Making a Poem" seem to describe some intense feelings when creating a poem. The poems show that it can be a long, difficult process, but it is somehow worth it in the end. How do these poems reveal your feelings towards developing?

JLP: I am not sure how to answer this question. "There Will Be a Poem You Can Lie Down In" is a metaphor comparing dying to writing a poem. My feelings about imagery best describe my feeling toward developing poetry. Each image that amazes us, such as "you waterfall, you cleft of rock," has the capacity to be all there is for a moment. I am imagining this is what we've become and in doing so find, as the poet William Baker states, "eternity is a grain of sand." This brings up spirituality, the belief in the intensity of beauty in nature as a gift of the Creator: "The

glove of the moon/writes the poem and you lie/down for the last time.” Imagining your own death not as torture or slaughter, but as an extension of nature gives wonder and respect for the dazzling imagery we experience on Earth. I think this is where poetry comes from, not from personality or intellect, but from how we know what a gift life is, and how the world is Holy, even though so much of how so many treat it is destructive. I have always been fascinated by the ocean. It assures me that the God who created all wonders and creatures is generous beyond wonder and part of the human soul.

So, this poem is an homage, a song, to that generosity and to our realizing we are gifted with wonder which will continue for those who are grateful for life, even after they die. Now, “Making a Poem” again uses the metaphor of comparing “making the poem” to mining with all the physical arduousness of mining. It is a metaphor for the creative process which requires fierce concentration and an actual digging at the core of language to find that imagery the equates with the ferocity of a poem’s own core. It is difficult to find, to hone, language. It is a lonely process and frustrating. But again, it is the gift of discovery and song. Frankly, those who live with poets, but are not poets, have little understanding to why “it took so long to offer it.” Yet, despite the tremendous energy required to write and revise heavily a poem one is satisfied with, there is always a terrible fear the poet will lose the gift and no more poems will come.

I: “Carnelia Doesn’t Get Relief from Acupuncture but She Gets This List:” certainly breaks the form of the prose poems that surrounds it. Is this meant to draw attention to the poem among the collection or merely is it an anomaly among the collection?

JLP: The form of “Carnelia Doesn’t Get Relief from Acupuncture but She Gets This List:” is exactly how the poem with its mythic equations came to me one by one on the acupuncturist’s table with the needles hanging out of me. So, in complete contrast to “Making a Poem,” here I was given this

poem as a gift, although I did not get any relief from the back pain. Also, I did tinker a bit with what was given to me. I created an echo to each line which imbued it with certain morbidity. An example of this, each of the last words of each line of the first four lines ends in a morbid word and image, but the last words of the last line, “let go,” suggest a demand for freedom. So, you may start with what literally comes to you, but you may also play with it and change it completely. That is my justification for the form, that these words came to me as lists whose changes I made only on the last word of every line.

An Interview with Ed Ochester

Conducted by Robert Vera, Alyssa Cohen,
Henry Ainsworth, and Daria Purdy



Ed Ochester grew up in Brooklyn, New York. He is the longtime editor of the *Pitt Poetry Series* (University of Pittsburgh Press), and the founding editor of the journal *SAM*. His own collections of poetry include *We Like it Here* (1967), *Dancing on the Edge of Knives* (1973), *Miracle Mile* (1984), *Allegheny* (1995), *Snow White Horses: Selected Poems 1973-1988* (1988), *The Land of Cockaigne* (2001), *Unreconstructed Poems Selected and New* (2007), and *Sugar Run Road* (2015). Ochester is professor emeritus at the University of Pittsburgh and is on the faculty of the Bennington College MFA Writing Seminars.

Interviewers: In the poem “Having Built the Coop,” and many others, you mention prominent postmodernist figures such as Jacques Derrida and Bernard-Henri Levy. Do you ascribe to the postmodernist philosophy and if so, why?

Ed Ochester: Note that the “Levy” mentioned in the epigraph is the poet D.A. Levy. I don’t ascribe to most of the views of Derrida et al, and think that the prominence of them in American English Literature departments has been a disaster—English Lit. used to be one of the largest majors in colleges of arts & sciences, but in the past couple of decades its numbers have shrunk dramatically—mainly because of the “theory” people . . . In this poem, the drone of cicadas (background noise) is derrida derrida derrida. I make a comment about “theory” in this poem from my most recent book:

Ross Gay

sent an e-mail to Ross Gay:
 congratulations on the Times' review
 of Bringing the Shovel Down
 though even in a good review of poetry
 there's almost always a snotty little quibble
 unless the poet's dead or English
 (this reviewer hates "shimmering labia")
 "yeah" said Ross "I laughed about that too"
 maybe it started when the horde
 of "theory" ph.d.'s rose over the horizon
 and poisoned all the books they landed on-- luckily then they
 started to kill each other off (we can use split infinitives now) —
 but around that time American poets
 began to write about John Clare
 the mad sweet nature poet lost
 in an unjust world one of the theory people
 I worked with wrote a novel (unpublished)
 so bad cats and dogs might double over
 which deepened her hatred of her
 irrational colleagues publishing
 poetry and fiction--perhaps Yogi Berra
 explained it best (note that "Yogi"
 like the poet we call "Homer" is growing
 by incremental repetition and now
 has an enormous oeuvre) Yogi said
 "in theory there's no difference
 between theory and practice but
 in practice there is"

I: You seem to mention Greek and Roman figures from History and Literature quite often in your work. Does this particular period of history interest you more than most others and why?

EO: I mention Greek and Roman figures often because they're

important to me (and our culture) — the founding fathers based our Constitution on what they learned from Greek and Roman experience, and that experience informs not just our literature but our science, religion, philosophy and historiography. On the other hand, I make a lot more contemporary references than classical ones.

I: In your poem “Poetry” you talk about the private life. How do you believe the meaning or value attached to the private life has changed? How does your poetry show this?

EO: “The private life” isn’t as private for most people as it used to be because of our electronic interconnectedness, and our compulsion to “share” personal experience. That’s not all bad, obviously, but it can/does lead to a lot of blabbing. And much of what concerns us as individuals is not important to others (see the kind of gossip about tv and movie stars on the web). And people who spend all their time on trivial stuff have trivial lives. I don’t want to sound snotty about this — I love to gossip and talk baseball/football as much as the next person — BUT many people I know are reduced to that. There’s more to life.

I: How does the area in which you live, outside Pittsburgh, inspire and influence you? What specific aspects of the place in which you live, if any, inspire you?

EO: The rural area in which my wife and I live forces us to depend more on ourselves. We like that. We’re not a-social, but we don’t enjoy the population density of cities. And we love to garden, like clean air, lots of trees, etc. etc. We have a very simple house and simple tastes in accessories — we don’t usually want “the latest” this or that. My wife, Britt, is a bird lover and has attracted well over a hundred species to our property over the years. Our main form of entertainment is reading (not movies, tv, and so on). Lest all this seems too primitive: I spend a fair amount of time each week working on the net.

I: Along with writing, based upon your poem, “My First Teaching Job, Boston University Night School ‘Intro to Lit ’” you also spend some time in the classroom. How do you feel working as a writer influenced your effectiveness as a teacher?

EO: I started my academic life as a teacher of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but was one of two people to organize the MFA in writing at the Univ. of Pittsburgh and spent 20 years as the director of the program. I took early retirement from Pitt in the late 90’s and since then have been teaching at the Bennington low-res MFA. A part of my usefulness as a teacher is that I know how things are put together (I’ve also worked as the editor of the Univ. of Pittsburgh Press Poetry Series for many years). I have very eclectic tastes in poetry (as evidenced by the books I publish in the Poetry Series), and that’s useful also for students: there isn’t just one way of doing a poem. And I’m very proud of my students. The best-known of them are Li-Young Lee, Terrance Hayes and Michael Chabon (you can find an essay by him online which describes me and his undergraduate days at Pitt), but literally dozens of them have published books, and many more have remained poetry fans.

I: At the reading you performed at Providence College, you shared a couple pieces of political poetry. What inspired you to incorporate politics in your written work?

EO: Two of the greatest poets of the last century—Pablo Neruda and Bert Brecht—wrote many political poems. In most countries political poems are not unusual. But in the U.S., we have an old (and spurious) academic tradition that views political poems with disfavor. I think ANY human concern (including politics) is a possible subject for poetry.

I: More specifically, you read and referred to a number of poems about President Trump. We would be interested to know what effect you think the current presidency will have on the content, tone, and volume of art in the coming years, particularly written work such as poetry. President Trump has proved to be more polarizing than many administrations have been in a long time,

do you think this will come through in the nature of art, either in protest or support? Do you think it will generally have a positive or negative effect on literary art and culture?

EO: Well, don't get me started on Mr. Trump. I grew up in the same area of Queens County that he did, and most New Yorkers know that he's a con man (but he's a good con artist and took in many good Americans). He is "polarizing" but he's also the most ignorant, vulgar, self-contradicting, lying person who's ever occupied the office of the presidency. Also, a sex criminal. (What's not to like?). There's already a good body of writing in all genres contra Trump, including work by many prominent conservatives. It will grow.

I: Are we then to expect a change in the tone of your future publications?

EO: I've had fun writing a group of Trump poems. I suspect the tone of my poems won't change much if at all. On the other hand, who knows? I've always been interested in seeing what happens, seeing what surprises my unconscious sends me. You plan out poems after, not before, those messages.

Petra, Jordan, 2011

Ralph Tavares



Mount Nebo, 2011

Ralph Tavares



Wadi Rum, Jordan 2011

Ralph Tavares



General Store
Alexandra Harbour



Autumn
Alexandra Harbour

Drip
Alexandra Harbour



Alida
Alexandra Harbour



Kennicott Glacier
Alexandra Harbour



Erie Bunkhouse
Alexandra Harbour



Lift
Alexandra Harbour



95% water
Mel Fricchione



not pictured 3 pals
Mel Fricchione

city flowers
Mel Fricchione



open
Mel Fricchione





Trim Castle Sunset
Eric Manning



Celtic Boats
Eric Manning



Nieakhanie Mountain
Eric Manning



Mt. Hood Burning
Eric Manning

An Interview with Ruth Gilligan

Conducted by: Gabby Bianco, Marisa Delfarno, Natalia Fournier, Stephen Joyce, and Joe Myko



Ruth Gilligan was born and raised in Co. Dublin, Ireland. When she was 18 years old, she moved to the UK, just one month after she had published her first novel *Forget*, which became a number one bestseller. She works as a full-time lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham. She writes regular literary reviews for the *Times Literary Supplement*, *Guardian*, *LA Review of Books*, and *Irish Independent*.

Interviewers: When do you find inspiration to write? How do you find the time to write while having to balance your time as a lecturer at the University of Birmingham?

RG: Since I work full-time as a lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Birmingham, I tell myself every semester that I'm going to be better at carving out a day or two a week to focus on my writing. But there is always a student who needs help; always some admin that requires attention, so I find I get very little done during term time. Thankfully, we get holidays, so I always try to make a real dent in the writing at those moments.

I: In what ways does your latest novel, Nine Folds Make a Paper Swan, differ from your first published novels other than its content? What challenges did you face while writing this historical novel?

