

ADANNA

LITERARY JOURNAL

Founder
CHRISTINE REDMAN-WALDEYER

Issue No. 2

Adanna accepts poetry, fiction, essays, and reviews. Please send a proposal for reviews. All submissions are electronically accepted in one file, preferably a word document file with a cover letter and a three to four line bio.

Visit our website for further details: www.adannajournal.blogspot.com

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About the Artist

Born and raised in Manila, Philippines, the foundation of **Jun-Jun Sta.Ana's** work is digital. He has shown extensively in the Philippines, United States and Russia.

Also known for his unconventional portraits, he was one of the featured artists at a show at the Portsmouth Museum of Art in New Hampshire in 2011 called "iImage: The Uncommon Portrait".

His two solo shows in 2011 were installations, the first being at the Negros Museum (his 3rd museum show, and 1st solo) where 316 one-of-a-kind small works on paper measuring 4 x 5 inches were used to claim one of the columns in the building together with other materials.

For the Manila show he used 1,036 one-of-a-kind pieces spread out into 4 installations occupying the entire Avellana Art Gallery's 2nd floor level.

Both shows were the fruits of an artist residency grant, awarded to the artist in August of 2011.

Adanna's Mission Statement

Adanna, a name of Nigerian origin, pronounced a-DAN-a, is defined as “her father’s daughter.” I chose to name this literary journal *Adanna* because women over the centuries have been defined by men in politics, through marriage, and most importantly, by the men who fathered them. In college, I was inspired by women such as Anne Hutchinson who had the opportunity to study under her father. Today women are still bound by complex roles in society, often needing to wear more than one hat or sacrifice one role so another may flourish. While this journal is dedicated to women, it is not exclusive, and it welcomes our counterparts and their thoughts about women today. I only ask that your submissions reflect women’s issue or topics, celebrate womanhood, or shout out in passion.

Christine Redman-Waldeyer, Founder

Foreword

Jane Hirshfield explores the secrets of “poetry’s inward and outward looking” in her collection of essays, Nine Gates: Entering the Mind of Poetry. She writes,

Outer images carry reflective and indirect meanings as well. Poems of this kind—the great majority of poems, that is—generally take one of three possible stances. In the first stance, outer reference serves the poet’s interior thinking: the world beyond the self appears, but the relationship is that of monologue, with a human—centered consciousness dominating. In the second stance, the poet and the outer world stand face to face in mutual regard; out of that meeting, the poem’s statements arise. In the third stance, the poet becomes the intermediary, a medium through whom the world objects and nature beyond human consciousness may speak; in poetry’s transparent and active transcription, language itself becomes an organ of perception (pg. 130).

For women, I always believed that literature could open up a dialogue between that outer world of social construct, one built on an illusionary foundation of the feminine self as society perceives and between the feminine self that seeks to know her true identity. The struggle becomes apparent when the modern world attempts to break hard set rules of what was, what is, and what continues to be. Attending a Catholic Women’s College, I had never considered my voice to be a quiet murmur amongst the many male voices. Early on in my undergraduate studies many nuns discussed the beginnings of the female centered college. Historically women in coed classes would take the backseat to their male counterparts. In an all female institution, the woman could hear her own voice, loud and clear. It was a time of self-reflection. It was a time of understanding that I had to learn what those walls were in order to break them down. This holds true for any marginalized group. Feelings arise out of a sense of inequity.

When I first began this journal, I had the women of Congo in mind. I had sat up late one night watching a PBS special that told the narratives of the many women who had been raped, brutally beaten, who lost children and husbands and were shunned because of their victimization. When searching the internet for a name that reflected how women had been shaped and molded within a male centered world, I came across the Nigerian name, *Adanna*. The name which means my

father's daughter isn't as deeply burdened with my sense of the name, but it held metaphorically a truth that I had come to identify with. We resemble our fathers.

Jane Hirshfield notes that "purely internal poems are rare...because most need some recourse to the outer world in order to speak." Our experiences, events, and feelings help us to understand who we are. It is what we push up against that help us come to the realization of what that is. In our world, that may be our sense of connection as mothers, daughters, caretakers, lovers, and as friends. Jane writes "through actively perceptive speech, outer world and inner experience collaborate in the creation of meaning." This meaning is important for change but more importantly this meaning is a foundation for women to become change agents.

Christine Redman-Waldeyer, Editor

Contents

POETRY

11	Peggy Aylsworth
12	Rachel Barenblat
13	Svea Barrett
14	Elliott batTzedek
15	Margo Berdeshevsky
17	Kristin Berkey-Abbott
19	Ronda Broatch
21	Valentina Cano
22	Cathy Carlisi
24	Cassie Ciopyrna
25	David Crews
28	Barbara Crooker
29	Suzannah Dalzell
30	Mary Stone Dockery
32	Juditha Dowd
34	Shaun Fletcher
35	Ruth Foley
38	Laura Freedgood
39	Gail Fishman Gerwin
40	Oscar Gonzales
42	Lois Marie Harrod
43	Katherine Hoerth
45	Claire Keyes
46	Kathleen Kirk
48	Gina Larkin
50	Kristin LaTour
51	Nancy Long
52	Arlene L. Mandell
53	John McDermott
54	Lynne McEniry
58	Jessica Mason McFadden
59	Ann E. Michael
60	Julie L. Moore

62	Jacqueline Dee Parker
64	Andrea Potos
65	Marjorie Power
67	Rinzu Rajan
68	Helen Ruggiero
70	Jennifer Saunders
71	Marvin Shackelford
73	Norene Cashen Smith
75	Carole Stone
77	Sharon Venezia
78	Pramila Venkateswaran
80	Karen J. Weyant

SHORT STORY

83	Diane D. Gillette
85	Cynthia McHale-Hendricks
90	Hannah Onoguwe
92	Linda Strever

CREATIVE NON-FICTION

99	Nancy Gerber
----	--------------

ESSAY

103	Suzanne Kamata
108	Lois Greene Stone

BOOK REVIEWS

113	Lisa Fraser
115	Kendra Weddle Irons
117	Lynne McEniry
119	Madeline Tiger

Biographical Notes

P

POETRY

Peggy Aylsworth

AWAY AS A SOLID THING

On the enamel pendant, black
on white, the ancient poem
breathes.

I wear it for the shy unsaid.

A woman in Japan looks through
the rim

of tears. The light descends,
dark blue as in a grotto at the
end

of a watery cave. He has
not gone far, but away. Her silent
waiting

tears at the waves, lacing
the shore. Still, she will not say
to him,

“These days remove me
from myself.” Her mouth grows
thick with silence.

Rachel Barenblat

WEANING

You push me away
and reach for the bottle.

Once in Scotland I parted
spongy turf with my fingers

and water welled up like sorrow
its source unknown.

In my childhood playhouse
the table was always set

for guests who never came.
Already my body is shrinking.

You settle like a little king
into the crook of my arm

one hand seizing
the plush belt of my bathrobe

the other splayed
across the warm cylinder.

Your lashes drift down
and your restless legs still

exactly as they did
when I was everything.

Svea Barrett

Poem With A Minimum of Regret

When you called your parents to tell them one twin had died after two heart surgeries, your father said, “well, it’s probably for the best. He never said he was sorry. Your mom told you later he was crying; how he hated the way you sounded those nights, home from the hospital. After that, how could you regret your first marriage when it brought two more sons? And even on the worst of days you can step outside to a landscape of hard, bright sun, and to the jagged beautiful shadows of spruce in your front yard. The snow you remove from your car is full of diamonds and you wouldn’t change that, even as you shiver when it cuts your gloveless hands.

Elliott batTzedek

So often now

So often now I've no idea how I
inhabit this stretched-out skin. Size 28
to 18 and back again, once
starving myself down to size six,
once my father's beautiful little girl,
before the asthma and the steroids made
my face a puffer fish and I, in husky
jeans, became my mother's doppelganger.
My straight As could not make her proud, nor
my fearless flinging branch to branch. Married
at 15, a baby by 16, her body, thin,
was all she had. *160 pounds!*
she hissed, and *Built like a pack mule* Dad agreed,
their voices trapped and echoing in my long, long ears.

Margo Berdeshevsky

UNTITLED TIME

Time and apples and burnished broken fall
and the very very old know November's
All Saints' Day, its follower, Day of the Dead
I follow my mother into her hall she is old,
she has a broken rib and pain no capsule
kills she has fallen before but she's
older —leaning on two canes she stands—
my hands hold white roses tinged with lime
and autumn's yield I want to kiss her
but I'm so afraid of her bones her ribs her hurt.
Her flat stands airless with an afternoon heat of age
that does not leave its cages often, anymore.
She leans more heavily dressed in periwinkle
she's taken time to brush her upswept blondness
just for me —she sits she puffs at her hair as
though to force it full and lush as it was when
she was thirty-five my English teacher perching
on her desktop facing classes spike heeled
“gams” dangling. Students all remember
that. Golden single hairs catch
now between her claw-nailed thumbs,
she is losing her golden hairs, she shakes each
to the floor, annoyed. But *belle*, she is, the beautiful.
Last night —she is eager to tell me —she wakened
certain she'd written two damn good lines of poetry
in her sleep: *Because I could not stop for death,
he kindly stopped for me.* The word “kindly”
does sound a little like Dickinson, she cocks her
head, a worried golden heron, she's searched
her shelf and cannot find such lines, so she's
authored them, and is no plagiarist.
Unwilling to insult her, I say I'll ascertain ...
“It's time,” she thumps the side of her un-certain
table, “time for us all to receive love. I'm
young. I can wait 'til March,” she grimaces,
the rib, thrumming. And then she tells again
how she woke last midnight sure she'd written
two good lines. “I'll look it up,”

I promise ... then together
we find the final verse
to mouth aloud
*Since then 'tis centuries, and yet each
Feels shorter than the day
I first surmised the horses' heads
Were toward eternity.*

Kristin Berkey-Abbott

Restoring the Seams

She used to count every rib,
a loom around her heart,
like the Appalachian tool
that spools honey into her tea.

But years of good food and wine
now hide her ribcage.
She lets the seams
out of the side of her favorite
dress, a dress bought long ago,
a dress stitched by a distant
woman in Afghanistan in a different decade.

She thinks of that country
come undone, torn and shredded.
She slides the seam ripper
under threads made softer
by the humidity of many Southern summers.

She thinks of distant graveyards,
young men buried in alien
landscapes. She thinks of English ivy,
that invasive immigrant, clinging
to the marble markers,
obscuring the names beneath.

Hours later, half blind from restoring
seams, she walks the woods
of a neighboring monastery.

The monks have reclaimed
an old slave cemetery, but a toppled
angel lies face down in the rich dirt.
She sets the angel upright
and brushes soil off her half-eroded features.

Kristin Berkey-Abbott

Tuscany Dreams

No one buys a suburban home
in Tuscany.
They buy old barns or sheep pens
or buildings of indeterminate
origin. In Tuscany,
the explosive wiring and undependable
plumbing seem charming
because it's Tuscany.

No one thinks about transoceanic
flights or aging parents on a different
continent once they've bought
a house in Tuscany.
No one needs health
care in Tuscany. No one develops
rare diseases there.

No one mentions the cost of phone
calls to all the ones left behind in the move
to Tuscany. It's all sun-drenched
colors and fresh foods, and no one suffers
homesickness in Tuscany.

Ronda Broatch

After Rain

On days like this she sinks into muck
thick as paint, mesh sneakers filling, socks
scrunched down around toes. Under rocks

she finds the idea of a chameleon,
but never the real thing. She wishes
to live in a world where asphalt

is an afterthought, where balloons swim
overhead, but don't frighten the horses, huff
of air and volume rising. She has no use for

the bathrobe hanging on the door, puts on
what she wore before her shower. It's been years
since she's spun, her wheels gathering dust

in the bedroom, her wheels spinning
when she most needs sleep. And isn't that
what everyone says, falling into spring,

watching winter slip away under-
appreciated. Green fingers of clematis,
a smudge on every window. She wants what burns

in the oven, the smell of pecan or almonds,
voice of Maya Angelou an island
amidst a hectic afternoon. She asks

the seaplane that circled above, and dove
just yards above her car, to replay its stunt,
wake her up, wants the pilot's

eye on her. In frescos of cedar bark she sees
criticisms, misplaced seed of her creativity.
Is goodbye the last line, or is there another

sound to string her along? Rain abated,
this cloudy mouth of sky holds no traffic. Loam

beneath her feet a sponge, she is suspended. She closes

her eyes, imagines inhaling up and over the crest
of her being, wishes to be water, to be well,
clear enough to see inside.

Valentina Cano

Prejudiced

The register rang like a tired phone,
all wires and lurching electricity.
I watched her hands gripping clothes
(a cow's snout digging through grass stalks)
and I felt a crumb of fear
expanding like yeast in my stomach.
Who was this woman,
with metal rings, like a tree's years,
around her wrists?
And why was a single of her smoke-filled breaths
better than my entire collection of thoughts?
I paid for my items
with red words between my lips
and left her to her day
as she left me to mine.

Cathy Carlisi

Milk Made

I dreaded the bovine barbarity
of it. Then, they plunked her
still-waxy body on my belly,
and this complete stranger
rooted for my nipple,
pulled until it felt like someone
slammed it in a car door.
I threatened the nursing Nazis
I'd quit. But at one week,
she'd gained three pounds.
And there was no one else,
not Nana or father, who could
hear her cry and feel milk rush,
no one who could wake
one minute before her, knowing
she was about to wail.
No one else who could slip a pinkie
between lips and breast to break
the suction and feel born
from her mouth, primal and elegant.

Cathy Carlisi

New Skin

My mother's knees stopped hurting
when my daughter was born,
cartilage and bone numbed
by the scent of new skin.

And my dying father says he's alive
because of this child. Miracles,
yet it's the metaphor I can't get past:
her in my studio, gessoing over
my old self-portrait, slow strokes
of thick white paint covering
my shoulders, neck, mouth, eyes.

Cassie Ciopryna

Not the First Time

At seventeen I am the mother and she
is my daughter, dependent on me
for my company and endless empathy.

I know of the cancer that took her own mother
from her when she was fifteen, and wonder
how she could ever think of voluntarily
doing the same thing to me.

Lifting her wrist, my eyes penetrate
the marks. It's not the first time
I've seen the darkened lines in her skin,
etched in as if they could ever be hidden.

David Crews

Bedroom

Where she dreams things
 almost nightly—
 tractor won't start
 cat in piano
 stuck
 some kid in French Honor's class—
she tells me.
 But there's no music.
 No sound.

Before bed these nights
 I'm staring at the guitar
 quietly, she
 brushes her teeth.

I turn the radio low
 Miles Davis
 Thelonious
 something sentimental.

But she doesn't really
 like jazz
 doesn't keep
her attention.

And what's missing
 these silent dreams?

 Tonight
the moon shines full
 through the skylight
 in the bathroom
 the mirror
looking through
 dark eyes, she's
fingering light
 undressing
 the bed's clothes.

There are reflections
and her skin
this night
I can't touch
because my chest
aches, she
sings
every day all
the time
loudly
anything
that comes to mind.

David Crews

Meditations on Egocentrism and Sweet Talking

When my ego slips
slides down the skin of your hips
and grunts please,
it's asking both forgiveness
and permission:
forgive me
when I burned down the neighbor's garage,
can I please, please
kiss your mouth?
When my ego
climbs into your body
it fears only
the fall.

Barbara Crooker

RELATIONS

*after "Invincible," a photograph by Lydia Panas
"The body is the harp of the soul." Body World*

Do you think you know me? I'm standing here with my sister and two cousins; you think we're alike because we wear the same clothes, black hoodies, tank tops, jeans. You have no idea, can't imagine the muscles of my heart, see the fear pumping. You think my smooth skin, straight hair is a road map, a ticket to ride right out of this town. You think I'm tough enough for anything. But you don't feel my pulse jumping like a cricket, the way all these choices are making me crazy: which college? which major? which boy? On my sweatshirt, there's a zipper, its teeth like the cuts I make on my upper arm, my inner thigh. I don't know where I'm going, but I know I want to be gone. Do you think you can catch me in your camera? I am butter in a hot skillet, April snow, water in a stream; I am gone.

Suzannah Dalzell

NORTH DAKOTA

autumn, 1900

We've got to bury
the baby right, he says,
first one we've lost, don't
want to tempt God. I wash
her cold withered
body, dress her in clean
white cotton,
tuck her in the shiny
store-bought casket.

But she's not the first.
Never told him I lost
two on the trip west –
not much to show,
but I knew – and
that spring morning
scrubbing floors
a boy slipped out,
wrapped him in sacking,
took him to the creek,
dug into the soft bank
with my fingers, plugged
the hole with stones.

Mary Stone Dockery

Birthmark

Mother lies on the bed, a blanket
draped over her
covering almost nothing.
Her naked backside pushes to the edge
where a soft light exposes a coffee-colored
moon-shaped smear, a smudge
of chocolate or dirt. I wonder why
Mother has not yet cleaned,
taken a wash cloth tenderly to her own body
the same way she would mine.
But before I can point at it,
she has lit a cigarette and
hisses at me to retreat
to the living room,
where I sit at my step-father's drum set,
my right foot on the bass drum pedal.
I invent a beat
that locks in on Mother's time,
a sound beat, steady,
the kind of thump
only daughters hear.

Mary Stone Dockery

From the Start

When the husky we'd only had a few days
growled and clawed my face
it had already begun.

