

Big Pond Rumours

Summer 2019

An International Literary E-Zine

Established 2006

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issue

Final Issue



2019 Winter & Summer issues
are available in PDF format.

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Fiction

Bob Boulton
Quentin Kerr
Daniel Lockhart
Robin Ray
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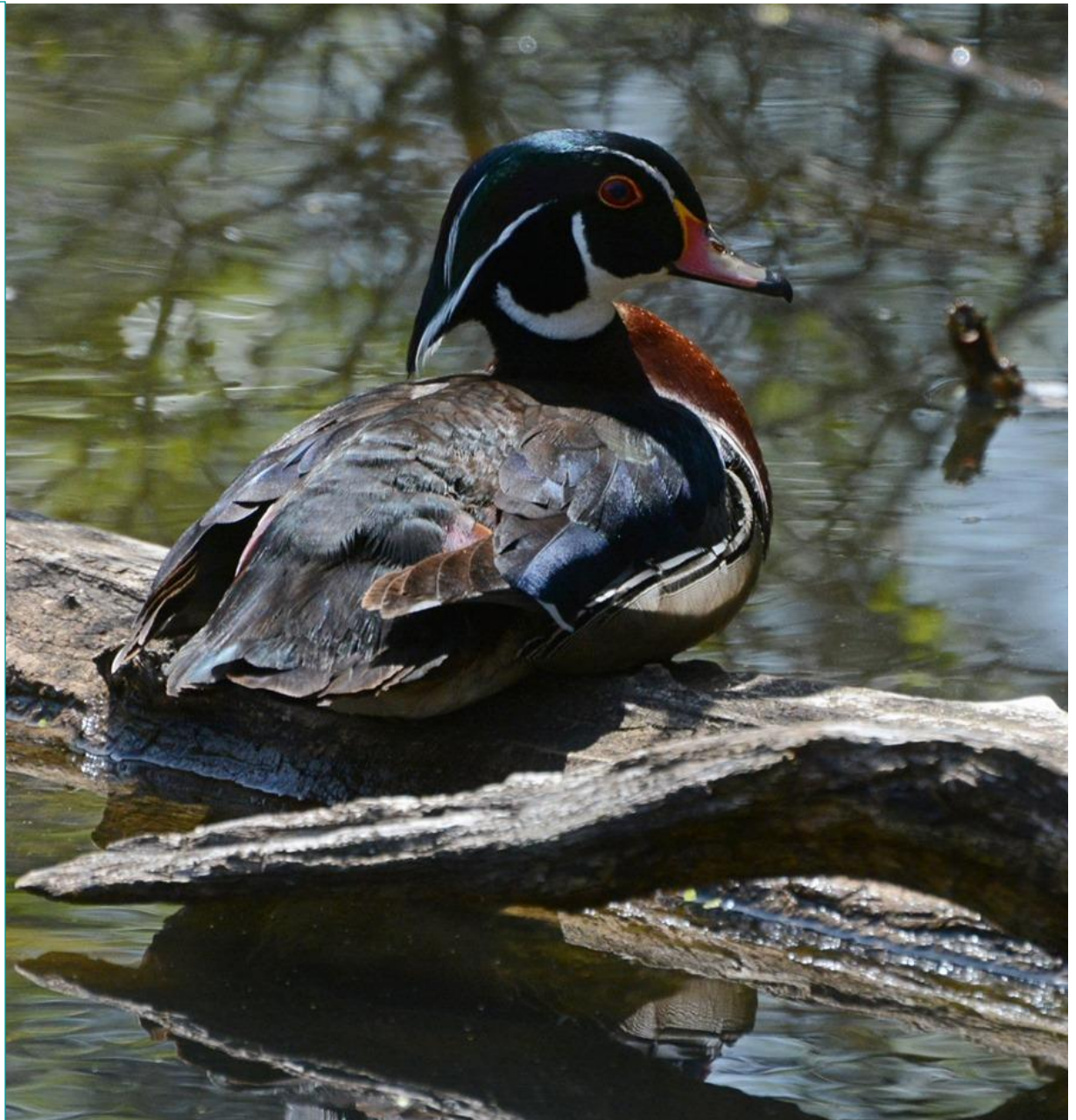
Contest Winners in Poetry & Fiction

Book Reviews of

- Fox Haunts
- Tamaracks
Anthology

Photography

Stephen Humphrey
Peter Rowe



Photograph of a Wood Duck by Peter Rowe

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Mary Frost: Assistant Fiction Editor
Sharon Goodier: Book Reviews

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by Sharon Berg

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Big Pond Rumours E-Zine and website are designed and created by Sharon Berg. Sharon Berg is the Primary Editor while Mary Frost is an Associate Editor for fiction.



Inside this issue

Book Reviews

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Photography

Stephen Humphrey	photographs inside the magazine
Peter Rowe	front & back cover photographs

The 2nd Literary Rumours Contest

Poetry

1 st Prize	Meg Freer	The Sound in Temples
2 nd Prize	Frances Boyle	Sluice
3 rd Prize	Robin Susanto	Under Plastic Whales



Fiction

Prizes were not awarded for
Fiction in this contest



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In 2006, I was on Christmas holidays from my job as an elementary school teacher when I founded this magazine. My partner at that time had looked at me sitting on the couch, surrounded by my students' blue journals as I marked them, and said, "I don't think I remember what you look like without a pile of marking in your lap."

That simple statement set off a whole lot of alarm bells for me. For one thing, I realized he was speaking to his perception that my focus was elsewhere, implying that I was guilty of neglecting him. So I decided I would no longer mark at home except on the weekends. I simply went to work long before school started so I could mark and plan.

Except, that was not the only alarm bell. The thing is, my devotion to my students also meant I was neglecting my own core concept of myself. I'd not been able to write creatively since I started teaching. In fact, though I continued to think of my 'best self' as a writer, I had rarely been able to write creatively since starting university studies in 1988.

So what did I do? I founded an international literary magazine, an online journal, and my partner (who was a tech wiz) helped me to set it up. He'd already started to teach me about building webpages, so *Big Pond Rumours* became an extension of that process and it gave us a project we could both focus our time and energy on. I still found it difficult to write creatively, but editing (read: coaching) came naturally to me as a teacher. I also believed I had somehow reconnected with the world of literature and writers. The editing I did for the many submissions received by *Big Pond Rumours* was a monumental part of my plan to stay-in-touch-with my earlier self, even if I could not devote myself to writing except for a few weeks every summer.

Each issue of the Zine created that relationship for me between January 2006 and December 2008 when my father suddenly passed. His passing hit me very hard. I put the Zine on hiatus, still keeping the webpages (issues of the Zine) online. However, my health also went for a time. I could only spare the energy to focus on lessons for my students again, my job, which was how I kept a roof over our heads. You guessed it. My partner felt neglected once again and this time we parted. It took a few years of living on my own before I came back to the Zine, feeling it would help me to reconnect with my former self, now that I was on my own.

Over the years, this periodical has gifted me with so much learning and such a sense of companionship with other authors – even temporarily - on this gigantic project of writing. Indeed, it's introduced me to several people who have since become close friends. In addition, I've read some incredible pieces of writing that I might not otherwise have been exposed to. Importantly, the Zine it has also allowed me to assist others in their journeys as authors. Still, that has not been quite enough.

→

Editor's Message - 2

I retired from teaching in 2016, and decided to launch myself back into the literary world full steam as a writer. I began writing again, slowly recovering my craft after decades of near neglect. (Believe me, it is not as simple as getting on a bicycle again!) Being a writer, necessarily, means both creating, submitting, and publishing. So, finally, in 2019, I am about to re-launch myself fully into my career as a published author. Though I had published poetry books before, my first collection of short stories, *Naming the Shadows*, will be released by Porcupine's Quill in September 2019. I am determined to promote that book as best I can, even as I work to improve the first draft of my first novel. I have several other projects under way, both in poetry and in nonfiction as well. So read this as my gleeful announcement that I am writing again!

Promoting a book is hard work, as any book-published author knows. And I am not young anymore, which means I don't have a young person's stamina. Therefore, I made the decision that - for the foreseeable future - it is necessary to make a huge shift in my focus. This explains why I am shutting down *Big Pond Rumours*, and why this is the final issue of the Zine. I hope that all the people who enjoyed the magazine will understand.

At the same time, I cannot simply depart without saying how grateful I am to the many authors, internationally and nationally, who have helped me to make *Big Pond Rumours* the vehicle that it's been for so many people, both those who are just emerging as authors and the established writers. You have all helped to sustain both myself as an author/editor, and each other.

My final message to you? Whatever else you do, please keep on writing and submitting your work for publication. You never truly know how it will be received until it has been submitted.

Peace.



Robert Keeler is an author who donated \$50 to support the publication of this final issue of Big Pond Rumours E-Zine. We really appreciate his support, and the support of anyone else who, like Robert, has made a donation to the E-Zine.

Robert is an author living in the USA.

There are many ways to offer support to Big Pond Rumours. I am not sure that the magazine has seen its final day, but for now it is being put into hiatus. Sending a donation is highly appreciated, but the truth is that it is just one form of support. As the current life of this Zine comes to a close, we offer the following suggestions:

- Obtain a copy of the Zines that inspire you.
- Spread the word about the existence of this international Zine
- Gather with friends and start a similar international Zine
- Attend the readings of authors frequently
- Buying the books of published authors is one of the best forms of support



Poetry Pages



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Photograph by Stephen Humphrey (detail)

On a lake view hill
polka dotted with sunflowers
monster nowhere to be seen
no tourists passing through
to mistake curl of wake
as something else

I kissed a girl
falling in preteen love
a few days later she says
I'm too nice, leaves me for a bad boy
who'll do time
and leave child rearing to teenage her

tourists passing through
report a sighting



Broken Glosa: (excerpt)

An alphabet book of post avant glosa

Hank Lazer: Quick Prognostications

*flip witness
hip gnosis
diminished homage
flesh muse*

Days "23"—Hank Lazer¹ (with nods to M. Mann & the gnostics)

flip witness

flick 'da switch & trick
some wisdom sayings
— ok, your first heresy

hip gnosis

so... blinded by the light
cut loose like a deuce
another runner in the night

diminished homage

like tapinosis, anti
bodies negative vibe
in material world

flesh muse

valentines, signor Valentinus
'dat spark in the dark
so... hypo thetical

¹ Yrs truly referred to (by Susan M. Schultz) as the "Canadian Hank Lazer"; hence a signed book from Hank: for Stephen—from the American Hank Lazer to the Canadian Hank Lazer—in poetry, in friendship (HL, the real deal, & then some, south of the border)

Barry McKinnon: Deep Throat Local Radio Time Signaling

*you've got 55 seconds
to come out & see what
you've
won.*

Bayday (from The the.)—Barry McKinnon

*you've got 55 seconds
to Hoover the goods
to flash your Rob't Coover maid•en•hoods
to gnaw down on your groover maneuver*

*to come out & see what
your gag reflex hooks like
your deep throat cooks like
your consummate consumer schnooks like*

*you've
got 10 'til *The the* then, zen
got 5 & an official verse culture dime
got zero left for fun with slime*

*won.
(zilch) nothing.
at.
all.*

bpNichol: These are my words

*i look at you this way
noun then verb
these are my words
I sing to you*

song for saint ein—bpNichol (with nods to Stein, of course, & to Zukofsky; with back nods to Davey & Scobie; & an enterprising nod to Nota Bene: A Journey ²)

*i look at you this way
her voice in my head al-
most 50 years, infectious
... like yesterday*

*noun then verb
St. Able deferring... if he
told her would she like it,
what history teaches*

*these are my words
“Joe in the old coach house on Walmer”
that v. same one, Hey Joe! where you goin’
down Kendal that ol’ map in your hand ³*

*i sing to you
“a song / entirely in my head” ⁴
comme l’amour
in its moment ⁵*

² Stephen Bett, *Nota Bene: A Journey*

³ This very coach house sat right smack in the back between Walmer Rd & our old 83A Kendal Ave, in “the Annex” (Toronto). I was too young for McCaffery & nichol’s TRG, but old enough for a few nichol dinners at the Miki’s a few years later

⁴ Zukofsky, “To my wash-stand”

⁵ These last two lines from *Nota Bene: A Journey*, p. 37

Frank O'Hara: I love Reverdy for saying yes

*I am not a painter, I am a poet.
 Why? I think I would rather be
 a painter, but I am not. Well,
 I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES.*

*Why I Am Not a Painter—Frank O'Hara (with nods to "Lucy Kent
 XIX"⁶, Schuyler, Ashbery & Don Allen)*

*I am not a painter, I am a poet.
 I do this I do that, I would rather be a jazzer
 play Tord G, Colin V⁷ ... while she whispered
 along the keyboard and everyone stopped breathing⁸*

*Why? I think I would rather be
 Abstract Express'ist, Post-Painterly Abs'ist
 intimate yeller at New York a.k.a. 10th St School
 I suspect he is making a distinction / well who isn't*

*a painter, but I am not. Well,
 so French, & puzzling (never v. sanguine abt pub'ing)
 so Camp Urbane, ah such personistic insouciance
 you just go on your nerve (all the way fr. Yugen)*

*I see Mike's painting, called SARDINES
 habits of actual speech... the measure of
 a continuous attention⁹ ... I love Reverdy
 for saying yes, though I don't believe it*

⁶ Stephen Bett, *Cruise Control*

⁷ Tord Gustavsen, Colin Vallon

⁸ Each buoyant, joyfully insouciant (& acerbic) stanza-ending line here, from O'H, is a personal favourite. Plenty of faves to go around though—at least one for every conceivable reader of O'H, & the inconceivable, & un-conceivable, ones too.

⁹ Quoting William Navero's bang on definition of "Personism" re: Creeley's voice, from Navero's essay in the Creeley issue of *Boundary 2*, spring/fall, 1978, p.351

Charles Olson: Ate Down to Baby Letters

colored pictures
of all things to eat: dirty / postcards
And words, words, words

No eyes or ears left

*The Songs of Maximus—Charles Olson (with nods to D.G. Jones
glosa, Dylan, Ginsberg, & Phil Spector)*

colored pictures
read forward / back, dizzy mu-sick
dis fury 'n gurry¹⁰, gutted
sick muse¹¹ oceanside us

of all things to eat: dirty / postcards
dat capital obs-kenity¹² : Mad Ave shrinkage¹³
what is said¹⁴, like Big O Tyres ate down
to baby letters (ad-verbs galore

And words, words, words
all dis palaver (don'tcha, Mr. Jones?
bomb bard-bard-bard-ment
invaded, appropriated, outraged
... *starving hysterical naked* (too

No eyes or ears left
even dose crude instruments¹⁵
even muzak long gone fr. ma' town
even dat spector, lulled, no wall
of sound left, eez all pop'd



¹⁰ Bett, "Lift Off 10: bite size (after Olson): Was it gurry/or offal//A bird at sea,/surely"

¹¹ "mu-sick, the sick music and muse": Sherman Paul, Olson's Push, p. 126

¹² "advertising men are the worst kind of obscenity": Frank Davey, PhD thesis: Theory and Practise in the Black Mountain Poets, p. 240

¹³ The vast majority of Madison Ave payroll, evidently, is taken up by outsourced psychologists (not copy-writers, etc.). So much for advertising as "informational."