RG: Because my three previous books were almost entirely inspired by personal experience, writing a historical novel was a new challenge for me. I did too much research, so trying to find the balance between fact and fiction was tricky. However, I had to remind myself that although I like the idea of readers learning

something new, the thing that matters most has to be the story.

I: Having studied at the University of Cambridge and Yale University, what would you say are the major differences in UK vs US university teaching and/or grading styles, particularly in regards to English and Creative Writing?

RG: I studied English — as opposed to CW — at Cambridge and Yale, so I can only really comment on that. To be honest, the biggest difference I found is that in the Cambridge school of English, the author is essentially dead — their personality, their background, their literary or family connections are irrelevant. The work must be taken and examined and appreciated in isolation, with a particularly close attention paid to details and formal decisions via close reading. In Yale, however, context was everything — we would spend weeks on historical background; on the author's life and connections; on the book's wider influences and implications. Close reading was nowhere near as valued, and the whole thing took a more macro- rather than micro-level view. To be honest, I much preferred the Cambridge style — I find it far more interesting (and important) to think about why an author has chosen a certain recurring image, or to notice their unorthodox use of punctuation, rather than to have to put together an entire presentation on the fashion trends of the time, or to figure out how they might or might not have known Virginia Woolf. Who cares! But that is just personal preference, I suppose.

I: What difficulties do you find in writing a story about an experience or setting you are unfamiliar with as you do in Nine Folds Make a Paper Swan? Does it take notably more time to research/prepare?

RG: My first 3 novels were very autobiographical. As a young writer, I had of course been taught about the whole 'write what you know' approach. However, increasingly I realized how limiting that was, and also how so many of the writers I admired went directly against that, and actually wrote far outside of their own immediate experience. I think ultimately that is the beauty and power of fiction — to make imaginative leaps into other worlds — both as a writer and a reader. It is, ultimately, about empathy. That's not to say this doesn't present its own issues — from misappropriation

and ventriloquism, to inaccuracies and misrepresentations — but I would rather take on those challenges than just churn out novel after novel about my own, rather non-interesting world.

I: Whilst marking or reviewing literary fiction, what is a common mistake or drawback you often tend to find in other people's' works? This can either be a macro (e.g. having a clichéd idea) or micro (e.g. formatting/presenting their piece undesirably on the page) issue.

RG: Formatting may seem like a minor thing, but it is SO important. If a student submits a piece of work that is incorrectly formatted, it suggests two things to me — 1) they have never actually read a book in their life, and 2) they are lazy and don't really care. Needless to say these are not good things to suggest! More broadly, I find a real tendency amongst students towards the melodramatic; the over-the-top. I was the same when I started out — I wanted to force my ideas down the reader's throat — so I used dramatic language and repetition to HAMMER. EVERYTHING. HOME. But if the ideas are strong enough they will speak for themselves, so the writing needs to ease up and not appear over-worked.

I: As someone with a MFA in Creative Writing, what advice would you offer to any student wishing to pursue creative writing as a way of making a living?

RG: Find a day job! Seriously — there are only a tiny tiny number of writers in this world who can make a living just from writing fiction. I work full-time as a lecturer; many of my writer friends work in journalism or publishing or teaching; some work in tech or media or something totally unrelated — anything that will pay the bills! But really, it is an unreliable career, so the trick is to have something stable to support it. Luckily I find my lecturing work feeds directly into my obsession with reading and writing, so it all feels part of the same process — the conversations with my students and colleagues are integral to my own development as a writer — so I'm very lucky in that regard.

I: What process do you take to find editors that will help push your work forward upon reviewing it?

RG: When I finish a book, my agent sends it out to various editors at various publishing houses. Then, depending on what they say — and how much money they offer! — I sign with one of them, and begin editing the book together. It's always a really enjoyable process, especially when you find someone who really gets the book (and indeed someone who, often, gets certain aspects of the book even better than you do).

I: To what extent does the family of the Greenburgs, within your 2016 novel Nine Folds Make a Paper Swan, resemble your upbringing as a child in Ireland?

RG: The Greenbergs lived in early 20th Century Cork, so there aren't a lot of similarities I'm afraid! That said, Ruth Greenberg, like me, is the youngest child, and very eager to please. However, in *Nine Folds*, the present-day character of Aisling is much more autobiographical — like me she is from Dublin, now living in London, and has fallen in love with an English boy. She has to deal with questions of identity, homesickness, belonging, religion, familial ties, so a lot of my own experience is in there.

I: Are there any particular themes or ideas you wish were better presented in literature? (Either commercially or just generally)

RG: I think in Irish fiction there is still a real lack of diversity in terms of people of colour or minority groups being represented. This is slowly starting to improve, although only really amongst certain small presses, so the bigger houses really need to get on board with this.

I: In what ways do you believe the American and European literary markets differ?

RG: The American publishing industry is just HUGE! Which is quite intimidating for an outsider. However, luckily I found a US agent, who then found me a wonderful indie publishing house who really took *Nine Folds* under their wing and pushed it as much as they could, so I felt a lot more nurtured than I might have if I had been at one of the huge US publishing houses.

An Interview with Phillip B. Williams

Conducted By: Dan Araujo, Brendan O'Brien, Ryan O'Malley, and Rebecca Redente



Phillip B. Williams was born in Chicago, Illinois and earned his MFA from Washington University, where he was a Chancellor's Graduate fellow. He is the author of *Bruised Gospels* (Arts in Bloom Inc., 2011), *Burn* (YesYes Books, 2013), and *Thief in the Interior* (Alice James Books, 2016), winner of the Kate Tufts Discovery Award. His poetry has appeared in *Callaloo*, *Kenyon Review Online*, *The Southern Review*, *Painted Bride Quarterly*, *West Branch*, *Blackbird* and others.

Williams is a Cave Canem graduate and the poetry editor of the online journal *Vinyl Poetry*. He is the recipient of a Whiting Award and teaches at Bennington College.

Interviewers: Our group found your poem, "Witness", in Thief in the Interior, to be interesting in terms of the content and style. We're wondering if you might be able to speak about what you were hoping to achieve stylistically, given the variety of writing styles and forms that were used, and how you thought this complemented the content?

Phillip B. Williams: For me, I just wanted to write a poem that interrogated the space of the page, the possibilities of form, in order to get across the difficulties of relying on anything at all to communicate how I felt while looking at my life through this story. I wanted to match all of the feelings moving through me but no form seemed reliable. I didn't have any hopes per se, just a vision, and that vision was to keep attempting a thing until exhausted, to keep moving through my fear and anger until I just couldn't anymore. The original poem is, I believe, 20 sections. I edited it down for the book (it was also what was best for the poem).

I: In reading "He Loved Him Madly," (Thief in the Interior), we found it to be something like a tapestry of different aspects of what we suspect to

be your environment in Chicago. We were wondering if you could perhaps explain or elaborate on how you weaved the different perspectives, voices, and references together to make this work; and how you think this work should be read?

PBW: The form is something I got from Terrance Hayes. He has a few pecha kuchas in his book *Lighthead*, one in particular called “Arbor for Butch,” which I really enjoy. He thinks about his father in that poem and it made me think about my own and how hard it must’ve been coming up in Chicago during the crack epidemic. But in my mind there is one voice, not many, thinking about Chicago as a place that has failed its residents, particular the working class Black residents in my neighborhood and surrounding neighborhoods. The work should be read straight through but one could read all the odd sections together then all the even sections together if they wanted to. I just wanted to make sure that the community had an eye on it as well as my relationship with my father.

I: The final poem in the your collection, “Birth of the Doppelganger,” we felt, to be one of most surreal of the bunch. It feels like a very dark and ominous vision of a rebirth from the body of the wolf into something else; when combined with the title we suspect that it’s describing how a new ‘you’ has come into being. We were wondering, if this work is about you, how you see this transformation: what were you before, what are you now, and what caused this change?

PBW: This poem is closely related, in my mind at least, to the opening poem “Bound,” where the question is asked “Can I be more than one thing at once?” I consider “Birth of the Doppelganger” to be an answer to this question in some way. It’s neither a yes nor a no. More like a “Well, there is always transformation, but this is not to say that this other part of you wasn’t always in you to begin with.” It’s not really about me. Most of my poems are from a speaker that is merely an aspect of me. There are a few where the I is reflective of me, such as “Eleggua and Eshu Ain’t the Same.” That is a poem absolutely pulled from my life but also

with exaggerations.

I: As an editor for Vinyl and a writer yourself, what kind of things do you look for when reading other people's submissions? How do you determine if a work should be published or not?

PBW: I look for a poet who knows what they are capable of. So many poets come to us at *Vinyl* without an idea as to what they are doing and how to better achieve their aesthetic goals. Every poem has an aesthetic personality, and it is often times easy to see when a poet is still figuring things out, when a poet has not been reading widely or enough, and when a poet accidentally happened upon something cool instead of intentionally working with that cool idea to create something surprising, yes, but also cohesive. I look for work that somehow proves to me that it is different than things I've read before. We get a lot of poems that, if names were removed, I wouldn't be able to say they were written from different people. I also look for poems that take chances with language, think about common tropes with unique vision, and are not ashamed of being beautiful, however that may look.

I: How does your role as an editor for Vinyl compare with your role as a writer? Do you feel your role as an editor strengthens your writing or at times interferes with your creative freedom?

PBW: It's a mix of both but mostly editing interferes. I try to get one out of my system before doing the other. If I am writing, I will not look at poems and vice versa. Reading other people's poems absolutely makes for a difficult writing experience. It takes me out of my creative mind. I do enjoy that I see what seems to be fads happening in poetry and can build up a resistance to them as I write my own work. Analyzing a poem to see if the writer has written something that if shared, could make people think differently about the world is different than wanting to be on the creator's side of thing, making the work that is unfamiliar and maybe even frightening for me and hopefully for the reader as well. I cannot wear the editor hat and the writer hat simultaneously, but I do learn a lot from reading the great submissions and finding

those poems that are utterly generous and thought-provoking.

I: After reading your poem “Do-rag” (Poetry Magazine) we were curious to know your inspiration behind writing it? It appears you poke fun at a modern drunken love story, but we’d love to know if there is any deeper meaning to this poem.

PBW: This poem is less about a drunken love story and more about a love story where someone who is pretty open about their sexuality navigates, tries to navigate, a romance with someone who is in the closet, who participates in toxic masculinity in order to feel some sense of false comfort in a world that does not accept them, rather it accepts a shadow of them. The speaker is willing to keep this secret, though, but not without making it clear that the world is not going anywhere; it can merely be hidden, temporarily, and regardless of what the world says or thinks, in order for the closeted lover to be with the speaker, he has to make himself vulnerable. Vulnerability comes at a price. Both the speaker and the lover pay it.

Eclipse

Judith Ann Levison

It was noon.

I could not look at the sun's shutting eye.

My world was becoming a black shroud
from this moving lid of death.

My chest swelled in a sphere of panic.

When I opened my eyes, someone yelled
"Don't look!"

Father wore a scary welding mask.

He held a can of beer with a bee on the rim.

I clung to my dolls in a stroller,

threw a blanket over them, for their eyes were made of glass
and could reflect the dying sun.

