



Dragon Doet Review

Summer 2016

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Peaceful Mornings

Alisa Velaj

Translated from Albanian by Ukë Zenel Buçpapaj

Nothing could save you
Even love failed
To show you the path
To Tramuntana

Your freedom kept wandering in other spaces
And thus could never encounter anyone on horizons
(Even eagles saw it nowhere)

Nothing could save you
Even love failed
To tell you why Tramuntana winds blew

You saw only breathless birds on shoulders of storms
And thus you avoided meeting seagulls
In crystal clear skies

Nothing could save you
Even love failed
To teach you
The secret of blinking beams

You would always abandon peaceful mornings . . .

Reprinted by permission of the poet. First published in Velaj's book, A Gospel of Light, by Aquillrelle.

It's Hard to be a Baptist Preacher in NDN Country

Sly Alley

It's a chore, some days more than others,
to drive the same road
to the same job
to see the same faces
and to perpetually fight the dream
to be as wild and untamed
as that middle-aged Indian woman
with the crooked teeth
who likes to joke within earshot
of that old Baptist preacher about
how she had stayed up all night getting drunk
on Wild Turkey whiskey,
and how she hopes she didn't get
any of her pubic hairs into the frybread dough
as she drops it into four or five inches of
Hellfire hot vegetable oil.

Lo Siento

Sly Alley

The hangovers hurt the most
when the desert's ghosts
ring the long dead bells of
Misión Santa María de los Angeles.

In Baja del Sur time moves faster than the dust on a cantina floor
blown by the salty wind, but the past stays with us
just like a scar.
Or a regret.

Haunted by a smile or a gleam in the eye
of a once familiar face and hoping
against lost hopes that her voice will
float across the room or through a door.

How long can a man carry the weight of the choices
he didn't make?
How long can he chase a ghost through the
cirio of Catavina?

Taped to a stone beneath the tallest Cordon Cactus
the words of a poet shine in the Mexican sun.
"Lo Siento," he says
and toasts the sweet young captive for whom he searches.

Overturnd Life

Bertha Wise

Tornado warning
wailed for all to take shelter —
weather forecasters screamed
get underground or leave!
we fled our home —
birds flew away to safer limbs —
winds whirled through
leaving behind
darkness
broken limbs
pelted rooftops
overturnd lives —
Afterward —
in the light of day —
I walked across the yard
picking up odd bits —
I found the nest
upside down in the grass —
tipping it back with my toe
four naked nestlings fell —
mouths still open
as if screaming just before.

Walt Whitman's Beard Versus Garcia Lorca's Eyebrows

Todd Fuller

omnia simul mixta – all things mixed together
– Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)

I have, at this very moment, divorced myself from Walt Whitman.
I have turned down the tin-types and covered the mirrors. I have

Had enough of the perpetual nostalgia and glistening adoration.
The last straw came the other day when I was alone with Lorca's
Poet in New York:

All of a sudden, Walt comes bursting in the room (full of his
Bursting-in-the-room exuberance – white beard and gray eyes
Leading the way), and he says:

"It is perfect!" and begins destroying the perfectly delicate silence
With words like "a death sonnet for Custer," which he later changed

To the more romantic & pastoral "From Far Dakota's Canyon."
To top it off, he got the thing published in the July 10 edition
Of the *New York Tribune*,

And (most disturbingly) canonized America's original moron.
So, all night, it was "O, the Sioux this and O the Cheyenne that"
Until I finally had enough.

Until finally, the moment broke itself into one crooked utterance
After another. Until flights of books, pens, and John O'Sullivan's
Exhumed thoughts* wounded surfaces and silence.

* Columnist and editor John O'Sullivan is credited with coining the term "Manifest Destiny."

Ditka Versus Hemingway: a Chicagoan Literary Tale

from *Binaries at the End of Nostalgia* (aka, *VERSUS / Verses*)