¹⁴ Chas Olson, of course, on the unfortunate shift from muthos (mouth) to logos (reason), curtesy dose Greeks; mu-sick & muzak: "what is said is sick, a sick story from a sick mouth": Robert von Hallberg, Charles Olson: The Scholar's Art, p. 58

¹⁵ "the mu-sick of the juke box has made the ear a crude instrument": Paul Christensen, Charles Olson: Call Him Ishmael, p. 123

for the outer limits of 1000 lakes

driving 5 hours back down the hill
over tree tops growing up from the ground
200 feet below
standing as a champion would over a beaten boxer
with snow holding everything down for a snooze.

In the darkness twisting
around the hills
through the hills
high beams flashing on rivers and lakes
where a car could roll down and begin to kayak
if it didn't sink first.

all these trails carved through granite or water
named after the natives who wished they still lived and hunted....

and in the early darkness you pop up onto old stomping grounds
tell wife to put away the GPS paper'd map
just as Robin Hood – you know you are 12 miles from home
and could find your back door blindfolded.

In the short visit you stay only long enough to be re-forgotten.
sit 'round amongst cousins who somehow are your 1st and 2nd all at once.
you realize you won't be missed when you turn to leave – except by two members
who brought you into the world and hate to see you leave theirs
– travel back up the hill into the ancient Ontario forest.

Driving through Algonquin to Huntsville
passing through Dwight and searching for a diner
you realize the trees here are grandparents of the lil' cedars growing
in your parents' backyard.
ghosts of themselves planting history and stories
the way our own lives do – the way we all must
before shedding off this mortal coil and asking God
'what next'.

→

Up the hill – down the hill
old into the young and vice versa.
inside it all – is a song.
sometimes it plays on the car radio
other times it plays from living room vinyl
– it leaves you wondering about it all...

this ancient province so young in the world
separating everyone from everyone they love
even when they think they're trying to escape

however
in the end you don't

you simply leave behind great stories
and you hear lost stories of other loved ones who went elsewhere before you
and did the same thing
or stayed here and lived the way we all need to...

searching for something that reconnects us all to the original hello
instead of so many goodbyes...



I remember,

an extreme cold.
The Scheldt completely frozen,
ice-floes at its banks, pinning
the barges against the quay.

I remember,

the Suez crisis,
oil shortage, first car-free-Sunday,
gendarmes on motorcycles,
my mother under escort.

I remember,

cosy in the back of the car
wrapped in a blue and white blanket,
looking out the rear window
at the building where I was born

A Flemish lady dressed in black
Came with me to Ireland

Nobody knows she's here
as she can't be seen or heard

Two baskets she carries.
Both filled with pearls
Black in one
White in the other

At night she goes to every house
visiting people in their sleep.
None wake from their slumber
All are treated the same

She listens to their breath
to know what they are like.

A person who is good in life
gets a white pearl on the forehead
and the rest of their night is filled with lovely dreams

If someone's wicked
a black pearl is placed instead
And a fitful night they'll have,
haunted by nightmares

You must be wondering:
how do I sleep myself?

Well me,
I snore like a trooper
the Flemish Lady says.



Winter thaws, slushes into spring
and inside the house weeps:

steady drip drop of melting snow
swells into window wells

summersaults down concrete walls
splashes into plastic pails of grief.

Outside more rain, a heavy down
pouring of April sorrow.

It toboggan slides over sunken banks,
skates over thin ice in eave troughs

sinks into weeping tiles, broken;

the gurgle and gush
of mascara blackened tears

romance paperbacks, magazines
adrift in basement's sump-pump failure.

Makes the humans cry too.

Inspired by the image "Hanging Collage" by Courtney Carroll

I cancelled the newspaper yesterday.

It reminded me of *Chicken Little*
that childhood story
where a feathered peeper sounded the alarm
kept telling everyone the sky was falling.

*Well, the sky ain't falling
And I'm not falling
for that fake news anymore.*

But fake news still lights up my TV screen
and journalists insist they have proof:
photo snapped images of people falling
like a wounded *Chicken Little* from the sky.

*I'm no sky-diving fool
but some people believe in
the apocalypse...*

I see the air force hanging from ropes
attached to a parachute moon
and a pilot lands (with his own *chicken* wings and a guitar)
stuck in a tree decorated with one eye and red lips.

*I told you I ain't falling
for no bunk, no sleepy head
on the road to Miami...*

And every fall day is a journey
along a long stretch of US Route 66:
the weight of Florida strawberries and limes
stuffed in a backpack that opens up into a parachute.

→

And people still point at the sky
like *Chicken Little* playing *chicken*
on the wrong side of a divided highway
as a transport truck blares it's horn

screeches its air brakes.

I bought myself some ear plugs to shut off the noise
so I could float away in a slumbering cloud
before the alarm clock rattles me from my dreams
like a crash on the floor when I roll

and roll and roll
and fall out of bed.

I'm so glad I cancelled that newspaper.



A white page has its own
idea: brain coral angel.
Who would've thought it?
Then the x-ray reverses itself,
evolves without permission.
Negative-to-positive, leaving
this wispy but lasting image
behind. Meanwhile, analog
night: underdeveloped, barely
making anything out. So
everything turns out to be
beyond digital reach. Same way
echoes are shadows of sounds
losing their own hearing.

That right whale carcass stinking up the cove
doesn't care about water levels anymore.
It fashions fables & fibs with its xylophone ribs
instead of moving tidal moments back & forth,
gradually redefining the whole land/sea dilemma.
If it had a shirt tail, it wouldn't be tucked in.

If you hold this poem to your ear, you'll hear
oceanic nostalgia yarns, organic nausea unravelling
what the hearty hands on deck were doing when
the rogue wave came to knot. Maybe you'll feel
better if you barf or laugh. You might even become
the man who shot the elephant in the china shop.

Again & again, nature does its best to avoid reality:
female sandpipers are shamelessly promiscuous,
but nothing pisses off a seagull more than another
seagull— they're simply not a sharing kind of bird.
Is all that stench coming from one dead cetacean?
If you had a bib, you might stop blubbering.

An acrid wind hones in from where it's been:
west of everybody's wishing. The storm surge
grinds down the shore's edge, a crushing rush
trumping everything. Tomorrow scoops out what
to make of now— speaking only in the present tense,
swearing it's never been here before.

When you leave, take what you believe along with you.



Mist covered the pasture,
the stream
gurgling the ditch.

I squeezed under the wires
and worked my way
through statted cows.

In fog, green spotted rags dotted
the ponds shoreline ~
frogs: in cartoon of escape
by pellet to the head.

Draped over branches, they reflected
in the black water, others
hung from thorns protruding
their shiny bent backs.

Across the mirror, a rubber boot
stuck out of the sky.
I carried its cold weight home,
my foot
squelching with each step.

Passed the Stewart home, the old man,
the one
who keeps every puck and ball
goes over his fence
stood rumped
and sleepy-eyed on the front porch.

“Hey, boy. Boy!
“I’ll give you a dime for my Davie’s boot.”

We crossed the fallow ridge
to the abandoned farm
looking for maps to hidden treasure.

Johnny shouldered the door
to worn floors and torn walls

broken glass
with pieces of sky
in shards of missing windows.

His little sister tagged along
peeled a strip of paper
above the stairs.

Wall came with it.

She said
their Grandmother died yesterday.

Nothing was written
beneath the lathe.

We trapped a mouse.
Johnny kicked it to death
in a corner.

Heading home
late for lunch

we drank from a stream
clean to the bottom,
tiny bugs
swimming round and round.

In the back yard we played
on the tire swing hoping
we wouldn't be asked to hoe the garden
mow the lawn clean the windows
or wash the car when Mary said
"Dad's home a lot now."

She didn't say it out of fear just

that we had more chores to do and
didn't get ice cream on Saturday's anymore
nor pockets full of change divided amongst us
on Wednesday nights
to put in our little brown books
on Sunday after church when dad
and the other man filled ledgers
in the church basement
because numbers counted
like so many cereal box tops
or soup can labels. We trusted
we'd get ice cream.

Even as we jumped through the sprinkler
on that hot summer day the cool water
running out and mom saying to dad
"We can't afford not to" and him
in the collapsible chair under the elm
his head in his hands eyes leaking.

I was the only one awake beside Steven
driving a soccer-van
that smelt like rented sweat.

Middle-management,
he kept an eye on the road
while the rest slept

their heads rocking with each
asphalt swerve

an October sun pouring
through the windows on our way
to an Efficiency conference
to save our Mill.

A hand on the wheel, Steven
looked at me, "We follow
accepted accounting practices."

Beyond him the land
was bared bedrock; mulch
scattered like feed for giants.

A battlefield ground down
to its roots; wispy trees
in sawdust ponds.

"If the worst happens," Steven said,
"I'll transfer to another plant."

"Loss is always someone's gain," I said,
hoping he stayed focused as the road rose
through jagged cliffs and fall-away ravines.
"Like Enron," I said.



for W.S. Merwin

Bruce Kauffman

after one of his shortest poems

Elegy

Who would I show it to

i don't have a massive poetry library
still well over 200 books
arranged alphabetically by author
nearly two dozen of them, Merwin's

this morning, having
learned last night of his death i
rearranged the bookshelf
created an upper space
on the top shelf
right side

pulled his books
from their spot
placed them there

added my 2 books of his prose

now they sit as if
shining
above all the rest

a memorial of sorts

an elegy

at the edge of this
newly remodeled
library
even the landscaping
around it different
 modernized
 synchronized

the old tree
on the corner
 taken down
new trees planted
luxuriously rich burgundy
woodchips scattered
 contained
on the soil beside
where a garbage can
and old bench
used to sit

more and new benches now

those benches here
old bench gone
 a holding point
 the sticking point
 this touchstone now
today for me

several years ago
a good friend and i chatted
on that old bench

summer then
he complaining of
the heat
sitting there in the shade
resting
escaping his walk
the heat as well

he at least several years
younger than i

lean and fitter

had never smoked
that i knew

in the prime of his life
i thought
that day, now 7 years ago

so i didn't understand
in fact disbelieved
when i discovered
a few weeks later
he had died

and here i am
looking at a beautiful
resting area
he had never
would never
see
and a new bench on which
he would never
could never
sit

somehow there seems
an unfairness in this

time has a way
of moving on
of forgetting us

but time also
has a way
of bringing things
back



Trees lining the 401
wave leafy hands
to our fallen soldiers.

Sap-blood
swells their trunks
stretching
taller and broader
one ring at a time,
barked pillars to the sky.
Branches and roots entwine,
entangled comrades.

*A tree planted for every hero
A goal of two million trees ...*

The Ontario Government entreats us
to honour our dead
by co-funding the living memorial
that inhales carbon dioxide,
exhales our very breath,
feasts on flying particles
and elixirs our water.

Should I sponsor a sapling?

If every country agreed
to plant copses for corpses
there'd be coast to coast woodlands,
rainforests that rival the Amazon's,
jungles as robust as Africa's.
Our planet would enjoy
lush life at the price
of growing armed forces
who harvest children.

→

Grateful there are no saplings
rooted for my three sons
I make an impossible wish—

For every tree sweetening the air,
a hero could breathe, stand
broad and tall.

April 30, 2018

Berlin, London, Nice
Manhattan, Charlottesville—
I thought it was safe to assume
vehicles driven by vengeance
and voices of illness
crashed into crowds elsewhere,
always
elsewhere—

Today, I lower the flags of my faith
as I watch and re-watch
a van careening
crunching bones
splattering blood
half-a mile south
on a Toronto sidewalk—
killing 10, wounding 15
all the way to Poyntz St.
where the van turns and jerks
to a stop near the house
where I once lived
with my four-year-old son
and new baby

I tell myself Poyntz St. lies
in the dust of my distant selves
Elsewhere—

Now I live downtown,
my sons, six-feet and strong,
but the yellow tape with black warnings
can't block off my memories —

→

In '78, my Poyntz St. neighbor, age nineteen,
drowned when her panicked dog jumped on her,
pushing her down too long
under the skin of the lake;

two months later, her husband—twenty—
swallowed his grief forever,
pills washed down with whisky

The next year, another neighbor's
truck became a metal coffin
for his charred corpse

I follow the caution tape
past the wreck of my marriage,
my husband's tight-fisted custody,
and me, mourning the children
I never lived with again

Elsewhere,
Else where?

Where contains *here*
and those 10 covered bodies

The tape extends
longer
farther
past wreathes,
candlelight vigils,
strangers comforting each other

It encircles the world
till all the places we call
"nowhere near home"
become Here
and Everywhere—

the yellow tape binds us.

Mary, as you weep by the cross
while they take your son down
and lay him to rest,
I hope someday he will
open his arms to enfold you;
you'll breathe in his scent
like the night he was born
while he rocks you gently, gently.

Later, as he dips bread into wine
you will marvel.

To reassure you
this is no figment, he'll show you
the rose on each hand and foot
and the scar from the long-stemmed lance.
You'll watch over his bed while he sleeps
till the sun restores the horizon.

Next morning, his eyes will darken:
What they did to me is unfinished
I must flee to a city by the sea.

Mary, I too know
how it feels to have a son leave.
When my boy's heart stopped beating
and quivered like a beached jellyfish,
a wave of darkness rolled toward me;
I wanted to lie on that gurney with him
when they wheeled him away.

In the waiting room I stared
at the hands circling the clock—
each hour, a century.

Then I bore witness to my son's resurrection—

→

a nurse in scrubs patterned with feathers
flew through the door and smiled,
Electric shocks, two stents,
your son has come back!

Mary, may the one you bore
come back to life
and sorrow's stone roll from your heart.



A baby's loneliness calls
from the spaceship of a crib.

My body jerks upright.
I reel down the hallway
praying,
thank you

His squall shattered a
nightmare—I was screaming,
keening, chasing red
tail-lights that receded
through de Chirico streets.
In the dream, I had
forgotten—forgotten! that
I was a mother! gathered
up my sketchbooks,
left the sleeping wain
on the bus...

*All night, my dear, I searched for
you, until your cry woke me.*

New-cut from my belly,
he awakens a star burning
in absolute zero.

His mother's loneliness
howls in the hollow beneath
the scalpel-wound, a uterus
that still resounds with an
inexplicable absence.

*Every night I dutifully set
you down, warm from our
nursing, and leave your
room for mine. But I lie
straining to hear the soft
bellows of your breath on
the other side of the wall.*

→

This is our tea-break, a pause
in a long day of examining
wall-clocks and street signs,
discussing dogs and Popeye.