A River, A World

R.T. Castleberry

Take your time in Dubai,
take your turn in Kabul or Jerusalem.
In seven rooms that face the river,
I pace my panic.
Uncapped paints pile table and desk.
Arrival Ceremonies, The Hangman's Departure
are panels settled in a painter's studio.
Mystery lines, bruised hands that won't heal,
assemble portfolios furtive with contrition.
Asking my question twice,
I've heard no answer.

For each day, she owns a different smile:
courtesan lilt, business bright,
modest mistress of the sewing room.
Harbored by each city's lover
is a conceit that her uneasy elegance
leaches a world pale.
I hold her husband's surly note,
a check, a pair of airline tickets.
I attempt no offense. I leave easy.

The evening turns late, light-hollowed,
suitcases lined like rifles in a barracks.
Framed by river bank and cliff walls,
water's fall blooms to the moon,
splashes white as it falls, as it flows.
Headlights, heat lightning slice the window panes.
Town car idling, we argue destination and direction.
Opinions hold, bitterly bearing gifts.

Late for Leaving

R.T. Castleberry

Boot soles slick on the tar strip lot,
I slow to roll my sleeves up,
feel the sweat from
the go-cup carried to the car.
I take bad habits for a stroll,
turn back burdens and blame,
like coins rejected as reward.
Beside the open door, keys in hand,
a cell phone pulses on my belt.
I ignore it for night's shaping vista:
satellites, arriving planes,
rain-threat nimbus.
Selling scents of barbecue and burger entice,
cantina neon sits bolder against the sky.
The weight of repetition sustains.
Amused, I stand awhile.

Perspective

Jessica Kent

First it was a lesson in art class, one you had to do a hundred times over because you could never get the lines right, not even with a ruler's help; then it was something your mother tried to teach you, when she would answer shuffled feet and mumbled complaints with comments about Ebola or nuclear war or walking to school in the snow; and then it was something you learned yourself, when you started taking the long way home at night to see the city against the sky, and you would picture a place without fluorescent lights or laugh tracks or constant routine; when you would lie awake and stare at the ceiling and imagine all the things you might be missing.

Venting

Kari Wergeland

When the wind picks up,
the rotating vent squeals,
reminding me of the steel merry-go-round
we rode in Davis.

The sound became intertwined
with twirl and twirl,
exhilaration—
lift of my gut
as I sat in the swing kicking my legs out.

But this squeak is a pest,
like gopher and skunk,
the coyote that calmly strolls back
to the regional park
after hunting for cats.

It passes suburban boxes,
padding across lawn and garden
before finding the Cowles Mountain Trail.

I zero in on the rotating mechanism,
which isn't easy to reach
in the attic.

Stay on the rafters

or you'll punch a hole through the ceiling!

I learned this from my father,
who smoked when I was in elementary school.
My brother and I used to steal his cigarettes—
try them out in the attic,
where my mother kept the Christmas box
and other precious things.

But this attic is empty,
squat with horizontal boards breaking up space—

requiring the limbo.
It's tough to keep the WD-40 handy,
an easy distance from that place where I hunch
beneath the circle—
base of the vent,
which isn't squeaking at the moment,
though a slight push reveals,
it still does squeak.
And the first joint I spray,
the grease
alleviates the sound
as oil comes down
on my pants,
but I stop caring
whether they're soiled;
I squirt the steel rod again,
hoping I won't have to return
for years,
hoping I'll never have to hear that screech
when I'm trying to sleep,
when the Santa Ana picks up
and it's hot out.
I don't want to hear screaming
the way rabbits do.

The Last Reel

Amy Henry

Back when I was a kid hanging around the film school at UCLA, there was this screenwriting instructor, Jack Milton, who used to say “Save it for the last reel.” This was five or six years after Lucas shot *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* entirely in digital, and it was clear to even the dumbest wannabe film director that digital had left 35mm film—first, last, and middle reels—in the dust. But Milton was old school. Save it for the last reel. That’s when the hero’s got to make a choice, take a stand.

After UCLA, I bummed around the country, shooting short shorts and lolling in a series of rambling love affairs until I found myself in New York City, working in a diner on Ninth Avenue near where the High Line is now. One night, just outside my subway station, I saw a peeling poster for the Tribeca Film Festival. They were still taking submissions. I thought *Go for it*. But when I looked through the stuff I’d shot crossing the country, it seemed like so much uninspired crap.

So I scripted this little film about a guy who works in a diner. Jack Milton used to say every story needs a goal, and at least one obstacle to reaching it. I made my diner guy a struggling songwriter in search of a hot band who would make him a (rich) household word. His obstacle was twofold: He didn’t have any personal links to a hot band, and he was a bit—well, a lot—Asperger’s, so though he was really smart inside his head and composed all these great songs, he just couldn’t manage to communicate that to others.

I shot it in ten days, with my co-worker Al as the songwriter character approaching random people on the street with his story. I wanted to shoot it with Al doing this inside the diner, but after he freaked out a table of customers, my boss threatened to fire us both and file charges. Al said if being an asshole on the job was illegal, everyone in New York would be in jail. I wasted two good

hours of shooting time convincing the two of them to make nice again.

I should mention here that I'd just moved in with this woman, Chloe Rose, in her studio flat on the Lower East Side. Chloe Rose wasn't her real name, but she said no one would take seriously a dancer named Linda Brumble. Not that she was famous or even exactly a dancer. She ran a workshop called "Music and Movement for Little People" over at the Y in Chinatown. But she'd taken these modern dance classes in high school and done a year at Tisch before dropping out.

"I couldn't manage all those egos," she told me the first time we talked. She was one of the regulars at the diner, so we talked a lot. If I was on break, we'd share a cigarette. One thing led to another (Jack Milton on clichés: Never use them ... except when they're useful.) and we wound up living together.

Anyway, I'd finished the Tribeca film and was filling out the online submission form when Chloe asked, "How does it end?"

"What do you mean?" Distracted, I pressed the wrong key and my synopsis vanished.

"Does the diner guy find the hot band? Does he hang it up and go for an MBA? Or maybe he decides to go out on his own. Like a millennial Bob Dylan. The last scene could be him carrying his guitar, walking into *The Bitter End*."

Actually, Chloe's idea wasn't half bad. Why hadn't I thought of it?

"It just ends," I snapped.

The thing was, it didn't exactly. End. Not in a way Jack Milton would recognize. I had tons of digital stuff of Al playing this inarticulate guy, interacting with passersby, humming bits of songs to junkies amidst overflowing garbage bags. Some of it funny. Some of it sad. I was pitching it as a statement about the degradation of the artist in our times. How can you script an ending to something that big and chaotic?

It was a couple of months after that when Chloe dropped her bomb. "I'm preggers," she said.

I'd just got home from work. Twenty degrees outside and I'd walked ten blocks to catch a train because my line was down for routine maintenance.

"And this came for you." She handed me a thin envelope. The Tribeca people. If you're in the arts, you know thin is usually bad news. It doesn't take much paper to say no.

I ripped it open. "Thank you for ... sorry but ...confusing ... lacks focus ... cliché."

In the background, I heard Chloe droning on. "About eight weeks. Said I'll be able to hear the heartbeat next month. Need prenatal vitamins. You'll have to smoke outside."

I stared at her.

One of the perks of shooting digital is how cheap and fast it is. You're not married to your original plan. If your first take disappoints, you can shoot another. Or a hundred.

I left a week later, after making arrangements for the diner to send Chloe my final check. It wasn't much, but I needed the piddling amount in my savings account to get back to Los Angeles. New York was pissing ice, and the emotional freeze in the apartment had plummeted to minus zero.

I took a bus to Columbus, Ohio, where I happened on the annual Arnold Sports Festival. Yeah, Arnold, as in Schwarzenegger. I shot an audience reaction piece for one of the events, the Bikini International contest, and convinced the local news station to give me \$60 for it.

After that, I thumbed rides to St. Louis, liberally using my five-finger discount at mini-marts across our great nation. Hanging around the Broadway Oyster Bar, I got into a one-night stand thing with a girl who went to St. Louis Community College. The one night stretched to three weeks. She took me to this place, Forest Park, where I shot a kaleidoscope of images of her. She was enchanted, calling it "Serena Light and Dark." But then we had a major blowout after too much wine and she wiped the video. I hit the road. I needed to get to a place I could do some serious work.

In Amarillo, I met this twisted David O. Russell guy and he

talked me into shooting a couple of blue films with him. He turned out to have zero knowledge of how we might go about it, but he had \$10,000 from an uncle in the oil biz. We paid the actors two Ben Franklins each and split the rest. I wired Chloe a thousand, and asked how the baby was coming along. She texted me: *Tbnc 4 \$\$ FU.*

The blue films came out dark and edgy with a Roman Polanski vibe. The oil tycoon's nephew called it genius, but I found the whole experience pretty depressing and definitely cliché in a not useful way, unless you counted the wankers who got off on it.

I was so strung out by this time, that I gave myself a month of R&R in Albuquerque. Everyone kept telling me how I had to stay until the International Balloon Fiesta. They said it would make a great film. Hoping to convince me, they shared blurry little movie fragments of the previous Fiesta they'd made on their smartphones.

I finally got to LA in April. My Albuquerque hiatus had done serious damage to the porno film money, but I had enough to rent a fleabag studio and send Chloe \$500. She was about six months gone by then, but I didn't mention the baby, and she didn't text.

Los Angeles felt great, warm and full of possibilities. I surfed the Net for jobs. I was hoping to be a DP, Director of Photography, on a high-profile indie project, but with all the holes in my CV, I figured I'd probably have to ride shotgun on the camera work while I got some money together to make my own film.

The first interview happened at a rude 8 a.m. in one of those rent-an-office set-ups. Fictionalized bio pic of PLO heavyweight Yassar Arafat, focusing on the murky circumstances of his death while under house arrest.

The producer eyed me with a laser gaze. "Looking over the opening scene of the script, what do you envision for the film? Lighting. Framing. Et cetera. How would you establish mood?"

I took a bagel from the "help yourself" plate. "Well, it starts out light, bright. Arafat's just won the Nobel Peace Prize. And then it gets darker. You know, ten years later the guy's dead and

there's a lot of questions. So it ends very dark. Lighting is significant. I sent you some samples of my work."

The producer looked over his notes and frowned. "Yes, we looked at those. A porn film and a series of images shot in the desert. The desert lighting was interesting, but there's no story being framed."

"What vision do you have for yourself?" The director cut in. "As a filmmaker."

Vision? I'd had so many visions of myself, it was hard to pin down any one thing.

I gave them my hundred-watt smile. "Well, everyone wants to be Tarantino."

They didn't call back. And neither did the next ten production companies.

I was flat broke and sleeping in a church shelter on the day I got a gig shooting commercials for an ad agency in Burbank. I was the assistant camera to a man named Dave who'd seen my blue films submission and thought "we'd get along great." Dave was a burly guy who enjoyed pinching the agency models' bottoms. A creep, really, but it meant I didn't have to spend another night listening to Jesus Saves stories and sleeping next to a guy who hadn't changed his socks since Obama took office.

Dave and I filmed toothpaste ads with white-toothed pinchable girls. And liquor ads with bikini-clad pinchable girls. And shower gel ads with unclad pinchable girls. By this time, Chloe had given birth to a boy and named him Phoenix. I sent her hundred-dollar checks now and again. She e-mailed me photos and asked if I was planning on coming east to see "our amazing kid." I told her I couldn't risk losing this gig, that it was important to me to be able to help her out. I guess she knew bullshit when she smelled it because she didn't write again though she continued to cash the checks.