At six, I could only wonder at how after,
so many paws hurried to lift me,
and I went twisting to the ceiling,
claws clutching my ribs, dropping me
on the bathroom counter, back to the mirror.

All I could see were these paws,
smothering my face,
slitting my lip open like an envelope.

A peroxide-drenched towel browned
beneath the vanity lights
and it was like the time I fell off
the merry-go-round, hit a concrete block
and my mother's soft hands
cradled my forehead, her sweater
saturated in my blood. When my step father
slapped my face weeks later, splitting open
the stitches, when my mom sat at the table,
ignored him, said all men used their hands
like that, it was already blistered into me
to surrender. When he came into the bedroom
saying – *What you need is to learn
to behave* – it had already
begun, years before,
and it was like sitting, unscarred again,
on my mother's knee.

Juditha Dowd

Dream of Dalliance

He seems taller
standing over there
against the backlit blind.
Larger than life—
wasn't that what I wanted?

Three of my grandchildren
come in the door,
asking for a glass of water,
and he's finding it for them—
a separate glass for each,

bending naked
to retrieve a teddy bear,
though he cannot begin
to know these children
will someday exist.

I suppose the dream
is doing its level best
to teach me a lesson
about patience,
inappropriateness,

or something else
I'm not interested in
contemplating here,
waiting by myself
in what appears

to be a bed—
You begrudge the kids water?
The children file out
replaced by a colleague
whose funeral I attended

decades ago.
Peter, a thoracic surgeon.
He was always pre-med,
so he may not know
about the Egyptian god

who has slipped me
this dream
for his own purposes.
Peter eases onto the bed—
yes, it *is* a bed—

patiently explains
how fooling around
becomes responsibility.
Is this Peter
or Jung in an owl costume,

I ask myself,
controlling the scene
with the confidence
dreams devise to taunt us.
And why, I wonder,

is my grandmother,
who taught me duty,
whispering from the wings
that she too had liked a man
now and then,

which reminds me—
where is he?
Delayed gratification,
winks Nana. *Get some sleep.*
Now I know everything

that's bound to happen,
has—
I've left my coat at the opera
and the temperature
is dropping fast.

Shaun Fletcher

All the Sides of Fire

She said *I may never be warm again* – Hedda Gabler
on my couch, my friend wrapped in shawls,
shivering, curled into herself to recycle the steam in her breath.

A zeroth law claims heat is energy – thermic,
so a loss of one correlates. Think exothermic
and think fire, rapid loss of heat. We thaw
icy bones by flames because fire gives
us its life, wholly, everything
forced out. How cold must fire feel?

A heart lapidary, fire, tools the size of cells
and smaller for such fine markings into muscle – notches of serotonin
document. She doesn't want a record of arms lying
around her, lying to her, under every blanket she can pile
atop the every dampening sofa. Every layer
holds heat and brings cheating

embraces. In the dark of a down cocoon
she longs for opposite reactions – endothermic.
Pull every millijoule and invert the flames, be cold
only to the touch.

Ruth Foley

Lying

Forgive me. In my hands, the astronaut
becomes a mermaid, the shooting star
becomes a fish—not even a starfish. I
need to save that for later. Your blood
has become various things: vodka,
the ocean, a pool of rippling water.
When I throw it in the air, it shatters.
What I cannot remember, I invent.
On the corner, children are laughing,
playing keep-away with a softened
basketball behind the tall pine fence
in January air turned April warm—
the nights are slowly getting shorter.
I cannot reinvent that, although this house
holds longer shadows than it might.
Even now, sister, there are no children.
There is only me, a pair of dogs asleep
in the narrowing wedge of afternoon.
Even now, I do not have a sister.
This is how I make the world.

Ruth Foley

Options

Enough of fear. Enough of the staccato
of footsteps behind you in the reaching

night of your walk home, of lying on
your back and counting the scars, of

listening for the furtive snick of the latch
while you pretend to sleep. Enough of

the slowly billowing dread, of this
mourning the not-yet dead, of living

in castles of exile when you can live
in the glorious ruins of welcome.

Choose your better place. Choose
your might. Choose to light the fuses

of rebellion. Choose the metallic
bite of furious strength, to feed

the parts of you that fume, to ignore
the dart of sorrow, sudden and electric.

Or choose to let it move you, barrel
towards it headlong, then through

the bearer of the footsteps, the weapon
of the scars, the thief, the trespasser,

the dread-bringer. Choose to leave them
in ashes. Choose petulance, if you must.

Choose anger. Choose to become
the fresh-born executioner of despair.

Ruth Foley

Small Ceremonies

for Sara

There is no ceremony small enough
for you, for one so small I cannot
hold you in my fingers, in my palm.
You were still too small to name,
too small to be anything more
than a secret sleeping warm between us
on flannel sheets. There is no word
small enough to describe your heart,
small as a poppy seed, barely beginning
to fill, to beat. No word small enough
to fill the space left by its stopping.
There should be prayers, something larger
than the voice—
that cannot be *my* voice—
that cries to heaven tonight.
A tiny stone for your month-old bones,
a tiny pile of earth in my hand
to cover you, a tiny box to wrap you
like an offering to God himself.
Know that I will hold you
in the smallest spaces:
in a silent moment blowing air
over tea too hot to drink;
in the second when I step
into a patch of sunlight on the porch;
in the words I choose to tell my sister
how beautiful her new baby is,
how she has her mother's eyes.
I will hold you in that small moment
when you were whispered hope,
a private prayer,
a fluttering in my womb.

Laura Freedgood

REHEARSAL

There is nothing certain but death and taxes

You make ratatouille,
chop colorful vegetables
I have meticulously washed free of pesticides.

At dinner we talk.
The sales you made that day,
my friend's cancer responding to drugs.

Over dessert we argue:
does your dog really need sirloin steak
for breakfast, lunch, and supper?

What shape is safety:
the steeple our hands make together,
the sound of your voice, familiar, resonant?

At night we become lovers.
You take me in your arms,
and I pretend

they are oak branches,
strong enough to hold us.
I measure their girth

with my hands,
then feel the slightness of your wrists,
nearly small as mine.

Gail Fishman Gerwin

Who Looks?

It's not the mirror that bothers her,
it's the photo. When she gazes at her
reflection, she sees a young woman,
brown eyes shadowed by the newest
product along cosmetic aisles,
sun-streaked hair untouched
by salon foils, arms taut
with a curved silhouette that outlines
muscles toned with heavy weights,
this generation's soup cans.

She downloads digital photos, sees
an old woman, neck folds in strings
like melted mozzarella, cheekbones
that crave rediscovery, lines in parentheses
around lips that forget to blush.

The young girl speaks to the old woman,
she speaks in fifties music that rolls
off her tongue as easily as the ABCs,
Sh-boom, she says, walk down by the river,
a little white cloud cries for you.

The old woman answers
Yadadadadadadadadada,
sh-boom sh-boom,
her grandchildren in the other room
frightened by the outburst.
Ma, her daughter says, *your poodle*
skirt called, it wants you back.
She smiles, thinks how life
could be a dream, a dream.

Oscar Gonzales

GRANDMOTHER

In the seductive soliloquies of childhood--
I find grandmother there.

Her voice is gone, but all the splendors
of her poetry remain.

Her *guava* tree endures
filled with so many woodland tastes
brimming with a fruit of soft and seeded center;
the bark of trees and light of stars
have been translated into food.

Her image is now diffuse
but her *nance* tree in the morning
has made a yellow carpet on the ground
The fruit is bright and bittersweet
like an ephemeral sun in my mouth.

The canopy of her *aguacate* tree
covers a wide expanse
where all the songbirds dream.

Her *mango* tree
with outstretched limbs
sings praises to the sky.
When ripe, the red fruit falls on the zinc roof
with a loud bang
reminding us of the incessant energy of her life.
The roots of the mango tree
stretch miles in search of water
and break through concrete sidewalks.

Even her *guanabana* tree
with fruit filled by a white, spongy core
surrounded by green skin with spikes
speaks of her.

I feel it is her poetry

her essence somehow compressed
in all her fruit trees.

Lois Marie Harrod

Numb Cold Night

*“ . . . and gave himself,
All thin and naked, to the numb cold night? Richard III, II, i*

He was naked under the sheet.
My father. The thin nakedness of dying.
Nurses asked me to leave
when they changed
the bed. They meant the diaper.
They wanted to spare me
the naked dying. My father.
Later he wore no diaper. Just pads
beneath him. He was no longer
drinking water. Nothing or little to seep.
The lineaments of his knees.

My father-in-law too
naked under the sheet, a tube
stuck in his penis, the nakedness of dying,
half an inch thick. He wanted me
to look, smiled goofily, *this is what I have*,
lifting the sheet, a kid showing his *whatsit*,
he wanted me to see. My turn next.
The lineaments of his thighs.
That's how he died—sepsis
starting at the catheter.

Some want us
to see. Some not. Old Noah lying
drunk, naked. Ham entered the tent
and looked. Shem and Japeth entered
backward to hide their father naked.
Old Noah lying drunk. Old Noah lying.
Ham, he cursed to Canaan, blessed
Shem and Japeth. Which am I,
cursed or blessed, the daughter
who looked without wanting to see?

Katherine Hoerth

Eros

There's a reason why I pinch your ass
as you open the refrigerator and ask,
"What's for dinner?"

Why, when reaching for the ketchup,
the back of your hand slides across
my chest. Why I undress slowly
in dying sunlight - hoping to catch
your hurried glances. Why bodies sigh
when they're together, inching closer
for closure, the bare skin of your belly
against mine. It is all so we can feel immortal

for just a moment, with our fingers interlocked,
we mold miracles together. Gazing at the nacre
of your eye – I know the end

is one breath closer, so we place seeds
into the moist earth.

Katherine Hoerth

Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia, 2007

I was ready - to pack away my binoculars,
to accept the earth, empty

of Eskimo Curlews. After so many springs
spent on our back porch, holding hands

in belief that the body must ripen like the earth,
that bloodlines don't silt up like dying rivers,

I was ready to accept that the world
just doesn't work that way.

But today, a watcher saw a curlew's cream
colored neck and heard that two noted miracle

of a song, and the wounds of hope unravel:
I dream that parents carry twigs in the curve

of their beaks, build nests and coo to one another.
All over again, I believe in the incubation of eggs –

the cracking of shells against beaks, the opening
of worlds. And if the Curlews shrill in Nova Scotia,

then too, this spring, must migrate here
and soar above the serried grapefruit trees.

And at last, I'll see him – that very last bird,
his dark eyes gaze into mine, the warm weight

of existence against my chest. May the shrills
of hope span across generations.

Claire Keyes

THE DISAPPEARED

He's driven a hundred miles to see me
and when we tramp the autumn woods,
gold and bronze leaves crunch
beneath our boots.

Nothing matters but his presence
until I point to the shelf
protruding from a maple, fluted edges
like an exotic fan. *A mushroom?*
I want to know. He laughs

and plucks it off, taps it: a dim,
hollow sound. *A bracket fungus*, he explains,
tossing it among the leaves. I lean into him,
wrapping my arms around his waist,
his arms a world from which I am soon
to be expelled.

That was long ago. When he left me,
when I no longer saw myself in his eyes,
I too disappeared.

Some things last, some don't.
He knew this; I didn't want to know.

Kathleen Kirk

Solipsism and a Schoolbus

It's hard to find out about solipsism
if you can't spell it, if you are looking for s-o-l-o,
in all its irony, instead of s-o-l-i,
as in the beginning of solitude
or solitary. Solipsism comes from *solus*,
alone, as does solo, that song you sing by yourself.

Since solipsism has mostly negative connotations—
solus; alone + *ipse*; self + ism (aloneselfism)—
it's good to find out it has two meanings,
both philosophical: 1. *The theory that the self
is the only thing that can be known
and verified.* 2. *The theory or view that the self*

is the only reality. And here we part
with solipsism, though it may be true
that we cannot know each other's reality,
number two seems like a load of number two.
And if you leave behind the pink gym bag
in clear sight on the kitchen table,

the one your daughter asked you to bring to school,
because you are always wrapped up in yourself,
it's still there, the pink gym bag, on the table.
She will wait, the bus will be late to depart
for the tournament in Lyons, a long night
not yet begun. Complication: a fire drill at one;

climax & resolution: the bus delayed by the bell,
students exiting *en masse*, fire trucks arriving,
sirens on, and there it sits, huge and yellow.
Solace comes from *solas*, one letter off; from *solari*,
to console, as I would console our daughter
if you had not gone back for what was forgotten,

as I would console you, since I'm not talking to myself.

Kathleen Kirk

Sputnik Crisis

I'm the red-faced squawking babe
in arms who needs to be taught
to be loved, or so you tell me,
taught to be touched, held,
wrapped in a towel after my bath,
rigid in rage at that naked dousing
or at needing to be dressed again
by all those tense fingers and hands.

Up goes Sputnik
& you're shocked, embarrassed, ready to compete,
pushing a safety pin into my thigh
to be able to pretend you got there first
but it's my first month of separation anxiety
and I cling to you, screaming in your ear
how much I love you now I've gotten used to you,
oh my father, oh my mother country.

Gina Larkin

BODY MEMORY

We take class together,
my daughters and I -
They are young and thin
dancer-bodied.

My body remembers arabesques,
split second ankle rolls,
tapping, like Astaire not Glover,
time step breaks to paddle turns.

My body remembers how it felt:
Ballet in white tulle and gold ribbons;
Irish reels in high soft shoes;
modern in bare feet and flour sacks.

Graham's solar plexus and contractions -
angst - my adolescent poetry in movement.
I danced ADeath@,
choreographed squirrels at play.

I watched as small whirling daughters
fell in love with plies
and pirouettes and promenades.
Now we stand together at the barre,

check the mirror for position, alignment.
My body cannot do what it remembers.
This ache is worse than
the pain in my knees.

Gina Larkin

SOMETIMES - NOT ALWAYS

Sometimes
when my ankle swells
making releves shaky
or my elbow throbs
making writing a chore,
when the mirror reflects
way too much
everything;
sometimes
when I've read the same paragraph
over and over
and still don't see its point;
sometimes
when age spots and thinning hair
and "would you like a seat, ma'am?"
start to matter,
when the eyes of a man
who once would have bought me a drink
look through
an invisible me,
then
I am old
But, not today.
Today
I have cleaned the last closet
even the topmost shelf,
today
I have played tag in winter's first snow
and planted ivy in a new blue pot,
today
the sun gashed the sea
with one swift stab
and you brought me wine in the candlelight.

Kristin LaTour

Flora, Dressed

I want to be woman as Flora
hold finches on my fingers
wrap vines of wisteria
around and around my waist.

Let gossamer webs sleeve
my arms and legs, violas
slipper my feet.

Weave bees into my curls
glistening with their honey,
rose thorns piercing my ears,
the blood to stand for a ruby.

Bind my breasts with
white bark of birch
and lace it with iris leaves.

Make this pale skin of my birth
be an embroidered book,
pages gilt and lettered in the ink
of crushed grains of pollen.

Nancy Long

Round-robin, bluebonnets

I

My sister wanted different rain to be
sewing mud bonnets in the sun,
shearing rattlesnakes in theRiverColorado,
chasing the Texas blue that would not line
break.

II

Bonnets in the Texas sun, mud in our shed,
mama's sewing shears chasing me around
the line that would not break
through the dank Colorado River with its rattle
snakes in the rain. My sister wanted different to be.

III

Under the weight of bluebonnets in the Texas sun,
in the mud of the dank Colorado River, with its rattle snakes
that nested in our shed, my sister—watching me crouch
there in the rain trying to hide from those enraged shears—
oh how she yearned to be different,

oh how she yearned to be
the one who did not break.

Arlene L. Mandell

Bad Boys and Bittersweet Chocolates

When Aunt Eva offered the elegant box of Barricini's assorted chocolates she said it wasn't polite to squeeze one, then nibble another.

I would agonize, hating to bite into gooey caramel, adoring cherries with their liquid centers.

In my late teens I switched to bittersweet—bad boys, dangerous but delicious, who sampled, then moved on.

Now that nutritionists say dark chocolate is good for you, my lover and I savor Barricini's Dark Chocolate Pistachio Toffee, 180 potent calories, almost as good as...

John McDermott

Advice for Women

Give a man some fish, he'll stop cooking.
Teach a man to fish, he'll buy a boat.
Teach a man to clean, he'll wash his car.
Teach a man to sew, nothing happens.

Teach a man to think, he won't.
Teach a man to hunt, he'll get drunk and lie
Teach a man to lie well, he'll move to Washington.
At least you'll be rid of him.

Training a man is a lot of work.
Maybe just teach your man to beg.