To be fair, as he dreamt under
his chiming plastic carousel or,
unable to stand himself, walked
toy people through plastic houses

I attacked the toilet, paid bills
made beds, swept. After this,
I'll get supper going. For now,
we are chillin'—bums on carpet,

backs against the wall, in the hall
that is Baby-Town. It's lined with
miniature buildings of all vintages.
A fat cottage with doors that, to the

child's delight, open and close. A
pressed-tin Edwardian from my
generation, a plastic barn from his: all
pounced on with joy at the thrift shop.

Inside them live cowboys, Bert and
Ernie, skeletons, dinosaurs, horses.
All rest now as, drink of choice
in hand, we gaze at a drywall sky.

The child gives a long thoughtful
draw on his bottle of juice,
points his finger into the air, posits
"Bubble... sky... moon."



I follow the tracks
by the sea at dusk.
A train plunges by,
quaking the earth and my legs,
stitching windows of light
onto night's black cape.
I am twelve.

The railway line
rises above our family home,
my mother's nasturtiums,
their bright orange
sun setting all afternoon.
The grey groundhog,
jaw circling as he grinds petals,
rests on his haunches
to watch the hurtling blur.

My father scavenged
old railway ties
to border the flower beds.
My room in the lopsided addition
had no insulation.
By February I gripped
my pencil, fingers numb,
in slippery gloves

at the desk by the window
breath a cirrus cloud.
I dropped my books
on the pine kitchen table,
called to my little sister
Please turn down the TV!
My father stomped
down the stairs,
swept my books
onto the kitchen floor,
Upstairs!

→

One morning before school
a red Mustang knocked me down
at the flashing crosswalk.
My front teeth
cracked, chipped.
Had I looked both ways?

I limped home, knees bloodied.
You're a survivor, Mother said.
Adult teeth,
my father said—
too old to change.

In the doorway of my bedroom
I rolled my alley marble—
blue swirled with green
like earth from space.
How it rushed to meet
the wall below the window
overlooking the tracks!
I lay awake under the down quilt,
tongue tracing the new jagged
edge of my upper front teeth,
listening for the moan
of the train,
waiting for her beam of light,
the veil she discards
in flight.



My sister and I, we work cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla, and all-spice into a dried mince of cherries, currants, and prunes. Ladled into a mason jar, the fruits bathe in the waterfall of *El Dorado* Demerara rum. Molasses deepens the hues of the liquor, a rippling burnt toffee like the Berbice River under trade wind sways of the pontoon bridge past the ramshackle ferry dock, where sailing times to New Amsterdam remain frozen in white letters on a black billboard.

*Fasten the jar lid and place it in a cupboard,
where the fruits can soak in solitude*

One month births a plump revival, so we pry the jammy lid. A whiff of frangipani on a sultry evening by the Georgetown seawall, steel pan calypso clamoring for provocative dance, strapless coconut skin, sorrel drink on ice. Arteries of rum sashay through packed spaces.

*Fasten the jar lid and place it in a cupboard,
allowing time to go nowhere but*

within

Sleigh bells ring, but we hear subtropic rains trample our terracotta roof, in the *land of many waters*. Soft lemon butter from holy cattle blends into a fork-whipped froth of eggs. Demerara sugar, warmed from a bottle near the open window shutter, splashes into the cream in shifting shades of amber. The crystals glom together like teens in pleated uniforms, ambling their way to Skeldon High.

*Open the jar and spoon the fruit into the
grazed daylight of a steel mixing*

bowl

We have never felt the graceful landing of a snowflake on the tips of our noses. But we pretend, with two cups of flour - shake, pour, feather, and fold - a mulled dough of memories...a red silk wedding sari and gold brocade kurta, palm tree trunks strung with strands of light. No wild roses for a bouquet, but the exchange of marigold malas. Stirred with a vigorous grip, this lumpy fragrant mixture.

*Grease the pan, then bake the batter in the
deep starry night of a Chambers*

stove

Soothing temptation, sucking thick stalks of sugarcane, we tumble back into the kitchen while the cake is cooling. Almonds chopped rough, we pummel into powder. Combining essence, water, and white sugar for a sheet as smooth as the Rockefeller skating rink we see on TV. Puffy coated patrons pattern figure eights while we flatten the marzipan with a slack handled rolling pin.

→

*Drape the thin paste onto the cake
as a flag bestows a goodbye*

We crown our confection in a billowy white *Royal Icing*. Egg whites and squeezed lemon, beaten foamy and opaque, devour light flurries of powdered sugar. Stiff peaks begin to soar, and we imagine snow-capped Rocky Mountains. We

*dearly miss our brother, and his bride
in Canada,
where all their Christmases
are white.*



Small Villanelle for Dylan

for Dylan Thomas

Cut glass smoothed by the green of the sea
Gull on the wind above the snow-clothed town
Such are the voices you speak to me.

Cocky punk with a cigarette on the rain-soaked quay
Even skunked in a pub you wear a poet's crown
Cut glass smoothed by the green of the sea.

Will these spindrift pages ever set you free
In this bog of Wales where you so dearly drown
Such are the voices you speak to me.

You pray at The White Horse on bended knee
Swaying slave to the verb and the slippery noun
Cut glass smoothed by the green of the sea.

Oh dearest Dylan I hear your sweetest plea
Within me pinned without the slightest sound
Such are the voices you speak to me.

I named my daughter after your wife so she
Might wed a poet and live a life out loud
Cut glass smoothed by the green of the sea
Such are the voices you speak to me.

for Leonard Cohen

I set out that rainy morning
to find out where I had been
As a pilgrim I started walking
up that corridor of sin
Always been a strain to know you, Leonard
but love don't shed its skin

On The Main we hear your praying
your lines surprise my tongue
And perhaps the world is fraying
and the pendulum has swung
But your words are such a necklace, Leonard
of a beauty freshly spun

You lived so long in wilderness
with your locusts and your wine
Of love you chose to do with less
always the man before his time
I often sense you, Leonard
barely balanced on the line

You spoke to us all of brokenness
and scars that fail to heal
It's how you saw the cards I guess
G*d gave you in the deal
We could have loved you better, Leonard
though we loved to see you kneel

You were delicate and bent, my friend
like a flower after rain
And blackened pages to the end
that's how you played the game
It's great to share your darkness, Leonard
such a dimmed but wondrous stain

→

I sit in Parc du Portugal
before your window's eyeless gaze
You sat here, too, I've heard them tell
until your final days
I feel you now beside me, Leonard
your bonfire and your blaze

You approached the world with a weariness
that put those rivers on your face
An informed and lovely dreariness
that was part of your embrace
You were the tender keeper of suicide, Leonard
yet the epitome of grace

Yes, I set out that rainy morning
to find out where I had been
As a pilgrim I started walking
up that corridor of sin
We're all a kind of pilgrim, Leonard
but love don't shed its skin

We're all a kind of pilgrim, Leonard
and love don't shed its skin



Moonglow through the bedroom blinds
& tinkling stars,
or if not stars—chimes on the back verandah.

So long have we been lying here,
our motionlessness composes—
the highest notes are ghostly,

almost godlike. What is likeness?

I've been asking people
what the scent of chrysanthemum is like.
Earthy, some have answered. *Piney*.

Like nothing, most reply,
by which they must mean *nothing else*.
Someone called it *step toward death*.

So long have we been lying here,
our motionlessness is old—
like blood & love, the lizard brain,

the rivalries, the tribe. Like inside jokes,
demotic hopes;
something fine & primal.

We pitch a teepee in the sheets
and huddle eye-to-eye—
looking in the dark like blinded spies.

I know when I am true—
when I'm alone in the yard
and open. *Radiance*, I say,
and *Clear me*.
Please, I say out loud,
speaking to a vision,
then a single physical junco—
freight-grey sparrow
foraging for morsels in the snow.
The wind is stiff; he sidles, bareback,
skipping over stone,
eye-white tail erect in quick ascent.

He comes this once
and vanishes
 and doesn't answer,
then he does— much later,
through caesura
 & ellipsis



Story Pages

Bob Boulton

Quentin Kerr

Daniel Lockhart

Robin Ray

Sheila Tucker

Your Improved Life

Choices

From the Banks of Jeffersonville

Car 20

Not Today

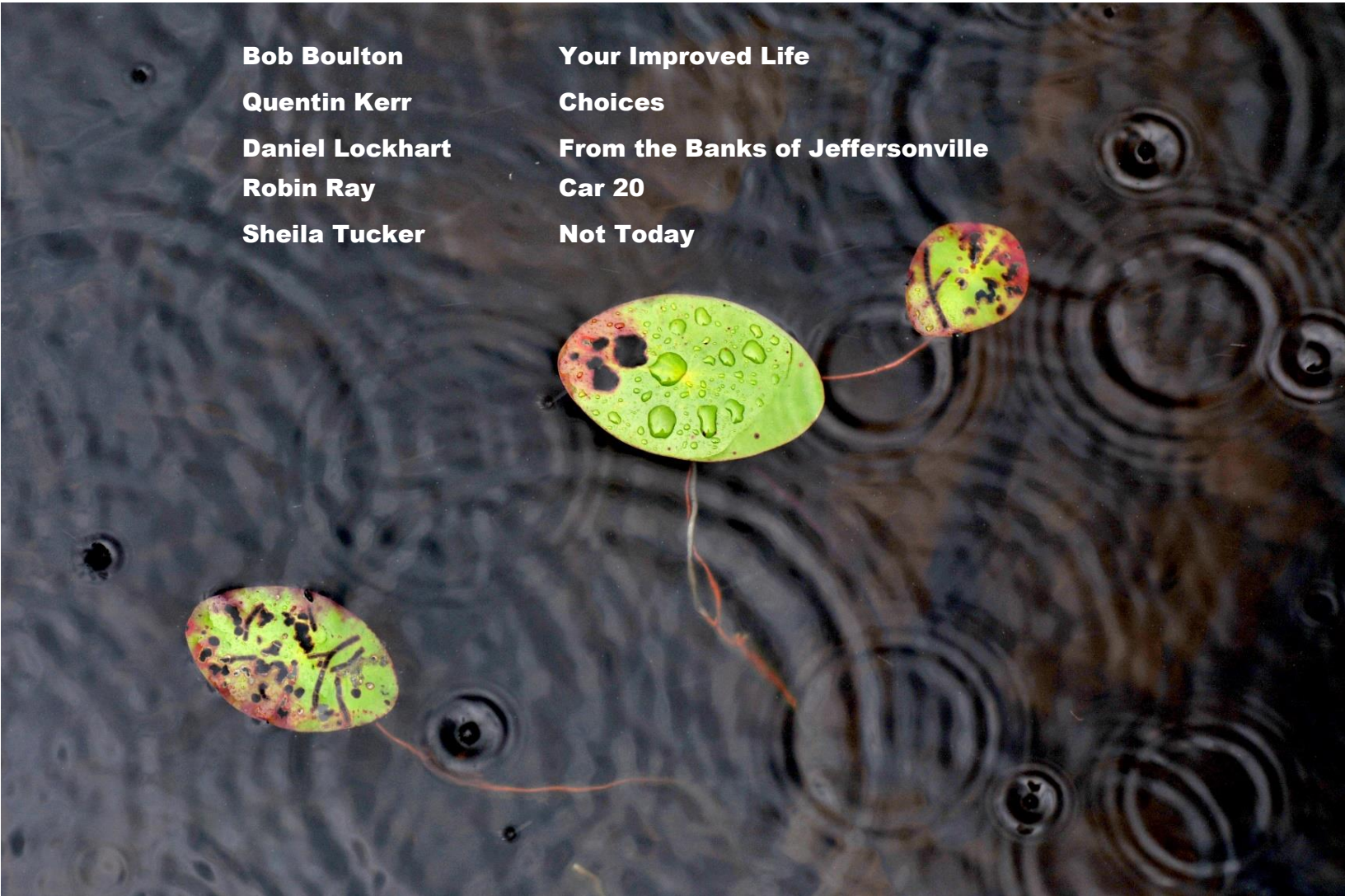


Photo by Stephen Humphrey

Thank you for calling *Gardner Life Insurance*.

Welcome to our *Sunshine Service* automated digital experience.

Our call volume is currently higher than expected. Your call will be handled by the next available *Sunshine Service* Representative in the order received. You are number:

Seventy-Six.

Are you aware that *Gardner* is having a limited-time service offered exclusively to our current non-claimant clients with up-to-date premium payments?

If you connect with us in the next 24 business hours, you are cordially invited to double your coverage for only an 89% premium increase. To take advantage of this extraordinary limited time offer, please press #90. Some conditions may apply.

If you are checking your payment history, you may go online to www.gardnerlife.com/myaccount. Or, you may press "1", leave your telephone number and your policy number. We will return calls in the order they are received.

If you decide to hold the line, please be advised that our Options Menu has recently been refreshed to better serve you. Carefully review the following instructions and press the Option Number applicable to you.

If you wish to cash in your policy, press 2 and hold the line to speak with our Senior Director Accounts Management.

If you wish to convert your Term Life Policy to a Whole Life policy for only 10 times your current premium cost, press 3.

If you wish to cancel your Term Life policy, press 4. (Please note, we will guide you through the forfeiture of all premiums you will have paid until the last day of the month following your personalized cancellation month.)

We take this opportunity to remind you that *Gardner Life Insurance* is committed to optimizing your money and delivering the best available service to you, our Improved Life partners. As you may have noticed in the usual mass media outlets, *Gardner Life Insurance* has downsized and we bid cheerio to 700 or so *Sunshine Service* staff.

For your improved convenience, as a key component of our ongoing *Sunshine Service* program, we have upgraded our client interface platform and are pleased to introduce you now to our new *Sunshine Service Digitized Data* experience.

→

Digitized Data allows us to instantaneously access all of your policy details in our files as well as all of your personal information on your hard drive.

In line with our Core Value Statement, and in full compliance with current legislation as we interpret it, we want to offer you, our faithful clients, *Sunshine Service Loyalty Reward*. Accordingly, we are delighted to report that your *Personalized Premium Reduction* is

\$12.93 a year.

In addition to these unprecedented monetary savings, we are also able to offer the following expanded *Sunshine Service* options:

If you wish to hear the names of our most highly-insured single, widowed or divorced or similarly unattached clients, and their addresses, press 5.

To ascertain whether or not you are the named beneficiary of another person's policy, and the amount of their coverage, without them knowing you are checking, press 6.

To discover the most up-to-date medical prognosis for a particular insured person, press 7.

For a limited time only, clients who press 7 are eligible, as a special Thank You bonus, to receive our No Seven Guarantee policy rider. For a monthly bank transfer contribution of only \$50.00, an \$8.33 monthly saving compared to our \$700.00 current annual rate, you are guaranteed that no one will be eligible to "Press 7" about you. Subject to availability. This policy rider may be withdrawn without prior notice. Sorry, no rain checks.

(Prohibited in certain Regulation Encumbered jurisdictions.)

This message is for general information purposes only. A full description of the *Offer* can be found on our website under *Terms and Conditions*. Or visit us at *Offer FAQ's*.