To be honest, I was curious about Phoenix. But I couldn't see a way to fit him into my world at the moment. I needed to stay where I was until I got my head straight. Got things sorted

out. The birthday fairy had just dropped #26 on me, and when I looked at the stuff I'd shot since college, it stank like four years down the crapper. Over a bottle of Don Julio tequila, I wiped most of it.

My blue films survived though and finally won me some work, shooting music videos for this LA band, Blind Monkey. They said they liked my "aesthetic funk." They said I'd captured the Mephistophelian quality of sex. Whatever. The two videos we shot were getting lots of clicks on YouTube.

Other bands approached me. MTV called. I liked the work. It was pure film. No goals. No obstacles. No heavy last-reel life-changing moments to manage. And the money was good. I started sending Chloe thousand-dollar checks. At Christmas, I sent Phoenix a very cool chemistry set that pitched its recipe for vampire blood.

4 crissakes, Chloe texted, *he's only 2 yrs old.*

Save it, I texted back, *he'll grow into it.*

It was about six months later that I ran into him. The ghost of Jack Milton. I was sitting in Sassafra, a Hollywood bar, draining my second bourbon, when he approached me.

"You went to UCLA film school, right?" He plunked down on the stool next to mine. "Gregor Lind. Class of '96. I was Jack Milton's TA."

We did the handshake thing and I refreshed his memory about my name.

"So, what are you up to?" he asked. "Still interested in film?"

I told him about my MTV gig, and dropped the bigger names of the bands I'd done. He nodded without comment.

"And you? You're certainly not still TA-ing for Jack."

"Jack died last October. Heart failure."

I raised my glass. "To the end of an era."

"End of an era," Gregor agreed.

We ordered another drink and talked shop for a while. Who was directing what. How digital had turned every monkey with a camera into a wannabe filmmaker. Gregor filled me in on the

various fates of former classmates. Then he said, “I’m getting ready to shoot a new film, a black comedy. You might call it an ‘amorality play.’ Six characters in search of a life. Kind of a riff on Pirandello, with a dark avenging angel.” He speared an olive. Popped it in his mouth. “Anyway, it’s a departure from my last two post-apocalyptic thrillers. I’m doing final revisions on the screenplay.”

I downed my bourbon, swallowed my envy, and asked if he’d send me the files of his stuff.

Waking the next morning, head pulsing, stomach roiling, I was certain I’d dreamed the whole encounter, but when I opened my laptop, there were the film files and the new screenplay.

I spent the day watching the films, twice through. Gregor was good. Probably on his way to being great.

The new screenplay opened with six young people who make a pact in college to build lives that have meaning. But what exactly is a life of meaning? The film explores that question as one by one the kids make increasingly bigger compromises for money, fame, power. Only Marie, a hospice nurse, struggles on searching for a purpose she can believe in. In the second half, the kids-turned-fat-cats fall victims to a string of violent deaths. One guy’s helicopter crashes moments before landing at his private helipad in Manhattan. One woman’s lungs burst when her tank goes empty while scuba-diving off the Maldives. In the closing moments, Marie fondles the glass shard that decapitated her last college chum in a nasty incident on his high-rise terrace. She winks at the camera: “Hospice work taught me how important it is to smooth the way for people who must exit this world.”

I sent Gregor my reactions to the films and two pages of comments on the screenplay. A week later, he called.

“About two-thirds of the funding’s nailed down on the new film. Wanna join the action?”

“I have a little money,” I stammered. “But—”

“Not money. I mean the crew. Be my camera operator.”

“Me? Your camera operator?” I bumbled in a most unprofes-

sional manner.

Gregor laughed. “Jack liked you. Thought you had talent. ‘That kid knows how to frame a shot,’ he used to say. Your feedback on the screenplay sounded just like him.”

Camera operator on Gregor Lind’s new film. I’d definitely get noticed. Offers from other indie filmmakers. And down the road, a shot at directing my own work. “Let’s do it,” I said.

Gregor and I had a series of meetings over the summer. I got to know the rest of the crew and sat in on the casting calls. Filming began that autumn. We did the interior shots on a sound stage down the road from Dream Works. By mid-November, we were in New York, shooting location.

I hadn’t told Chloe ahead of time I’d be in the city. I wasn’t sure how I wanted to play this scene, but our last Friday in town, several beers over the line, I called her. “I’m here for a few days, working. Thought it’d be good to finally meet Phoenix.”

I can’t say Chloe was excited about the idea, but after about twenty minutes of wheedling, I got a grudging “okay” from her.

We wrapped filming the next day, leaving Sunday free before my flight back to LA. Chloe was living in Queens now. I was shocked to see how small and dark her new place was.

She shrugged. “Rents keep going up. I’m not getting as many students these days.”

At that moment, Phoenix emerged from the other room. He’s blond like Chloe, and wiry like me. But it was his physicality that gobsmailed me. The sheer fact of his being. A cautious excitement emanated from him as he stared up at me from the safety of his mom’s side.

Chloe winced and emitted a sharp cry.

“Mommy has bad headaches,” Phoenix said.

I glanced around at the grungy walls, the single grimed window. Who wouldn’t have headaches in this dump?

“I could take him out somewhere. Prospect Park,” I offered. “Let you get some rest.”

Chloe smiled, more of a wan grimace really. “That would be

good. At least I know I don't have to worry you'll run off with him."

Okay, I probably deserved that, but did she have to say it in front of the kid?

Phoenix and I got on the bus, and he began pointing out stuff. Buildings, stores, trucks. He really got into the trucks, telling me what each one did: street sweepers, delivery vans, dump trucks, garbage trucks. He was amazingly smart for a three-year-old.

I've always liked Prospect Park best of all the city's green-scapes. Olmstead designed it after he finished Central Park. But unlike that Manhattan playground, you can really forget you're in the middle of a metropolis here. Phoenix and I raced up and down the rolling landscape, skipping stones across the Lullwater near the Boathouse, playing hide and seek among the trees.

Resting in piles of orange and yellow leaves, Phoenix asked, "Are you my dad?"

Chloe and I had talked about this a long time ago. How since I wouldn't be around much, maybe it was better to not make a thing of me being his father. But he was looking at me with eyes that demanded an answer.

"Kind of," I said. This at least bordered on something like the truth and left the door open for future revelations. For a moment, I felt almost good, clean. But Phoenix wasn't satisfied.

"What's a kinda dad? Do they like little kids?"

How had this gotten so complicated so fast? We were having this great Sunday-in-the-park scene, and suddenly he was launching these questions at me. Bam. Pow.

I did the dad thing. Ruffled his hair. Tickled his ribs. Gave him a quick hug. "Of course they like little kids. You, for instance. Kinda dads especially like you."

I grabbed his hand and pulled him to his red-sneakered feet. "I've got an idea. Let's buy you some cool toys!" I frantically searched my phone for the nearest Toys "R" Us. Found one on Flatbush Avenue.

"Why are we getting toys?" Phoenix asked as we boarded the

bus. “You already got me something for my birthday.”

I rewound to August. What had I sent him? Then I remembered. A My First Camera.

“Damn, we should have brought your camera today. Taken some pictures for your mom.”

Phoenix shook his head. “Mommy put it away for when I get bigger.”

Jesus, Chloe always treated the kid like he was a moron which he clearly wasn’t.

“Your mom maybe worries too much, buddy. I can show you how to work it.”

We got to the store and it was a zoo. Kids screaming and parents shuffling after them like zombies.

“Pick whatever you want. Everything you want,” I said, grabbing a cart.

Phoenix stared at me, but then dutifully joined the throng snaking through the aisles. As stuff piled up in the cart—a marble run, the Playmobil pirate ship, a fleet of Tonka trucks, a Lego Junior helicopter, a dinosaur action set, and something called Robot Invasion—I couldn’t escape the weird feeling that he was doing this for me.

I handed over my credit card at checkout.

“Someone’s a lucky boy.” The cashier smiled.

Out on the street, surrounded by giant plastic bags, I hailed a taxi. “Ever ride in a taxi, Phoenix?”

He shook his head.

Chloe let us in, icepack pressed to her forehead. “What’s all this?”

“We went on a spree, didn’t we?” I ruffled the kid’s hair for about the millionth time. There must be something else dads do, but I couldn’t think what it was.

Chloe sighed. “We don’t have room for this stuff.”

“For chrissakes, Chloe, he’s a kid!” She flinched and I lowered my voice. “I just wanted to do something nice for him, okay?”

But when I left thirty minutes later, after showing Phoenix

how to work the My First Camera, it wasn't the toys he thanked me for.

"Rolling in the leaves," he murmured, hugging my leg.

I bent down and he threw his arms around my neck. "You liked the park, hey?" His grip tightened. "I had a good time, too." And then because it seemed like he needed something more, I kissed the top of his head.

Over the next nine months, I hung out with Gregor and his editor as they cut the film, getting it ready for Sundance where it wound up winning an audience award. We were still at the festival when the call came through. Paramount wanted him to direct a psychological thriller à la Peter Weir's *The Last Wave*. The film would be set in Australia, and Gregor could pick his crew.

"Woo-hoo! We're going down under and Paramount's picking up the tab." He slapped me high five and we did a little dance.

Later, baptizing me in a spray of champagne—bottle number three on the night—he said, "You'll be my DP."

Director of photography on a major motion picture. I rubbed the sticky champagne sting from my eyes and saw my future all bright before me. A six-lane highway leading in so many possible directions.

Fast forward to the present: The crew's six weeks out from our flight to Sydney and I've just got my special media visa when the text comes.

I haven't seen Phoenix since our day in Prospect Park, but we talk on the phone sometimes and Chloe sends me the little films he makes on his camera. He's a big kindergartner this year, learning his letters, so now I get messages: *skool gud frends r palo + mark*.

But this text stops me in my tracks. I sit down amid the piles of tees and shorts I'm packing and dial Chloe.

"What does Phoenix mean, he's going to live with Aunt Connie?" I remember Chloe's aunt well from the one torturous dinner we had with her. A self-righteous old bag.

"Don't shout," Chloe says, then, "I'm dying. A brain tumor. They're giving me four, maybe six weeks."

Jeezus.

“Connie’s the only family I have. It’s not ideal. Phoenix will have to start over in another school. But what choice do I have?”

You have me. But even as I think the words, I see myself getting on the plane for Australia. Flying toward my big break. Two months filming in Sydney. Another six weeks in the outback. Long hours. And when filming ends, then what? I can’t haul a five-year-old kid around the world like a sack of potatoes.

“I can’t deal with this right now,” I tell her.

“You never could deal with anything,” Chloe says and hangs up.

I shove aside the clothes on the bed and curl up in a fetal ball. I’m screwed.

It would be seriously unfair to Gregor to back out of the film at this point. But if I don’t claim Phoenix now, Connie will never give him over. And how much help can I expect from the courts—the guy who’s seen his son once in five years?

I doze off. In the moments between sleeping and waking, I feel my nascent film career oozing away formless.

When I come to, the sun has barely cleared the tree tops. I shower. Make myself some eggs and toast. Then I call Gregor. We talk for a bit. He takes it well.