Lynne McEniry

Bonjour Tristesse

In my favorite used bookshop
searching for some distraction
from a sad, sad loss
it calls to me from a battered
spine... *Bonjour Tristesse*

Although I've often promised myself
to learn, I know no French beyond *bonjour*
oui chapeau fromage

Before handing it to the clerk
for proper shelving, my attraction
to musty, cracking pages calls me in

the name *Cécile* mesmerizes me
from page to page to page *Cécile*
I pay my dollar and all the way home
I pretend I am
Cécile

Bonjour Tristesse, I say over and over
and over, not knowing who or what a tristesse is
I say it husky and low, a passion word
to welcome a lover to my Paris flat
I say it light and lilting, a twinkle
on my tongue, as I, Cécile, say hello
to what awaits me in this place called Tristesse

Lynne McEniry

Cilantro

Teach me all about cilantro

you whispered through the phone that night
your breath a warm rush from that distance.
I did not yet know of your annual mission
trips, the bunch you found pressed in the pages
of Exodus 20: 1-17
smearing *honor*, smearing *you shall not*
and *you shall not* and *you shall not*

yet you have come to enjoy warm tortillas
covered with my pico de gallo
and you have come to love the way I gather
the zesty greens to my face before chopping
them for our meal
inhaling its clean scent its promise
to quell the bite of habenero

Lynne McEniry

If I were to die

**italicized lines from Li-Young Lee*

I'd want you to know
I dreamed of cooking
my mother's beef stew for you
your freckled legs swaying
from the arm of your chair

I was at the counter
trimming fat from the meat
leaving just enough
for a deep brown gravy

You were reading to me from *the city in which*
I love you
choosing my favorites
guessing at others we'd soon hear
the poet read

the space between us
filled with the scent of sweet carrots and
a common language

This Room and Everything in It
Lie still now
while I prepare for my future,

I peeked under the corner
of the bright blue tea towel
to see how the bread was rising
you read

certain hard days ahead,
when I'll need

then stopped before the line
break, or no – the alarm clock made
its demands

Lynne McEniry

whittled woman

it began as a fragment
of an old medicine bottle
deep blue and
dirty
tossed overboard
by a sailor with stomach trouble

*

walking the shoreline
she knew the Sea Glass
Association collectors hunted
reds, blacks
coveted oranges
to fill trays and fashion trinkets

but she treasured abundant
greens and blues most of all

*

those perigeon tides come around only twice each year

what were the odds
this whittled woman
this battered blue fragment
would arrive on the same shore, same time
after the century's turn, a new war raging

Jessica Mason McFadden

Reading *Artvoice* before an Eight O'clock Performance
of A.R. Gurney's *The Cocktail Hour*

I have an enormous
need to be naked on top
of General Lafayette
in his over crowded square,
full of nameless faces
familiar, twisted knots
of dreadlocks and a sea
of gun-powder tea,
unfolding.

Yes, I need to be the show,
the voice, the beat, the long
frail shadow reflected
in a purple lens;
I need to be a free show.

Tonight I'm an elaborate
drapery: black, deep,
and tight lipped—
drink in the hand
of my subconscious,
skipping across pages
with a dry tongue.

On a stage of sawdust
in a renovated church,
I'll whisper huskily
and blink blue circles to erase
the demons of white light;
I'll be a woman tonight.

Ann E. Michael

Father's Daughters

My father's daughter grew up quick-witted, competitive, well-read, funny. If the mind is a steel trap hers is oiled and sharp, hardworking, cunningly placed; she can bite but says she's only teasing, she's more loyal than any stubborn-jawed dog. Go ahead, argue genetics or environment with her, she'll set you straight or prove you wrong. She sings out loud, salts her food excessively and quarrels with authority. My father's daughter embraces the continuum of the spiritual, plants—in her garden—annuals, pulls apart expectations like carding flax, hopes to twist the fibers back into something she can clothe her uncertain self in. She's knee-deep in creek water, stymied by language, sure of the sun when lost. She knows she'll find her way listening for her father's voice ascending from the pulpit to the apex of the nave, out through steeple and onto the strange street and quiet towers: song of the father who said to daughters you are blessed among women his arms upheld in what might be benediction and might be embrace.

Julie L. Moore

Aubade

Late August moon, its full face
brilliant in the blue-soaked sky,
hovers over morning. The thick air
of summer has lost its weight,
thinned into the cool dry wind
that will soon turn the leaves
crisp, chill the trees' brave bones.
My daughter has gone to college.
I find myself standing in her room,
staring at her vacant, neatly made bed.
Why do I dust her table and dresser,
taking care to arrange whatever
she's left there—a broken
necklace, half empty bottle of lotion,
three brown buttons—
in such precise places?
Why call the dog to come,
speak in low tones as she circles
the room, snuffling every remaining
scent? When I look out the window,
I see my daughter at ten,
riding her bike for the first time alone,
up the hill to her friend's house,
less than half a mile away.
I remember how, distracted
by my son, I returned
to discern only the rider-
less Schwinn, already in that drive.
And oh, that absentminded moon: Star-
struck, it has forgotten the time
and lingers with the light.

Julie L. Moore

Where were you when you realized

your mother would one day die?

I was in my living room reading about Stephen Dedalus
as Baby Tuckoo, unable to remember when I ever wet my bed,
though I could recall, long ago, posting my little sister at the edge
of the boxwood hedge to spy anyone approaching
before I peed in my neighbor's bushes on Church Street,
using an oak leaf for the wiping.

My mother was busy making dinner,
maybe noodles boiling in a pot,
sauce simmering, ground beef sizzling—
all for Hungarian goulash,
a dish I hated, the too-many, too-mushy tomatoes
mingling with the meat, triggering nausea
like a finger inching toward the back of my throat—

when I walked into the kitchen to ask her,
with all the transparency a teen dare muster,
Will you die? One day. Will you?
And she, wondering what in the world
the school was doing to me that week,
shrugged off my question as she picked up
the paprika, flavored the only thing she could.

Jacqueline Dee Parker

AUGUST BIRTHDAY
for A. N. and R. B.

One woman declared the water smelled
like an udder. Another said, yes,

she tasted a mauve nipple
swirled with coarse white hairs.

A third confessed she couldn't tell a thing--
but a walk in the woods after heavy rain?

Scent of wet dog, hands down.
Who could argue? *B-b-b- benny*

and the Jets rattled the speakers, overhead
a fan whirred, tired insistence, a mother

on rewind, minding... All at once tall drinks
of water, their children had evaporated

like tear drops. In the lazy eye
of an August night, circling a vine of chalk flowers,

chartreuse, scarlet, minty with desire
the women held their cups aloft to cheer--

it was another birthday, after all, and
they laughed about the water til they dried.

Jacqueline Dee Parker

THE GUILD HOUSE ELEGY

It was then he was alive
on the top rung of the ladder

fastening velveteen globes to the ceiling's
scaffold with lengths of invisible string

as outside that window she grew up inside
snowflakes fell on Chapel Street and the green,

three stone churches and blinking pizzarias--
in the display she sat cross with homework

studying pedestrians on the other side of glass
bluster past in knit caps, crowns of crystals

fluffed like dollops of whipping cream,
clutching satchels in the rush hour city

buses hissed to stops—around the corner
the Schubert's pit orchestra tuned and

bent on design her father cut triangles
in matboard, pyramids soon filled the floor,

a forest trimmed in untold measures
of beige with gold-flocked stars.

Andrea Potos

WALKING IN GREECE

on Sifnos

I'm surrounded by blue
shining that nearly blinds.

Whitewashed stones wind
a path through the village--

old men at their tables,
a pack donkey tied to a tree.

Something in me
feels even

with the earth,
the weight of sun

that knows its strength.
I climb the steep path,

my grandmother's grandmother's hands
softly pressed on my back.

Marjorie Power

Between Surgeries

She keeps knitting
while she chats about us, not her.
She keeps knitting
when her husband says: *Our trip
to London won't happen, this year.*
Her face looks thin. Light blossoms there.
She keeps knitting.

Marjorie Power

Kept in Mothballs

Click, and my granddaughter appears
on the computer screen. Seven months old,
red headed, blue eyed – just like, click,
her twin brother. Click, and both babies
sit side by side, looking one another in the eye.

They wear little suits I kept in mothballs
thirty years plus, elaborately knitted
by two ladies in Norway
whose names I never knew.
Friends of the twins' great grandmother,

Rachel, who hailed from a village
just south of the Arctic Circle.
Her son – red headed, blue eyed –
married me, fathered his own son
and left.

But Rachel remained Grandma Rachel.
She and I did what we could, click,
to ignore the absence in the room.
I listened to her stories about Norway,
the click of her knitting needles, and mine.

Rinzu Rajan

An Ode to my Unborn Child

I've looked for you
in the pout of the pot
pregnant with water,
on the right side of my bed
unassumingly unoccupied
in the tethers of my arms,
warming my weariness.

Imagining how rotund my belly
would look, if you're a woman
like me and not so round
if you're your father's son.
I've written nursery narratives for you
your anthems before school
I've coloured the apples and grapes for you
with the vignettes so vivid
and named your dolls and bears.
I've sung lullabies to you
when insomnia was an infection
irking my irises.

I've known you by my mother's name
worded you by mine, a trinomial

Helen Ruggiero

CHIYO-NI (1703 – 1775)

Basho's student, Kikaku,
was her teacher as she
dared the other world,
the floating world
of poems by men

her poems
her life
surrendered to
the way
of haiku

*in the middle
of a great haze
she finds
the morning moon*

of her husband's eternal
absence she laments
*how wide the bed
when you are in it
all alone*

of her newly dead son
the dragonfly hunter
she asks
*how far have you
traveled today?*

memory is
*flowers opening
their faces
in the morning fog*

and the tremulous
motif she returns to
again and again
butterfly
what do you dream of
spreading your wings

a fragile beauty
floating over the world

Jennifer Saunders

Aubade At Three O'Clock In The Afternoon

Let the clock melt and slide
down the front of your bedside
table to pool on the floor
with your navy blue briefs
and my I-bought-it-for-you lace bra.

Let the hands bend and curve
and travel backwards across the face
to this hour again, to my hands and yours
bending and weaving beneath blankets,
roaming up and down long legs.

Let the minutes fall and get caught up
in the tree outside your window.
Let magpies come and carry away
each shining second. Stop marking the time.
Put your hand on my breast,
 put your mouth on mine.

Marvin Shackelford

DENVER

my grandmother is dead and in the ground
and we have pissed in the parking lot of the watering hole lounge
where women stripped the scars on their bellies
to show us a little of their lives

dave says even the cute young one had stretch marks that showed under
the black lights

but i'm not a pretty man and i'll carry
the rosary of the older stripper's titties taking dollar bills from my teeth
and repeat it to the sunlit snow piled at the edges of denver's airport
runways

the way these planes lift smells the same as a dancer's naked beauty
the way they tilt and dive and move little ways
you wouldn't notice from the bar

and now an arab man dressed so overly American
smoking marlboro cigarettes and speaking
tongues full of rolling consonants into his phone
mentions two words in English

sulfuric acid
and repeats a few jumbles later
acid

and i'm so very far away from a burial in pulaski tennessee

Marvin Shackelford

WINNIE

she was always biscuits and gravy
slow and deaf around the kitchen
blue blue dresses faded

it was just her fingers
warped and weathered knuckles
pulling feathers from a bird's back
once my uncle shattered it
sky to pasture
with an old old rifle

she picked and plucked the body
like our broken southern fields

nothing grown for ages

her face gray
wrinkled like a smiling photograph
she never wanted us to want
for a thing on earth

Norene Cashen Smith

Raven

When she arrives in her air
of vetiver, crocheted poncho,
and half-sleep
I see eyes, my own eyes,
looking and looking
in mirror-stunned stillness

Then we say hello.

And it's only seconds
before we hug
and she is soft again
in whatever mother-ness
I have to give

Just this armful,
which is so humble
compared to the gold
of the heart

That's what this must be,
I think, that glistens
in the bottom of the airport
where steel carriages roll
and loudspeakers announce
what has departed
and what has arrived

In the dingy white
expanses of alone
revolving doors
push people in and out
like memories or tears

I have waited here so long
at the luggage carousel
since before she was born
and I was picking her name

from the totems
of Northwest native
mythology

And already she walks
toward me, tall and sure
the young woman
with long hair and glasses
wearing weathered boots
and talking of plans

Plans as brave as love
as big as the universe

Carole Stone

In the Matter of Pumpkin Soup

*No one likes Dad's soup,
my daughter tells me.
It's cold, too spicy.*

I remember those nights he walked her,
rubbing her back, the colicky baby
herself a mother now,

the child who sat cross-legged
on the nursery school floor
round and good as a Winesap.

Each Thanksgiving Day,
her father chooses a fat pumpkin,
scoops out the seeds, boils

and mashes the yellow rind,
mixes in the heavy cream.
How can I tell this man

of habit to change? How can I
tell my daughter, just eat?
Then the soup arrives.

Carole Stone

Pairs

At the Japanese curved bridge,
a wedding couple pose for a photo.

The bride's train trails like a peacock's tail.
Reclining on a park bench, I am reading

Anna Karenina. She's moving out
of Count Vronsky's house, their bed

of passion unmade. At the lake's edge,
my husband feels a flat stone

to see if it will skip when thrown.
I rush to the railway station

to save Anna. In the weeds, a pair
of mallards shake their feathers dry.

Idealism, dry as a yellowing love letter,
my heart settles

for the everyday:
Break bread. Boil eggs.

Sharon Venezia

Cricket

As the Santa Anas whip past
the eaves of your sleep,
whistle into your dreams,

send Birch branches pulsing
against the window,
I listen to your breathing.

The green bowls
stacked high with nothing,
the coffee mugs heavy
on their hooks.

We are all orphans tonight,
like the crickets you fed
to your pet snake.
I turned away
before it was over,
you smiled, said it's just nature.

My body turns beneath the sheets.
I listen for the cricket's wings
singing into the night,
afraid of the silence.

Pramila Venkateswaran

Autumn

I'm pregnant
again this is my eighth
but this time it's different

This morning the river the mango and jackfruit
branches heavy with shadow last night's rain
fresh on the path this baby makes the world new

behind me the cashew groves stand taut
I venture into them receive
a handful of roasted cashews
in their pink-and-brown lined skins
from a woman's smooth dark hands

she in blue top and white mundu melts
into the deep cool where winds whistle
as I lift my hands to my face to smell

his fair baby skin and coal black eyes
His smile don't ask me how I know
will charm make me want to live

Pramila Venkateswaran

The Kitchen Years

my day stretches like the river
pots and pans are rocks
I could be a mermaid stretched among them
or I could be moss
a crow shaking off dew...
I see the lone papaya among the leaves
a sliver of sunbeam cutting through them
flooding the grass

could the goddess of song sail across the room
in the smoke hanging like gossamer mist
among black ceiling and walls

see me framed by my dripping hair knotted loosely
as I sit fanning the flames
and plant a song on my tongue

I am a drying bed among coconut fiber and soap
wanting to be saturated by flow of syllable and syntax
away from these yawning steel mouths
the moist crushing dark

Karen J. Weyant

Sleeping with the Radium Girls

In your dreams, it's always their lips
that disappear last. Sitting in rows
clutching watches in their hands,
girls the same age you are now,
dot dials with a mixture of water,
glue and radium. Sometimes,

their paintbrushes slide to their mouths,
shape worn bristles to sharp points.
They paint their nails, their eyelids,
their dimples, their freckles.
Specks sparkle and gleam when
they turn off the lights.

One jaw shifts to the side, another slides.
A chin quivers and falls, a cheekbone sags,
tugs at an eye. Two older girls cough,
spit into their handkerchiefs,
pry loose teeth from their mouths.
There's no blood. One girl haunts

you the most. She reaches up, folds
the still breeze into halves, blots.
The room grows stagnant, almost stale.
A kiss glows in the air. She still
has her smile. When you wake up,
your mouth puckers, you whistle, you blow.

S

SHORT
STORIES

Diane D. Gillette

Thin White Line

The girl's freckles –beautiful little fairy footprints across her nose and cheeks – were too many to count, but still, Johanna tried. She sat next to the girl in her night class, but week after week, she and the girl never exchanged more than a few words, all completely lacking in depth, too miniscule to even be called small talk. Yet whenever the lecture was dry, Johanna found herself studying the delicate curve of the girl's ear, fighting the urge to reach out and trace her finger along it.

She gauged that the girl was actually more woman than girl, but certainly she couldn't claim any more than a quarter-century of life experience. And with Johanna being saddled with almost twice that, she could only think of the girl as “the girl”.

After each class, Johanna would return home to her husband, slide between the sheets, stirring up the scent of lavender fabric softener, and pull him to her, biting his lower lip ever so gently and savoring the feel of his hand gliding down the slope of her hip, across the valley of her waist, finding a home in the soft suppleness of her breast. Johanna would close her eyes and imagine how the girl's sweet lips would taste, how her slender fingers would softly explore her secret spots in an entirely different manner than her husband's too large, too familiar hands.

And all this was before Johanna ever even saw the thin white lines laddering up the tender inner flesh of the girl's forearms.

One warm spring night, the girl came to class in short sleeves, the first time all semester she'd done so, and Johanna spotted the battle scars. She saw then, not a woman who had survived and bore her thin white medals of courage proudly – but instead a girl who'd had such a firm grasp of who she was and who she couldn't be that she was forced to seek out razor thin relief. Johanna longed to whisper reassuring words into the girl's beautifully curved ear as she wrapped her in a firm embrace.

She couldn't concentrate on the lecture that night, her eyes drawn instead to girl's arms resting on the table, one hand unconsciously tapping a pen on a spiral notebook. Catching Johanna's gaze, the girl pulled her arms into her lap, and looked away, a lovely blush staining the porcelain beneath her freckles. Johanna excused herself to the ladies room where she splashed cold water on her face and looked in the mirror, droplets still clinging to her eyelashes like tears. Hot red splotches

marred her cheeks. Shame or disgust, it didn't really matter which was the cause.

“What's your problem?” The girl was waiting in the hall for her when she finally came out of the restroom.

Johanna shrugged and tried to push past her, but the girl reached out and grabbed her arm.

“No. All semester, you've looked at me. Always just staring. You got issues?”