Todd Fuller

— after Richard Brautigan

Marlins and bears and bulls, o my! / No doubt Da Coach and Papa (when asked about how to settle the affair) would agree to a boxing match that would take place in a nature preserve: Ditka most comfortable with the physical and Hemingway with the natural. It's all hands and clubs and rifles with these two: what's a bullet here or there? With the ringing of the bell, they each emit 20 gallons of testosterone and (from opposite / diagonal corners of the preserve) begin their journey toward destruction. Mustache mania reverberates across the arena full of adoring men and panty-dropping women (and underwear-dropping men). When the sweat-soaked specimens finally meet, somewhere near the panthers, Ditka will strike the first blow with a press conference tirade that includes giving his opponent "the finger." Hemingway counters with brittle Nobel laurel leaves that he thrusts into Coach's eyes. The struggle will continue for another 89 hours with combinations of monkey snot slingshots and lion feces arrows; elephant trunk bowling balls and giraffe bone javelins; bear claw hammers and Sloppy Joe* glass shards. It's hours of creative epithets and ferocious fists to the chest. At one point, Hemingway takes to the trees and fires mojito bullets, which Coach flicks away with his granite elbows. Finally, after simultaneous blows with bottles of Old Style and vermouth both are passed out alongside Carl Sandberg's grave and the match is declared a draw – much to the dismay of Faulkner and Lombardi.** The only way this ends is by Mike and Ernest embracing a hangover antidote of "dames" and Bloody Marys*** out on the ocean – out on the sea a fair distance from gridirons and big-game.

* Hemingway's favorite bar and long-time haunt in Key West, FL.

** Famous opponents of both the author and the football player.

*** Lore has it that Hemingway invented the Bloody Mary, which is highly doubtful: see the following link: <http://www.foodrepublic.com/2012/10/30/7-things-you-didnt-know-about-ernest-hemingways-dr>.

The (Pawnee) Muses Versus Abbott & Costello

from *Binaries at the End of Nostalgia* (aka, *VERSUS / Verses*)

Todd Fuller

— after Richard Brautigan

*You will never know the joy
of childbirth she tells me*

*You constantly pine over the damn
bills she says*

*You are the colonizer she insists
Your children are both she posits*

*Your occupying army has been
on my land long enough she seethes*

*Your people think of land as a commodity
for exploitation she laments*

*Nothing is more sacred than our
children and their ancestors to come she surmises*

*Your daughter will torment young
boys, which will give you anger & fear she promises*

*You're living the life of a burned-out
rocker in an alternate universe she supposes*

*You have filled me with perfect rage
and love – not in that order she clarifies*

*You will never know the thrill
of baseball I tell her*

*You always stretch that last penny
to its smallest molecule I say*

*You are the colonized I contend
Your children are neither I counter*

*Your language does not include
a word for genocide I clarify*

*You consider the dirt under every
American foot as sacred I offer*

*Nothing is more sacred than our time
together I plead*

*Your son will make girls giggle
in bathrooms and hallways I predict*

*You're walking down a red carpet
in some fantasy world I insist*

*You torture me with immensity and
beauty – a heartrending combination
I confess*

The Word That I Only Say When You Are Not in Hearing Distance

Cecilia Villalobos

These are the things I do for you,
the deer trails I travel
to avoid direct sunlight
of a clear and even path.

Sound bytes and dollar gifts I send
across oceans
exchanging hands and languages to find you
in some future time

So I can say it in ways that reflect my fear
of the tenderness leaking from my pores,
fear of the word that gets caught
in my mouth
like stray hairs loose from my plait.

To Be Home

Cecilia Villalobos

I lie on itchy grass somewhere
between the willow and the oak
that provide overlapping, luxurious shade
on an Oklahoma day that breathes like water.