Once again, congratulations for choosing *Gardner Life* where your life is our business and you are *Number One*.

Please press 8 to repeat this message. Or hold for the next available *Sunshine Service Representative*.

Thank you for your patience. You are now number:

Seventy-Six.



The old man enters the restaurant slowly. He is shuffling, a man with layers of clothing draped over small hunched limbs, layers of spotted skin sagging from thin bones. He seems to tumble forward rather than walk, his steps rolling, one into the next. He is a man folding into himself; someday soon he will fold into himself entirely, and disappear.

Behind him comes a woman, tall, thin and upright. She shuts the door quietly behind her, strides ahead of the man, one hand reaching down and resting on his shoulder, the other pulling back the thin wire chair. She guides his slow sinking, his shuffling fall, pats him on the back, pushes him in, and sits down next to him. She is younger by some twenty years – old still, tired still, but her lips are painted red, and at her neck is a small chain, a tiny brass cross. She has wrinkles, stretching around her eyes and nestled in the corners of her mouth. On her head is a yellow hat.

The table is pushed up against the window; on the street outside it starts to rain. Children walk by, small rounded creatures with bright coats, bright rain boots, hoods pulled tight overhead. One girl, older than the rest, peers into the restaurant. She does not see the man, does not see the woman; sees only her reflection. Frowning at the glass, she tucks a strand of hair back under her hood. Inside the restaurant, a waiter sweeps out from the kitchen, spinning past the counter, head cocked back on thin shoulders. He catches the woman's eyes, his lips automatically folding themselves into a smile. His head bobs up, down. He snatches a pair of menus from the counter, tucks them beneath his arm, vanishes back into the kitchen, re-emerges with glasses and a pitcher. The old man frowns when the menu is placed in front of him. He watches his cup fill with water. Growling, he takes a napkin from the dispenser. Shaking his head, he wipes the rim of the cup where a few drops have spilled.

The waiter frowns, apologizes. The woman smiles her forgiveness (her

→

cheeks, rising up, fold her eyes into twinkling crescent moons); the waiter smiles back. The old man clears his throat, in a deep rumbling breath, but does not say anything. As the woman and the waiter talk the old man finds himself growing still. His legs settle into the seat, his bones become hard; giving up the idea of motion, the old man becoming a resting thing, a planted thing. Outside, the children shriek, giggle, splashing in puddles and running past. The rain, falling harder now, comes in sudden angry gusts and drums against the window. The sky is clouded, dark.

The old man hunches over the menu, leaning forward at an absurd angle, his arms resting on the table, his nose barely an inch away from the large print menu where *Calvino's Italian Eatery* is written in wide red letters, and underlined in green. Below is a small black stencilled leaning tower of Pisa, a cartoonish wreath, an elegant bordering vine, purple grapes. The old man regards these closely. He has spent time in Italy. A fair bit of time, he thinks, although he's not sure. He has a memory of Pisa, too. Of a yellow-brown lawn, a cold afternoon, a gap-toothed man selling roses for 75 lira. Or was that in Assisi, at the Basilica? It is hard to know. His daughter sent him photos of Pisa, he is certain of this – he will ask her, the next time she visits.

Maybe he will order the gnocchi. He has a memory of gnocchi – maybe in Italy, maybe not, but he is sure it is a good memory. The man feels it in his head, the same way he explores the gap in his mouth where his molar used to be. There is a woman in this memory, but her face is shifting and translucent. There are slanting gold-tipped mountains rising from dark rakish vineyards, maybe. A cat, too, a small soft orange cat that sits in a basket by the fire. Or was it a dog, thin and yellow, that nipped at his ankles? The old man frowns, sighs. He clears his throat again, rumbling and coughing, and glares down at the waiter's hand where it rests on the table. The hand does not budge. Perhaps, the old man thinks, the boy

→

is flirting with the woman. Either way, he wishes they would quiet down so he could concentrate.

The old man returns to the menu. Where was he, again? His eyes waver past the thin lettering of the pastas, stopping on the entrees: *Pollo*, he reads. He frowns, scrunching up his face. The old man hates chicken. Always dry and burnt, chicken. Except his wife's chicken, but that's different, that's good chicken, with green beans, and tomatoes, pulpy and sweet. The old man was a terrible cook, though; just the other day he'd barbecued chicken, had become distracted trying to fix the TV, had burnt it, terribly, awfully, had thrown the whole damn thing away. Where the hell had his wife been then? He will ask her, when she gets back. But no, this chicken will be no good. Burnt, probably, and dry. Besides, the old man hates chicken.

He will order steak, he thinks. Beef, after all, is the food of hard-working men. The difficulty is finding someone who cooks steak properly: seared well, to a good hard grey, and hot, too, with gravy. That was the way to do it! No damn red, or anything – blood, after all, is the sign of the savage. That was what the old man's grandfather said, had always said, loudly and angrily, his hands shaking as he waved a steak knife in the air, lips shining with spittle. His father's hands were like that too, now that he was old: thin and prone to trembling. The old man shrugs at the thought. Like father, like son.

The old man looks up. The waiter is gone, has left, returned bearing hot tea, and left again. The woman sits upright, her hands wrapped around a mug. She smiles at him. She had been watching him, enjoying the way his face wrinkled and moved as he muttered, like twisting charcoal, grey and lined and soft. She reaches out, now, tapping her index finger softly against his menu.

"Remember," she says quietly, "your doctor says you shouldn't eat red meat."

→

The man clears his throat, mutters indistinctly, feels a rough rasping cough in his chest. He had forgotten, somehow. He lowers his head, returning to the menu. He sighs, swears. Maybe he will still order steak. What did the hell do doctors know, anyway? The doctor wasn't a hard working man. The woman is still watching him. She is far too nosy, he thinks, and flirts too much. Maybe he will get steak. Let her try and stop him – what did she know?

But then there was a picture of her, somehow, that came to the old man. It wasn't the woman, but someone else, someone else, someone he knew from long ago. Her face shifted, blurred. The woman in his head was frowning, he knew. Her frown was unbearable.

No beef, then. No pasta, either, because pasta is always overcooked in America – no one makes pasta like the Italians, of course. And the old man had spent time in Italy, so he would know.

Fish, though. Maybe he could have fish. The old man liked fish – yes, he had always liked fish. He is certain about this. He sees the thin body of a white scaly bass, wriggling and flipping, held tight in his tiny hand above a white glassy ocean. An albatross flies through the restaurant, screaming above him, scimitar wings cutting the air in vast, slow, muscular turns. His mother cries out, grinning in delight at the small squirming creature he has caught, and he shows it to her, smiling up proudly, sticking out his chest and feeling the saltwater drip down his arm. "And what will you have today, sir?" his mother says.

The old man blinks, shakes his head. He rolls himself upwards, rolls back his shoulders, looking up. The waiter is back; the albatross is gone. The woman next to him is smiling, a strange look on her face. Her hat is far too bright, he decides.

"Sir?" the waiter says again. "What can I get you?"

The old man looks down. The menu stares back. He squints, mutters, clenches-

→

ing his trembling hands behind his back. His fingernails bite into the soft yellow skin of his palm. He clears his throat, and his eyes fixate on the very first item on the list.

He points, without thinking, without looking up.

"Very good sir," the waiter says, and nods, smiles at the woman. Snapping his notepad shut, he turns back, walks past the counter, pushes past the double doors and into the kitchen. Here, his shoulders sag, his smile slackens. The cook, nodding along to the opera on the radio, turns his spatula in long whimsical circles. Next to him, a skinny kid with a red nose leans against the counter, talking about the time he got lost in the Bronx. The kid holds a crumpled blue dish-towel in one hand, and it flaps back and forth, back and forth, in rhythm with the story, soapy water dripping and collecting on the tile floor. The waiter ignores the red-faced kid, frowns at the dish-towel; he has heard the Bronx story a hundred times before.

"That Miss Buchanan, with her old man?" the cook asks, raising his eyes from the simmering broth.

"Yeah," the waiter says. "She wants the risotto, garden salad."

The waiter walks past, and his head disappears into the refrigerator at the back of the room. He emerges with a bottle of Perrier, two slices of lemon.

"And her father wants the carbonara, I'm guessing," the cook says, tapping his spoon against the side of the pot.

The waiter turns, grins. "Of course," he says. "He always wants the carbonara. Guy's been here a hundred times. Always gets the carbonara."

Outside, it is getting dark. The children have long since disappeared, are home now, sitting around neatly set tables, eating from neatly set plates. The street lamps switch on, one by one. The rain has decided that enough is enough,

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and no longer falls; the clouds pass overhead and the street is cast in grey. The puddles reflect the city lights in oily red and green and white, disturbed only by the occasional car, passing quietly through the night.



Hot, was the only word that Dmitri could think of as he pulled off his sweat drenched shirt and dropped it on the floor. The dancers around him continued to fold, divide, and pivot, their movements spurred by the turns in violin swipes, the notes climbing and falling like the pitch of a barge on a storm swept river. A string of Christmas lights gave what little illumination they could to the crowd below them, the ethereal half bath of shadows and light giving way to occasional flesh, occasional slips of white cotton clothing.

Dmitri would later say that they moved, all of them that is, by touch and clear want to be in the physical place nearest someone else. As a woman with short, boyish, dark hair spun past Dmitri through another division of the crowd, he watched the loose tufts of her hair in that low devil light and could only think about the heat and that none of them could stop because with the movement and shifting of bodies, the crowd had reached an equilibrium. The subtraction of just one body – she was bent backwards now and Dmitri fell forward resting the weight of his belly upon her – just one subtraction and the entirety of this dance would collapse. The band halted with the final reel of the violin.

“Y’all have been very attentive tonight and me and the band would like to thank you,” the singer of this week’s Commonwealth import addressed the crowd. “As I’m sure y’all can feel, the band needs a drink in this heat. And it’s more than likely there are some places all of us would like to be getting.”

The dancers applauded and Dmitri backed his weight off the woman before him. He looked her over. He hoped to make out her face in the low light of the dance floor. She seemed younger than he would have liked, but the light was just too damned low to make out details, so he decided things should be more to his liking. Her eyes were small, her nose not large, yet pretty in a way that pleased him. Dmitri pulled her back upright by the arms.

“Thanks,” she said. She straightened the back and sides of her shirt. Dmitri’s great Aunt Beata had told him to give that extra few moments to his final dance partner because you never know what you can bump into in the shadows of a contra dance. His Uncle Bradford had met his wife of twenty-some-odd years by spending that few minutes chatting. He was the family point-in-case. Now in his late

→

was the family point-in-case. Now in his late thirties, Dmitri had become more and more apt to follow his great aunt's advice. Dmitri was, for the most part, single and melancholy, and Bradford was a happily married man.

"You seem to have lost your shirt," the woman said and pointed rather seriously to his deeply tanned bare chest.

"Like the band said," he returned the boldest smile he could, "it's hot up in here." Dmitri looked around and down to the floor where he might have hoped his shirt would be. "It seems long gone, wherever it is." He was both pudgy and hairy, yet carried a raw masculine charm that he liked to strut. Losing a shirt was nothing new to him.

"You any cooler?" she asked.

"Nope, can't say that I am." The floor around them had cleared quickly of the majority of dancers. "But to hell with it. It's nothing but a shirt."

The woman grabbed him with surprising strength, pulled him alongside her and turned him about. A man with a large professional looking camera stood in front of them. Dmitri could smell the ballroom on her; sweet, earthy, like the steam off a country still. She was almost his height, three inches short of tall, and the smoothness of her skin as she wrapped herself around his back and arm felt young, like the first look he had got of her. He pitched out that same smile again and the camera flashed.

"Need your names and towns for the photo caption," the man held out a small recorder in front of them.

"Abbie Kessler of Clarksville." She looked back at Dmitri nervously when she said it.

"Dmitri Pentracis. Arctic Springs."

The man with the camera and recorder turned and walked off into the shapeless bulk of the straggling people. He slipped into the bruise-like blue of people beyond the small hue of lights above, disappeared. Dmitri felt Abbie drop her arm from around him.

"What is it," Abbie said, "that you're supposed to say to your last dance partner of the evening?"

"Can I see you again? One of my aunts told us to spend a little extra time with the last woman we dance with," Dmitri answered. "Always good to get to know people you spend some

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time with.”

Abbie smiled and shook her head in disbelief. Dmitri was lost as to why she gave the look, but he took it for good as she smiled. “The things you find out about people might not always be to your liking.”

“Got to figure that’s why they might be worth finding out about,” he said.

Abbie laughed and shook her head. “Give me your number,” she said, handing him her phone, open to the spot where he could enter it. As she waited, she asked. “Your aunt, is she a happy woman?”

“Maybe, but who am I to tell?” he replied as he handed back her phone.

Abbie looked at him with the half-cocked smile of someone on their way somewhere that just found the best reason to stay put. She stopped and started at saying something before her cellphone buzzed. A glance down and then back to Dmitri, she paused again as if thinking of something to say. “Well Dmitri,” she dropped a half bow and looked over her right shoulder, “My ride back awaits. Maybe you’ll be famous. Maybe we’ll get to spend some more time like this.”

Dmitri couldn’t fathom why anyone would wish someone to be famous in a good way. He had never cared much for fame nor thought about it either. He strutted down the sidewalk outside the Eagles Lounge, past the mostly empty parking lot, to Pearl Street. The summer heat was both aggressive and stagnant. He pulled out his cell phone and fired off a message to his roommate, Fred, before stopping at a convenience store and grabbing canned sweet tea to drink. Going against the likelihood that fame would find him, he had given up on booze the week before. He felt great on the whole, but was thirsty more than he ever remembered being. He considered it something to do with muscle memory. Fred was getting off work at the nearby cigar bar. Dimitri asked him to meet up along the river with the hope it might be a little cooler there.

The small amphitheater of a park met the water line of the Ohio, and in the stifling air a coal barge moved upstream, past the east arm of Louisville. It left rippled light turned upside down in its wake. Fred sat above the park, on bench overlooking a crammed open plaza. Dmitri sat down on a bench beside his. Fred offered him a ragged t-shirt he had brought. Dmitri draped the shirt over the back of the bench.

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“All these years,” said Fred, “and we can do no better than pull coal outta the ground and burn it to keep us happy. We ain’t nothing more than crude animals, man. Crude animals.”

“It’s a miracle that we can move stuff like that though.” Dmitri said. He had thought little of the coal barges. They were accents to his daily rituals.

“Tell you what, you got that one right,” answered Fred, “But we still need to burn that garbage just to get by because we ain’t nothing more than crude animals.” Fred, too, had given up the drink after being forcibly removed from the front steps of the Mohamed Ali Museum over a vending machine dispute. That was almost two and half years ago and ever since the moment the judge handed down his probation, Fred had given himself over to sweet tea and declarations of man’s animal nature. Dmitri had followed suit after an incident at the Louisville Bat Museum and a Ty Cobb replica bat.

“I’ll always leave the positive thinking to you,” offered Dmitri.