“Turns out Jack Milton was right,” I say. “Every story comes down to the last reel. You can’t avoid the big moment.”

I hear Gregor smile through the ether. “No,” he agrees, “but remember, there’s always the possibility for a sequel.”

I call Chloe. This conversation is not so smooth. We argue. I make points. She slaps them down, but eventually she concedes. I ask her to put Phoenix on the phone.

“Hey buddy, change of plan. You’re coming to live with me. Actually, I’m coming to live with you, but we’ll find a sunnier apartment and you won’t have to change schools.”

The silence stretches. My heart beats loud in my ears. Then his creaky little-kid voice asks, “You’re gonna live with me? Like a kinda dad?”

“No, Phoenix.” I take a deep breath. There’s no walking this back. No do-overs. “Like a real dad. Because I am your real dad.”

After I hang up, I rinse the breakfast things and go for a walk.

I can get work in New York. Dave from the ad agency in Burbank—the cameraman who has trouble keeping his hands to himself—has good contacts in Manhattan. And he owes me big time for letting him haul me along to every strip dive in LA. I’ll keep pitching for indie work in the city. The Sundance film certainly gives me viable cred. And I promised Gregor I’d stay in touch.

I think about sequels. How the ending of one thing is really just the beginning of another. On Alvarado Street, I drop ten bucks into a homeless man’s hat and wish him better days.

Tilting my face to the LA sunshine, I feel Jack Milton smiling on me.

The Clock Collector

Steven R. Roberts

Before he started collecting clocks
he collected money in order to buy time.
He bought his first by the time he was forty.
Time doesn't move like it did then,
though he owns more clocks now.

His collection covers four walls of three rooms
that echo what he imagines time sounds like.
It's enough to drive a man mad, winding
the clocks with so little time on his hands.

When the clocks stop, time wavers.
He questions the need for pendulums,
and whether time really exists.
His conclusions, with no time to spare, allow
him to unwind in the absence of answers.

Sisters

Alexis Jais

We've been sprawled on the old wood bridge for hours.
Our young palms are splintered now by twisted boards
and the tops of our feet sting,
red
from the biting chill whipping our bare skin.

I'm more scared than you are.
You're more scared than anything.

Icy gray clouds shift endlessly above our sweet warm breaths:
mine wasted on childish trivialities
and yours blessed with provocative profundities.

We wade in half-frozen water in the woods by where we are grow-
ing up.

This is the place I will stagnate
and it is almost winter
and our world is still big.

*

* 1st Place Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

The Hands of Someone I Love

Kristy Nielsen

I pretend I am asleep
when the others prophecy in loud, bossy voices,
when they quarrel. I pull the blankets around me.
When their hands are hidden, and when they rise
from the ground with dirt under the nails and motion ‘come here.’

I close my eyes when the tide comes in
and the wind picks up, when tornadoes have been spotted
and thunderclaps rattle the windows. I roll into a ball.

I exhale slowly while the crops grow around me,
temples rise and then jungles. Wildcats scream
for food. I keep my eyes still. I count my wishes
while tiny cardinals clutch the limbs
of the wind-thrashed eucalyptus

while the hands of someone I love reach
through my ribs for the quiet heart. I pretend to be asleep
when the hands form a teepee of prayer,
when they tell secrets. I close
my eyes when they motion “Shhh”
and I dream.

Introducing the Wounded

Kristy Nielsen

Sometimes we line the corridors
with our heads between our knees like children
during an air raid drill. Other times, the piano
rolled to the center of the room, we sing
anthems of glue and dance the dance of broken pieces.

Fallen leaves come to life
in the corners of our eyes, lunging toward insect shells.
Our demons do not find another host.
We step with shoulders rounded,
pelvis scooped in to avoid the next blow. We speak
in halting voices, chipped off a glacier. Every movement
of the blood an assault on the need to become ice.

Asylum is taken, not given. We take it
in unlikely places: the stuffed red chair
left in a basement, behind a church,
at the international terminal. We take
asylum in the fleeting pauses of voices,
those few moments when nothing
reminds us of something
we want to forget.

The Theory of Whiteness

Rachel Sullivan

I had a theory about white walls. White is a sterile color, unfeeling and void of emotion but not meaningless. The hospital walls were strategically colorless because memories don't stick to something so bland. It is a mechanism to help ease the healing process, to try and alleviate the grief and mourning of the families who had lost so much. It is a futile but understandable technique. No one should be tormented by the memories of the aseptic rooms and hallways that were paced as the results of life altering diagnoses were awaited, the ghastly silence of the waiting room, or the last breath of the person who had once been filled with so much life. But not even the bleached walls can prevent the inevitable pain and vivid memories.

White is intended to be crisp and soothing. Maybe the white walls do help the healing process, their lackluster appearance ensuring that the memories of sickness and pain do not stick so forcefully. Maybe it does bring some peace to those who are awaiting God's divine hand to release them from their suffering. But for me, I am blinded by the aggressive white walls. My mum thinks I've turned into a cynic, but these walls mark my time spent secluded from the world a twenty-one year old should be living in. I don't find peace here. These walls that surround me only serve as a reminder of what my life has turned into—a medically induced existential crisis. I had been a college student approaching the end of her junior year, and now I was death's ambassador, representing the fate that was hanging delicately before me. It was a fate my parents tried to ignore, or rather a fate they tried desperately to change through faithful prayer, as if their bartering could save me from

the threads of human destiny. We already knew my thread was probably going to be cut before I reached my twenty-second year; the Fates had already decided my destiny.

* * *

I was in little pain the first day I met him, a miracle in itself. I had just finished my weekly meeting with my doctor and was waiting in a hard-plastic chair while my parents had their turn. It was the beginning of August, so a soft wave of heat caressed my face every time the automatic doors slid open, infiltrating the cool interior of the hospital. I was absorbed in the tangle of headphones sitting in my lap when a little boy whizzed through the doors. His small hand was clamped around a wooden plane that he was flying animatedly over his head as he wound his way around the waiting room.

“Ronan, please sit for a couple of minutes while I talk to the lady at the front desk.” A woman with dark hair coiled into a knot at the nape of her neck was pointing at the chair next to mine.

“Mummy, but I need to fly my plane,” the little boy pleaded, rocking up onto his toes.

“Not right now, here take this.” She gently directed him toward the chair and handed him a small bag. “Daddy will take you to the park later to fly your big plane, okay?”

With a pout, he folded his arms across his chest and let the bag fall from the chair. A half dozen books slid across the floor around my feet. I could see the mother turning back towards her son as I leaned down to retrieve the books.

“Ronan.” Her voice was firm but tired.

With a little huff, Ronan jumped off his seat and joined me in picking up the books. His hair was a soft brown color and curled neatly at his neck. I grabbed *Amelia Bedelia Hits the*

Trail and smiled

“I used to read these when I was little,” I told him, gathering the bag and placing the book inside.

“Amelia Bedelia? How old are you?” He glanced up at me as he swept the rest of the books into the bag and returned to his seat.

“Twenty-one.”

“Wow,” His brown eyes widened significantly. “You’re four whole hands.”

“Plus one finger.” I laughed, holding up my index finger. “How many hands are you?”

With a quiet nod to himself he counted his fingers out before holding them out towards me proudly. “One hand and one finger. I’m six! Daddy got me a real plane for my birthday. It flies so high I have to be careful it doesn’t touch the sun.”

“Woah, it must fly pretty high. Are you a good pilot?” I leaned back in the chair, resting my head against the wall.

Ronan’s face lit up and he smiled, revealing a gap where his front teeth were supposed to be. “Daddy says I am the bestest pilot he’s ever seen, and he flies all over the world.”

I smiled to myself and let my eyes close as Ronan reached into the bag to grab a book. My body was heavy with exhaustion. There was no chance that I was going to make it the whole twenty-five minute ride home without falling asleep. I let the sounds of the hospital lull me into a half-sleep.

I felt a soft poke on my shoulder and rolled my head towards Ronan.

“Are you sleeping?” He peered up at me innocently with his wide brown eyes.

“No, just resting my eyes.”

“That’s funny my mummy rests her eyes sometimes too, especially when she’s watching the football game with us.” Ronan imitated his mother, closing his eyes and folding his hands across his chest as he leaned back against the chair.

I shifted the hospital bracelet down my arm. “I bet that’s what I looked like, too.”

Ronan’s eyes flickered down to my wrist. “Are you sick? Why do you have that bracelet?”

“I am sick.” I laughed as he grimaced and slid to the far side of his chair. “Not that kind of sick, you won’t catch it. The bracelet just lets the doctors know who I am.”

He looked fairly skeptical but inched a little closer to the center of the seat. “Will I get one? Mummy says I have to get a kitty scan for my head. Have you had a kitty scan?”

I chewed the inside of my cheek to keep from laughing. “A CAT scan? I have had one before, it’s not scary I promise. If you’re extra brave they might even give you a lollipop.”

Ronan tipped his head towards me as if about to tell a secret. “A red one?” His voice, though soft, emanated excitement.

“If you ask nicely, I bet they will give you a red one.” I poked his cheek.

“Ronan, honey, come with me please. We’re going to go meet your doctor.” We both looked up at the sound of his mother’s voice. She was standing next to the front desk, a handful of paperwork held to her chest and a hand extended outwards towards her son.

“Okay, Mummy, I’m coming.” He gathered his bag and airplane and slid off the chair, his feet landing with a small slap on the linoleum floor. “It was nice to meet you, Mrs.—”

“I’m not that old,” I teased, handing him the forgotten

book. “It’s just Elsie. Good luck today, I bet you’ll be brave.”

His little chest puffed out as he marched over to his mother, pausing once to turn around and wave at me. I waved back, and his mother smiled at me.

“Elsie told me that if I’m good the kitt—CAT scan workers will give me a red lollipop.” His excited chatter tapered off as they stepped into the elevator.

* * *

It wasn’t until a couple of weeks later that I saw Ronan again. My mum and I had just gotten into an argument about whether or not it was overly optimistic to plan a family vacation to the seaside for the following summer. She said it would be something to look forward to. I told her it would be a waste of money because the chances were high that I wouldn’t be in attendance. She had burst into tears. I went for a walk to clear my head, swallowing the egg-sized lump in my throat as I closed the door to Room 416 behind me. I had a hard time dealing with my parents’ grief, not because I was cold-hearted but because I felt so personally responsible. What they don’t tell you about being terminally ill is the guilt that eats away at your heart as you watch your parents die with you.

I was still blinking back the sting of tears when I reached the hospital’s food court three floors below. Untucking my journal from underneath my arm, I flicked through the worn pages until I reached my bucket list. I didn’t like to dwell on all the unchecked boxes (like graduating college and skydiving), rather I tried to focus on everything that I had done. I was determined to pick one of the activities off my list to bring back to my mum, offering the chance to do something together as a forlorn apology for what I was putting her through.

“Mummy, look—Mummy! It’s Elsie, my friend who told

me all about the red lollipop.”

It was Ronan and his mother. I peeked up from the pages of my notebook and gave him a small wave. He was wearing corduroy overalls and a bright red t-shirt that matched the small plane clutched in his left hand. His mother looked more tired than she had the last time I saw them, I felt a pang of recognition in my chest. I knew that look; I had seen it so many times on my parents’ faces when they thought I wasn’t looking.