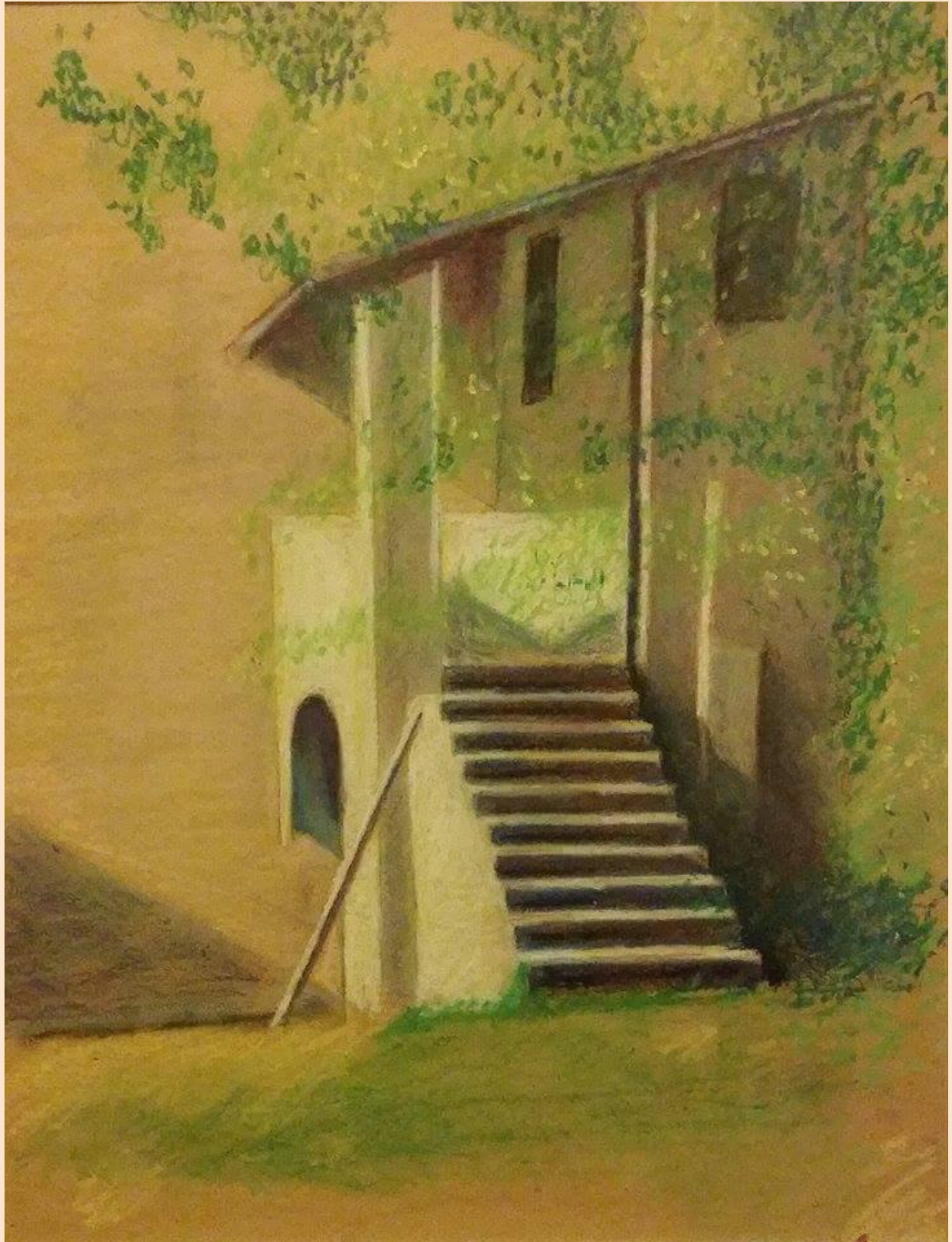
The pendulous willow shimmers.
I hear the cicadas and think of a harp hung and tears shed.
She is supple, with arms reaching.
I know that, if she could, she would kiss my face.

The strong-structured shadow of the oak
is like Time's back, twisted yet unrelenting.
Deep-lobed leaves protect his ground
and I wonder what foreign gods are hidden under him.