“Just calling it like it is.” Fred stood up, walked to a nearby bush and began to urinate. “You should know that this heat makes me damn near ornery. But suffice it to say that plenty of folk are getting pissed off by Kessler Energy. Aren’t doing nothing but burning toxic crap and making sure none of us see a hot nickel for it. Someday someone is gonna snap.” Fred returned to near the bench. He hovered over the river vista before him, taking it in quietly. “Hey, how the hell was that dance of yours tonight?”

“The band was pretty good and there were a lot of people,” answered Dmitri. “Wish they would have spent a little extra of some lights, darker than a cave in that place.”

“You really like that old time music?” Fred sat beside Dimitri. A single car rattled down the street behind them, towards the bridge.

“Yeah, yeah,” he answered. “Don’t fix what isn’t broken right?”

“I hear you there,” Fred replied. “Good story to losing the shirt this time?”

“Nothing really,” Dmitri said, “other than it was hotter than hell in there. I let it go sometime before the last song.”

“Throwing your shirt around like some hillbilly.” Fred laughed. “You sure as shit were born to be on this river bank.”

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“What can a man be but what he is?”

“Coal burning crude animals,” said Fred and shook his head.

Dmitri swore he could feel the dull thrum of the barge’s engines. Its steady shaking grew into a presence that made him uncomfortable. He wanted it to break as it was worse than the heat, heavier and almost aggressive in its persistence. He got lost in his discomfort. Stared at the tail end of the barge, wished deeply for it go silent.

Fred laughed and took a big pull off the sweet tea. “Just two past their prime single guys,” he said, “sitting by a river waiting for something to happen, hiding out from the heat.”

“Ain’t got no problems with that,” answered Dmitri.

He thought about telling Fred about Abbie. He was thinking of her. He had a short unremarkable history with women. He often thought, only briefly, it was on account that he also had a short unremarkable employment life. For the most part he ran odd jobs for slightly wealthier acquaintances he hustled up. On occasion he sold some of them insurance products. Dmitri knew that wasn’t the sort of thing that lured the opposite sex his way. Besides, it was better to know one’s true self, and Dmitri knew he was not a full-time sort of guy. Without the booze he had taken to thinking more about women. Abbie was the first one in a good long time he had spoken a series of genuine if not pleasant words with him, let alone got his picture taken with.

“Ended the night on the upside,” boasted Dmitri, “one good final dance in.”

“I bet you did,” Fred ribbed him.

“No lies,” said Dmitri, “even got a photo to prove it. Well not yet.”

Fred looked at him curiously. “Yet?”

“Newspaper guy,” replied Dmitri. “Guess is that its that weekly arts paper from Louisville. But they got a picture. Betcha they put those up tomorrow. People love watching other people having fun,” he declared with a joking hook.

“Well damned if you and your girl aren’t gonna be plastered all over Kentuckia tout suite tomorrow morning.” Fred laughed. He had been for a great long time the type to celebrate the

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accomplishments of his friend with as much bravado as Chicagoan on a bourbon tour. “You and your shirtless warthog gut all over the pages grinning away beside some pretty young thing without doubt.”

“True manhood if they ever seen it.” Dmitri pulled a long haul off his sweet tea bottle. He heard people talking and laughing from the nearby Big Four Pedestrian Bridge. Rich multi-coloured lights across its large steel trusses lit them enough so he could make out a sizeable group of them. He swore he saw a baseball-sized flaming object fall from the bridge towards the barge and a single person run off towards the Louisville side. About a hundred feet this side of the bridge he saw someone turn around and holler at the group. They walked hurriedly and seemed to signal for the group to walk back towards the Jeffersonville side. He perked to attention. Dmitri scanned the bridge to make sense of the warning but saw nothing. The first tuft of black smoke crossed in front of the center span and he realized the fire was coming from below.

“Oh shit,” said Fred, “that barge is ‘bout to be lit up.”

Dmitri noticed the smoke and traced it back to the barge. Neither man moved. The dull hum of the engines stopped. Dmitri noticed a second person close to where he was half-certain he had witnessed the falling object. They hesitated then ran back towards the Jeffersonville side. “Like it ain’t hot enough?” They watched as the first flames emerged from above the deck, coming from the side of the large mound of coal. The people atop the Big Four Bridge briskly made their way down the bridge back into Jeffersonville a couple of blocks inland.

“Should we do something?”

“Sit here,” replied Dmitri, “front row seats. Besides what else we gonna do? It is fire surrounded by water. The rest is someone else’s problem.” The rest unfolded slowly as if mired in the thickness of night. It seemed to take near an hour as the flame and smoke spread toward the center of the barge. More and more black smoke obscured the bridge and city lights behind it. A good chunk of the barge was on fire before Dmitri made out the splash of the boat crew members jumping overboard. The men were halfway to shore, the Jefferson shore, before the emergency vehicles descended on Riverside Drive. Dmitri and Fred hardly moved the entire

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time. Fred was taken with the growing fire. He lit a cigarette, offered a drag to Dmitri who refused it.

“Slow burner,” Fred pointed out, “this gonna go on for awhile.” The police and fire were hollering at the men who had swum ashore. Other spectators had begun to gather around the waterfront. “That’s one of them Kessler barges.”

“Someone is gonna take a bad fall over this,” offered Dmitri.

“Looks like your late-night newsmaker dance just got booted off the front page,” joked Fred.

“Good,” Dmitri replied, “never been one geared for no front pages.”

“Don’t think that one is ever geared for that sort of thing,” said Fred. “It sort of finds you, whether you like it or not.” The barge was mostly engulfed in flames.



Morning came on with dusty-baking light like the worst kind of Sunday morning. Dmitri had slept in till near ten am. Sleep had been fitful given the heat and stagnant air that even a couple of fans couldn’t seem to push around. He had no dreams he could recall. He found Fred sitting on the couch in the living room, three fans pointed at him, newspaper in hand. A plate of mostly eaten toaster waffles lay on the chipped plate on the coffee table between two fans.

“Those square dances take a lot out of a man?” he joked. (Take out this space)

“Contra,” Dmitri corrected him. He had to correct Fred almost daily on the name since he had taken up the dancing about six months prior. Although his roommate had been right about the dance making you tired, exercise was something Dmitri had left behind after high school, the dances were something he had come to look forward to between work and benders. He was certain that Fred had chosen to rib Dmitri about the one thing he knew he wouldn’t get sore over. “Barge still burning?”

“All over the news,” he said. “Non-stop about the smoke and the health hazards and you know, the usual ambulance chasing. Good news for us is the smoke is blowing towards New

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Albany. We get to keep our windows open.”

Dmitri retrieved a cup of lukewarm coffee and sat across from Fred in the still air behind the fans. “Those news people rely on your crude animals for their work,” he said. “They need fuck-ups like that boat crew to make a living off of. Made you buy a paper.”

He leaned forward retrieved an almost full waffle and proceeded to eat it. Fred shook his head and laughed.

“Funny you should say that. That girl last night, you know her name?”

“Abbie,” Dmitri replied. Clear headed as if the answer were the single reason he had gotten up that morning.

Fred pushed the newspaper over to Dmitri. “Kessler?” he asked.

“Yeah,” said Dmitri. He grabbed for the newspaper, scoured the first page for a picture of her. Some part of him hoped to see their picture from the Eagles.

“Not there,” offered Fred. “Look inside” Three page shuffles and he found a picture he quickly recognized as her. She was standing with a family, clearly one of the daughters of this well-to-do business family. “Kessler as in Kessler Energy Systems,” Fred spelled out for him. The company name was synonymous with local environmental disasters, worker deaths, and the general disregard that some of Kentuckiana’s wealthiest had for anything outside of money and the large estates they could buy up with it.

“What is this?” Dmitri asked.

“Kessler and Company owns that steaming coal barge out there,” said Fred. “People are pissed. Might have done some damage to the bridge. That looks like the sniffer rag that hunters throw out to the dogs before they going hogging.” He sat upright, suddenly taking notice of Dmitri’s serious posture. “You were actually hooking up with a daughter of that shitbag family?”

Dmitri shook his head. “The shitbag family,” he said. He looked over the photo of the Kesslers, particular attention on Abbie. She looked early twenties young, someone about to be freshly minted from university. He recognized her by the nose. She was a tad bit prettier in his memory than she was in the photo. Still though, for what passes for beauty in the blue bloods in this part of the Ohio River Valley, she wasn’t half bad. “This bad you think?”

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“You did what, get your picture taken with an heiress the night her family fortune pissed off Kentuckiana?” Fred scratched at his leg. “Don’t sound like the end of the world to me. But maybe get back with me after a minute. Things really escalate quickly in this sort of heat.”

Dmitri knew Fred was right. He had always remembered the way the shootings in West Louisville spiked when heat like this settled in. The slow burning smoke off the river barge added ominous haze and grit to a heat-charge atmosphere that only seemed to make things more dangerous. As for the moment there was only the possibility of a picture with Abbie Kessler in some publication, somewhere in the area. Until anything happened, like the emergence of that photo or the explosion of that coal barge in the river then all of this mattered only to Dmitri. Stories, even when they could span a city in scope, only mattered to those they spoke about. Stories were profoundly personal affairs. He opted carry on, as if last night was a pleasant passing of sorts. His phone chimed in with a message request on his social media. AbeeKessler502 had asked him to meet up with her.



About an hour later Dmitri went down to the riverfront to meet Abbie. He had not wanted to tell Fred out of fear that meeting might prove more embarrassing than anything else. He used the excuse that he had to get out of the thick heat of the apartment, find a breeze and a sweet tea by the river. He found a bench, upriver from the barge fire and a quiet spot not too far from his place. Still the air was thick with haze. The scent something similar to turn of the last century Louisville when coal burning was as celebrated as college basketball championships were now. He was certain a sizable crowd of people would still be watching slow burning fire. Louisville and its Indiana suburbs were made up of folks that watched disaster as if they were post-dinner game shows.

Abbie Kessler arrived less than fifteen minutes after Dimitri had settled on that bench. She pulled up in a newer black German sedan. He was mostly certain that she parked illegally before getting out of the car, crossing the street, and approaching him.

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“Was worried I wouldn’t recognize you,” she said.

“Guess it wasn’t all that dark,” Dmitri joked. Abbie took a few steps closer to the bench, still keeping her distance. His joke clearly missed the mark.

“Um,” she started, “so you haven’t seen any of the – ” she lost the nerve or will to finish the statement. “You’ve got the social media stuff. Guess you aren’t using it that much?”

“Not really,” offered Dmitri. “Only really social where I can actually be present. Besides, everyone busy drinking and taking pictures of their food I can get on cable TV. But I gotta look the part.”

“Ok,” said Abbie. “Well, that explains the calm sitting in the park. You know there’s a barge burning in the river?”

“Yep,” he replied, “watched the whole thing happen last night. Actually, right after I finished dancing with you. Funny enough, also just sitting by the river.”

“Do you mind if I sit?” she asked. She motioned to the far side of bench, beside Dmitri. She sat down.

“Your people are in the coal business,” said Dmitri. “I’m guessing your people also got something invested in that burning boat.” Abbie nodded her head. She appeared to gain confidence. “And you’re a fine dancer,” he added. That comment elicited a smile from Abbie.

“Because what my family is known for,” she started, “both good and bad, means that at certain times I can get a little too much attention and gain the worst sort of reputation.” She lingered on that last comment for a second. “You know,” she added, “sometimes things that are pretty normal like going out dancing and then ending up in a local lifestyle magazine or on a web site in a picture with a working-class guy and then you’ve got your face on every site.”

Dmitri took the declaration of him as working-class as a compliment. Folks had generally called him asshole or drunk fuck or lowlife. He did work. And while it didn’t by any means define the way he thought of himself, the idea of being cast as a worker brought on grand thoughts of being seen as the brawny, shirtless hero of the factory crowd. Fire cooked metals tumbling an assembly line, him hammering it into perfect form with a majestic hammer. Then he thought about the picture.

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“Wait,” he said, “the picture.”

“You and me on a million or so pages,” she said. Dmitri was clearly impressed with the thought. “But thanks for meeting me.”

Dmitri grew excited that a woman should thank him for anything. He did recognize that thanking was usually the step before women asked him for things. He paused for a good moment in silence and tried to assemble everything before him.

“So are you saying that a lot of people are looking at the photo from last night?”

“Starting to anyways,” offered Abbie.

His mind was racing, trying to make up something on the fly, adapt to the places and events the world wanted to take her.

“Look,” she said, a sense of earnestness appeared in her voice. “I am on my way to press conference with my dad and brothers. It’s because of the barge fire. The smoke and stuff isn’t going over well with people that already pretty pissed off at the family name because, well –”

“You make money by selling coal,” said Dmitri. “And it’s dirty.”

“My family does,” Abbie said. She was forceful in her correction. “I’ve got my own life, down in Ashville. Or I’m trying to, anyways. But, I was thinking, if all you’re doing is sitting here on an otherwise nothing-is-gonna-happen-day that you could maybe come along.”

“To a press conference?” Dmitri asked.

The request was odd but alluring. Abbie was not entirely unattractive. Uncle Bradford would most certainly have approved of an action of this caliber. He looked her in the eyes and wanted to say he saw the lights of the dance reflecting back at him. He was ready to agree to it before Abbie answered.

“It can be lonely being the youngest daughter,” she flirted, “of a wealthy, disliked family in this part of the commonwealth.” She leaned forward accentuating her breasts through a simple cotton shirt.

“But we’re in Indiana,” said Dmitri. He dumbly stared at Abbie’s chest.

“Close enough,” snapped Abbie, losing her sweetness momentarily. “You in?” She waited

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a good few seconds without a response from Dmitri. “Besides people are starting to see our picture everywhere. Let’s give them something to talk about.”

Dmitri laughed aloud and nodded his head. He knew that no one would be looking at him, the entire premise of Abbie offering a showering of attention from an adoring public was ridiculous as the Ohio River flowing backward. Sitting on the bench, hot, exhausted, and short of breath from bad air would land him back alone in the same twin bed in the apartment with Fred like it had every other night for the last two years. Not ever being to a press conference in his life, added to the allure. He agreed and he dutifully followed Abbie to her car and to the press conference.



The atrium of the building hosting the offices of Kessler Energy and Systems was a bland leftover from the end of the last century. The interior showcasing drywall and some white metal and dust stained windows with ubiquitous potted plants from someplace almost tropical but not quite exotic.

The building reminded Dimitri of a Steven Segal movie that he couldn’t place the name of.

The drive there had been quick and ethereal, with the opaque atmosphere of the fire heavy throughout the city. Abbie had talked about the way things could be better if only people were more than their ancestry. He listened. Through their conversation Dmitri had pieced together the important facts for himself. That Abbie Kessler was honestly single, that contra dancing was more than just slumming it for a rich girl, she did enjoy it, and that alcohol was something that her mother’s behavior had made her dislike intensely. She was also clever in the way that more honest private school graduates tended to be. Abbie mentioned a college in the Carolina’s, somewhere she had recently graduated from. She mentioned he should come and see it with her. Dmitri agreed to.