There were many things Johanna could have said. She could have told the girl she was paranoid. To simply fuck off. Could have said her androgynous beauty was haunting. Could have said she admired how so obviously comfortable she was in her own skin.

Instead, Johanna looked down at the slender fingers curled around her arm, just above her wrist, and knew the girl must feel the rapid beat of her pulse. She reached out and gently removed the girl's hand and turned her arm over. Johanna's fingers slowly trailed over the ladder of thin white lines, admired the intricate spidery blue river pulsing beneath it. She knew what it meant when a girl cut herself. Only a girl who didn't fit in developed such a dark habit. Girls like that grew into women who knew exactly who they were, whether the world accepted them for it or not. They did not grow into women who, at almost half a century old, set out on quests of self-identification that involved night classes and marriage counseling. The scars were her beautiful proof.

“I envy you,” Johanna whispered, as she rubbed one thin white line and counted the rapid beat of the girl's pulse under the flesh of her thumb.

GUARDED IN CASTOR GROVE

Paul was up long before the low *cooowaah, cooo, coo, coo*-ing of the mourning dove. He lie still, his dark eyes opened wide to the shadows cradling the crawl space two feet above where he lay. It was a cool, early spring morning, and he rested loosely swaddled in a slightly frayed sheet. His young face showed no emotion, nor labor, but every now and then, the muscles under his black eyebrows would tense, then release. It was a reflex, the only visible aftermath of being downed by a stampepe.

He thought about what happened the night before, when he asked his mom, Lisa, again: “Where’s my dad?” more emphatically than ever. “I’m sick of wondering about him. I want to go and find him. I want to know who he is.” His voice rose on *who he is*.

“I suppose you’re getting to an age where you want answers.” She got up from the table and put her dish in the sink. “Clean up when you’re finished eating.”

“Why haven’t I ever met him? Why are you keeping him from me?” His anger hit him full force. She walked away down the hall and shut herself in her bedroom like she always did when he asked her about his father. She prayed to herself, though he could hear her through the door. He banged the flimsy wood with his fist. “Tell me!” His scream echoed down the empty hall. He waited; he languished long; he gradually skulked mid-way down the hall. He was ashamed of most of himself, the part he let slide to a seat on the floor. She was not going to get away with this. He was going to know. This time, he waited for her.

When Lisa appeared out of her bedroom, she slouched down on the floor next to Paul. There were pictures in her hand. “I never met your father, Paul,” she sounded defeated, sympathetic to Paul. “I was 16, and I just got home from school,” she started, but a tightness gripped her throat, so all she could do was drop the pictures into Paul’s lap; her hands were trembling; her eyes welled up with tears and horror. Paul’s eyes burst at the black and white shots of bruised, swollen, mauled, contorted versions of his younger mom. There were three photos: front shot; side shot; back shot. Each one shocked him like a punch in the gut. “You were conceived out of that attack,” punched him worse than the shots of his mangled mom.

“Oh my God – Oh, my God. Mom,” he reached over to touch her hand. Her hand sprang back as if a viper had bitten her. She stopped

crying. They were both silent – Paul conscious of his choking breath. “Why did you keep me, then?” His voice cracked.

“I had to. All children are God’s children, Paul,” she said by rote. They both stayed there in silence for many long minutes. Lisa filled the silence: “Now you know.” She stood up and lingered over him, and almost put her hand on his shoulder; then, she walked into the kitchen and started on the dishes.

This morning, he was trying to bury these details. He crawled out of his room. At 16, his muscles were just establishing themselves, visible under the white moonlight as he kicked on tattered jeans and t-shirt, ran his hands through his hair, and swung a book bag over his back. On his way down the hall of the small house he shared with his mom, he saw, as he passed their tiny family room, the silhouette of her kneeling figure and bowed head – statuesque in her morning prayer. She whispered intermittently. He stopped, watched her, motionless. He had flashes -- running to her, holding her, screaming at her, breaking her, or worse. He kneeled down next to her. “Bye, Mom. I love you.” Her whispers strengthened. She did not move. Paul got up. “I’m going out with Ellen after school. I won’t be back until late.”

Lisa shrugged; she turned her head to face him, and her eyebrows closed together in a furl, annoyed. “I never gave you any curfew.”

Paul felt like stone. He turned away as he heard her change her mind.

“I’ll have something warm on the stove for you in case you’re hungry.”

The bottom wooden frame of the door fell off again when he opened the door, so he lined it up under the protruding nails, gave it a couple of taps, then shut it gently up and onto the jamb. Through the glass, his mom, up now, gave him a nod and that wild look he had known so well.

The sun was just mounting over the water as Paul walked between the lake and the ramshackle one-stories that lined the gravel road, hiked his miles through Castor Grove, and up a steep hill to the bus stop. It was coming up on him throughout his walk, rising in his mind like the harsh glint of the morning sun, rising again like his reflection in the puddle under the evergreens. He looked at himself now; he stepped into the puddle, eclipsing his image. He could not erase himself; he could not pretend; he could not forget. It was on him, clearer now than it was the night before when he could cloud it with anger, more imminent than overnight when he could toss out a thousand other possibilities,

more certain than when he left the house when he could hope for some kind of reason, logic, or explanation from her. Instead, he let the bus take him away from the revulsion of the Grove.

He didn't feel the same when he greeted his friends on the bus. He tried to act the same -- slapping their extended hands, switching seats in mid-route, making the bus driver mad, throwing spitballs at the freshmen up front. He was going through these motions automaton-like, with his consciousness seemingly shadowing him, and he was desperate to make it all more real.

He sat back in the bus, sank into the seat, closed his eyes, and ruminated over the details of the night before.

He was shaken from his thoughts when the bus came to a stop. He got off the bus and walked into his high school building. Inside, while walking down the hall to his locker, he was starting to reflect again on those moments of the night before. His girlfriend, Ellen, broke his train. She was waiting for him by his locker. He saw her; he felt as if he were one gliding on a conveyor belt, unconscious of himself. He thought about their kiss the day before after school; he almost felt blood rush through his body; he almost felt a mix of things he could not quite identify: Was it anger? Was it lust? Was it power?

"I know why guys rape girls," he said to her, jokingly, holding her, in the middle of their long kiss. He said this as one says "aha" when discovering something for the first time. This was his first real kiss. She laughed like one endeared. She told him she had heard about the needs of boys and men, so she understood; they kissed until her father's voice could be heard calling her across the field. "Tomorrow night?" he asked before she broke free. "Yes, tomorrow. My dad will be working late, so we can stay out until 10," she said to him, smiling with a glint in her bright eyes.

Today she looked different to Paul – there was something else in her eyes. It was worry. "I need to talk to you," she said secretly, under her breath. "Let's go in the library after home room." After the morning roll call, after the pledge of allegiance, after the announcements, she found him again in his hall by his locker and led him to a semi-private table next to the magazine and newspaper shelves. They sat down. He put his hand in hers.

"No, Paul," she squirmed her hand out of his. "This is serious." He put his hand on her leg instead, in a loving rub. She blushed, giggled, and tried to act relaxed. She took a few moments to regain her composure. Paul felt power. "I think I might have given you the wrong idea," she started, putting her hands over her mouth. He listened,

purposefully blank-faced. “Yesterday -- when I said that I can stay out late with you,” she continued.

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.” He pressed her leg.

“I’m not ready, Paul – I’m not ready to, you know,” she blushed again and bowed her head. He felt the joy of making her feel dumb with his insouciance.

“So?” he asked casually, raising his eyebrows and keeping his hand on her leg. “Listen,” he patted her leg now, “I’ve got to get to English class. See you after school?” Paul started to rise when she nodded, he kissed her cheek, and he headed out of the library.

He knew she watched him go out, so he turned back. He saw instead that she was looking down. She smoothed the wrinkles that his hand imprinted on her skirt, and left the library.

By the afternoon, he could tell that her worry and insecurity had turned to annoyance and pride. She was too nice. Opening the door for him, giving him an extra sweet “hi,” and offering him a clementine. She was going to break up with him. Paul noticed these subtle, but significant, changes in Ellen. His growing disregard of her made her pity increase. As her pity augmented, so did her kindness.

He took her hand as they walked across the street toward the path that led to their afternoon hangout, the field of her old grammar school, about a mile from her house. The third time she called his name, he noticed her. “P. a. w. -- u. !!” she said firmly, annoyed. He stopped and looked at her. “I need to tie my shoe!” He was leading her too fast.

He loomed over her as she stooped down to tie her shoe. When she finished tying it, she looked up at him while seating herself on a nearby rock. She looked out upon the roaring brook. Above, through the trees, the hoarse cry of the great blue heron croaked. “It looks like it’s going to rain,” she said, looking up at the darkening sky through the trees. She looked back at him. “Paul, I need to talk to you,” she started. “I want you to know that I do really care about you” -- Paul broke her train by putting his tongue down her throat. She tried to pull away. He lifted her off the rock and thrust her against an oak’s trunk, scraping her back and thigh. He straddled her on the tree, pinning her. She could not break free. “No, Paul.”

“It’ll be fine,” he crammed his tongue into her, his low pitch too close to her ear and keeping his eyes averted from the horror that beamed out of hers.

When he let her go, she smoothed her skirt back in its place. She was quiet and shaken. He was cool and gave her his hand. “Let’s go – it’s starting to rain,” he said as large cold drops tumbled off the tree leaves and splashed on their heads and bare arms.

“I was trying to break up with you,” Ellen yelled out, and when he looked at her, he saw that tears were welling up.

Paul stopped and looked at her in disgust. “Make up your mind,” he said to her coolly, and he walked away, leaving her there to walk the mile home alone.

The Heart of a Woman

One could hear an ant breathe in the silence that descended the room. In that lull before the storm, Hadiza kept her eyes shut as her heart jerked within her chest like a captive bird struggling for freedom. She had braced herself for what was coming but still flinched, her insides shrinking.

“*What* did you say?” Ishaku’s voice was low, silky, and very deadly.

Her eyelids lifted. “I’m...pregnant, Papa,” she forced out from a dry throat.

“Hadiza!” her mother gasped, a hand at her throat. An apprehensive look in that direction was met with one of utter dismay.

Hadiza didn’t see it coming. The blow made her cry out and threw her a couple of feet to land half-sprawled against a leather hassock, her elbow burning as it scraped the leopard skin rug. Real fear leapt within her as through her blurred vision, she saw her father advance menacingly, malevolent intent in his dark gaze.

Galvanized into action, her mother sprang up from her couch and fell to her knees before her husband, her gold bangles clacking against the tiles as she clasped his feet. “My husband, do not be overly provoked. Have mercy,” she entreated, casting an imploring glance upwards.

“Mercy!” he exploded. Nevertheless, he moved no further. “Did she remember mercy when she was flat on her back-” He cut himself off, his chest heaving as he took a breath. “So...who is the culprit?”

Hadiza had recovered somewhat; her eyes were at least focusing properly. “Ismaila.”

Large hands clenched into fists. “You mean after I forbade you to see that low-life, you went against my orders and continued frolicking with that...that pauper?!”

“The...deed had been done before you gave that order, Papa. We were unaware.”

The quiet words seemed to incense him further as he began to pace in agitation. “You bring disgrace to me by consorting with one far, far below our social standing; not a hint of noble blood flows in his veins.” Ishaku turned his fury on his first wife. “You who would give me no sons, can you not control even your firstborn?”

Maimuna was now sitting on her heels, her gaze respectfully lowered. “I have failed you, my husband.”

It seemed he would say more but shook his head impatiently, as

if at the futility of it all. He speared his daughter with a look. "You will shame me no further. You will wed him before this month is done, or I will have his head." With that, he strode out of the room, muttering something about his reward for educating females. The guards outside the door moved swiftly after him. The room seemed much larger with his absence.

Mother and daughter looked at each other.

"Come," Maimuna said finally, rising gracefully. Hadiza slowly followed into her mother's chamber, watching silently as she gave terse instructions to a maid. Her cheek had begun to swell and she lowered herself into the nearest chair and grimaced as her mother touched it with a warm, damp cloth. They exchanged another measuring look.

"Mama..."

Maimuna wrung out the cloth, long tapered fingers delicate but capable. "You were very brave."

Hadiza let out a breath shaky with relief. "I thought he would end my life or hang me at the city gates...or both."

"It was a shock." There was something akin to a smile on her face. "You are your father's daughter; subsequent wives have entered this house the very same way. It baffles one why he is *so* extremely offended." She sighed at the bitterness in her voice and continued her ministrations.

"But you say nothing, Mama."

"It is not in my place to do so."

"You...do love him?" Hadiza ventured. Somehow, surviving her father's wrath with little more than a bump made her bolder than she would ordinarily have been.

"Love....yes, but it encompasses many things." Her eyes were a little sad as she thought back to the trepidation she had felt at seventeen, being wed to such an important older man, although she was by no means small in pedigree. She promptly pushed the past out of her mind. "And it took time. I fear it is not the same with your generation."

"I love Ismaila, Mama. So much."

Maimuna gave her that look again, then nodded in resignation. "You will make a beautiful bride."

They shared a conspiratorial smile. Their plan had worked perfectly.

Linda Strever

Rooted

The unrooted ones do not consider me a sentient being. Perhaps they claim a deficiency in my kind because they do not hear us protest when we are cut, nor do we speak with a language they recognize. Perhaps with their two-legged horizontal movement, they do not understand our verticality. I do not wish to defend myself on their terms. Instead, I wish to speak the truths I know. I hope that they might come to understand me with some sense beyond their ears and eyes. In spite of how they view me, I wish to span the gulf that separates us. I speak only for myself and leave others of my kind to do as they wish.

The walkers undoubtedly will want to know particular facts about me: how long I have stood here, for example. They cut us down and count our rings, which tells them nothing of importance, though a certain quantity startles them. They invariably begin to list what we have lived through: their kings and queens, their wars, their inventions. They express awe at the oldest of our kind, marveling at the measure of two-legged time we have witnessed.

I keep my awe for shedding and budding, seeds and cones, tap roots and seedlings. Those who move about so easily on their feet and in their contraptions—how can they appreciate rootedness? Yet I defy what they call gravity, lift my branches in the smallest stir of air. The distance between rings carries meaning, a way they might begin to grasp receptiveness to sunlight and water. Yet they cannot know the sensation of fine root-hairs reaching through soil and taking hold.

* * *

What kind of soul do rooted ones have? It is one thing I am sure they will want to ask.

We bend in wind, make our living from sun and rain, resist fire and drought as best we can. We make their houses and the floors they stand on, enable them to float on water. We create the outside platforms they use for grilling meat, aid them in erecting barriers to keep things in and out. We smooth and shine in the sculptor's hands, feed their fires, form vessels for their meals.

I have a soul that is rooted in one place, yet I give shade, warmth, pleasure. One answer to their inevitable question: a generous, willing soul.

* * *

One of them comes by and touches my bark. She does it each time she walks this trail: pauses and flattens her palm, extends her fingers and holds her hand against my trunk. She closes her eyes and breathes. She looks up through my branches, looks up beyond where three trunks merged and made my single one. Sometimes she turns her back, leans against me and looks out on what I see. I am getting to know her.

* * *

She is here again. I feel the soft skin of her palm against my bark, hear her breaths. In this moment I feel that I should tell her something about myself. I speak but my voice is low, so low that I fear she may not hear it, a faint vibration she may not be able to feel. But then—Jubilation!—she places her other palm against my bark. She stands like a five-pointed star, solid on those two legs, her arms stretched upward, her hands outspread like smaller stars on the ends of her arms. Her eyes remain closed.

I want to call her by name. I think her name is “Star,” no matter what she was called at birth. I tell her this and wonder if she listens.

I wish to tell her how we rooted ones communicate, how the movement of needles and leaves carries across the land, and we learn of things in the unrooted realm, pass news of their ways between us. I try to tell her this, but she opens her eyes, releases her hands, walks up the trail and disappears. These unrooted ones have no patience.

I am one of the lucky ones. I rise from protected ground, and so their saws cannot touch me. It does not mean that there is nothing to fear—there are violent storms that blow and tear, mountains that explode and shatter, burrowing ones that devour from the inside out, disease that blights without warning. There are my weaker kin whose roots do not go deep enough, who fall at the wind’s whim and take the strong with them. There are sudden fires caused by careless walkers, and knives they use to cut their names into our skin. Still, I am fortunate, standing as I am next to this trail, where I encounter the two-leggeds and can get to know them as I wish. And the fact that I am three-become-one makes my trunk triply blessed by strength. I can afford to be patient.

* * *

I am visited often by the flighted ones. They build their nests and fledge their young in my boughs. The taloned ones sight their prey from my heights. I am visited as well by the furred chatterers who harvest my cones and scatter my seed. They chase each other, hide their caches of winter food in the crux where branch meets trunk, leap as if they wish for wings. And the eight-leggeds who fly on their sturdy and flexible lines,

weave them into webs, cast their nets in my cracks and among my branches. We are compatible, I and the flighted and nearly-flighted. They have unseen roots that link them inextricably to me.

I shall have to see if there can be made some compatibility with the unrooted two-leggeds. This star-like one holds promise. I will have to see if she can be trusted.