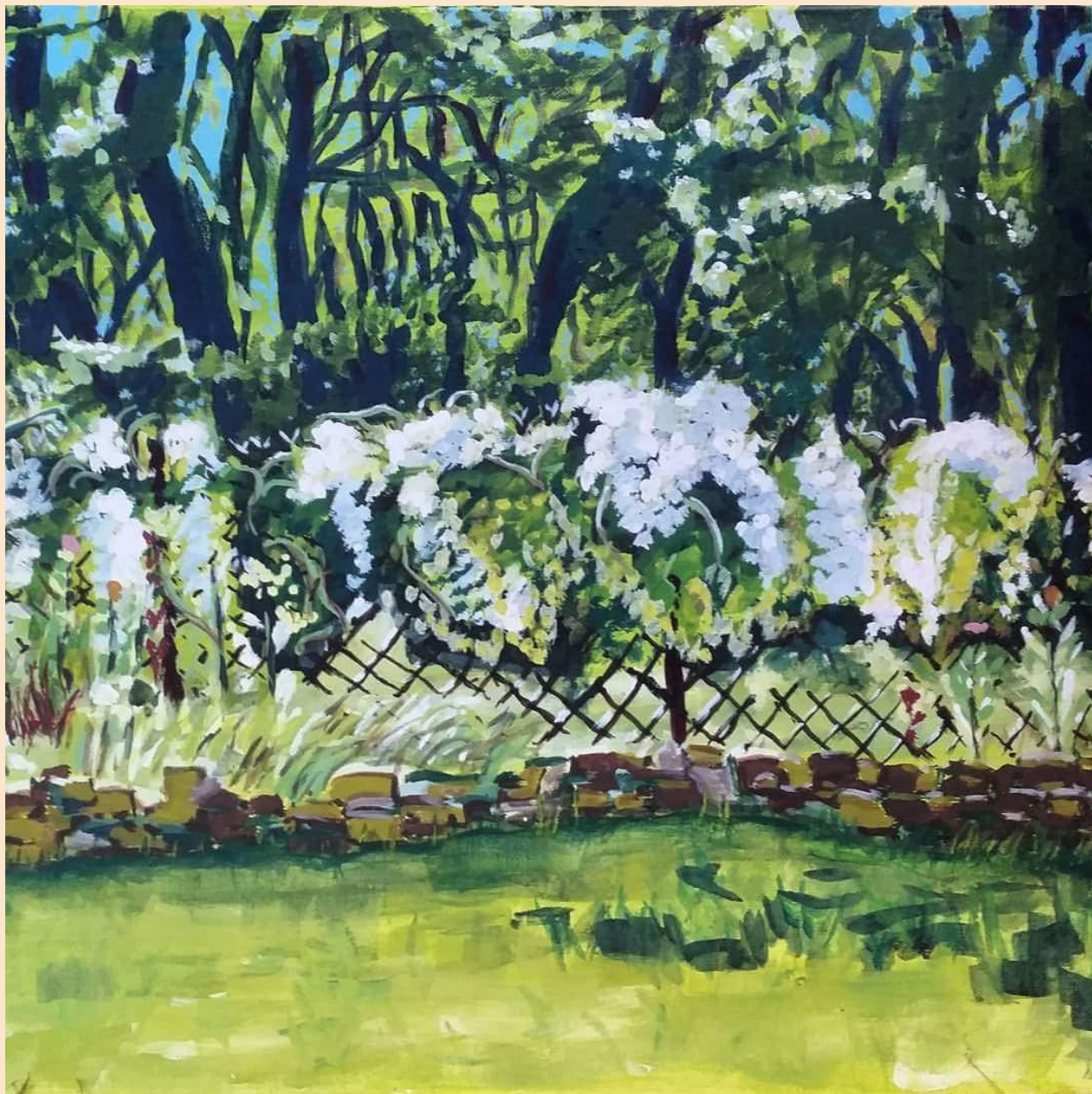
One short lived, one unending,
I wonder which I would be made from.
I perspire and dream in this little human body
and wonder if I am something in between.



Cecilia Villalobos, **Typewriter**, Photograph, taken in Moncata, Spain, near the city of Barcelona, July 2015



Cecilia Villalobos, **Montone Sunlight**, Oil Pastel Drawing, 16x20", created in Montone, Italy, Summer 2012



*Cecilia Villalobos, **Wild Clematis**, Acrylic Painting, 16x20", September 2015*

Lost and Found

Robert Herman Broyles

It is legend
from ancient times
that there exists
a "lost and found"
on a distant planet
orbiting a distant star

A planet called Amor
where lost loves may be found
by those freed from earthly cares
who have been faithful
in heart if not in body
to rejoin a love torn asunder

there to live happily ever after
without having to re-live the pain . . .
to heal the breach
caused by circumstance
rather than by evil act . . .
if one's love feels the same

The stars that could not align
for star-crossed lovers in the first life
are brought into congruity
by celestial probabilities
coincident at last . . . with love . . .
discordant on earth, harmonious in eternity

Chocolate Pie

Terri Cummings

was the punchline.
The family response
flattered and frustrated
our mother, while painting
a smile on her face.

What do you want for dessert?
she asked. It should go with
what we have for dinner.
How about a carrot cake
with beans and ham hock?
Or a nice chess pie with
fried chicken and okra?

We added great-grandchildren
to her table, but the sum of our
response remained the same.
Sometimes, Mom rebelled
and made the chess or cake,
but our praise registered
a finger lick less than desired.