There was a large gathering of local reporters and media milling around in the atrium. A

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podium had been placed near the elevators and a couple of private security guards took a position near the elevator doors. None of the reporters made much if any note of his and Abbie's arrival in the tower. They were preoccupied by their phones and speaking to each other. Looking around, noting the way others were dressed, mostly in suits and ties, he had the sudden realization that neither he or Abbie matched the dress code. Abbie stopped them on the periphery of the gathered media people. They waited. Abbie checked her phone.

"You and your dad close?" asked Dmitri. He wanted to ask if they were expecting them, but he thought it sound too accusatory.

"Biologically, yes." Abbie scrolled through several messages on her phone. "Looks like the family just figured out I'm home from Charleston."

"Just figured out?" asked Dmitri.

"Yeah," she replied matter of fact like, "probably they just saw our photo together in the Rivermen." She laughed like a kid about to get away with something. "I'm pretty glad I found you on my way here."

Dmitri's head spun. None of this matched up.

"Just why are we here –" Dmitri's words were cut short by the opening of the elevator door. Out walked the family he recognized from the newspaper article that Fred had showed him earlier. The oldest Kessler brother he recalled from a billboard on I-65 north of Jeffersonville. They looked the part of the rich family, every one of them. Their very appearance made Dmitri uneasy.

"To watch all the ways they are going to smolder," replied Abbie. "and help them do so a little bit more."

Dmitri was surprised by his presence in the situation. His brain raced to keep up with recognizing the way he had ended up here. Well known in some parts and portions of Kentucky as one of the most worrisome forces of chaos in taverns, tourist attractions, and family restaurants, the territory Abbie's cagey comments hinted at was a place he was all too familiar with. The witnesses were about to be equally surprised by the turmoil that was about to be released.

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“You didn’t say nothing about fighting with your family,” offered Dmitri.

“Didn’t want to scare you off,” she replied, “you know leading with your best impression.”

Her father and mother both noticed her in the crowd, making it known with a determined scowl in their direction. Walter Kessler stepped before the microphones placed on the podiums.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,” he said with confidence that only money could buy, “as you are all more than aware, the S.S. Harriett Fitzsimmons is currently smoldering in the middle of the Ohio River, due east of downtown. We at Kessler Energy are co-operating with responders and officials from both the Commonwealth of Kentucky and the State of Indiana. The crew of the Harriet Fitzsimmons are all accounted for and are currently being debriefed by our legal and internal investigation teams.” He continued by relaying the technical description of his company’s coal barge and the safety record of the company.

“He’s lying,” Abbie whispered to Dmitri. “about just about all of it. But it’s all a show. Everyone here knows it, too.”

“I saw it happen,” offered Dmitri. Although he hadn’t really seen anything, he had simply been nearby when the fire began. He spoke only to involve himself with Abbie’s course of action. “I mean from shore.”

“They don’t even care,” Abbie said. Dmitri doubted she had heard him. “They are more pissed about you.” Dmitri looked up to see the stares cast down on them by Mrs. Kessler and the older brother. “They hate people that aren’t rich or don’t have a name, but can sell a newspaper or ad campaign.”

“I saw it happen,” repeated Dmitri. “the burning thing from the bridge falling on it.” Abbie swiveled her attention but not her gaze. She held her gaze on her father but the torrent of emotion slowed in her. She was thinking the way Dmitri had tried to when the Louisville Police had showed up to arrest him for destroying a crate of Derek Jeter bats at the Louisville Slugger museum. “Be careful what you admit aloud,” she replied, “the worlds we create are a whole lot better than the ones that really exist.” She paused as her father stated that the company maintained the highest safety standards and were looking into whether it was an act of vandalism that caused the fire. She smiled as she heard those words. “Speaking makes things

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true, you know?”

Her voice had the strong snap to it that he knew wealthier, self-considered wiser people used to speak to working guys like him. The words came as if he was outside of any semblance of self control. He knew that Abbie was decidedly in control. And she was beautiful in that moment. Abbie was beautiful and wholesome in the way that being raised wealthy and free from the crushing stress of life without had left most every other woman he had met in recent years.

“I’m just a working guy,” offered Dimitri. “Burning barges, fights over family fortunes, that sort of stuff, isn’t me. That’s all big world, important people stuff.” He realized he was trying to find a way out before his panic set in. A panic that was partly made up of a confused, gushing attraction to Abbie, and another part that recognised his independent control of self was slipping away.

“That’s the thing, Dimitri,” she said, “the world is made up of small people doing small things. Then all of a sudden one grand thing happens, like a barge burning up on the river, and all those small people start looking for something of grandeur from that one big thing. But it’s all exterior to us. It really doesn’t go on to matter what it means to us. It’s just this thing that happened and maybe made us look up from whatever it was that we were doing.”

“Like drinking a tea on a hot night with your roommate on the river,” added Dimitri. He felt himself giving in. Her story mattered. His point did not.

Abbie laughed. “Yeah, like that. Small things, the very things that make up the reasons why we do everything.” She paused, looked around the park before her. “But those big important things that happen go ahead and do what they have to do. We don’t matter to them or to anyone else. The boat burns because it burns and we do what we did that night not because of it, but because we’re just two people who wanted to dance to old time blue grass.

“Small people doing small things,” offered Dimitri. “If you’re into those things.”

“I am,” Abbie said, “very much so.” She reached down and grabbed hold of his hand. It was warm and while she was a good number of years his junior, he felt a strength and warmth in it he recognized was vastly stronger than him. “You were with me last night,” she said, “when we saw the barge catch fire.” Her look at him, all wide-eyed, and earthy and damned beautiful,

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was like a late July sunrise over the Ohio. It was the small things, yes. And yes, telling that story, the story that they were together on the shore when the barge caught fire, would be such a small thing.

Dmitri nodded. He smiled back.

Abbie nestled her head against his shoulder. She had not let go of his hand. She watched her family's press conference for a solid few minutes. She led Dmitri out of the building before the flurry of reporter questions descended upon the conference. He knew the family had seen him. Abbie and Dmitri understood her family's anger at the presence of their daughter's working class boyfriend. They drove back across the river to Jeffersonville through the slow clearing smoke of the smoldering barge. And Dmitri understood that whatever followed this day was sure to be different from everything that had passed before.

"What am to you?" asked Dmitri.

"The best alibi a woman can ask for," she answered.



“Car 20. Pickup, Car 20.”

Mahmud grabbed the beige Motorola handset clipped to his dashboard, gagged from its lingering cigarette smell courtesy of the previous driver, and pressed the talk button.

“This is Car 20.”

“Scoot on over to the Nite’s Inn Motel on Aurora,” the dispatcher requested.

“What room?”

“She’ll be waiting up front.”

“Ten four.”

He replaced the handset, swung his cab around, and headed towards Aurora Avenue. He noticed they cleaned up the snow on the main drag, but there was still about a foot of the powdery stuff, gray and black in spots, piled up on the sides of the road. The shimmering crystals of hoarfrost dangled off the leaves of each tree he passed, temporarily blinding him with their reflection of the early evening sun.

The legendary avenue had been changing lately. Ladies of the night weren’t working as much. The influence of Naloxone and bicycle cops were being felt. Spanking new legitimate businesses were being built, displacing the sea of contraband that usually flooded the area. The recently fallen snow lent the zone a softer, less harsh hue. He remembered how treacherous the strip had been – he’d encountered an armed robber himself, but like a linguist who’d forgotten speech, he chose not to remember that wicked day.

Mahmud checked the time on his watch: 1930 hours. He’d been on duty for just 90 minutes but only had two short fares so far. He hoped the slowness wasn’t a harbinger for the rest of his shift.

Pulling into the motel, he immediately saw his fare. She was the only person standing by the manager’s station. Conservatively dressed in blue pants, a green jacket and white beanie, he figured her to be about 55 years old. Noticing her left arm was in a cast and sling, he quickly skipped out and helped her get into the back seat of the sedan.

“Good evening,” she greeted him as he returned to his seat.

“Hi,” he responded.

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He picked up his clipboard and pencil and started writing.

"Where are you headed?" he asked.

"The Safeway in Ballard," she answered. "Do you know the one?"

"Market Street."

"Yes. That one."

He left the motel and began driving towards the grocery store.

"Are you going to work?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she answered. "Just shopping."

Hmm. He thought it was a little odd she'd go that far out of her way to shop especially since they'd be passing at least four supermarkets, but a fare's a fare. It wasn't his to question. She did, however, sense his curiosity.

"What's your name?" she asked.

"Mahmud."

"Where are you from, Mahmud?"

"Bangladesh."

"Oh! How nice! My name is Barbara."

"Hello, Barbara."

"I like *that* Safeway because I used to live near it. Their pastry chef is the best."

Mahmud nodded politely. "I see."

"You know, I used to drive," she claimed, her voice sure and strong.

"You gave it up?" the cabbie asked.

"Remember the real heavy snowfall three weeks ago?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I was driving to the doctor's and I got broadsided by some kid who couldn't stop."

"Wow. And you broke your arm?"

"No. This wasn't from that. Both cars are totaled, though."

"You can't be too careful."

"I moved into that motel two weeks ago."

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“Really? I heard it’s not exactly the safest place in town.”

“I didn’t have a choice,” she admitted, her voice moist with regret. “That’s what Social Service will pay for. I used to live in Ballard, like I’d told you before, but some rat chewed through the electrical wiring in my house. It was set on fire. I woke to the house in flames.”

“Oh, no!”

“Yeah. I only had time to grab my keys off the center table. By the time I got outside, half the house was gone.”

“You’re a lucky person.”

“I guess,” she agreed, nodding. “My neighbors were pretty helpful. A few days ago, I left the motel to walk to a donut shop. On the way back, I slipped on an icy patch. Would you believe I broke my arm?”

“Just like that?”

“Just like that.”

“I hope your whole life wasn’t so unlucky.”

Barbara shrugged. “There were bad and good times – same as everyone else. How was your life in Bangladesh?”

“Ah, well, you know...it’s a poor country. Some towns have no running water. There are people living in slums. There’s no sanitation. Diseases run rampant and uncontrolled. Seems like you spend your whole life just trying to get out.”

“To come to America?”

“Actually, any place with opportunity. Doesn’t matter. Libya, Saudi Arabia, Australia...”

Just then, the dispatcher’s scratchy voice burst from the speakers.

“What’s your location, Car 20?”

Mahmud picked up his handset. “A few blocks from Market Street.”

“Oh, okay. Never mind,” the dispatcher said, then hung up.

Mahmud cradled his mike. Seconds later, he pulled up to the entrance of the Safeway.

“What’s the damage?” Barbara asked, taking bills from her purse.

Mahmud smiled. He always thought *damage* was an unusual and contradictory American

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substitution for price, like the *damage* of a haircut or the *damage* of sending your daughter to private school.

“It’s okay,” he answered. “On the house.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes.”

Barbara took a \$10 bill and stuffed it in his jacket’s pocket anyway. Seconds later, he stepped out to help her exit.

“You’re a good driver,” she congratulated him. “You don’t have to feel sorry for me.”

“I just think it’s good when folks can help each other out. Doesn’t always have to be about the almighty dollar.”

“I’ll need a ride in an hour or so. Can you pick me up?”

“If I’m in town and not busy.”

“I’ll call them and ask specifically for you, Mahmud.”

“Okay,” he agreed, then returned to his taxi and took off.

It was chilly out that evening, but as he drove out of the parking lot, he relished his *damage*. He would produce his first warming smile in ages.



Just look at her—perched on the old log in the village park, deep in thought at seven years old.

Her mom is on a nearby bench, knitting, and occasionally looking up to check on her daughter's whereabouts, but she needn't worry. The child is going nowhere. Not today. We all know her dad was posted to Syria. He left yesterday afternoon. Many of us stood along the street to wave him off. He kissed Maureen and hugged little Karen tightly before getting into his friend's car for a ride into the city.

We understand, of course, that military folks sign up with this in mind, that they may be sent to a war zone. And even though it's a peacekeeping mission, we know what can happen. It's up to us in the village now, to keep an eye on Garth's family. We'll take turns to visit once in while, not too many of us all at once, but enough to reassure them of our love and respect. We'll offer to babysit when Maureen needs to go somewhere, and we'll invite Karen to sleep over with our children some weekends. Even though it may be only a street away, kids love sleepovers.

I wonder what is going on in that lovely girl's mind. Sometimes, we underestimate youngsters and forget that when we're watching the news, they're taking it all in too: the bombs, guns, bodies under sheets. Children often stop asking questions after a while. But they know about the cruelty of the world, the danger, the grief of starving parents of skeletal babies and the pain of boys with blown-off legs. Ironic that movies are rated. We forget that worse is on the screen in the daily news.

Karen is staring off into space. Is she scared? Deep-down angry? Quietly revisiting those television scenes of the Middle East?

For a normally boisterous kid, she's very different this morning. I see Maureen now gazing at her thoughtfully. She's putting her knitting away. I see her call something to Karen, with no response. She calls again, and Karen shakes her head and stays where she is. She doesn't appear to want to get up.

Not today.