She visits often enough. She comes in driving rain and thick, gentling snow. And so she has a kind of steadiness that I admire. Steadiness is important among my kind. She walks here day after day and never misses placing her hands against my bark. Sometimes I hear her speak in words aloud, talking with the air perhaps, or with all of us assembled here: furred, feathered, rooted. Perhaps she speaks to the soundless mosses, the curling lichens, the wet and glistening fungi and mushrooms. I watched her once make her way along the snowy trail, her boots forming the only set of prints besides those of the pawed and hooved. I watched her take care not to knock the crystals from the overhanging branches, watched her twist and duck to avoid brushing anything out of place. No disturbance but her boot marks.

In the bright season I have watched her step aside to let a scaly one slither past, or a brown-skin that usually hides beneath the fallen leaves take its halting steps across the path. I have seen her sniff the air, smile at an oozy one stretched long on its sticky track, crane her neck to glimpse the red head of the winged one who drums the dead and dying trunks. Once a flock of black-feathereds followed her along the trail, and she did not seem to mind at all, just walked amidst their loud squawks as they moved on one wing among my kind, right over her head. Many times I have seen her wait until a hooved one with her spotted young cleared the path. They do not mind her, not a bit.

And so I have come to think that she may be the one: the one who will listen.

* * *

Her steps are heavy, her eyes downcast, and when she places her palms against my skin, they seem weighted. I can feel her pulse, her warmth. I sense that she has a great need, but for what I cannot know. She stands star-like for an unusually long time, and I sense no eagerness in her to move on.

“Give me a sign,” she whispers, and I feel that she speaks directly to me. She looks up through my branches just as a band-tailed feathered one flies. She watches the white arc of its tail as it thrusts from one of my topmost boughs and meets the sky. Her eyes fill with tears, and she places her cheek against my trunk for the first time and cries.

Now I know for certain that we can trust each other. We stand skin to skin, hers soft and moist, mine hard and dry. Sap that has trickled along a furrow in my bark shines amber in the light. She touches it with the tip of her finger, so gently, traces its crooked path.

“I wish you could speak,” she says.

* * *

This is what I tell her first, when I see her look to the sky through my branches: reach for the light. She smiles when I say it, and I hope it means that she understands my language. I want to believe she does, and so I tell her more.

Reaching for the light is not a simple matter. It requires being grounded fully in the darkness, searching with delicate tendrils around rocks, past worms and fungus, to tap a hint of water so minute it could be reckoned nonexistent. I do not know if an unrooted one such as you can understand what that takes.

* * *

Perhaps one day we will easily converse. Perhaps one day she will be able to tell me if she follows what I say. A long life in one place teaches patience. I do not know what capacity for patience abides in a mover such as she. I saw her stand one-legged like a gray-blue feathered, and I surmised she might be trying to learn its brand of waiting. Yet for all its stillness, there comes a fast reward—the small swimmer it flips in its beak to go easily down its slender throat headfirst, without the impediment of fins. The gray-blue lives in a stripped-down world, at least when it is footed on the mud. Its flight I do not know, except for momentary roosting in my branches.

I am talking about the ability to wait while the merest drop of water takes its fluid time to rise all the way to bough-tips, something neither flighted nor walking ones can know. Perhaps this one—she who walks so quietly—will be able to slow down enough to divine what I mean.

I would know her story, too. I wait for her language to lean across mine enough that I might fathom what it takes to walk along this world.

* * *

I have been waiting for her. I have seen her hair change from brown to silver, so many of her years spent walking in my shadow. I remember when she first ventured a palm against my trunk. In that touch I began to know her. I believe she began to know me, too, for since then she never passes without a touch—and now a two-palmed one.

I would like to tell her how to find the moisture only darkness gives, how to raise it to the very tips of reaching for the light, how to live in both earth and sky. And I would like to hear what is gained from a multitude of places, what it takes to move and keep moving.

I will bend to meet her. I hope she can climb.

C

**CREATIVE
NON-FICTION**

Nancy Gerber

Flesh and Bone

Today I am visiting a foreign country.

For the past two years, my mother has been a dementia patient in the locked unit of a nursing home near the New York state border. My mother is in the advanced stages of dementia and cannot speak. Her gaze is blank, unfocused. She slumps in her wheelchair, limp as a rag doll. Sometimes her eyes brighten for a few moments when I try to make eye contact with her. I live for this illumination.

I take a seat next to my mother at a small table in the unit's dining room. Seated next to my mother is a nurse's aide, whose nametag identifies her as Sandra. My mother's eyes are closed, so I gently touch her shoulder and say my name in her ear. Her eyes flutter open and then snap shut.

I start calculating how much longer I should stay. Five minutes? Ten minutes? Should I leave now?

Suddenly Sandra starts to talk. "My mother is coming in two weeks," she says. Her lilting voice entices me out of my cocoon; reluctantly I start paying attention to her words.

"My mother is so wonderful," Sandra says. "I don't know how to say it. I love her."

My mother is wearing a white plastic bib stained with the remnants of her breakfast. She is wearing a black-and-white checked blouse and white pedal pushers that probably have been washed many times, an outfit I could swear does not belong to her though the nurses assure me the residents' clothing does not get mixed up in the laundry. Her face is slack, lifeless, the skin paper thin and translucent. Purple bruises have blossomed on her ankles where they knock against the metal footrests of her wheelchair. She weighs less than 100 pounds. Around her neck is a white plastic pearl necklace that looks as though it came from a child's dress-up box.

"In Haiti we don't have nursing homes. We live together," Sandra says.

I feel stricken with guilt and wonder why I put my mother in a nursing home.

"After I heard about the earthquake, I left work and went to the hospital," Sandra says. "One night. After I got out I stayed in bed for two weeks. I couldn't move. I couldn't drive. I couldn't eat. Even after I knew my mother and kids were okay, I felt sick. Even now, sometimes, I feel sick."

My mother's foot taps to the music playing on the CD player, Harry Belafonte singing, "Day. Me say day, me say day-o." The two of us used to love that song.

"It took me three days to reach my mother by phone. I couldn't get through. I didn't know what happened. To her, and my two sons. They have always lived with her. They call her mother, *manman*. Me, they call by my first name.

"When my sons came here four months ago, they showed me a picture of what happened. Their house was destroyed. Completely destroyed! There was nothing left. They lived on the streets. On the streets! I couldn't do anything to help them. Can you imagine?

"The people here helped me. The families of some of the patients took up a collection and sent money. They prayed in the chapel downstairs. You know, when you take care of patients 16 hours a day, they become your family, too. When they don't eat, you know it. When they don't sleep, you know it. You care about them.

Sandra is part of a community, I think. Where is my community? I envy Sandra, and I feel ashamed.

"My brother wants my mother to live with him and his wife. But she doesn't speak Creole, and my mother doesn't speak English. How will they understand each other? *Non*, my mother will live with me. She is mine."

I imagine Sandra and her mother at the airport, holding each other close. I think about my mother as she was when she went to concerts and movies, dressed in a sweater with a matching scarf.

Harry Belafonte is still singing, "Daylight come and me want to go home."

I bend over and kiss my mother's cheek. I wish Sandra good luck with her mother. There is nothing here for me anymore.

So I go home.

E

ESSAY

Suzanne Kamata

Polka Dots, Forever, With Love

I'm wondering how I can get out of the promise that I made to my twelve-year-old daughter, Lilia.

A few weeks ago, I invited her to go with me to Osaka, two and half hours away by bus, to take in an art exhibition. The latest creations of the internationally renowned Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama – she of the polka dots, the pumpkins, *the polka-dotted pumpkins* – would be on display at the National Museum of Art in Osaka until the end of March. I'd been intrigued by this artist for awhile, and had a Yayoi Kusama-related writing project in mind, so this relatively nearby exhibit seemed like the perfect opportunity to get to know her work better. At first, I'd been planning on going alone, maybe while the twins were at school, or while they were stashed at their aunt's house, but it occurred to me that Lilia was old enough to enjoy and appreciate Kusama's art. Plus, if we went together, I wouldn't have to worry about getting back in time to pick her up from school, or asking my husband or my sister-in-law to change their plans and look after her. My son would be okay left alone for a few hours, but my daughter is multiply disabled.

Of course, when I proposed this outing, Lilia was eager to go. Art! A bus trip to Osaka! Polka dots! What's not to like?! So we made plans. But as Lilia enters spring break and the exhibit draws to a close, I find myself dreading the trip. I doubt my daughter's capacity to keep herself entertained on the long bus ride to Osaka, and again on the trip home. If I go by myself, I could read, daydream, doze, but with Lilia along, I might have to chat - in sign language - for most of the trip. It would hardly be relaxing.

Also, I've been fatigued. A visit to my gynecologist the week before indicated that I am a tad anemic – nothing serious, just a prelude to the Big Change – but simply going up the stairs in our house leaves me winded recently. I'd probably have to push Lilia's wheelchair up inclines. I might even have to carry her. At the thought of physical exertion, I just want to cancel everything and stay home. But Lilia reminds me.

“We're going to look at paintings tomorrow!” she signs.

“Um, yeah,” I say, casting about for some excuse.

On top of all of my other concerns, we aren't really prepared. I was planning on showing her a documentary I'd bought about Kusama's life and work, and then discussing it with her. I've read the artist's autobiography, *Infinity Net*, so I know that she made macaroni sculptures

because she was afraid of food, and phallic sculptures because she was afraid of sex. I know that due to mental illness, she has lived in a psychiatric hospital in Tokyo for the past thirty years or so, that she credits her art with keeping her alive. If she did not paint, she says, she would kill herself. I've done a bit of research about the artist and I have some context, but Lilia doesn't, not yet. Maybe we aren't ready for this.

Then again, it was me who wanted to see the Kusama exhibit in the first place. If I don't take advantage of this opportunity, I'll regret it later. And how can I allow myself to be defeated by a little fatigue? Friends and family older than me are running marathons, for Pete's sake.

On top of that, my daughter hasn't been out of the house in three days. I remind myself that Kusama, who works with simple motifs, could be potentially inspiring to Lilia, an aspiring artist herself. Although some paintings and drawings make Lilia twist her cheek with her thumb and forefinger – the Japanese sign for “difficult” – she could actually imitate the dots, the line drawings, the macaroni glued onto mannequins. Also, like my daughter, Kusama paints in spite of various challenges.

I want Lilia to understand the considerable hurdles the artist has had to overcome to become a world class artist. As a child, Kusama experienced hallucinations. She heard the voices of flowers and animals. She grew up in a wealthy, but dysfunctional family, and her mother forbade her from painting. She did it anyway. She even found a way to go to New York City where she made a name for herself.

Lately I've had to literally drag my daughter out of bed in the mornings. Although Lilia can't walk or hear without her cochlear implant, she is physically capable of throwing back the covers, getting out of bed, going to the toilet, washing her face and changing her clothes *all by herself*. Even so, she has been lazy of late, making me wish for a winch and a crane. Now that it's spring break, I don't really blame her. But on the morning of our expedition, she is at her DIY best. She rises even before I do, and composes a funky outfit – a black shirt with white polka dots layered over a white T-shirt with sparkles and a big pink heart, striped turtleneck, black and white striped tights, and blue and yellow striped socks. Perfect, I think, for a viewing of the art of Yayoi Kusama. She prepares her Hello Kitty rucksack and a handbag, making sure that she has her pink wallet, paper and pen, and books to read. She's ready to go before I am.

I didn't buy bus tickets in advance, as I'd originally intended, but I manage to get front row seats, the most accessible seats on the bus, both there and back. Thanks to the Japanese welfare system, Lilia's fare is half price.

We will also be able to get into the museum for free – Lilia, as a person with special needs, me as her companion.

When the bus arrives, Lilia manages to hoist herself up the steps and into her seat with almost no assistance. I show the bus driver how to collapse the wheelchair, and he stows it in the belly of the bus.

There are not a lot of passengers now at mid-morning, and the traffic flows freely. It's a gorgeous day – sunny, albeit a bit chilly. Out the window we can see the lush verdure of the hills of Naruto. We pass the resort hotels along the beach, and then we're crossing the bridge that spans the Straits of Naruto where enormous whirlpools form when the tides change.

Lilia occupies herself with her book, her drawing. I read for awhile, then feeling guilty, I propose a round of *shiritori*, a Japanese word game. I let her go first. She writes "momo" (peach). I have to follow with a word beginning with the final syllable. I scribble "mokuteki" (goal) underneath. We take turns another ten or so times before Lilia gets tired of playing. She isn't interested in studying right now. She just wants to be left alone.

We cross over to Awaji Island, with its many onion fields, and then come upon the Akashi Bridge that connects to Honshu, the largest island in the archipelago. The glittering city of Kobe sprawls along the coast, easing into Osaka, our destination.

Once we reach Osaka station, we approach a cab. I worry that the driver will balk at the wheelchair, but he is kind. "Take your time" he urges, as I motion Lilia into the back seat. So far, so good. Within minutes, we're pulling up to the museum, and then we're in the lobby, preparing for a look at "The Eternity of Eternal Eternity."

One might think that Kusama's oeuvre would be inappropriate for children. After all, at one time she was best known for her phallic sculptures, gay porn films, and for encouraging nudity in public settings as a form of protest against war. However, most of her paintings and sculptures are, in fact, child-friendly. The artist herself, who wears a bright red wig and polka dot dresses, retains an innocence in spite of her illness – or perhaps because of it. Much of her work is playful and whimsical. Also, children are more inclined than most adults to be attuned to an irrational fear of macaroni. In any case, my daughter is far from being the youngest visitor to the exhibit. Mothers and children in strollers fill the lobby, and share the elevator with us as we descend into the underground museum.

The first gallery features a series rendered in black magic marker on white canvas entitled "Love Forever." I hear a little boy say, "*Kowai!*" ("That's scary!") I'm not sure if he's referring to the

proliferation of centipede-like figures in “Morning Waves” or perhaps the repetition of eyes in “The Crowd,” but he gets it; he feels Kusama’s phobia, the intention that led to the work.

The next room is white with giant tulips dotted with large red circles – an experiential work entitled “With All My Love for the Tulips, I Pray Forever.” Lilia is delighted with the surreal space, the colors, the giant tulips. We take several pictures, then move on to “My Eternal Soul,” in which many of the figures that appear in the black and white series re-appear in vivid pinks, oranges, yellows and blues. For a Westerner like me, these colors and images seem joyful and exuberant, but in Japan, where mothers hesitate to dress their children in bright clothes, and married women tend to don somber grays and navies, such hues are unsettling.

Lilia likes the colors. She pauses before the bright paintings, then reads the somewhat baffling titles. “Fluttering Flags,” which applies to red flag-like images, is fairly straightforward. However the vibrant mood of a pink canvas covered with lushly-lashed eyes, a spoon, a purse, a shoe, and women’s profiles contrasts with its somber title, “Death is Inevitable.”

Finally, we watch a short film documenting Kusama’s life and work. There are no subtitles, but Lilia can see the artist at work, the assistant who eases her in and out of her chair, and who helps her to prepare her canvases.

“See?” I want to tell her. “We all need a hand from time to time.” But I don’t want to disturb her concentration, so I’m silent and still, letting her take in whatever she can by herself, and then we move on to the gift shop. I buy a catalog of the exhibit for us to look at later at our leisure before we head for the café for cake.

On the way home, I feel pleasantly exhausted, but hopeful. The trip was not as arduous as I’d anticipated. I’m also encouraged by Kusama herself, by the way she’s found a way to make a living – and to stay alive – through art, in spite of everything. I’m not pushing my daughter towards a career in the fine arts. As a writer, I know how tough it can be. I don’t necessarily expect Lilia to become famous, or even to earn money through her drawings or paintings, but I feel sure that having art in her life will bring her joy and satisfaction. It will enrich her life and give her a means of expression.

I’m hoping that with today’s expedition, I’ve pried the world open just a little bit wider for my daughter – and for myself. I start planning future trips in my head. The two of us can go to the Fashion Museum in Kobe, and the island of Naoshima. To the United States. To Paris!

Back home, on the island of Shikoku, my daughter is eager to tell her father and brother about the polka-dotted tulips, the mirrors and lights, and the chocolate cake. When she's explained enough, she signs, "Paper, please."

I give her a stack of white sheets, and she begins to draw.

Is a wedding a marriage?

Dolls. Shirley Temple's wooden body was grasped as I danced around shaking my straight blond hair almost as if it were Temple's curls. Deanna Durbin was taller and came with a floral garment; as a very-little girl, I sang using Durbin as a partner. The bride doll! Not to be used for play, dancing, singing, she was a visual part of the imagined future. She represented a fairy tale complete with Prince Charming, a magnificent gown that would only be worn once and no one would comment about the waste of money, she was the symbol of a magic day where I would be totally center-stage and everyone around me would ooh and ah, and, as childhood stories, I would then live happily-forever-after.

Calla lilies. My mother's portrait, that adorned a wall in the master bedroom, was done with transparent oil paint over a huge photograph. Her dad, a professional photographer, recorded the innocence and expectation in her eyes. A bouquet of Calla lilies appeared as white bells, at least to me when I stared at that vision. Her veil seemed unimportant when her dad captured maidenhood's last moments.

I told my parents that I'd be married before my older sister, pranced around showing off my pretty face and perfect figure just enjoying my sense of self and sibling rivalry. They told me that the oldest had to be wed first. Well, I'd never learned that in Sunday school but maybe it was some custom carried down and no one remembers why. I won't wait forever, I exploded at age 14; the bride doll was still on my dresser as an adornment, along with tangible items from my horseback riding time. Two months after I turned 18, she, 2 ½ years my senior, wed and she was totally lovely in satin and Chantilly lace with a crown of pearls holding her veil. Rose petals were strewn on a white runner and the union was made under a tent of flowers. Her groom sang to her in his magnificent tenor voice, and that personalized the magic for both of them.