Now summer holidays' days
moan in Mom's chair
and wait for our response.
We rave over her chocolate pie
made by our grandchildren,
pass Mom around the table
heaped in stories and recipes.
Ease our hunger for
a slice of her smile.

Natural Order

Tina Baker

The sun is moving closer to noon and
I'm never ready.
I want to sit longer and sip coffee;
relaxed, on the park bench
in front of stacked firewood,
remember: a tan honey bee fringe on the birdbath rim,
six squawking, awkward hens
running after frantic grasshoppers;
our laughter;
tall and golden cosmos,
a morning's satin haze
draped atop the long stretch of photinia hedge and
blazing above the red and orange slatted picnic table;
a heavy table we somehow centered in our wooded scene
then noticed it looked as if it had always been there;
as if it will be there,
forever,
where I'm still in white terry robe and purple pajamas
smelling the mocha brew,
holding memories of my child
wearing her grandmother's floppy cotton hat,
helping papa;
her small arms up and proud, trying to be strong
and hold on to dangling onions.

I'll resist thoughts of the elderly alone, assisted living, medical needs.

Yet — there — is — Mom's last look at her laundry room
when I watched her lean into its door facing and
shake her head to an unspoken,
"No, I Can't Believe It."

Life's clothes washed. The only ironing board she ever owned,
still standing stable and sturdy; a pantry packed
for what could only be her offerings: her okra, her angel food cake,
her seasoned vinegar soaked cucumbers;
waiting, for what used to be and

I thought with age and coffee,
I'd understand; I'd accept my turn.
No, I expect I'll tarry,
change into my lighter weight robe,
look over these four acres one last time,
linger, while I watch breakfast dissolve into brunch.



*Bryce Barfield, **7 Year Bday**, Photograph*



*Bryce Barfield, **Disobedience**, Photograph*



*Robert Ferrier, **Yellow on Blue**, Photograph*

Fireflies and Stars

Ron Wallace

A frail and ragged grey disappears
as a three quarter moon
throws a fade across the twilight sky,
and a single cicada drones
a dying summer song.

The last lightning bugs gather
above the creekbed,
flickering like lost stars,
fallen on September from the August sky.
And slowly . . .
real stars appear one by one,
ancient silver fire
that flamed long before this world was born.

Constellations form cathedral ceilings
above the shrouded lawn.
The night descends like a silent prayer,
and beneath this myriad of gypsy lights,
exists a fragile magic
where angels dance in shadows cast
by a waning moon.

If you simply stand and listen well,
you'll hear a screen door slam
somewhere out there, miles away,
across ten thousand summer nights,
wrapped in the sweet scent of scarlet darkness,
where the ghost of roses,
long gone,
lingers on the summer-ending air,
waiting to be breathed.

Girls in Baseball Caps

(with Apologies to George Gordon Byron)

Ron Wallace

Walking across campus
I see girls
wearing baseball caps
and something makes me smile.

Whether they have long hair
falling down their backs
from beneath the logos
of favorite teams

or pulled back and tied up in buns
that reflect sunlight and shimmer
in the close of August,
it makes no difference.

Bright red spaghetti straps,
blue jeans and boots
offer Oklahoma ornament
that lies below a Yankee cap.

Forgive me, Byron, this small theft,
but they walk in beauty, like the day
of cloudless blue and sunlit sky,
so soft, so calm, yet eloquent.

*the smiles that win, the tints that glow,
but tell of days in goodness spent,
a mind at peace with all below,
a heart whose love is innocent!*

Costa Brava

J. C. Mahan

When my treasure chest lies full
Of forbidden plunder, sunken asunder
And your maiden coast lies in ruins,
Ancient yet beckoning tokens of history,
We will both be forgiven and free
Once we have passed beyond the living.
After this life, liberated to the afterlife
Still we will exist but no longer be:
No longer bound to the territorial boundaries
No longer tethered to leashes of desire.
When we're unable to be taken captive by desperation
Released from service in the armies of commitments
Having relinquished all duties and responsibilities
Eliminated from farming, the sowing of righteous seeds
Saved from the guilds of upright craftsmen
Adrift in an eternal sea without sextant or admiral
What actually indeed will we perceive?
And feel for ourselves, each other, our lives?
Shall we be happy and rejoice complete
In our abilities to navigate these seas,
To enjoy ourselves and each other and prosper?
Or shall we reminisce about the love we missed
The chances never taken, love missed or forsaken?
Think again and choose now, my Sweet Isabella.
Command the ripe choices at your fingertips.
Receive the kisses offered to your willing lips.
There may still be new continents yet to discover,
Perceiving that this time as all times
Shall soon forsake us and fade to black,
Eternity revealed might just be reliving it again.