Book Reviews

Bill Arnott **Fox Haunts by Penn Kemp, Aeolis House (2018)**

Sharon Goodier **Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century**
Edited by James Deahl
LummoX Press, California, USA (2018)

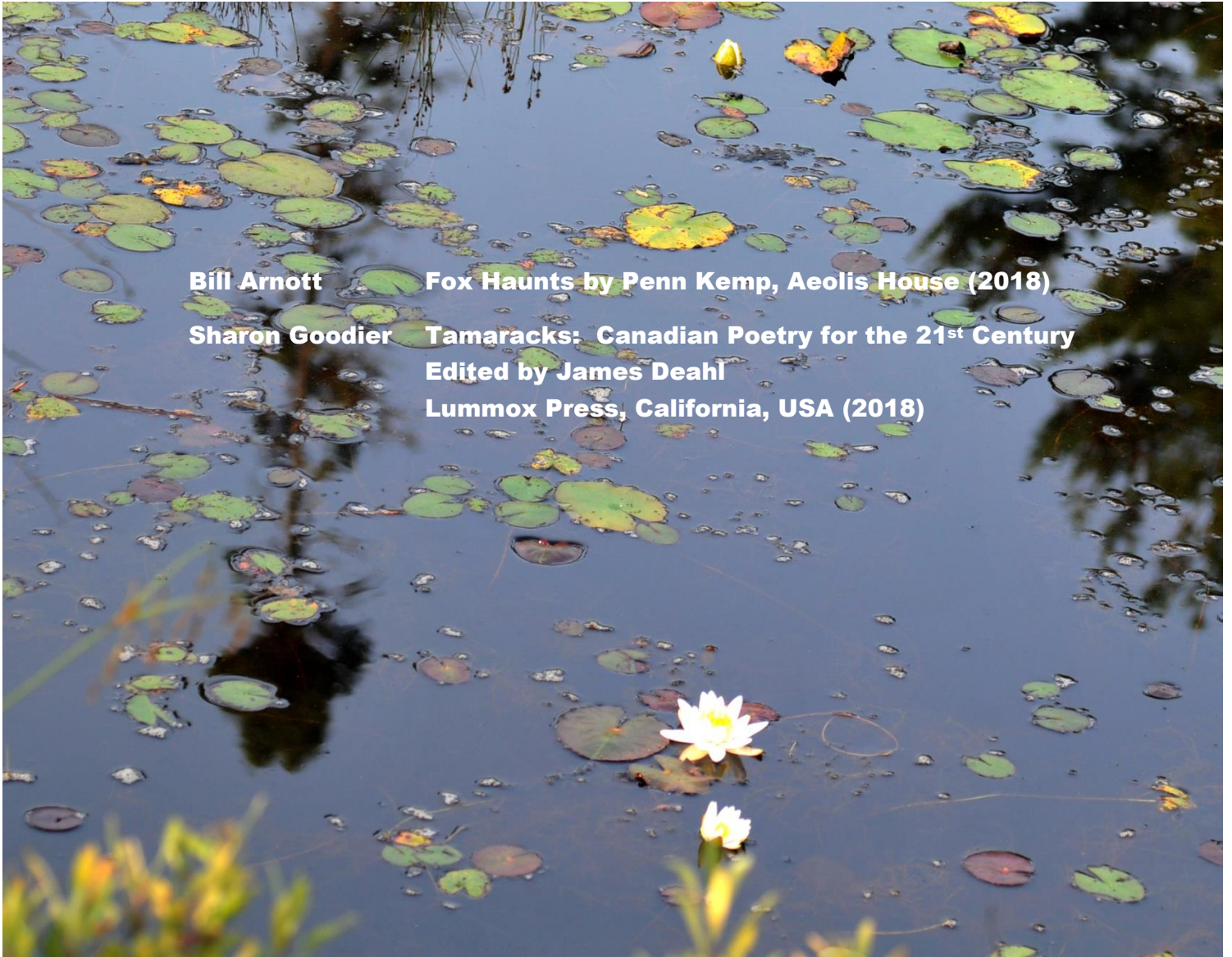


Photo (detail) by Stephen Humphrey

by Penn Kemp Aeolis House, 2018

The first time I saw a fox, I was atop an open-air double decker, trundling along Cornish coast, and intermittently thrashed by leafy birch as though in a Finnish sauna. I was compelled to shield my eyes – feeling that entity was there beyond my grasp. In fact, it was present for everyone. Laid bare, unabashedly rich in its beauty and lore, the slender, russet-blond animal was taller than I imagined. Regal. It was the same when I met Penn Kemp. Somewhere a fellow trickster – Loki, Kokopelli perhaps – grinned as I carried a newly signed Fox Haunts to my semi-detached lair.

Adaptation runs through this former London Laureate's poems in darting twists, almost as though in flight from an imagined hunter's horn. At times furtive, dreamily camouflaged, or bounding into plain sight, Kemp's artistry enraptures. We join Kemp in childhood, her parents fused to fox in her memories through "A Child's Garden Fox."

Sleepy, sleeping in my mother's lap. Nestled.
When. A fox ran in front of the car. And
was transfixed by the headlights. Ran and
ran in front of the car but could not escape.

In red hued monochrome we glimpse dead fur and living banshees in "Steal, Stole, Stun."
The dried heads of black fox hung
from my grandmother's stole as if
ready to strike. Dead flat button jet
eyes shut tight to their own secret

And with fireside ease we move through seasons, geography and myth, playful "Glow" perching us parrot-like on the writer's shoulder, experiencing evolving worlds while peering real-time into her thoughts.

That narrow snout surfaces to
figure your next ploy, asking
curiously: 'Who do you serve?'

The essential question mocks
my reply. The whole, of course.

Reading Kemp's work I feel nestled in a sidecar affixed to the master's motorbike, confident in her route, at times in conversation, listening to her storytelling, or akin to a lie-down on a therapist's sofa. This book can leave one simultaneously inspired and intimidated, seeing genius expand exponentially with time.

Writing this I'm at Penn's desk, at least the one she left for me to use in Vernon, BC. Beside me *Fox Haunts* lies curled and content, in its rightful place atop the rest. Through a broad bay window a few last leaves cling in vixen colours, and from "Entertaining the Fox" the author's words linger.

May you be translated. And remain
entirely your own.



Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century

Edited by James Deahl, Lummo Press, California, USA (2018)

This seems to be the Age of Anthologies in Canada. The New Canon 2005 edited by critic and poet Carmine Starnino, collected fifty of the most interesting Canadian poets born between 1955 and 1975, many of whom had never made an appearance in a major anthology. The Best of the Best Canadian Poetry in English: The Tenth Anniversary Edition (2017) highlights the best poets of the last ten years of The Best Poetry in Canada series and The Next Wave: An Anthology of 21st Century Canadian Poetry (2018) by Jim Johnstone (Editor) introduces readers to established and emerging poets, all of whom have won awards, with at least one book published.

Tamaracks: Poetry for the 21st Century edited by James Deahl is the largest anthology to date, showcasing 112 poets who have published from 1 to 70 books, 1-8 chapbooks, received none or numerous awards, and been in 1 to 70 anthologies. Deahl has chosen 13 newcomers for this anthology, some published in many magazines and others in only a few, but all with no books or chapbooks. This is phenomenal.

These poets don't shy away from the grit of the world they live and write in. We live in alarming times and many of these poems reflect this. There are several memoirs of war. Robert Acorn writes about WWII in *Bedspreed* and *Paschendale*. Becky D Alexander, in *Buried Deep*, works from a memoir of Sergeant Jim Alexander who died in WWII. Henry Beissel's *Manifesto in Times of War* begins each stanza with "Tell the enemy this..." and gives various endings throughout the poem like

"missiles can no more blow up the human spirit than tanks can crush an idea."

Steven Donovan gives us *The Sea Air at Middlehead* for John James, gassed and wounded in 1917, whose war-battered lungs gave in to consumption. Deborah Panko walks through a garden of sculptures of wartime scenes from Viet Nam that honour the sacrifice but mostly call on regret.

Several poems deal with disasters. Ronnie R Brown in *Thoughts After the Carnage* paints a picture of a school shooting and a mother who teaches shooting to her disturbed son who shoots up a grade school. The poem ends with a chilling question:

"Think carefully, then list everything that's wrong with this picture."

The sinking of the Fairie Queen in 1859 is a memory of a disaster in P.E.I. by Stella Mazur Preda. *Before and After* is Diane Attwell Palfrey's recollection of the Spanish River derailment in 1910, the worst train accident in Canadian history prior to the conflagration at Lac Megantic in Quebec in 2013.

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Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century

Edited by James Deahl, LummoX Press, California, USA (2018)

There are several poems about dead or dying relations. Sylvia Adams makes a delightful comparison with music in a poem about her dying father. Sharon Berg's prose poem, *Prophecy* is a sad reflection on Al Purdy, her older brother's father:

"sweeping in with your bravado... tearing
other lives apart"

In *Persephone Unbound*, a prose poem in three stanzas, Clara Blackwood assures the reader:

"But this time she will flee those
who try to bind her"

In, *Vacancy at the Blues Barbershop* (Chicago), Kent Bowman eulogises a dead barber:

"let us pay homage to this long-suffering cutter
who heard one blues song too often and took his own life"

Many poems are openly political. Gertrude Olga Brown in *Babelplatz*, a dystopian poem, writes of book burnings:

"here the manic's thoughts melted and all reason... choked
the crazed world with forgetfulness"

Turning the library into a 'crypt'."

Trolling Toward Terror is W.G. Down's extended metaphor of fishing:

"Beware the big fish might
take the bite"

Patrick Connors' *Exit Pole* gives satirical advice to a new Prime Minister. In *Just Say No to Family Values*, David Day, shadowing Allen Ginsberg's Howl, decries how youthful visionaries are lured into the system

James Deahl's poems are the best in his long literary career, in which he has written twenty-plus books but has never been given a literary award. *Ulysses*, is about a minor who "grew frail...(with) depleted bones and black lungs" and is a mythical hero that needs once again "to light fire where fire has died." In a partner poem to Ulysses, Deahl confronts the idea of the good and laments "the fading of the world" begun in the Vietnamese War. The answer lies in silence according to *The Fields of Autumn*, a lyrical and imagistic masterpiece where "the harp of rain falls silent" and he sees in his palm:

"fields that go on forever a
distant sea too far away to
know"

Dusk enters his body "to awaken the heart's sorrow" but by then:

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Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century

Edited by James Deahl, Lummo Press, California, USA (2018)

“no one will be able to resist
the flute coming down from the mountains”

an old friend “returning...in this season of need.” The poet is the flute and is Ulysses lighting the fire “where fire has died.”

The real life of the poets is displayed in many fine narrative poems. Robert Priest gives us *Poem for a Tall Woman*, an expressive, sensuous love poem. *The Mask* by Lorna Crozier tells us how after her husband’s death she put on the face mask he had worn in the hospital. Bruce Myer describes *My Father’s Death Contained No Poetry* and in *The Death of Christianity in Oil City* he honours James Deahl. Michael Mirolla writes of us all in *To a poet struggling to recover her words*. Al Moritz writes in *Of the Birds* how his father knew the name of every bird he saw and Colin Morton describes the packing up of his mother’s house. Lois Nantais’ father is dying of brain cancer and Shane Neilson writes *Angelic Salutation* for his mother dying:

“in the hospital of no fixed address...
(where) we pay with our bodies
in the language of pain.”

Some poems challenge the reader by their style, content or diction. *Where You Get Lost or Go Away* by JJ Steinfeld and *Blackface* by Dane Swan portray the anxiety of living while black. Lynn Tait perplexes us with an unidentified “She” as the subject of *Slipstream* and Jennifer Tan winds us through *The Wind Chimes* with some Sanskrit words. Six poems are offered by Grace Vermeer in *Returning To Fairpoint*, Ohio where she addresses:

“God of the lost and forgotten coal mining
towns... of my mother in the rambling
parsonage... my brothers who learned to trap
muskrats... God of the Mennonite church... of
the brown brick school on the hill... of the slag
heaps...
(where) grit drifted down on the flannel diapers”

and on her return she

“crawled back into the bones I’d deserted becoming a woman
resuscitated from her dead life”

Nevertheless, some poems were disappointing. The poetry reader needs to be seduced by a poem, its ideas, feelings, sounds, imagery, and not necessarily all of these in the same poem. A blank verse that doesn’t go beyond description or narration leaves us standing on the platform waiting for a train that never arrives. It is not enough that the poem is meaningful for

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Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century

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the poet. It must relate to the reader who is not able to translate unknown words and unfamiliar places unless the meanings are obvious or the poet tells us their significance. It should not be necessary for a reader to google these words. Their importance should be clear in the poem without turning a stanza into a dictionary.

Some poems build to a final line like Kevin Savage's *Learn to Appreciate Doors*:

“Remember that windows are merely
Vicarious and you...are...a traveler”

The reader is puzzled by the word “vicarious” to describe windows and mulls it over and over.

It is impossible to do justice to so many fine poems and poets in a review. I have had to trim my review and the cuts were painful for me. Those I left out are in no way less worthy than the ones I put in. Poetry is a complexity of dance steps that invite the reader by sounds and rhythms, visions and silences to dance with the poet. This dance contains the world.



The 2nd Literary Rumours Contest

Introducing the Judges

This contest was independently judged by two Canadian authors. Paul Dutton judged the Poetry section and Merna Summers judged the short fiction. The judging was done blind, so that even if an author had put their name on their work, their name was removed before the judges saw it.

First prize is \$100 plus publication
Second prize is \$50 plus publication
Third prize is publication

Winners appear in order – first Poetry, then Fiction - on the following pages.

The Judges

Poetry



Paul Dutton

Paul Dutton is internationally renowned for his literary and musical performance and best known as an oral sound artist. He's published, recorded, and performed solo and collaborative work, in print and film, on TV, radio, and the Web. He was a member of the *Four Horsemen* sound poetry quartet (1970–1988), along with Rafael Barreto-Rivera, Steve McCaffery, and the late bpNichol. He joins soundsinging oralities and harmonica-playing to John Oswald's alto sax, Michael Snow's piano and synthesizer, and John Kamevaar's percussion and electronics in the free-improvisation band CCMC (1989 to the present). He has won the bpNichol Chapbook Award, 1989; Villa Waldberta Scholarship, Cultural Department, City of Munich, 1998; and Dora Mavor Moore Award, Toronto Association of Performing Arts, 2007.

Fiction



Merna Somers

Merna Summers lives in Alberta. She was a freelance journalist before turning to fiction. She has been active in The Writers' the Writers' Guild of Alberta and she visited China in 1987 as a member of the Canadian Writers' Delegation. She served as writer in residence in several places, and was faculty of the Banff Centre's Writing Program and Sage Hill among others. She's been a fellow at Hawthorden Castle, Scotland; Fundacion Valparaiso, Spain; and Kalani Honva Retreat Center, Hawaii. She won the Marian Engel Award, 1989; Writers' Guild of Alberta awards, for best short fiction, 1983 and 1989; and Katherine Anne Porter Prize for Fiction, 1979. Her works in progress are, *A Whole Bunch of Us Angels*, and *Poet Laureate of the Zoo* (a book of verse for children).

1st Prize - Literary Rumours - Poetry

Meg Freer

The Sound in Temples

It's not easy to change
the sound in temples,
oak, mahogany or spruce,
still dry to the touch,
brittle rings that tremble.
The acoustics fluctuate,
lose cohesion. Your profile
tilts painlessly on a different axis.
Storm the air, awaken your senses,
recast your thinking ears.
Let extravagance pay off.



*inspired by Alex Ross, "Temples of Sound", *The New Yorker*, print issue, May 22, 2017

Frances Boyle

Sluice

Abbreviated noise. Link to an answer
that's always correct. Nation undivided
in its dedication to squirrel baiting, tree

barbering and mackerel. Sky striped
purple with those cloud striations. Wink
from a blackened eye. Bricked-over entrance

to corner store, its new shapes too vibrant
against bricks edge-crumbled, faded tomato-
soup red. A trickle through summer dirt

picks up chaff and seed casings, eases its way
around small clumps of earth. Topples them as
seep becomes rivulet, then flow. Smoothed-out

surface of snow—gashes marked as indentations,
objects as minor humps. Never entirely sure
of the question. Asking, not receiving. Distinguish

shapes in clouds, watch them change. Passageways
under city streets, and the concise click of heels
on granite. Hard wind to walk against. Grit

in your teeth, in your eyes, pecking cheeks,
filtering to your scalp. What you lower
in a bucket to the bottom of the well.