Marriage isn't a wedding. I didn't yet know there was a difference.

Religious and social structure spelled out right and wrong, and pressure to follow the norms ensued. Girls didn't wear lipstick until grade 9. Skirts or dresses were proper attire, and even the carrying of white gloves made an outfit correct; this was also a rule when I was an undergrad in New England and 'slacks' could only be worn on Saturdays until 4pm. As a coed, even a married woman whose spouse was in Korea

fighting could not live in the dorm with maidens. So marriage had a mystique; weddings were still magic days.

Four weeks after I turned 20, my mother received a different title: widow. To many, it seemed like a disease that could be catching and the very same people who danced at my older sister's wedding were now turning their backs on a woman no longer part of a 'couple'. She'd been his princess and I'd only seen the happy-ending-union, but the ending was sudden death after 24 years of marriage, shunning of the widow. Mourning was unreal, but real.

I commuted to grad school in New York; my fiancé was a medical student in Tennessee. It never crossed our minds to stay together when I flew down to see him; we were products of our society, and physical relations were not to be done until after the legal document. We honored that upbringing.

My gown of lace and beads was so wide it occupied an entire corner when I saw it on display at a Fifth Avenue store. Even two hoops didn't do the fabric's width justice. The long lace fingerless gloves (now in the Smithsonian; the gown is in The Strong Museum) were donned for added modesty during the rite, so I could have the circular band slipped on the pointer finger. Hand-rolled veiling was affixed to the crown my older sister had worn. My younger sister, 18, knew she'd eventually be a bride and also without a father to share this and other of life's milestones.

I remember Cinderella only at the ball and not when her coach turned back to a pumpkin. Marriage was not a wedding; there was morning breath, soiled clothes to launder and then iron, meals to prepare, routines to adjust to with use of the shower, apartment to clean, getting to and from my teaching job without a car, typing my spouse's med school papers and editing his research while I also graded papers and made out lesson plans. There were acquaintances to entertain, arguments to resolve, learning how to be a couple, when to have a sense-of-humor, issues with expenses, and the expectations of being a good wife that had been repeated even in my undergrad Sociology courses. Weddings were fantasy happenings; marriage was work. When overwhelmed, my mother guided me with wisdom and memory, keeping her personal loneliness to herself.

The Marriage and Family Life course I got three credits for so long ago reads as dated as outhouses and unheated log cabins.

Hollywood films that once couldn't have two script-married people in the same bed now have nudity, first-date coupling, clothing exposing bodies. Our politicians and sports' figures assume 'I'm sorry' will vindicate them from affairs. Many couples prefer living together as an alternative to a legal document that is messy to dissolve if/when

they've had enough 'togetherness'. Bride dolls are different from Barbie, and wedding gowns are designed strapless like prom dresses; Barbie and Ken go to the prom.

January 11, 2012, The Wall Street Journal, page D1, had an article by Jeffrey Zaslow that noted "...wedding gowns remain a symbol of hope." Yet he mentions a research report: "...39% of Americans believe marriage is 'becoming obsolete'."

Are today's young people given information about marriage? Are they told about balancing a checkbook while balancing two separate personalities, and how to work out both? Do they know it's okay to argue productively, laugh at mistakes learning about one another, to feel tired or overwhelmed, to make time to walk and look at Nature to share its beauty while distracting from the everyday? Have they tools for blending lives, or is society still promoting satin and lace, and happily-ever-after?

Is marriage obsolete? How can we, not in the 'shoes' of those growing up today, answer for them? We've disposed of Beta tapes, and land-line telephones easily, and cell phones have altered everyday lives... just notice how many are speaking while walking a street/ store/ supermarket. These young are connected with Facebook and not contact. They text rather than talk. Television airs violence, sex, reality shows, and they'd be bewildered by a re-run of "Father Knows Best". Swimwear is brief, and dressing up is often in tight jeans and high heels with a sequined sleeveless tee. Some operations are done with robots; landing on the moon was so-yesterday. What have we passed down thorough our actions or faith to assist them with choices? And are the ones we made better, worse, or merely different from 21st century young?

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B

BOOK REVIEWS

Lisa Fraser

A Review of *Women Writing on Family: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing*

Carol Smallwood and Suzann Holland, editors; foreword, Supriya Bhatnagar, Director of Publications/Editor, Association of Writers & Writing Programs

The Key Publishing House Inc.
Toronto, Ontario
\$27.99 (paperback) 2012

ISBN 978-1-926780-13-9, 343 pages

There is a long history of women supporting each other in matters of family. Likewise, writing is a time-honored activity of women, particularly writing relating to home and family. *Women Writing on Family: Tips on Writing, Teaching and Publishing*, edited by Carol Smallwood and Suzann Holland, brings these together in a well-rounded resource that provides support for women of today who are writing about family and related issues.

Like the letter-writers among our great-grandmothers, modern day authors must strike a balance between honesty and privacy in writing that will be shared with others. Several contributors to *Women Writing on Family* address this issue in thought-provoking chapters that help writers determine what to share and when to share it. Looking at this balance from the perspectives of both author and family members, as Lisa Romeo does in her chapter on writing about one's spouse, "For Better, For Worse, For Publication", helps the reader consider all sides and come to a decision in this highly personal question.

Diarists from past eras jotted their notes in between household tasks, and for many women who write today this is still the case. A half dozen chapters provide concrete tips for authors who want to make writing a priority in their already busy lives. In one of these, Lela Davidson discusses making the best of short sessions in her chapter, "Laundry, Life, and Writing". Another section covers how to use experiences from daily life and family history as jumping-off points for writing.

In the tradition of passing along knowledge from one woman to another, the writing exercises and strategies shared in *Women Writing on*

Family will help beginning and experienced writers develop their craft. Contributors bring a wide range of backgrounds and experience, and this allows readers to explore new ways of expressing themselves in their writing. Whether the reader is considering writing a childhood memoir, crafting poetry, or posting to a blog, there is guidance available from those who have achieved success in that format.

Women of today have the freedom to publish their work that was often denied to earlier generations, and having someone to help navigate this ever-changing landscape is a boon. Chapters on marketing, working with an editor, making the most of conferences, and self-publishing contain nuts-and-bolts advice that can save the reader time and effort.

Writing for publication is not for the faint of heart, and writing about highly personal issues can make one feel particularly vulnerable. By hearing stories of women who have undertaken this journey and flourished, writers may be inspired to take the next step with their own writing.

Taken together, the fifty-five chapters in *Women Writing on Family* are a writing group in a book, a resource that can increase writers' knowledge, skill, and confidence. It promotes a feeling of community among writers who may never meet, yet still provide support and guidance in the manner of women throughout time.

Kendra Weddle Irons

A Review of *Reading Women: How the Great Books of Feminism Changed My Life*

by Stephanie Staal (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011): 275 pages, \$15.99 soft cover. Also available as an e-book.

My Midwest university curriculum in the late 1980s did not include courses in feminism, or if it did, I was remarkably oblivious to the fact. It has only been through my own reading, mostly during summer breaks when the day-to-day realities of teaching subside, that I have been introduced to our feminist foremothers whose diligent and courageous activism created the opportunities we now too frequently take for granted.

While I am gratified for the stories and wisdom those early feminist writers provide, I often wonder how I might have constructed my life differently if I had encountered them as a young co-ed? I imagine how women's studies would have supplanted religious studies, my personal interest in the subject being piqued in a way religion didn't provide in part because I seldom was exposed to female authors or female teachers.

Although Stephanie Staal was exposed to feminist texts as an undergraduate, she contemplates a related question: how do these authors speak to her ten years after graduation, with a husband a child in tow? Staal, a graduate of Barnard College and Columbia's graduate school, and author of *The Love They Lost* as well as numerous publications appearing in *Cosmopolitan*, *Glamour*, and *The Washington Post*, among others, provides a compelling narrative of the nexus between the realities of lived experiences and the ideals of feminism.

In the midst of turmoil created by a sudden move, a baby, and a bad case of writer's block, Staal felt the oppressive weight of "what if?" She wondered if she had sacrificed her feminist ideals by her marriage and family. While it was true she and her husband had worked out a seemingly equal distribution of familial labor, she felt the demands of motherhood more acutely. And as she responded to claims on her time, her work became less fulfilling and more of a nagging presence to her already overcrowded schedule.

Nudged by a feeling she had somehow lost her way, Staal decided to return to Barnard to participate in the feminist courses where she had previously been exposed to the great literature of women's

studies. Perhaps, she thought, hearing these voices again would enable her to move beyond her current state of inertia and doubt.

Over the course of two years, Staal drank from the well of feminist discussion and feminist texts. She explored how her responses to these mostly familiar texts were different from her first exposure. Listening with a new framework, she began to understand her life and work in a new light.

Part of what Staal gained by this re-reading was the impetus to make a change. An earlier move from New York City to the suburbs where she had never really felt at home was reversed by a return to the city. Too, there was a softening toward her self, a realization that feminism required practical compromise and that she could be a feminist, and a mother, and a spouse. And, that her embodiment of this identity did not need to create an inner tension, but rather could be expressed as a process: a movement with ebbs and flow, with fluidity and flux.

While this book is difficult to put down because of its narrative pace—we're told, after all, in the title that she will find herself—Staal's perceptive insights culled from reading these texts again are excellent too. As she moves through the waves of feminism, Staal embraces both her journey and the challenges of a feminist conviction. Her poignant conclusion, one that emerges through the reading of a contemporary blog by an Iraqi woman, is that feminism is about having and embracing our voices and using them to contribute to society, working to affect change where it is needed. In other words, feminism fails if it has not lived up to its claims: empowering women to lend their voices in support of others.

As interesting and engaging as this narrative is, one should not overlook the appendices. Not only are there discussion questions for book groups, but Staal has included her reading list.

Reading Women, in the end, is not just about women. Rather, it is a call to embrace who we are as persons, as part of the human experience. And, if we embrace the conviction that to be human is to respect the humanity in others, then we must always turn our focus from ourselves toward others, working to create justice for all people in all places. Staal's outstanding book can help us take the first step.

Lynne McEniry

A review of ***SHIMMER***
by Judy Kronenfeld

WordTech Communications
Copyright Judy Kronenfeld, 2011
ISBN: 978-1936370542
112 pages
\$20.00

In *Shimmer*, her third collection of poetry, Judy Kronenfeld visits and revisits sacred times and places. From the global and communal to the local and intimately personal, she boldly confronts the wars of her lifetime. This collection of poems is a glint, a beam, a shimmer in the eyes of its readers, providing ways – both hauntingly familiar and new – to consider illness and death, the body, mothering, war, prayer, and living in exile.

From the first poem, "Ex-New Yorker Remembers Her Natural Landscape," it is explicit that war is a natural landscape for Kronenfeld. New York is a "fortress city" of "battlements of near tenements." The familiar place of home is also a place of danger and exile: "Oh my city of sorrows."

And, there is always the paradox to help us somehow make sense of it all. In "All Comfortless:" "Here the protect him / from falls, but do not protect / him." Then, in "Exiles from Heaven:" "called back from exile / into the exiles' community."

From New York to the Middle East, to her father's deathbed, to rooms in her own home, and even to heaven, Kronenfeld takes us to the frontlines of her wars, personal and political. The poems are the vehicles through which we navigate these tragedies and take us to the places where they merge. This happens in "Epoch" where a moment between a grandfather ready for worship and a grandson playing with action figures, "age / to you, old country to / the new." The poem carries us between the present moment, the moment of the grandmother's death in the recent past, and to the wars of the grandfather's distant past. Likewise, in "This War," the reader travels cross the globe:

Here, I leave the clear and beautiful
aisles, I take home my cold, clean
orange juice, so sweet in dusty

throat, my glistening chicken
dripping into its plastic pan,

though I am ashamed
to live them because Yonatan's mother cries,
because there is only dust
in Qana, because my own children
are so safe, for now
on an American Coast.

And, *Shimmer* is also a collection of resilience and beauty, of seeing the glitter, glimmering beauty in the natural world, the sacred, in our most meaningful relationships – with human beings, and with a beloved dog. From "Thaw:"

And made me think
ambergris,
made me think
waterfall,
then diverted me with
false aralia, before rearding me
with
sweet gum

Shimmer is an experience with the tragic and the glorious places that both our sense of sight and the mind's eye can take us when we open wide and face it. This collection of poems travels between and among the places and experiences where a woman is her most vulnerable and alone in the midst of tragedy, to a place of loving communion with others and the natural world, creating moments of sacredness that bring about clarity, wisdom, and a common understanding. Mary Oliver said that a poem must have an "authentic body." Judy Kronenfeld has gathered many such poems in this collection.

Madeline Tiger

To Make the “Ordinary Shine”

A review of ***HARD BARGAIN***

by Karen Blomain

Foothills Publishing

P.O. Box 68

Kanona, NY 14856

Copyright Karen Blomain, 2009

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\$16.00

“...For surely it is a magical thing for a handful of words, artfully arranged, to stop time. To conjure a place, a person, a situation in all its specificity and dimensions. To affect us and alter us, as profoundly as real people and things do.”

from “My Life’s Sentences” by Jhumpa Lahiri, *The New York Times Sunday Review*, p. 1, March 18, 2012.

Familiar small town locales are more than “stage sets” for this new collection of Karen Blomain’s poems. As if alive, the towns and countryside of eastern Pennsylvania exist at the heart of *Hard Bargain*. A reader finds herself inside these towns, or along the river, or watching trains winding down the tracks of the Lackawanna. The Susquehanna, slim here, twists through its own poem, formed to show this “serpentine” going out of sight. (p.48)

The images are so specific—down to the furze and flowers along riverbanks and in longtime front gardens, the old houses, the parks and hills, the old movie theater, the campus buildings of a local college—that we are there, long ago, and again later, and now, reading, watching them age and fade, watching time pass.

The poem “Allentown” describes “this world, adazzle in crystal,/ the sudden drift of woodsmoke, a horizon obscure/ as the future...” and these lines lead to the thematic prayer of hope that energizes these poems, especially in the sections concerned with the poet’s youth and her moving away from the region: “...the hopes we consume like air,/ everything we hold our breath for.”

In “Tracks,” (p. 49) after describing “a walk we know/ so well we hardly see the sluice,/ the brace of ash, thistle, asters...” the poet observes

old “spikes, plates/ or studs, ikons of another time, when the track ribboned here,/ glint amid the cinders...” and marvels at what she has suddenly noticed “or didn’t know...until morning air and new/ light made the ordinary shine.” Just what these poems do!

Past and future are real dimensions as well as abstractions; yet, with brilliant irony, the poems take place as if every incident is now, and “now” is timeless. Jhumpa Lahiri’s words say just what these poems achieve: “...a handful of words, artfully arranged, ...stop time...”

Reading *Hard Bargain* we are given glimpses into the personal “story” of one woman; we become conscious of the social boundaries she endured during her youth in small town life and restrictive family life. At the same time, we are increasingly aware of her talent at making poems that brings this world to life. We see that “it’s the missing, the partially obscured, invention/ after meaning that makes any sense at all,” the poet asserts to open this collection of her poems in “Reading by Moonlight”. “Invention” does shed light and discovers many depths of meaning.

Of the wonderful range of poems in *Hard Bargain*, my favorites are the lyrical reminiscences of adolescent years. Not sentimental, they are as sure as the familiar houses and yards. Even in the semi-formal lines of “Summers,” with its grim images of Main Streets “boarded up or leveled for/ more parking spots, a town/ tamed and dwarfed...” are the quintessential dreams of the young: “None of us sure how to leave/ or if California existed,” but all of “us” yearning, they sneak off to movies to imagine the world beyond them; they study “how lives might pirouette/ upon a well-turned phrase.” (P. 46)

As a teenager suffering harsh criticism and regulations, the poet needed to wander, to learn the world. “...I wanted anything from the world/ outside that she (her mother) so feared. And I so longed for.”(p. 10)

One of Karen Blomain’s triumphs of irony occurs when the necessity of leaving and the excitement of that venture are made plain, yet the poems also show the magnetic pull back in the other direction. The double direction is tracked all through the collection. Moving isn’t easy; an early poem indicates the necessity of bravado: “At night, every window / warns: don’t go./ You’ll be sorry... But the wind/ has shifted and pulls/ me to another place. / Like all creatures/ with hollow bones/ I have to go.” Later, the poignant poem “Summer” ends with a recognition of “time’s tricky mirror” and the town’s “power to call us home.”

While marking this record of a lifetime turning point, the poet manages a charming play of words and images, as if, with her own pen’s

“pirouettes”, she were reflecting herself in that “tricky mirror,” as she was going on.

Strenuous poems of leave-taking are followed by poems with scenarios from Russia, Ireland, and Mexico. Even in these distances we learn the landscape’s character as we meet the colleagues-becoming-friends working (and dancing!) in the varied locales.

There are remembered cars and many roads throughout this collection, leading back in time and place, and going slowly forward. In a visceral motif of riding on trains, a landscape “streams/ Beyond the window” as “we hurtle by.” This poem is also cleverly referring to lovers. The poems give us the presence—the “now”—of then.