Song of the Siren

J. C. Mahan

The song of the Siren waifs
across the waves
like sweet perfume from roses.
You imagine her soft petals
her perfect flesh, flawless
her color rich and radiant.
Longing to be there
you listen to the melody.
Your mind urges you to steer
towards her rocky shores even though
you know her thorns are sharp
her vines impenetrable
her heart as jaded as the sea's.
You listen to her song and ache
but your heart beats, "Do Not,
Do Not, Do Not, Do Not."

Fall Clearance

Anca Vlasopolos

at sixty-seven
despite my boneache inwit
of mortality
i keep buying these discards summer's leftovers on a dirty plate
then seed bury bulbs and sticks with roots

not even for eating or seasoning though for those too

inside the brain
something's muscled its way to the reins
something unreasoned raw born forever yesterday
hollering for another spring

This Last Day of August

Anca Vlasopolos

heat envelops
 a moist large aunt
 whose hugs we can't escape

 yet
you must not deny

 ocean waters turn back to themselves
 kicking off languid jellyfish
sun parcels out gold on ponds
 each dawn a little later
scatters rosy farewells sooner

 of orioles we've left but a dropped feather
 wrought like a Fabergé obsidian and fire

 eel grasses still stand
 tapered chopsticks out of water

 but
look
 they're just this morning tinged
 with autumn's sear

Aces

Richard Dixon

Visiting family north of Houston
sunny Sunday morning drive to church
turn a corner and see
a twelve-year-old boy riding a bicycle
toward unseen tennis courts
racquet bag slung over shoulder
basket of balls in tow
on his way to practice serves
and bask in his own
house of worship

Brand Loyalty, Farm-Style

Richard Dixon

Living and working on a dairy farm in high school, I observed farmers were brand loyal to a fault. My foster parents were Ford people, pickup and car. The two-ton truck was a GMC, but only because of a good used-vehicle deal. Bib overalls were Lee; denim for work, striped (*striped*) for holidays and funerals. Boots were Red Wing work, Nocona dress.

Our two tractors were Allis-Chalmers, an older, rear-mount WD-45 and newer D-17, with a side-mount and, luxury of luxuries, a cushioned seat. New Holland was the choice of hay baler (and I think widely-held to be the best), while in the dairy barn Surge milkers with the surcingles would only fit the bill.

Other brands of overalls were Round House, Key Imperial and Osh Kosh (B'gosh). Among the many tractors were Case, International Harvester, Massey-Harris, Farmall, Ford and the ever-popular John Deere. (*What did the earth say to the plow? Roll me over easy, John Deere.*)

All the farmers I knew stuck with their chosen brands, thick and thin, year in and year out; no one I knew ever changed a single brand. Vienna (*Vi-ennie*) Sausage seemed to be a common snack, easy to grab the can with some crackers on the way to the barn.

Our neighbor across the road, Tony Story (Storicyscin, from the Ukraine) had a small dairy and farmed part-time while holding down a job as a chrome-plater at nearby Tinker Air Force base. His wife and grown daughter were saddled with the milking and chores, while he did all the tractor work. Every tool he owned was chrome-plated.

The story was he served in the Airborne in World War Two; on one jump his parachute hadn't opened and he landed in some trees and bushes. Consequently, he suffered from migraine headaches the rest of his life. On still, windless afternoons I could hear him screaming at his wife and daughter, no end. The 14-year-old son I never saw lift anything heavier than a set of car keys. He would hot-rod their brand-loyal Studebaker pickup and car up and down the road, just like dad. Stoodies were rough and solid; big V-8 engine, high-performance, soon to be defunct.

One day I was sent over to his place to borrow some wrench or other and, unbeknownst to me, he had a running disagreement with the oil company who were laying a pipeline through part of his property. As I pulled to a stop and got out, he was storming out his back door with a 30/30 rifle. He saw me and said to get in the pickup with him. Off he barreled straight up the road, slamming to a stop when we reached the work crew, just starting back after a lunch break. He jumped out of the truck, cocked the rifle, at the same time yelling, "You're gonna get off my land right now or I'm gonna rip off your heads and throw 'em in your dyin' asses." A hasty retreat ensued.