“Mummy, can I sit with Elsie while you get our lunch?”

“Honey, I’m not sure she wants company.” She looked at me apologetically, her hand moving to Ronan’s shoulder.

I was about to apologize and say I was just on my way out when I caught the utterly dejected look on his face that had replaced his huge smile. “I don’t mind, really! It’s always nice to have someone to talk to.”

His mother introduced herself as Elena Grey and thanked me for humoring her son’s request as Ronan pulled a chair up next to mine and placed his plane on my notebook. His legs swung freely above the ground and his hands were clasped neatly on the tabletop as he waited for our conversation to end.

“I was really brave, and the doctors gave me two lollipops, but there was only one red so I had to have a purple one too,” Ronan stated proudly as his mother left.

“Two? You must have been extra brave if they gave you two.”

“I was.” He nodded his head fiercely. “Mr. Doctor told me that my brain has a bee-nine thing on it and that was why my head hurts so bad all the time.”

I felt my stomach tighten instinctively. “Benign is the nicer kind.”

“I know that, Mr. Doctor told me. What is that?” His attention had quickly turned to my journal.

“It’s a bucket list,” I told him, pulling it out from underneath his plane so that I could show him.

After explaining the premise of a bucket list (and convincing him that it had nothing to do with actual buckets), Ronan decided that he wanted to make one of his own. We ripped a page out of the back of my notebook and got started, me as the scribe and him as the spokesman. He decided it was of utmost importance that he try each chip flavor in the vending machine, so thus was our first entry. I ended up sitting at the table while Ronan and Elena ate their lunch, the three of us adding to the list until it was rather extensive.

In the months leading up to the surgery to remove Ronan’s benign tumor, we began to pick away at our list. Our visits to the hospital overlapped more often than not, and on the days that it didn’t, I would occasionally get pictures (both real from Elena and hand drawn from Ronan) of the “real world” bucket list activities Ronan and his parents were doing (i.e. going to a plane showing a couple towns over from their house, an absolute out of body experience for Ronan). But most days we fulfilled the pursuits that could be easily accomplished in the white walled hospital

4. The ultimate slip and slide

Hospital life meant that our supplies were limited and that actual slip and slides were strictly prohibited. So, we made do. The ramp outside of the food court was exceptionally long and slightly steeper than normal, and when the floors were freshly waxed it was slippery as hell. Armed with a fresh supply of hospital socks and the permission of the hospital staff (as it was a rather quiet morning), Ronan and I made our way down to the first floor, Ronan holding his little plane and me holding

the socks.

“I bet I’ll be as fast as my plane,” Ronan spoke quickly, the excitement building in his voice as he spoke.

“You might be even faster,” I offered, holding the elevator open as Ronan shuffled out.

“You think so?” He tipped his face up towards me with a smile.

I lifted my eyebrows. “We’ll have to see, right?”

The hallway leading to the food court was empty with the exception of the occasional doctor or nurse. As we approached the ramp I handed Ronan his pair of socks. With a giggle he plopped himself onto the floor, his plane placed gently to his right, and pulled off his sneakers. I watched as he tugged the oversized socks over his feet.

“Hang on a second, bud.” I stopped him as he bounded up to his feet. “The sticky part on the bottom will keep you from sliding. You have to put the tops on the bottom, like this.” I fixed the socks so that the patterned grips faced the ceiling rather than the floor.

“You know everything, Elsie, don’t you?”

“I don’t even know half of everything.” I laughed as I replaced my shoes with socks.

I made him hold my hand as we carefully made our way up to the top of the ramp. At twenty-one it was little more than a ramp, but for Ronan it was an adventure. The slope of the ramp was like a mountain just waiting for him to slide down.

“You promise to be careful?” I asked, looking down at Ronan as we reached the top. “I told your mum that I’d bring you back in tip top shape.”

He nodded eagerly, pulling at my hand until I let go. “I’ll

do it just like you showed me upstairs.”

Small hands knotted into fists, he did a little jog before letting the momentum pull him forward. He didn't move very fast but you would never have known that from the peals of laughter that bounced off the walls. His happiness was infectious, something that I had learned in the short time that I had known him.

After doing a few slides of my own, I opted into pulling Ronan down the ramp. He held my hands tightly and leaned back so that his body was slightly angled. With my back to the base of the ramp, I maneuvered with a cautious quickness that made him squeal as his feet slipped and slid beneath him. Some of the nurses would smile as they walked past, watching the way his face lit up each time we made the trip. When I stopped to rest my hand gently against the white walls, steadying my uneven breath, he would lean his head against my legs and squeeze my hand in time with my breathing.

One of the many beautiful things about Ronan was that he never asked about my illness. I was his friend, and as far as he was concerned that was all that mattered. He knew, of course, but it was only in his small gestures that he acknowledged that I was sick too. There was something relieving about the fact that I didn't have to talk about it. It wasn't that I was getting significantly worse because I wasn't, but I also wasn't getting any better. I was frozen in a medical standstill whose outcome I already knew the answer to. Each day was gifted to me by the tiny pills that sat by my breakfast each morning, but there was going to come a time where not even they could delay my fate any longer.

7. Beach day

“What about that one?” Ronan's hand was lifted towards the sky, his index finger indicating the small fluff of clouds that

circled ominously close to the sun.

It was late October and our “beach” was the small playground by the parking lot. We were both bundled in warm clothes and swaddled in a thick blanket, at the insistence of both of our parents. My mum and I had brought two beach chairs from home, so it was in those that Ronan and I were reclined on the edge of the grass and mulch.

“A pirate ship,” I told him after observing the cloud for a couple of seconds. “What about that one?”

I watched as his eyes followed my hand. “That one’s Mr. Doctor!”

“You know, you’re right. It does look like him.”

“What is he doing up in the clouds?” Ronan giggled, his pink cheeks rising above the edge of the blanket that was tucked beneath his nose.

I reached over to fix his blanket. “On his lunch break, I would think.”

He sniffled quietly. “I like Mr. Doctor. That one looks like your car.”

“Hey, Ro. We should probably head back inside before the tide comes up and washes us away with the sea,” I stated, noting his runny nose.

“Aw, but Elsie...”

“What would our parents do if we floated out to sea? Huh?” I tickled his side, smiling as his laughter filled the crisp fall air.

1. The Chip-capade

A couple of days after Ronan’s surgery—a very successful surgery, might I add—I came to visit him in his hospital room, laden with an overly packed grocery bag. He

smiled as I opened the door. His parents, who were seated next to his bed, looked exhausted but happy. They had made it to the other side so long as the tumor stayed gone, which the doctor said was highly probable. It was a side some families never got to see.

“Elsie!” Ronan clapped his hands together as I pulled a chair up to the bed opposite his parents.

“Look at you, you little mummy!” I joked, referring to the bandages wrapped around his head.

“It’s not even Halloween, but I have the best costume! I bet I’d scare Gigi and Papa, don’t you think, Daddy?”

His father laughed and agreed that he would. At his insistence, I helped him pose for a picture to send to his grandparents who were on their way from New Hampshire to see him.

“I brought you a treat,” I told Ronan after he had settled back against his pillows.

In a quick motion I dumped the contents of the bag onto the bed. A dozen bags of chips scattered across the blankets, slipping down the slope of his legs and onto the mattress.

“Our list!” His eyes were as wide as saucers as moved his legs, the movement sending some of the bags cascading onto the floor.

We spent the better part of an hour trying every chip from the vending machine. Some Ronan liked and some he spat out into his mother’s hand. I had saved his first choice for a special occasion. I stayed with him after the last of the chips had been discarded of, his parents moving downstairs to pick up dinner.

“You’re the bravest person I know, did you know that?”

I told him, my elbows sinking into the mattress as I leaned forward until I was at his level.

His eyes crinkled as he smiled, his cheeks pink with pride. “What’s going to happen to you now that I’m better?” The edge of his bandage slipped over his eyes as he spoke.

“I’ll still be here, promise you won’t forget about me?” I teased as I lifted the bandage away from his face so that I could see his eyes.

“Pinky promise, I’ll come visit every day when I’m better,” he said solemnly, hooking his pinky onto mine.

Ronan didn’t visit every day, not that I imagined he would (even pinky promises are broken sometimes), but his checkups were often enough that I still got to see him. A few months after his surgery his visits became more frequent, and then, one day, I became the visitor. The blurry blob had returned to the CAT scans, but this time it wasn’t the nice kind. Our delicate hope had turned to ash. On the last day I saw him, he was sitting up in his bed, his brown eyes tired but alert. He still smiled when he saw me, though his diagnosis was slowly taking its toll. I left a small piece of my heart behind each time I looked into those beautiful brown eyes.

With my head on his pillow we watched the clouds outside his window, murmuring softly as we picked out our favorite shapes. Even in pain his happiness shone through, though dimmer than it once was. I was staring out into the sky, a heaviness weighing in my chest, when he squeezed my hand.

“Elsie, will you keep my plane safe until I can go home?” Ronan asked me, his voice was soft and his hand cold in mine.

“Of course I will, Ro.” My voice was barely audible, but he must have heard me because he nuzzled his soft curls into

my neck and squeezed my hand again.

I was right about the walls, they don't make you forget. I see him everywhere. He's in the clouds that float listlessly above my head, the hospital socks on my feet, and the little red plane that sits on my nightstand. But I've found that I don't want to forget because he brought life to the white walls that surround me.

*

* 1st Place Fiction Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

Emmett Till

Kiana De Leon

Based on the painting "Open Casket" by Dana Schutz, 2016

Inside the open casket lies a **Black boy**
 Whose face tells his-story
 An innocent **Black** boy who was supposed to—
 Live a sweet childhood
 Yet, there it lies
 His mutilated face
 Upon the pillow of grief
 All hopes of tomorrow
 Lost in his **Black** suit of sorrow
 His torso buttoned up
 By the whiteness of his killers
 His pants carrying the blood
 Of a flower that had yet to grow
 His name was **Emmett**
Till – one day two men
 The same color as his bed of flowers
 Wanted him dead
 Because the color of his **Skin**
 Screamed unworthy kin.
 May you rest well, **Black** boy,
 And please say hello for us to **Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin,**
 Along with the rest of the **Emmett Tills** that society has killed—
 If you will, **Emmett Till.**

Pierced

David Buckley

How many hearts have been pierced before finally chipping?
Fashioned jaggedly by nature, apex acute, now aberrated and
depressed. So be it, no longer a need for bloodshed and brutality,
yet hearts lay slain. Souls weep in pain inflicted just, as sentience
perishes in fleeting summer winds. Shrouded in fire flowers doth
progenitor burn, cindering under roars of hallelujahs. Do rockets
red glare? Hero's dying shades: red, white, and blue, immortalized
in bleeding tints of amethyst.

In remembrance of David Buckley Sr.