People have lived for many generations in the home-base region . So has the poet’s family, having emigrated in several historic waves, carrying traditions of their old cultures, notable in the stories and wishes of the characters who make telling appearances in the poems—her mother, who made gussied-up pretensions to fashion and treated the young poet angrily; but who—in a later poem, in her dotage, when she wishes for an excursion to Atlantic City, the daughter takes her on a brave outing, and we see her finding “mercy” by the end of this remarkable poem, the “Safari”. The beloved grandmother appears in several poems as a sustaining force, and finally in a chilling image of her drowning: “...don’t know/ if I doze and dream/or just recall/ my grandmother’s hair / fanned out in the water/ behind her... Why did she let down her life so early? ..exhausted, I swim/ after her...” From beyond her death we find that this puzzling, sad grandmother has given the title of this whole collection: “Life’s a hard bargain,/ she said.”

There are significant images of elderly women— some tending their gardens, one, a fellow diner at Dunmore’s Burger King counter, “...her face close, rouge slanted/ toward a smile and eyebrows/ dashed across a matte foundation/ like eager little wings.” The poet is reading Stafford at this road-stop and feels sure that “Bill” would have also found her “as interesting...as a traveler on the Paris/ Metro...” and the anecdote goes on, with the woman shuffling in her handbag for coupons.

There are campers in the woods that the poet explored with friends in childhood, where the children imagine them adventurously as they rifle through the tenters’ belongings.

There are fellow professors in the college where Blomain had taught for years; they appear with her in a series about faculty meetings, the closing of an old building, the stress of retirement. Some of these are dedicated to her colleagues, but some make vivid the students in her classrooms, who were, we know from these scenes, her own true teachers; some, too, were lost in the “action” of the Viet Nam War. Thus,

these scenes connect the poems to the difficult world beyond Pennsylvania towns. A quiet, but dramatic scene at the war memorial that bears the names of the dead harkens back to one “boy’s” remembered childhood in the neighborhood, and his family, then and now... all the way to his children. Memorable.

There are poems concerned with the German horror and other tragedies. Death is not a stranger to this volume, but it is not melodramatized: death is wondered at, and acknowledged, bluntly. There are several specific elegies and narratives of human loss, including a touching little poem “Memento” about driving a distance through the Poconos wearing her father’s black hat (and her mother’s “best scarf,” we learn as a second thought!), but grief is not the central focus of the work. She is on her way to the lawyer’s office, she has closed the family house, she is—again—taking leave. But, expecting an image of “home,” she finds “an empty socket... painful/ as the place the tongue/ visits a missing molar.” Morbid? No, witty; it’s a prosodic turn, and there are other exacting surprises in the last lines of this poem. The writer’s wit combines with –and carries– the complex and very serious human emotions. Another sign of talent for paradox and irony is evident. Despite the part it plays, Death is not the major “character”; and when death appears in a refrain in one of the formal poems, the presentation is not a woeful *adventure* but has by now become part of the prosodic *venture*. Even when we meet a survivor of the Holocaust, he appears as a heroic minor character in the images here, reading “quietly in the secret syllables he used/ those months away...”; then, a symbolic figure of a rabbi in an old photo sets the old man at prayer beside those who were lost.

We see the people themselves, the horror is not forefront; it doesn’t need to be. The people need to be here for us. Similarly, in “Memento” we do not see the parents’ deaths, we see the poet— driving again! On the road, with Scranton in the rear view mirror “in murky twilight” and the poet, moving on, wearing her father’s hat. The motifs of this collection appear in just such quick glimpses. Only in the witty poem of the “Safari” to Atlantic City do we see the mother dying.

World history is engaged necessarily: suffering and survival, world-over, are recognized from the beginning. In “Time Lapse: November 22, 1963” we see the poet hearing the news: “...The year emptying softly,/ almost gone before we knew what we’d recall.” Again, the poet makes past and future a part of the very present of the poem: recalling the national tragedy, she is studying the picture of her new baby girl, taken that same day, and remembering how she tended to that precious child: “And I, her subject, half listened as the television news

broke in./ Shocked into silence...” then. The poem can tell it for her now: the angelic baby, “glutted with milk,” her eyelids “flutter then close over...” The mother watching as she slept, now describing her “pearl of spit; fragile as the world,” while creating the poem that marks the president’s terrible death. Birth and death. Private world, public. What a wide scope this book manages, with delicacy.

Even when looking at World War II photos of young lovers with “...No inkling of war clouds/ their clashing, the armor of youth strewn on the calculating/ floor of history’s bedrooms,” the poem preserves it all—love and carnage.

In many poems Karen Blomain gives the reader metaphors of the setting, the season, and human history, as in the November 22nd poem: “Warm for November, the world paused/ then a slow exhale before the long dive/ toward winter. The year emptying softly...”

These connections hardly seem metaphorical, although the poet is deft with metaphor, as well as other devices that seem to occur naturally in her work. In “Winter Eyes” (p. 35) we see “Across the lake pine trees/ Tuck dark strands of sky/ Under icy boughs” and then, smoothly, there is a picnic easily pictured: “We...Scrape back our chairs/ For another family story.” And the reader is in a long past scene of a family outing in the poet’s youth. Her image of ancestors merges into the scene and leads to a metaphysical ending: The “story” is “Told this night by old ones/ Whose winter eyes/ Are the stars we see by.”

The formal poems *[see note] also seem natural, feel necessarily driven, as do her variations on villanelles and those of four-line stanzas which weave repeated lines down through the poems. (These seem to be classical European inventions for the phrasing and metric challenge.) Only the repetitions begin to remind us of the prosody at work. A reader comes, from deep inside the stanzas, almost saying the lines aloud, to admire the serious work of making well-wrought poems. Even the rhymed couplets fit their assignment of dramatics and wit. “Old Broads, “ in yet another, more open form, becomes a jazz injunction, syncopating the announcement of women’s power and inviting “little sister” to follow: “It’s our turn to take / Our time. / And when yours comes, little sister, You’ll be glad like always/ That/ We / Were here/ First.” See how the spondees strut and declaim! It is a particular pleasure to flag this poem on this day of mourning for Adrienne Rich, sister in poetics and feminism for so many of us. Karen Blomain understood that work and certainly kept up that tradition.

Karen Blomain shows the relationship of nature and human experience. She gives us the actual landscape and, at the same time, presents us with the people, in vivid flashes and in quiet contemplation

—people she has seen, people she has known. We know them. She does the same with linking childhood and adult experience, long-ago feelings and mature awareness. Seasons and ages link.

A reader barely notices how the metaphoric moves into the surreal in some of the lyrics of love and appreciation, but in “Luna,” with the moon as “Our only child” we are reminded from the start; because of the lilt of the lines and the certainty of the feelings here, a reader willingly accepts the fusion, it’s in the light details, as “you sigh and mumble/ when the world is still.”

When the moon tires and leaves, there we are: “...you/ shudder, wake, smile/ and hold out your arms.” This is a mature pairing of appreciative lovers.

Even in bickering (“Winter Argument,” p. 70) with a travel metaphor from the imagery of driving, again, “that weeklong mile” (sic) the poem plays with the scene of nature and the human; and it gives the quick back and forth of bickering in speedy rhymed couplets. The wit here indicates an understanding of how their argument flares and hums, up to “A snap, a pause, then we let it down.”

In the series of poems about teaching experiences there is nostalgia for that career, yet realism about moving on. Many classroom scenes that give witty observations or bits of advice for students are so often for herself (and colleagues, and readers); from “Intact” (p. 15), for example, appropriately placed early in the book, we “hear” advice given to students against taking a “guy-talk poet” as their right model and guide in poetics and attitude: **“Cast new metaphors”** she advises them, **“from the wide net of your own intelligence. Help each other/ haul them in, hand over hand, gleaming and slippery, elusive,/ magical and ordinary as thick steam over a bowl of rice.”** Urging them to **“refuse any role, no matter how sweet,/ that doesn’t lead you into the new world with all your parts/ intact, clear-eyed and singing at your own speed.”** And isn’t that what Karen Blomain has done in her own career! And aren’t these lines appropriate to the honoring of Adrienne Rich that we want to offer in this moment.

The last poem takes the view from her study window (at “824 Wheeler” in Scranton) at Christmas time and becomes a sweetly appreciative poem of children passing by holiday signs as seen from their bus windows, and the whole scene being observed by the poet from upstairs in her study. The driver of the children “slows and glides into the future.” As in many of these smooth poems, a reader barely realizes when the metaphor is moving the mind’s eye.

“The wise everywhere know/ you can make any trip this way.” These last lines remind us how the collection has traveled, in tune with its

themes, through countries and hometown places, far and near, through stages of life, and through sustaining visions.

**footnote*

“The poet makes the form work for him; he does not work for the form” ----Mark Jarman in an article on Michael Dickman in the journal of the Academy of American Poets

Madeline Tiger

“WHAT LIES BENEATH”

A review of *WHAT MATTERS* by Adele Kenny

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“ *Language itself, not its emotive referent or expressive content, is the intrinsic aesthetic component of poetry.* ”

—Edith Grossman, from her introduction to *The Solitudes* by Luis de Gongora, quoted by David Orr in “Ways of Saying,” *New York Times Book Review*, December 11, 2011.

The poems in *WHAT MATTERS* by Adele Kenny are carefully wrought, held together by their images and the “music of ordinary speech.” The diction is spare, yet full of implications: the lines ride beyond initial impressions. If you enter this book expecting a narrative of survival you will be surprised: many of these poems do indeed deal with breast cancer and the writer’s surgery; but this is truly a collection of celebrations—of making poems, of river and sky, of life every day, and even a celebration of sorrow.

The reader is of course drawn into experiences of loss and medical threats. Several poems detail, frankly, Adele Kenny’s operation for breast cancer—her fears, her pain and struggle, her determination. Finally, the reader feels the deep breath of relief with her emergence into light and a spiritual lightness. The ordeal of coping with breast cancer is certainly a major topic, but the poems grip life with such assurance that they are more than reflections on endurance, they are detailed expressions of love. Throughout the book many images are metaphors for life: even in an early poem, children touching neighborhood trees feel the sap in their hands.

The poems include childhood memories— of a good father, especially; and of friends, animals, homes, back yards and maple trees.

The past is my first language... introduces a loving view of working class neighborhood life— scenes on front porches, beer-drinking fathers, mothers singing in the kitchens; even before the children knew about death, *the last stars took their places...like nail-heads on a dark and holy board*. What begins by seeming almost mythologized thus reveals an underlying awareness that can only be articulated by the adult poet, decades later. In that world, her father gave her the love of animals, of song, of all that “matters.”

This section of the book also deals with social class and upward mobility, in the same context as joy and grief, with surprising linguistic wit.

There is sadness, inevitably, but the poems keep us in view of the sky, in touch with earth, and enlightened by the dawning of images and the poet’s subtle wisdom.

...A river splits/the creased ravine... /And in all the grandeur, suddenly: ...a voice/ that’s barely heard belongs to you... The power of the river, of all natural forces, death too, is insurmountable; yet the poet captures this vast world, finding beauty everywhere: *...here: this wing, this living*, as the Prologue introduces the motif, this is what the poems teach, season by season.

When Adele Kenny writes about recovery (from cancer) in “No Word for It,” the lines are moving; but it’s the writing we dwell on, in images of *the heron’s glide and dive,/ wings part of the sky... or wind/ that hauled a cargo of clouds*” beyond the life story prompting the work. Dreamlike, her courage and movement into recovery are represented by surreal imagery, slowly, in a low key. The reader hallucinates with the persona and goes “through” the image, as the poem ends with quiet triumph: *“...a door that opens/ inward, and she’s / walking through*.

The path of recovery is strenuous, straining toward *...the road/s bent knee...*, but the poems amass witty images that keep our minds on this working with words: *No big epiphanies,/but smaller things/... moths that call the / porch light a party, my dogs asleep on/ pillows beside me...* The narrative never becomes a sentimental journey. It is just one’s person’s hard story; but these are well practiced poems, and we enters into the rounds they are making.

In a central poem of power and persistence in facing danger, an (imagined) angel is her prompt, the stave of her daring. But in the amusing images of a creaky angel, we see imagination, language, spiritual power: these are the real weapons a writer has. We also see her in her natural setting, among the ordinary details: *...Your dogs, breathless from running rabbits/ and weeds, sit at your feet, heads cocked, ready for home*. As the poet retells her world, *A small brown birds sings in its*

sleep, and (look at you)/ you are almost happy. That is how a poem raises one to joy.

Kenny notices much detail, here and remembered, huge and infinitesimal: *Dewdrops fall on/ the spider's web, small acclamations.../ ...This is the world/ flung from the sun's infallible fist...*

Even in shadow there is a semblance of life, as in the second title poem. Speaking of the dead, in assuming they remember and dream and feel hunger, she offers their wisdom, saying that they *...have something to tell us: / what matters is the quiet beak of a lark in the seed...*

Natural scenes reflect inner experience: in "What It Will Take" she has achieved a calm, stoic fatalism, like a *stone...wearing down to the light in which it casts no shadow.*

Many poems display clever devices of sound patterns, as in a poem that includes dreaming:

The trocheed tick of the mantle/clock is trained in the coming/ hour, tomorrow already taking/ shape... One notices an ominous undercurrent. Then, slowly, *The vision shifts*, and one feels the dream surrounding as *...my mother and/father dance beneath a willow gone.* Vowels open, image lilting. Sadness in balance with beauty. By dawn, one hears the onomatopoeia of consonants again: *...Fitful and faint, a/ night cricket rubs its forelegs together, the first pale bird warbles and weeps.* Sounds are always "in service to the sense,"(as Alexander Pope said they should be!)

Little aural surprises are also introduced in "Snake Lady". There's a charming series of rhymed sequences as the carnival snake lady herself charms a tent full of youngsters, who see the snake *between her breasts making its thick descent along her thighs...* and releasing the *sudden milky venom*; this Cleopatra-like image turns the poem from innocence to the *easy way she made them burn.* The lines move so quickly one can barely note the paradox of snake venom's milkiness, or the surprises in sounds and meaning at the end: Oh what that snake lady did to those boys! It is Adele Kenny's wit that comes through, in her dextrous manipulations of rhyme and paradox, innocence and intent.

Kenny wisely appropriates the painter's image of Icarus falling to consider "mutability": On accepting failure, the poem declares *we all/ fail* and continues: *...life goes on: ploughman, shepherd / oblivious sheep... the garden passes its shadow to the fence...* and ends with *The earth curves into place. Water. Silt. / Sky. The moon rises and keeps on rising.* In the continuity of all things, loss and change must be acceptable as the fall of Icarus.

Several poems have a graveyard setting. One sees the *light moving across the gravestones...*, and joins the poet in accepting reality

but also finding relish in such moments of beauty: *seed tufts float above the river* and *A wild bird pauses between songs*. There is loss, but no time now for mourning; rather, a delicate delight in the living of each day— if the spirit sings clearly, if the senses record precisely, if the narrative is laced with images of this amazing world.

Describing two people tending a grave, *We...thrust our/ fingers into earth...*, there is a tactile richness, and no fear of declaring that they *know what lies beneath*. Death becomes a familiar in these clear lines.

When the poet's dog dies, grief is fully accepted, but quiet images express the joy of loving as well as the sorrow: *...Like all deaths that summer/ remembers...* and *A patch of sun climbs the stairs/ without him...* Tucked into this scene is a telling turn of phrase, *...summer/ remembers*. Even the days and seasons have consciousness, have memory, have wisdom. *The stream remembers/ how to be a stream* (from "Tending the Grave").

Realistic awareness has its hold on how frail and temporal this life is. Paradoxically, such honesty staved by a powerful use of language, provides a strength that common conversation cannot offer. Poetry is meant for this—to serve the speaker and the reader not with certainty, but with strength, and with marveling.

Small details carry the themes: Body and soul are in touch through earth, river and sky. And the moon, *...December's / piebald light, white-maned and glistening/ the moon above us...* "What matters," is earth, sky, human life and death, is memory, is love, is vision, is the poem itself.

In a mystic poem near the end of the collection, major themes are echoed obliquely:

...what you don't/ hold onto, what you/ don't keep ... It's what/ you know is truth...One eye dark,/ light in the other... Here is that acceptance of not knowing, that assertion of "light" for whatever it may mean. Another lyric full of light touches on the details of an autumn scene: *...the way trees darken/ before the sky, the way light slants through / pines... Not the expected order of things but moments of/ other ...and the heaviness lifts inside you*. The poem becomes a parallel for the writer's own body: the poem discovers the body (the poem itself) as "a perfect mold of the light gone through it." Thus, as the poet has allowed the world into her imagination, has seen earth and river and sky, has found the words (which another poem said could not be found!), and has allowed the light to filter and shine on so many things in these lines, she has found the light moving through her body. "A perfect mold" is the human form; it is also the well wrought poem.

The last lines of the collection serve well here: *We don't forget/
how it feels to rejoice.*

B

BIOGRAPHICAL
NOTES

Peggy Aylsworth has appeared in *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The MacGuffin*, *Chiron Review*, *Ars Interpres* (Sweden), *Rattle*, *Poetry Salzburg Review*; *Tampa Review*; *Berkeley Poetry Review*. Her work has been published in numerous other literary journals throughout the U.S. and abroad.

Rachel Barenblat holds an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars and rabbinic ordination from ALEPH: the Alliance for Jewish Renewal. She is author of four chapbooks of poems; her first book-length collection, *70 faces*, was published by Phoenicia in 2011. Since 2003 she has blogged as the Velveteen Rabbi. She serves a small congregation in western Massachusetts, where she lives with her husband and son.