Another day I noticed a trail of dust coming down our quarter-mile driveway, Tony rounding the curve with tractor throttle full-open, came to a stop, kicked in the hand clutch, jumped off the back with a well-practiced dismount, walked up close to me, his face lit with a maniacal grin, and spoke, "How you doing? Can I borrow your come-along? Huh? Huh?" I fetched it from the shed, he threw it on the tractor seat, said, "Well, gotta go, hey!" leapt on the seat, swung his leg over it, at the same time pulled the hand clutch with his right hand as he jammed down the hand throttle with the left, all of it one fluid motion.

The tractor reared up on its huge rear tires to a 50-degree angle, Tony finessing the clutch like a professional. The tractor landed on all four tires as he cut the wheels, spun a circle in the dirt, doffed his hat with that same crazy grin and off he went, the only things missing a mask and a *Hi Ho, Silver*.

Cellar

Benjamin Myers

An old wooden door thrown on the floor
kept our feet above a quarter inch of water
while we sat on two rusted cots.

I thought there were cottonmouths
down there. I learned to distrust
a certain shade of dirty gold in a spring
afternoon, knowing it would lead
to evening storms and hours
of squatting refuge in the cellar.

I tried to read by flashlight, refused to lean
against the damp and musty quilts that hunched
like buzzards on the ends of the cots. My father
stood in the yard to watch wall clouds. A near
orphan himself, he was just learning to save
everything he loved by shoving it underground

and every ten minutes paced from his place
in the yard to the square of light at the top
of the cellar, waving as if in benediction,
as if he intended to paint a cross
of lamb's blood on the lintel.

And even when he came running to pull
the cellar door behind him,
barking for me to help hold it closed,
I was pretty sure we would emerge
to find the house, the yard, the truck
unmoved, that after the gusting howl
had raked its teeth across the scalps of all
the scrubby trees, we'd find
again the wild mercy.

Croquet

Benjamin Myers

English game with a French name,
beloved of Scots-Irish Okies,
played on lawns that were little

more than weeds mowed low. Across south-
eastern Oklahoma, after church,
at every family gathering, out came

the rack of wooden balls and mallets,
the double-diamond pattern of white
wire wickets pushed into hard dirt.

My grandfather would hurry from his shed,
printer's ink streaking his fingers,
to grip the mallet and dangle it

like the clapper of a bell between his legs.
(Was it as nakedly masculine as that?)
The men in my family who printed

newspapers, husked corn, painted houses, burned
in refineries, took this game of English
aristocracy as seriously as Monday night

football, delighted in knocking their opponents' balls
(It was as masculine as that!) across the road
into the dandelion scruff and poison

oak that swarmed the drainage ditch. Children
were granted no mercy, knocked aside and left
to tap the painted stake long after the men

had adjourned to fried chicken and cans of beer,
having driven their balls over grass and dirt clods
in lines as wobbly and erratic as their table talk.

I think about these men sometimes when playing
wiffle ball with my kids in the backyard, gripping
a plastic bat as big and red as the nose

of a cartoon drunk, swinging three inches above
each pitch to let my five-year-old son

strike me out, throwing the game

even when the kids start to trash talk: *Daddy, you stink
like a diaper*. I want to build them up
more than I want to win.

But every now and then, I hunker into my serious stance,
eye the ball for real, and knock one over
the privacy fence and into the alley

behind our house. Then I hear those men, who
had to take any victory they could –
even from their own children –

clapping their calloused hands as I round the little plastic bases.

Dog Tale

Sharon Edge Martin

It is almost enough to make me believe
in reincarnation, the way that big dog
all ivory fur and black face
showed up just days after we brought you home
from the pound

You had your ways, afraid to enter a door
if we were standing too close
unable to walk straight to the food bowl
when a sneaky bypass would do
but you wagged your tail when we talked to you
licked our hands at bedtime
and run off any animal that came near the place

Except for one
Every day, he'd show up mid morning
and stay until mid afternoon
Every night, you'd wait to come in until you knew
he wasn't coming back

We found his person,
learned his name
Buster
and how he'd been dropped off out here