Arson

Joan Colby

A swizzlestick of fury stirs
The act, the match, the cask
Of gasoline, sharp as an insult
With its intoxicating scent.
To burn the witch is
Destiny, the torches of the Iroquois
Teasing the captive priests to blaspheme
Or raise their voices in prayer
To the deaf god of the foreigner.
The building sleeps in the humid night,
Its broken fire escapes and alarms,
Blocked doorways of the poor in spirit.
Revenge is red as a flame's first spark.
The children wake to smoke that creeps
Like a fusty rodent beneath the sills.
The three-month baby whimpers, seized
In the father's burning arms The leap
Into darkness three floors down.
A witness says that earlier
A quarrel broke out. Handful of tinder
As the words crisscrossed
In a wigwam bonfire. Nobody thought
It would come to this. She clasps her
Arms to ward off spells.
The bloody tumbrils in the streets
As pelted stones struck their mark.
The quiet grease of women's hymns.
The killing floors. The bundled pyre.
What fire consumes cannot be found.
The children in their simple beds
Of genesis. The bird of fire
Arising from its nest of ash.

Stairway at 48 rue de Lille, Paris 1906

Joan Colby

The curve of the staircase.
Treads worn to ambergris.
The steps of a foundered man
Ascending heavy footed
To a landing,
A battered door. If a woman
Waits, he'd be surprised,
Then angry.

Light glints from an unseen bulb,
Slicks those stairs to threaten
Balance. He might be
Drunk or just lonely,
Climbing slowly the way the
Heartsore do.

Afro-

Dawyn Henriquez

I was six, or seven. It was a scalding Dominican summer day that began with a hurried packing of bare-essentials—underwear and shorts—as my aunt prepared me for a visit to my grandmother’s in the *campo*. It was basically out in the wilderness, some miles away from the city. Whilst I was inside, saying goodbye to my cousins, readying myself for the journey ahead, the *guagua* seemed to appear out of thin air, blasting its horn outside my aunt’s door in a frenzy. I peered outside to see a rusted chassis with a navy-blue coat of paint that was one rain away from peeling off. The four tires seemed about ready to melt in the noon time sun. Each one in a different phase of their lives, three in their respective winters, while one had seemingly just been reborn in the spring. I couldn’t see inside past the tinted windows, but I knew the driver had to be a disheveled old fella of some sort, impatiently tapping his foot wanting to be on his merry-lacking way. Those drivers were always miserable guys and I’m sure the equatorial summer had plenty to do with it. Though somehow, through the rusted disrepair of the bus and the likely irritable driver, I imagined a *Magic School Bus* adventure with a male Ms. Frizzle at the helm of it all. Needless to say, it was nothing of the sort.

I arrived what felt like days later to my adolescent mind. I was cramped next to my aunt the entire time, who was dropping me off at a stop where one of my uncles would pick me up on his scooter. She held my hand most of the way there, I don’t know whether it was to reassure me she was there or whether it was to reassure *herself* I was. Everyone worries a little too much in a Dominican family, especially if you come from the States. They always think you somehow reek of New York, even if you’re from Rhode Island and not the famous “*Nueva Yor,*” the state that encompasses most of North America to everyone there.

Caribbean families always think you're going to get robbed or kidnapped and held for ransom or something. To this day, as an adult, they expect me to take off any jewelry just to be safe. They thought if they got rid of any physical indication that I was from the States that they could protect me, that I could pass for any other island native, but my broken ass Spanish would forever be a dead giveaway of where I came from.

The ride to my grandma's house on my uncle's scooter was almost five hours with the midafternoon sun on my neck and back, or at least that's what it felt like then; it was probably less than thirty minutes in real-time. The scenery shifted from close knit buildings reminiscent of old 1950s sepia pictures to all fields and woods. Eerie little bundles of houses gave way to outpost like buildings, and past that to nothing but dirt road and tropical trees. When we reached another huddle of shabby houses painted in classic Caribbean greens and pinks we stopped; we had reached as far back as my maternal ancestry went.

It was a modest little setup, everyone had just enough room to be ok but not quite enough to be fully comfortable. The community itself stared into the distance at an African grassland. The stalks of grass in front of my grandmother's house were *that* tall, giant even. Every strand a part of a place that laid the stepping stones to my existence.

"*Bendición mami,*" I said with excitement laced in my blessing. Her sun beaten arms wrapped themselves around me like lush brown earth, ready to nourish a seed. *Una negra hermosa.* She was the color of a warm cup of coffee on a wintry night in the States, with just a subtle hint of cream giving her a chocolatey complexion. Over the years, I grew to associate that color with her warm hugs and her tender forehead kisses.

"*Que Dios te bendiga, mi amor,*" her cinnamon scented voice whispered down to me. She hugged me tightly, not wanting to let go of her small grandchild the color of caramel coffee with extra cream—the result of her falling in love with a half Italian half Dominican breed of arrogance who thought he could bypass

fertility even though he didn't even use a condom. That visit was one that would forever change me for the better. During my time with her I realized that I am *la sangre de mi sangre*, the blood of my blood, coming from both conquerors and the conquered of a New World, like all Caribbeans are. It was she who taught me to love the skin of our ancestors, the ebony-ivory tomes of our collective pasts—the pages of our history. And it was she who taught me that love extends beyond what we can see through the flesh. Shit, I wish my grandmother had shown America how to love.*

* 2nd Place Poetry Winner of Poetry and Fiction Contest

It is (my) anxiety

Mallari Bosque

It is (my) anxiety

i became consumed with horror when i realized how comfortable
i had gotten in my Mess...

and now It's like the tinnitus in your ear,
a l w a y s painfully there!

but sometimes you can forget, and for just a second, things seem
okay.
other times, It's the only thing ringing in your head,
reverberating through to every cortical crevice.

and when you close your eyes,
there is nothing but darkness stretching over everything that exists
within yourself.
and your proprioception screams in your ear, telling you exactly
where you are,
but you almost refuse to believe it.

you see nothing and hear nothing so you've become certain that
under you is also nothing.

as It pinches your shirt, dangling you over a bleak emptiness,
one whose existence is so aggressively asserted,
you feel your entire organism begin to suffocate—
and it's almost as if you've allowed It to, but the reality is that
you're just tragically helpless.

and echoing louder is a foreign, heavy breathing that gasps for life
and does not belong to you.

It shares your panic and envelops you in raw discomfort.

you burst open your eyes, but still there is darkness.

and you choke on your breath,

and you're kicking your feet and violently grasping the air, desper

ate for stability,

but there is nothing.

The Apology

Marvin Glasser

Sorry about the gimcrackery.
Tried, couldn't do better. All
they had left in stock at DNA Supply.

The flashy moral measure, now, is particularly
regrettable. Breaks down under pressure —
of cash, inconvenience, an indulgence.

It does inspire some lovely sentiments, though.
Been known for the occasional noble gesture.
But then weakens, finds an excuse, goes awry.

Then there's the flesh. Frail. Faltering.
Always making demands. An embarrassment,
letting you down at awkward moments. Aging.

What can I say about your minds.
What could I have been thinking of
to impose so improbable an implement on you!

Erratic. Feeds on illusions. Splits hairs.
Conceives an impossibility then works
to bring it about. Turns back on itself.

Lives unfixed in a quicksilver shifting,
stirring about in a shimmering reality,
lives hung over the lips a void, soon undone.

Again, sorry.
Wonders done, though, with a fresh supply of DNA
on the 8th day. You should come and see.

*

Simon Perchik

And though the shoes are black
you add a glow to your lips
that opens by itself, spreads

the way a simple kiss
is scented with wood catching on
just once — this coffin

needs it dark, is closed
and the door to each room
guttled to find the evening

that came here to stay
to hear it from you
it was a fire, just a fire.

*

Simon Perchik

Though there's no grave for its shadow
the stone covering your face
has a place for a mouth as the emptiness

that arrives thirsty, tired, side by side
— you dead no longer have cheeks
need a mask and behind its silence

the touch when tears become too heavy
— it was the usual burial — flowers, dirt
and by the handful a shoreline

to keep you from falling — your eyes
use this darkness now for the moons
that long ago stopped passing by.

*

Simon Perchik

Between its shadow and the sea
you dead no longer wave goodbye
— a single oar steadies each boat

letting it drift close to the others
embrace all this water sliding under
as darkness and salt — no one dies

without owning a boat and the silence
arm over arm rowing ashore
taking hold as rock that waits

the way a name stays in the mouth
— it has to be written — lettering
is wanted here, dates that move

though you are drowning in a breeze
thrown into your throat by stones
smelling from grass and the faces.

★

Simon Perchik

How could a moon so dim
see the room being taken away
— the door was closed from behind

as if nothing will return
except to light the stars
with evenings though the bed

stays empty, was uprooted
pulled further from the wall
now mined for its darkness

where each night pours sand
little by little through the blanket
over a room that died.

Contributors' Notes

Jeffrey Alfier has recent books including *Fugue for a Desert Mountain*, *Anthem for Pacific Avenue* and *The Red Stag at Carrbridge: Scotland Poems*. His publication credits include *Copper Nickel*, *Meridian*, *Poetry Ireland Review*, and *The McNeese Review*. He is founder and co-editor of Blue Horse Press and *San Pedro River Review*.

Tobi Alfier (Cogswell) is a multiple Pushcart nominee and a multiple Best of the Net nominee. Her current chapbooks include *Down Anstruther Way* (Scotland poems) from FutureCycle Press, and her full-length collection *Somewhere, Anywhere, Doesn't Matter Where* is forthcoming from Kelsay Books. She is co-editor of *San Pedro River Review*.

Mallari Bosque is a senior psychology Major at Providence College from Chelsea, MA. Although she is from Massachusetts, she has fallen in love with Rhode Island and loves to explore Providence during free time. Among her greatest loves are coffee, hard ice cream, plants, and dogs! Mallari is bilingual in Spanish and English and proudly embraces her Guatemalan heritage. She is a first generation immigrant, the oldest of three girls, and the first in her family to graduate college. In the fall, she plans to attend graduate school for counseling psychology. Mallari is a strong mental health advocate and aspires to become a therapist one day.

David Buckley hadn't really known what he wanted to do with his life growing up. Upon reaching college he had already rifled through many different ideas: political science, history, marketing, even anthropology at one point! None of these fields stuck with him. Second semester of his freshman year he took an intro to writing course and the floodgates opened. Writing has gotten him through many good and bad times, it is something he has been able to find solace in. Creative writing is something he believes

everyone should take part in at some point in their lives. Creating beautiful works of art with characters as real as any individual you could find throughout your every day life, is something which he finds to be truly miraculous.

R.T. Castleberry is a Pushcart Prize nominee as well as an internationally published poet and critic. He was a co-founder of the Flying Dutchman Writers Troupe, co-editor/publisher of the poetry magazine *Curbside Review*, an assistant editor for *Lily Poetry Review* and *Ardent*. His work has appeared in *The Alembic*, *Santa Fe Literary Review*, *Comstock Review*, *Roanoke Review*, *Pacific Review*, *Iodine*, *Foliate Oak* and *Silk Road*. His chapbook, *Arriving At The Riverside*, was published by Finishing Line Press in January, 2010. An e-book, *Dialogue and Appetite*, was published by Right Hand Pointing in May, 2011.

Ryan Charland is from Upstate New York. A graduating senior at Providence College, he is receiving his Bachelor of Science in Biology, with a minor in English Literature. Next year, he will be pursuing an MFA in Film, with the hopes of becoming a professional storyteller.