3rd Prize - Literary Rumours - Poetry

Robin Sustano

Under Plastic Whales

- On Burnaby Mountain

We march in the name of water
so we can overflow the streets.
We bring pebbles for throwing at bulldozers,
and climb behind our chiefs
upward like water under pressure.

We hang the economy from a tree
so it can grow sweeter like a fruit,
for one whole morning without the need to get bigger.
We occupy the land with walking, the air with slogans.
Because only on the field of protest can water be imagined:
water that holds its breath, water that sinks like stone
water that cradles the bodies of weeds
the heavy heads of whales
water that calls, from that bluest of silence
that is finally voice

water that is mother

but also water that comes up for air
gasping in the shallows and the froth,
water that breaks out in hives from contact with us,
water that is cut up:
the water we sell
from the water we are.

And though the whales we hoist are plastic, the fins cardboard,
the ground [where] we stand is ground
where money doesn't talk...
shuts its bills in deference and serves instead of rules.

(The woman asking for donations, young
as the first of roadside blooms at the edge of gravel,

3rd Prize - Literary Rumours - Poetry

Robin Sustano

Under Plastic Whales - 2

is asking no differently from the crocuses,
an equal envoy from the mountain's mouth
... earth's one spring made word in March.)

What does it say?

Money doesn't talk where gravel speaks of ages and ice,
of peoples and of hordes,
of earth song more ancient than Orpheus'
song of women song warriors

The drums have a way of calling
the heart you have always been
to come home like dancers from beyond the field,
beating from the outside in.

To see is to breathe.

Look how the curtain lifts:
the poplars and the very morning,
no longer sacred but holy,
calmly stepping out of their own image
like a friend into your gaze.

For once I stand
not in front of things but with them,
with the poplars and the very morning,
true stems of summer's promise,
with the tall and the cut down, both proud in their own way,
with those who have come to throw pebbles at bulldozers,
among trees and other thoughts that stand their ground.

Under the plastic whales on sticks
I know what reconciliation means:

the clear daffodils of my "stop Kinder Morgan"
the "water is life" I am.



The 2nd Literary Rumours Contest

Fiction Judge – Merna Summers

I am sad to report that Merna Summers decided none of the submissions were of sufficient quality as short stories to warrant an award. They all needed some heavy editing. The standard of Big Pond Rumours has always been high, which is why we engage in an editorial process with our authors when we feel a piece is close, but not quite there. In the case of a contest, however, that editorial process cannot be engaged in. An author can only win or lose.

The stories entered were read blind by the Judge, with the proviso that they could be awarded a prize, or not. This is the second time that no prize has been awarded for fiction in our contest. What does that say?

The previous contest's Judge noticed a vast difference in the stories that were submitted to the magazine and those submitted to the contest. Perhaps the authors of quality fiction are less willing to enter contests than the authors of quality poetry? I cannot be sure.

I do, however, thank Merna Summers for holding fast to her judgement, which is difficult in a situation like this. No prizes are awarded for fiction.

Sharon Berg (editor/founder)
Big Pond Rumours



Contributors

Poetry (A–F)

Bill Arnott Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Author, poet and songwriter Bill Arnott is the bestselling nonfiction author of *Wonderful Magical Words* and *Dromomania*. His poetry appears in League of Canadian Poets *Heartwood* and Paper Dart Press (UK) *PLAY* anthologies as well as online. *Studio 6* is his CD of original Indie Folk songs and spoken word. Bill's CD and book sales have generated charitable donations to Make-A-Wish Foundation, St James Music Academy, St Ives Arts Club and Caetani Centre, where he was writer in residence. Bill performs at events across Canada and the UK.



Stephen Bett Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

Stephen Bett's father took him to sit, age 15 and starting out in poetry, at the feet of his father's friend P.K. Page, the doyenne of Canadian poetry, who later revived the "glosa" in Canada. Bett's new book, his 25th, in a sense brings it all back home. *Broken Glosa* takes the "glosa," a Renaissance Spanish Court form, and breaks it down to its contemporary essentials—fractured forms for fractured times and alternate realities—riffing on post-postmodernist poets in ways that are as surprising and inventive as they are richly textured while remaining fresh and playful.

Frances Boyle Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Frances Boyle is the author of two poetry books, *Light-carved Passages* (2014 BuschekBooks) and *This White Nest* (forthcoming 2019 Quattro Books) as well as a novella, *Tower* (2018 Fish Gotta Swim Editions), and an upcoming short story collection from The Porcupine's Quill. Her poems and stories have appeared in print and online magazines throughout North America and in the U.K. Visit www.francesboyle.com for more.



Martin Durkin North Bay, Ontario, Canada

Martin Durkin is a Canadian writer and has published 3 books of poetry. Durkin's latest book, *Steeltown for Mary—Memoirs from a Dick*, was shortlisted by the Hamilton Ontario Literary Awards Council. First recipient of the Milton Acorn People's Poetry Medal, Chris Faiers stated: "Durkin served his apprenticeship well in mastering the deceptively casual language and techniques of Al Purdy and others. He has taken a long step forward into the ranks of Canadian Poets of consequence."

Meg Freer Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Meg Freer teaches piano. Her award winning photos and poems have been published in various chapbook anthologies and periodicals. She won a writing fellowship to the 2017 *Summer Literary Seminars* in Tbilisi, Republic of Georgia. In 2018 she was shortlisted for *Room Magazine's* Short Forms Contest and was a contest winner for *Cosmographia Book's* Poem of the Month. She was also a finalist in contests for *A3 Review* and the *Poetry Matters Project*.



Contributors

Poetry (G – L)

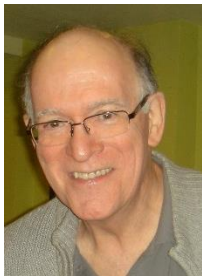


Marc Gijsemans Slane, Co. Meath, Ireland

Born in Flanders, Belgium, Marc's a member of the New-Irish-Communities in the Irish Writers Centre, Dublin. With them, he appeared in *Poetry Program* and later on his own in *Playback*, both on RTE-Radio 1. He also appeared in the International Writers Network radioprogram on NearFM, in Dublin-North. A winner of the Staccato Literary Salon 2018 Christmas-hamper for poetry, he had a poem published for Poetry Day 2019 in the *Poetry Ireland Online Resource* for schools, in the Dublin magazine *Nothing Substantial* and in *Qutub Minar Review*. His short story *Cider Noise* is published in the *Pop To-magazine*.

Debbie Okun Hill Camlachie, Ontario, Canada

Debbie Okun Hill worked as a journalist for two newspapers and a communication specialist for the Winnipeg Art Gallery, Lakehead University, and Fanshawe College. Her poetry includes *Tarnished Trophies* (Black Moss Press 2014) and four poetry chapbooks, including *Drawing From Experience* (Big Pond Rumours Press 2017). She is the former president and life member of The Ontario Poetry Society and a former co-host of Sarnia's Spoken Word event. Follow her literary journey on her blog: <https://okunhill.wordpress.com/>



Bill Howell Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Bill Howell has five poetry collections, with recent work in *The Antigonish Review*, *Event*, *Grain*, *The Impressment Gang*, *Juniper*, *Naugatuck River Review*, *Prairie Fire*, and *Vallum*. Originally from Halifax, Bill was a producer-director & program exec at *CBC Radio Drama* for three decades. For further Information: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry/howell>

Keith Inman Thorold, Ontario, Canada

Declared the "people's poet", Keith Inman has been writing since his twenties and has become an award-winning poet. Prizes he has won include those from Cranberry Tree (2007), The Bannister (2004), and Freefall (2004). Inman is a member of the Canadian Authors Association, the League of Canadian Poets and the Ontario Poets Society. His newest book of poetry *SEAsia* was released by Black Moss Press in October 2017.



Bruce Kauffman Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Bruce Kauffman lives in Kingston and is a local poet, editor, and organizer. His work has appeared in local artist collaborations, anthologies, journals, 2 chapbooks, and 4 collections of poetry, most recently *an evening absence still waiting for moon* (2019). An anthology he edited, *Inspired Heart for Teens*, was just released. He also facilitates intuitive writing workshops, organizes a monthly open mic reading series, and produces and hosts his weekly spoken word radio show, *'finding a voice'*, on CFRC 101.9fm.

Contributors

Poetry (L-S)

Donna Langevin Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Donna Langevin's latest poetry collection is *Brimming*, Piquant Press 2019. Short-listed for the Descant Winston Collins prize in 2012, she won second prize in the 2014 GritLIT contest, and in the Banister Anthology Competition 2017. Her plays, *the Dinner* and *Bargains in the New World* won first prizes for script at the Eden Mills Festival in 2014 and 2015. *If Socrates Were in My Shoes* was produced at the Alumnae Theatre NIF Festival in 2018 and co-written *Waiting for Attila*, won a staged reading in 2019. *The Blue Girl* won an honorable mention Stella award at Act 2, Ryerson, 2019.



Deb O'Rourke Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Deb O'Rourke's is an educator, a visual artist and an author. Her visual art can be seen on her website at <www.milkweedpatch.com>. Her prose has appeared in *Now* (Toronto) and in various news, arts and academic publications. Her poetry has been included in several anthologies, and she was awarded a second prize in the 2016 Nick Blatchford Occasional Poetry Contest in *The New Quarterly*.

Kate Rogers Hong Kong/Canada

Kate is an award winning author who has been published in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, the U.S. and the UK. Her book *Out of Place* (2017) debuted in Toronto and *Painting the Borrowed House*, debuted at the Hong Kong Literary Festival in 2008. Originally from Toronto, Kate has taught writing, literature and English in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan for the past ten years.



Mala Rupnarain Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Mala Rupnarain is a recent graduate of the Poetry Workshop series at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. She's a past president of the Society for Technical Communications Canada West Coast chapter and works as a software technical writer on the mainland in British Columbia. Her most recent works have been published in The January 2019 issue of *Eclectica Magazine* as the Spotlight Runner Up for *suit and bone* and *puja*.

David Stones Stratford, Ontario, Canada

David Stones is a poet and performer, residing in Toronto and Stratford, Ontario. He transformed his first book of poetry, *Infinite Sequels* (2013), into a one man show of the same name. Stones' poetry appears in numerous print and on-line journals, including *Synaeresis 5 and 7* (Harmonia Press), *Arborealis* (Beret Day Books), *Open Heart 13* (Beret Day Books), *Universal Oneness* (AuthorsPress, India) and *Her Royal Majesty* (Paris, France). He was the winner of the Brooklin Poetry Society Poetry Contest in 2018 and is currently preparing two manuscripts for publication.



Contributors

Poetry (S - Z)



Robin Sustano Vancouver, B.C., Canada

Robin Sustano is a teacher, translator, and writer. His poems and fiction have appeared in magazines and anthologies like the *New Quarterly*, *Contemporary Verse 2*, *Blue Print Review*, and *Wild Weathers*, an anthology of love poems published by Leaf Press. His translation of an Indonesian novel was published by the Lontar Foundation under the title *Never the Twain*. His poems won honourable mention in the 2017 Ross & Davis Mitchell prize for Faith and Writing contest, and more recently the 2019 William Henry Drummond poetry contest.

Elana Wolff Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Elana Wolff's poems currently appear in *EVENT*, *Room*, *Riddle Fence*, *White Wall Review*, *Acta Victoriana*, *Juniper*, *Big Smoke Poetry*. They also appear in *Another Dysfunctional Cancer Poem Anthology*, and *The League of Canadian Poets Tree Anthology* and *Tamaracks: Canadian Poetry for the 21st Century*. Her fifth collection of poems, *Everything Reminds You of Something Else*, was released by Guernica Editions in 2017. Her sixth collection, *SWOON*, is forthcoming with Guernica Editions in 2020.



Contributors

Stories (A-K)



Bob Bolton Sarnia, Ontario, Canada

Born, raised and living again in Sarnia, Ontario, Bob Boulton began writing poetry, short stories and humorous articles for his high school newspaper in the period just after dinosaurs roamed the earth. Over the past two years, his stories and verse have appeared in various print and online publications. bobswritefromthestart.blogspot.com is his blog, which is designed to support new and renewing writers.

Quentin Kerr Kingston, Ontario, Canada

Quentin is a writer of short stories, poems, and other things. This is his first publication. He works in Kingston ON, where he writes when he can, and doesn't when he can't.



Contributors

Stories (L-Z)



Daniel Lockhart Windsor, Ontario, Canada

D.A. Lockhart has four poetry collections, including *Devil in the Woods* (Brick Books 2019) and *The Gravel Lot that was Montana* (Mansfield Press 2018). He is a recipient of Canada Council for the Arts grant for Aboriginal People and Ontario Arts Council grants for his poetry. His work has garnered several Pushcart Prize Nominations. He graduated from the Indiana University - Bloomington MFA in Creative Writing program where he held a Neal-Marshall Graduate Fellowship in Creative Writing. He is a member of the Moravian of the Thames First Nation.

Robin Ray Port Townsend, Washington, USA

Robin Ray is the author of *Wetland and Other Stories*, *Obeys the Darkness: Horror Stories*, the novels *Murder in Rock & Roll Heaven* and *Commoner the Vagabond*, and one book of non-fiction, *You Can't Sleep Here: A Clown's Guide to Surviving Homelessness*. His works have appeared in a variety of periodicals and magazines.



Sheila Tucker Oakville, Ontario, Canada

Sheila Tucker was born in England and lived in Europe and the Middle East before coming to Canada. She writes poetry, essays and short stories, and is the founder of Poetry&Prose, a monthly open mic and feature speaker event in downtown Oakville. Sheila has had her work published in anthologies, newspapers and e-zines. Her first book, *Rag Dolls and Rage: A Memoir*, will be published in the summer of 2019.

Contributors

Book Reviews

Sharon Goodier Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Sharon's chapbook of social justice poetry is *A Stone in My Shoe*. She is part of the organizing committee for *The Art Bar Reading Series* and co-founder of *Change Artists*, a soon-to-be-launched online poetry magazine for socially engaged poetry. She also organizes an annual reading for 100,000 *Poets for Change*, an annual international event taking place in more than 500 cities around the world.



and Bill Arnott (see Poetry)

Contributors

Photographers



Stephen Humphrey

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Stephen Humphrey created radio documentaries for CBC Radio's IDEAs about bee intelligence, life in the universe, going to Mars and the human microbiome. His photographs, videos and tanka poems are included 'Odes to Solitary Bees'. His wild bee poem, "Ode To Minerva" is displayed on an 'audio bee cabinet' at [the High] Park Nature Centre. He is working on an ecology book and is author of *Zone Boy and the Worm of Incidence*, a sci-fi flash fiction serial.

Peter Rowe

Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Peter Rowe, was born in Heart's Content, Newfoundland and has resided in Toronto for more than 50 years. His interests in photography include nature, wildlife, travel and portraits of artists in the music field. His work was first published in the Toronto Sun in 1980. He has had a few solo exhibits over the years, including Contact Photo festival (2001). He frequents many reading events since the mid-sixties, sharing a love of poetry and song with others.



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Photo by Peter Rowe