Svea Barrett is a 25 year veteran NJ public school teacher and mom of three teenage boys. Her chapbook, *Why I Collect Moose*, won the 2005 Poets Corner Press Poetry Chapbook Competition, and her book *I Tell Random People About You* won the Spire Press 2010 Poetry Book Award. Her work has appeared in *Samsara Quarterly*, *The Journal of NJ Poets*, *LIPS*, *Caduceus*, *US 1 Worksheets*, *Ariel XXVII*, and other journals.

Elliott batTzedek holds an MFA in Poetry and Poetry in Translation from Drew University, for which she translated poems by the Israeli Jewish lesbian writer Shez. She works as a literacy consultant, adjunct graduate school faculty, and co-leader of Fringes, a poetry-based havurah. Her work appears in *In the Biblical Sense*, *Two Lines Translation Anthology*, *Overplay/Underdone: Poems in the Third Dimension*, *Contemporary Love Poems*, *Armchair/Shotgun*, *Poetica*, *Poemeleon*, *Trivia*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Lamba Literary Online*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and as a Split This Rock poem of the week.

Margo Berdeshevsky is author of two poetry collections, *Between Soul and Stone*, and *But a Passage in Wilderness*, (Sheep Meadow Press,) and a book of illustrated stories, *Beautiful Soon Enough*, recipient of Fiction Collective Two's American Book Review/Ronald Sukenick/ Innovative Fiction Award (University of Alabama Press.) Other honors include the Robert H. Winner Award from the Poetry Society of America, 7 Pushcart Prize nominations & 2 Pushcart "special mention" citations for works appearing in *Kenyon Review*, *Agni*, *Pleiades*, *New Letters*, & *Poetry International*.

Kristin Berkey-Abbott earned a Ph.D. from the University of South Carolina. Her publications include *Whistling Past the Graveyard* (Pudding House Publications) and *I Stand Here Shredding Documents* (Finishing Line Press). Her website, with connections to her blogs, is: www.kristinberkey-abbott.com.

Ronda Broatch is the author of *Shedding Our Skins*, (Finishing Line Press, 2008), and *Some Other Eden*, (2005). Nominated several times for the Pushcart, Ronda is the recipient of a 2007 Artist Trust GAP Grant, and is currently Poetry Editor for Crab Creek Review.

Valentina Cano is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time she has either reading or writing. She also takes care of a veritable army of pets, including her six, very spoiled, snakes. You can find her here: <http://carabosseslibrary.blogspot.com>

Cathy Carlisi's poetry has appeared in *Prairie Schooner*, *The Mid-American Review*, *The Atlanta Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *The Sycamore Review*, *The Greensboro Review*, *Gargoyle* and many others. My manuscript, *The Natural Order of Things*, has been a finalist in several contests including the Tampa Review Prize for Poetry, Lost Horse Press Idaho Prize for Poetry, Carolina Wren Press, MMM Press Book Prize, Elixir Press Annual Poetry Award, and The Washington Prize.

Cassie Ciopryna is an MFA student at Southern Connecticut State University. She has a day job while earning her degree but hopes to pursue a career in writing after graduation. She can still remember the first poem she wrote when she was five years old, and looks forward to all the rest of the poems she still has unwritten. She has also been published in *Noctua Review*.

David Crews (davidcrewspoeetry.com) has poems published or forthcoming in *The Greensboro Review*, *The Southeast Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*, *Berkeley Poetry Review*, *Paterson Literary Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, and others. Essays found in *Adanna Literary Journal* and *SPECTRUM*. Most recently, he has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Barbara Crooker was a recent finalist for the 2011 NJ Poet's Prize. Her books are *Radiance*, which was a finalist for the 2006 Paterson Poetry Prize; *Line Dance*, (Word Press 2008), which won the 2009

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Mary Stone Dockery's first poetry collection, *Mythology of Touch*, was released by Woodley Press in 2012. Her chapbooks *Aching Buttons* (Dancing Girl Press) and *Blink Finch* (Kattywompus Press) are forthcoming. She lives in Lawrence, KS.

Juditha Dowd's most recent collection is *What Remains* (Finishing Line) Her poetry has been featured on *Poetry Daily* and included in journals such as *The Florida Review*, *Cider Press Review* and *Rock & Sling*. She is a member of the Cool Women performance ensemble.

Shaun Fletcher is a New Jersey poet most at home with a helmet and two spinning tires. A high school science teacher, Fletcher spends half of his free periods reading poetry and the other half setting up experiments. He is a current MFA student in Drew University's MFA in Poetry and Poetry in Translation.

Ruth Foley lives in Massachusetts, where she teaches English for Wheaton College. Her recent work appeared in the premiere issue of *Adanna*, and is appearing or forthcoming in *The Bellingham Review*, *Yemassee*, and *Weave*, among others. Her poetry has been nominated for the Best New Poets, Best of the Net, and Pushcart anthologies. She also serves as Managing Editor for *Cider Press Review*.

Lisa Fraser is a librarian with King County Library System and an adjunct lecturer at University of Washington. She writes on local and family history and library practice.

Laura Freedgood's second book of poems. *Slant of the Heart* was released in the fall of 2010. Her first book, *Weather Report*, in 2007. Her poems appear in *Descant*, *Hawai'i Pacific Review*, *Euphony*, *Wisconsin Review*, *Journal of New Jersey Poets*, and other print and online journals. Nominated for The Pushcart Prize, she was also

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Nancy Gerber earned her doctorate in Literatures in English from Rutgers University. Her writing has appeared in *Journal of Aging, Humanities and the Arts*, *The Mom Egg*, and other literary and academic publications.

Gail Fishman Gerwin's poetry, book reviews, essays, plays, and features appear in journals and other outlets. She is associate poetry editor of *Tiferet*. Her memoir *Sugar and Sand* was a 2010 Paterson Poetry Prize finalist and her poems earned five consecutive Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards honorable mentions. She owns *inedit*, a Morristown, NJ, writing/editing firm, and she and her husband Kenneth are parents of two daughters and grandparents of three boys and a girl.

Diane D. Gillette has an MFA from Emerson College, a day job teaching some really great students, and two demanding cats. Her short fiction has appeared in such journals as *Hobart*, *Sniplits*, *Inch*, *flashquake*, and *Press 1*. She is also an Assistant Managing Editor at *Chicago Quarterly Review*. When she is not busy enjoying Chicago with the love of her life, she is hard at work on her first novel. For more of her work, please visit www.digillette.com.

Oscar Gonzales is a Honduran-American poet and the author of three poetry books including *Central America in My Heart*, published in a bilingual English and Spanish edition by Arizona State University in 2007. Gonzales was awarded Yale University's Field Prize for his poetry anthology *Donde el plomo flota* (Where Lead Floats). He was the first undergraduate to receive the award. For more information, see www.oscargonzales.org.

Lois Marie Harrod's *The Only Is* won the 2012 Tennessee Chapbook Contest (*Poems & Plays*) and her 11th book *Brief Term*, a poetry collection of about teachers and teaching was published by Black Buzzard in March 2011. She teaches Creative Writing at The College of New Jersey. Read more www.loismarieharrod.com

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Dr. Kendra Weddle Irons teaches World Religions, Ethics, and Biblical Studies at Texas Wesleyan University in Fort Worth, Texas. Her research interests include the intersection between feminism and Christianity as seen in her monograph *Preaching on the Plains: Methodist Women Preachers 1920-1956* and more recently on her blog *Ain't I a Woman* at www.deconstructingchristianimages.blogspot.com.

Suzanne Kamata's most recent book, *The Beautiful One Has Come: Stories* (Wyatt-Mackenzie Publishing, 2011) won a Silver 2012 Nautilus Award. She is also the author of a novel, *Losing Kei* (Leapfrog Press, 2008), and editor of three anthologies including *Love You to Pieces: Creative Writers on Raising a Child with Special Needs* (Beacon Press, 2008). She lives in rural Japan with her husband and twins, where she is working on a mother-daughter travel memoir.

Claire Keyes is the author of two poetry collections: *The Question of Rapture* and *Rising and Falling*. Her poems and reviews have appeared in *Verse Wisconsin*, *Prairie Schooner* and *The Newport Review*, among others. She lives in Marblehead, Massachusetts and is Professor Emerita at Salem State University in Massachusetts.

Kathleen Kirk appeared in the inaugural issue of *Adanna*, won first prize in *Adanna's* Love Poetry contest, and is happy to appear again in this issue. Her work also appears in a variety of other print and online journals, including *Arsenic Lobster*, *blossombones*, and *Confrontation*, and she is the author of four poetry chapbooks, most recently *Nocturnes* (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2012).

Gina Larkin is the editor of *The Edison Literary Review*. Her collection *When the Gods Play Hide and Seek* is available through Amazon.com.

Kristin LaTour has poems forthcoming in *dirtcakes*, *The Adroit Journal*, and was recently published in *Midnight Screaming*. Her two chapbooks and snippets of selected poems are available at her website, www.kristinlatour.com. She teaches at Joliet Jr. College and helps hold down the fort in Aurora, IL with her husband and two dogitos.

Nancy Long lives with her husband and dog in a small cabin in the woods of south-central Indiana, where the first wave of rolling hills flow out of the flatlands. By day she works at Indiana University in the Research Technologies division. By night, she fancies herself an evangel for poetry, working with others to raise awareness of its power—reading, listening, writing. A student in the Spalding MFA program, she also holds a B. S. in Electrical Engineering Technology and an MBA.

Arlene L. Mandell, a retired English professor, was formerly a writer/editor at Good Housekeeping magazine. She has published more than 500 poems, essays and short stories in newspapers and literary journals, including *The New York Times*, *Tiny Lights* and *Wild Violet*. A recent venture is an echapbook, *Scenes from My Life on Hemlock Street: A Brooklyn Memoir*, set in the 1940s and 50s, available free at www.echapbook.com/memoir/mandell.

John McDermott now teaches ESL at Union County College and lives in Cranford. He has also taught 2 years in Nanjing, China and 2 years in Osaka, Japan. A Dodge poet and former editor of US1 Worksheets, his poetry has appeared in magazines in the US and Japan. His book, The Long Way Home, was published in 2005 and a CD version published in 2010, both by Everyday Path Press.

Lynne McEniry is a poet with work published in *Adanna*, *5 A.M.*, *The Stillwater Review*, and *Paterson Literary Review*. She won Honorable Mention in the 2011 Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards and collaborates on a variety of readings and workshops, including those in conversation with visual arts at the Maloney Art Gallery and Visual Arts Center of NJ. She holds an MFA in Poetry from Drew University and works at the College of Saint Elizabeth in Morristown, NJ.

Jessica Mason McFadden lives in Western Illinois with her wife-partner and their two daughters. She is a part-time graduate student and full time stay-at-home mother, writing feminist and lesbian poetry whenever she has a spare moment. Her work has appeared in *Women's Voices Journal*, *Read These Lips*, *Diverse Voices Quarterly*, *Breadcrumbs Scabs*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Saltwater Quarterly*.

Cynthia McHale-Hendricks is an Associate Professor of English at Goodwin College. Her poetry has appeared in two journals, *Icarus*

International's *One Small Step* and *View from One Hundred*, and won honorable mentions in *New Millennium Writings, Volume XV*, and *Mattia* online poetry contests. Her first volume of poetry, *Small-Town People*, was honored with the *Paul Smith Award* at Trinity College; in addition, three short stories became selections of the esteemed Southampton Writers Conference on Long Island, New York.

Ann E. Michael's collection *Water-Rites* is forthcoming in spring of 2012 from Brick Road Poetry Press. She lives in eastern Pennsylvania, where she is writing coordinator at DeSales University. Her poems and essays have appeared in *ISLE*, *Runes*, *Ninth Letter*, *Natural Bridge*, *Writer's Chronicle*, and in five previous chapbooks. She is currently at work on a libretto with composer Alla Borzova.

Julie L. Moore is the author of *Slipping Out of Bloom* (WordTech Editions) and *Election Day* (Finishing Line Press). In addition, her manuscript, *Scandal of Particularity*, was a finalist for the 2011 FutureCycle Press Poetry Book Prize and a semi-finalist for both the 2012 Crab Orchard Series in Poetry and the 2011 Perugia Press Prize. A *Best of the Net* and two-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Moore has also had her poetry published in *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *The Missouri Review Online*, *The Southern Review*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Verses Daily*, and previously in *Adanna*. You can learn more about her work at www.juliemoore.com.

Jacqueline Dee Parker is a painter and a poet. Her poems appear in many literary journals and anthologies, including *Atlanta Review*, *The Southern Review*, *Chelsea*, and *American Diaspora: Poetry of Exile*, among others, and her work has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize. She is the recipient of a 2007 Artist Fellowship from the Louisiana State Division of the Arts. Her visual work resides in numerous private and corporate collections, and was featured in the 2010 *Studio Visit*, a juried artist book published by Open Studios Press. For more information please visit www.jacquelinedeeparker.com

Hannah Onoguwe lives in Jos, Nigeria, which is the setting of her fondest childhood memories and the birthplace of her love for writing. She currently works as a representative of an IT company and has other stories and a full-length manuscript in progress. A graduate of Psychology, she enjoys watching funny movies and trying out new recipes.

Andrea Potos is the author of four poetry collections, most recently *We Lit the Lamps Ourselves* published by Salmon Poetry of Ireland. (www.salmonpoetry.com). Her poems appear widely in journals and anthologies online and in print. She is delighted to be part of Adanna for the first time.

Marjorie Power is a poet, wife, mother, and grandmother. She grew up on the east coast and has spent her adult life on the west coast. Her poems appear in many journals and anthologies, as well as six chapbooks and one full length collection, all from small presses. Her most recent chapbook, *Flying on One Wing: Poems for Breast Cancer Survivors and Those Who Love Them*, is in a third printing.

Rinzu Rajan writes in an attempt to sear away from the boundaries of cliché. Research in the field of biology and blogging occupy the rest of her time as well as writing fiction.

Helen Ruggiero has a new book of poems about early women writers of Japan - *Butterflies Under A Japanese Moon* from Kitsune Books. She is working on a series of haibun about women in extreme situations. (helenruggieri.com).

Jennifer Saunders is an American living in Switzerland with her Swiss husband and their two Swiss-American hockey playing sons. Her poetry has appeared in *Ibbetson Street Magazine*, *Literary Bohemian*, *Literary Mama*, *Shot Glass Journal*, which nominated her for a Pushcart Prize, and elsewhere. She blogs at Magpie Days, where she muses about writing, expat life, and ice hockey.

Marvin Shackelford's stories and poems appear in such journals as *Cimarron Review*, *Confrontation*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Harpur Palate*, *NEO*, and *Kestrel*. He lives in rural Texas, earning a living in agriculture.

Norene Cashen Smith is a writer and writer-in-residence with InsideOut Literary Arts Project in Detroit, where she teaches children to unleash the power of their own words. She's was a longtime arts journalist for Detroit's Metro Times and many other magazines and newspapers. Her poems have been published in *Exquisite Corpse*, *Temenos* (Central Michigan University), Markszine.com, *Quill Puddle*, *MOCAD Stories* (Museum of Contemporary Art Detroit), and the anthology *Abandon*

Automobile (Wayne State University Press). She was a contributing editor for Dispatch Detroit

Carole Stone is adjunct and Professor of English Emerita Montclair State University Her books of poetry are: *Lime and Salt*, Carriage House Press, *Traveling with the Dead*, Backwaters Press, *American Rhapsody*, CavanKerry Press and seven chapbooks.

Lois Greene Stone, writer and poet, has been syndicated worldwide. Poetry and personal essays have been included in hard & softcover book anthologies. Collections of her personal items/ photos/ memorabilia are in major museums including twelve different divisions of The Smithsonian.

Linda Strever's poetry credits include *CALYX Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Nimrod* and others. Her work has been a finalist in the William Van Wert Fiction Competition, the Summer Literary Seminars Fiction competition and for the A. E. Coppard Prize for Fiction. She has an MFA from Brooklyn College.

Madeline Tiger's most recent collections of poems are *Birds of Sorrow and Joy: New and Selected Poems, 1970-2000* (2003), *The Earth Which Is All* (2008), *The Atheist's Prayer* (2010), and *FROM THE VIEWING STAND* (2011). Her work appears regularly in journals and anthologies. She has been teaching in state programs and private workshops since 1973 and has been a "Dodge Poet" since 1986. She has five children and seven grandchildren and lives in Bloomfield, NJ under a weeping cherry tree.

Sharon Venezia received an MA in creative writing from San Francisco State University. She is currently completing a manuscript titled *The Silence of Doorways*. Some of her work can be found in Reed, Transfer, Parthenon West Review, Midway Journal, Wicked Alice, Stirring, as well as other online and print journals. She can be found at sharonvenezio.com.

Pramila Venkateswaran, author of *Thirtha* (Yuganta Press, 2002) *Behind Dark Waters* (Plain View Press, 2008), *Draw Me Inmost* (Stockport Flats, 2009), and *Trace* (Finishing Line Press, 2011) is an award winning poet who teaches English and Women's Studies at Nassau Community College, NY. She is the 2011 Walt Whitman Birthplace Association Long Island Poet of the Year.

Karen J. Weyant's work has appeared in *5 AM*, *Barn Owl Review*, *Cave Wall*, *Copper Nickel*, *Harpur Palate*, *River Styx* and *The Tusculum Review*. Her chapbook, *Wearing Heels in the Rust Belt*, won Main Street Rag's 2011 chapbook contest and was published in 2012. She lives in rural Pennsylvania, but crosses the state border to teach at Jamestown Community College in Jamestown, New York.