Joan Colby has published in journals such as *Poetry*, *Atlanta Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Pinyon*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *Spillway* and *Midwestern Gothic*. Awards include two Illinois Arts Council Literary Awards and an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship in Literature. She has published 20 books including, *Selected Poems*, which received the 2013 FutureCycle Prize and *Ribcage* from Glass Lyre Press which was awarded the 2015 Kithara Book Prize. Three of her poems have been featured on *Verse Daily* and another is among the winners of the 2016 Atlanta Review International Poetry Contest. Her newest books are *Carnival* from FutureCycle Press and *The Seven Heavenly Virtues* from Kelsay Books. Her next book *Her Heartsongs* will be published by Presa Press in 2018. She is a senior editor of FutureCycle Press and an associate editor of *Good Works Review*.

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, since 2000. Her poetry has recently appeared in *Big Muddy*, *The Cape Rock*, *New Ohio Review*, and *Gargoyle*, and her published books include *Walking Twin Cities*, *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Ugly Girl*, and *The Yellow Dot of a Daisy*. She has been a featured presenter at Write On, Door County (WI), North Coast Redwoods Writers' Conference (CA), and the Spirit Lake Poetry Series (MN). Her newest poetry collections, *A Perfect Day for Semaphore* (Finishing Line Press) and *I'm in a Place Where Reason Went Missing* (Main Street Rag Publishing Co.) will be out late 2018.

Marisa DeFarno is a graduating senior at Providence College, majoring in English with a minor in Classics. She started writing short stories when she was eleven, in which she was primarily influenced by the Nancy Drew series and Stephen King. She also enjoys writing poetry. After graduation, she plans on pursuing a MFA in writing.

Kiana N. De Leon is a senior here at Providence College who's majoring in Psychology. She was born in Boston, MA, but she currently reside in Revere, MA. Her family is originally from the Dominican Republic, so she grew up fluent in English and Spanish. This year she joined BOW (Believers of Words), which is a poetry club on campus, where she was able to reconnect with her love of poetry. BOW also pushed her past her comfort zone with the opportunity to perform her poetry. As a senior and a second-year resident assistant, finding the time to indulge in her favorite hobby can be difficult, but she has found it to be a form of expressing her understanding, not just of the world around her, but of her inner self.

Mel Fricchione is a fake redhead born in Pennsylvania living a dream in Providence Rhode Island. Mel is a junior at Providence College studying Public and Community Service

along with exploring the power of photography. Photography is a new interest that has helped Mel interact with her environment differently. She is hoping to connect these interests in the future by showing the community how art and social movements influence each other.

Marvin Glasser is a long-retired teacher of English with a belief in the importance of poetry for defining us as human beings. Writing poems along with breathing has kept him going from day to day, and he has had many published in various magazines.

Alexandra Harbour graduated from Providence College with a degree in biology in 2017. Since graduation, she has spent most of her time wandering around, taking pictures and listening to Noah And The Whale.

Dawyn Henriquez When he was a young he drew. Whether it was to escape eviction notices or the ill-fated romance of his parents, drawing was where he took refuge. In middle school, however, he soon realized that drawing could not tell elaborate enough stories for him and he took to words. Stories and family are all he has now; his truths woven from written lies are just as much art to him as those drawings ever were.

Amy Henry is a writer of fiction long and short, as well as the author of numerous magazine, newspaper, and online articles from which she has earned something resembling a living. She lives in Massachusetts with her übersupportive husband and two wayward cats. When not writing fiction, she blogs about the human condition on her website.

Margaret C. Hughes has poems which have appeared in *Cider Press Review*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, and *Small Craft Warnings*. Margaret is a queer organizer and activist, and holds a B.A. in English Literature from Swarthmore College.

Alexis Jais is a Global Studies major and Sociology minor in PC's class of 2018. She is originally from Hyannis, Massachusetts, but after living in Colorado for a brief time she has lived in Sarasota, Florida with her mom and sister for most of her life until college. She enjoys making art and music in her free time and hopes to apply her love for the arts to her post-college endeavors. After graduation this May, she plans to work with an AmeriCorps program in Boston or Providence for a year before getting her Masters in Sociology.

Jessica Kent is a writer living just outside of Boston, Massachusetts and a recent graduate of Providence College, where she got her Bachelor's in English and Creative Writing.

Judith Ann Levison was born into a logger's family and raised on coastal Maine. At fifteen she was published in *The New Yorker*. Inspired by her poetry, a high school teacher assisted and guided her toward higher education. She holds degrees from Mount Holyoke College, Hollins University, and Drexel University. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and she has published two chapbooks, *Oak Leaves* and *Sand Cradle*. She currently lives in Pennsylvania with her husband where she pursues her poetry career and paints abstract watercolors.

Eric Manning is a freshman at Montana State University studying to be an architect. He grew up in Portland Oregon, where he developed his dream of being the first non-hipster photographer from his city. He enjoys baseball, backpacking and skiing.

Sheryl L. Nelms is from the Flint Hills of Kansas. She graduated from South Dakota State University. She's had over 5,000 articles, stories and poems published, including fourteen collections of poems. She's the fiction/nonfiction editor of *The Pen Woman Magazine*, the National League of American Pen Women publication, was a contributing editor for *Time Of Singing*, a Magazine of Christian Poetry and four time Pushcart Prize

nominee.

Kristy Nielsen has published fiction, poetry, and nonfiction in many journals including *Mid-American Review*, *Poet & Critic*, *The Prose Poem: An International Journal*, *Kalliope*, *ACM*, and *The Madison Review*. Thorngate Road published a collection of her prose poems, *Two Girls*. Among other awards, she has most recently won the Vi Gale award in *Hubbub*. In addition, she has co-written a screenplay based on two of her short stories. The resulting feature film, *A Measure of the Sin*, won several awards at Indy film festivals and is now available as video on demand.

Elisabeth Murawski is the author of *Zorba's Daughter*, winner of the 2010 May Swenson Poetry Award, *Moon and Mercury*, and two chapbooks: *Troubled by an Angel* and *Out-patients*. *Heiress* will be published by Texas Review Press in the fall of 2018. Publications include *The Yale Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Field*, et al. Currently residing in Alexandria, VA, in her heart she has never left the “city of the big shoulders” where she was born and raised.

Simon Perchik is an attorney whose poems have appeared in *Partisan Review*, *Forge*, *Poetry*, *Osiris*, *The New Yorker* and elsewhere. His most recent collection is *The Osiris Poems* published by box of chalk, 2017. For more information, including free e-books, his essay titled “Magic, Illusion and Other Realities”.

David Sapp is a writer, artist and professor living along the southern shore of Lake Erie in North America. His poems have appeared widely in a number of venues across the United States, in Canada and the United Kingdom. His publications also include articles in the *Journal of Creative Behavior*; chapbooks, *Close to Home* and *Two Buddha*; and his novel, *Flying Over Erie*.

Matthew J. Spireng is an eight time Pushcart Prize nominee. His book *What Focus Is* was published in 2011 by WordTech

Communications. His book *Out of Body* won the 2004 Bluestem Poetry Award and was published in 2006 by Bluestem Press at Emporia State University. His chapbooks are: *Clear Cut*; *Young Farmer*; *Encounters*; *Inspiration Point*, winner of the 2000 Bright Hill Press Poetry Chapbook Competition; and *Just This*.

Rachel Sullivan is a senior English major who is also completing her business studies certificate here at Providence College. Along with being a copy editor for *The Owl*, Rachel is also the editor for the Benjamin Family Social Media Fellowship. When the busyness of school allows for free time, you can find her reading or refining her cooking skills (virtually with the Barefoot Contessa).

Stephen R. Roberts spends more time now with grandchildren, trees, and poetry, not necessarily in that order. He collects books, geodes, gargoyles, and various other obstacles that fit into his basic perceptions of a bizarrely chaotic world. He has five published chapbooks. His full length work, *Almost Music From Between Places*, was published in 2012 by Chatter House Press.

Kari Wergeland has poetry which has appeared in *Catamaran Literary Reader*, *New Millennium Writings*, *Pembroke Magazine*, and many other journals. Her chapbook, *Breast Cancer: A Poem in Five Acts*, is due out from Finishing Line Press.

Sam Ward is a member of the class of 2021 at Providence College. He is from Warren, Massachusetts where you can find him working at Wendy's or kicking back with the boys. He's also an avid listener of hip-hop. He loves writing free verse poetry.

Meet the Editors

Megan Manning is a senior English and Creative Writing major at Providence College, originally from Portland, Oregon. This is her fourth year on the Alembic editorial staff and she is living in denial that it is over. Like any good book nerd she loves good coffee, red wine and a quality playlist while she reads. She is unsure what she will be doing next year due to the fact that becoming a princess is not a realistic post grad career, but if you have an interesting job offer, she would probably be interested. Wherever she ends up in the next year, she knows that it will be another great adventure. She would like to thank her family for their unconditional love and support, her friends for reminding her to laugh and Providence College for putting up with her shennanigans for four years.

Anissa Latifi is a senior at Providence College reluctantly being forced out into the world without an ounce of adult knowledge. She majored in the literature of English and helping people who do not want to be helped. She has thoroughly enjoyed being a member of the Alembic editorial staff for the last 2 years of her college career. In her free time she enjoys spending all of her money on good food, good company and most importantly coffee. If asked what she enjoys doing most she would say running away from her problems and running late. Both of these are incredibly important to her. In rare moments she will speak French for an audience. If she is not found on a park bench knitting somewhere she would most likely be chatting with strangers in the local mall.

Hannah Albright is a senior English major and double French and Evolutionary biology minors. She has a lot going on schedule-wise. If she's not in class or rehearsal, you can usually find her

holed up in the library. Over the course of four years, she has read the entirety of May Shelley's *Frankenstein* over 8 times, not always of her own volition. Her dream is to be published one day, like any good writer.

Elizabeth Dumais, more commonly known as Betsy, is currently a Junior at Providence College, studying English and Secondary Education, and suffering through a Business Certificate. Home for Betsy is in Burrillville, Rhode Island, a town in the middle of woods where nothing much happens. Besides her position on the editorial staff for the *Alembic*, Betsy also spends her time reading, running, watching *New Girl*, and practicing her signature. Betsy's favorite band is the 1975, drink of choice is lemonade, and favorite holiday is Cheesefest. Although currently on track to be a high school teacher, Betsy's secret ambitions include becoming a farmer and running a marathon in every state. In her opinion, Betsy's contribution to the *Alembic* staff was a more organized office and the dry humor necessary to make any poem fun to read.

Carly Martino is a Junior at Providence College currently pursuing a double major in English and Spanish. She comes to us from Hopedale, MA, but is currently spending a semester abroad in Seville, Spain. She spends her time at PC sharing her skills as a Writing Tutor in the tutoring center and as president of the Debate Society.

Nicholas Ogrinc is an English and Philosophy double major at Providence College. When he is not reading stacks of books at school he enjoys reading leisurely at home, as well as hiking and mountain biking through the tree covered mountains of New Hampshire.

Marisa DelFarno is a graduating Senior at Providence College, majoring in English with a minor in Classics. She started writing short stories when she was eleven, in which she was primarily influenced by the Nancy Drew series and Stephen King. She also enjoys writing poetry. After graduation, she plans on pursuing a MFA in writing.