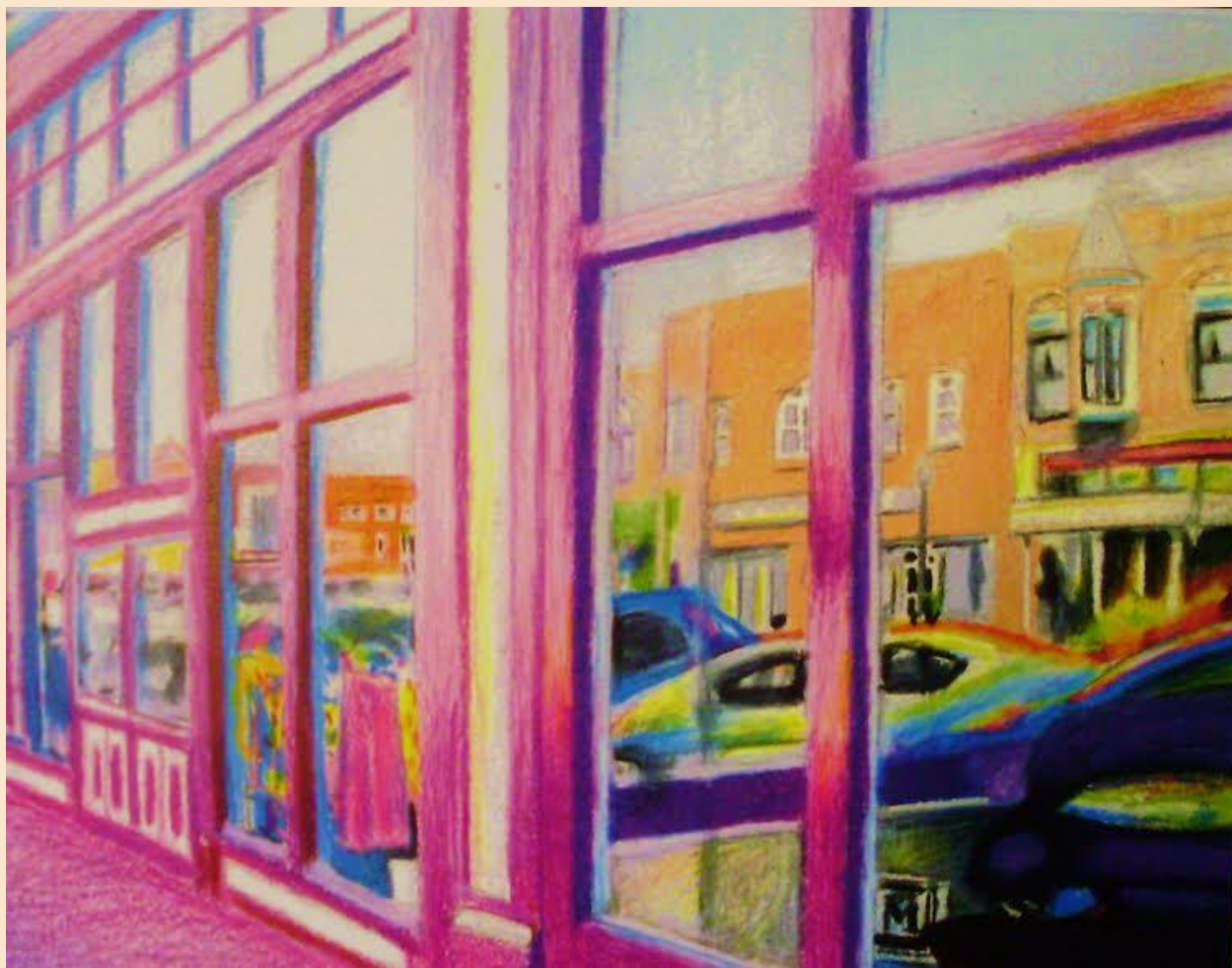
You can have him, he said
He'd fed him, at least
but the big boy was free of constraints
no collar, no leash, no tags
and then, one night, he stayed

He lives here now
He sports a red collar, and you two wear matching tags
He's lost a few things
including his potential for fatherhood
but he's found a home

When you chase after squirrels together
wrestle on the muddiest spot in the yard
take tastes from each other's bowls
I have to wonder
what relationship did you two have
last time around



*Michelle Skinner, **Clouds**, Colored Pencil on Paper, 9x12"*



Michelle Skinner, **Pink Reflections**, Colored Pencil on Paper, 9x12"

Déjà Vu

Kai Coggin

Déjà vu, from the French “already seen”
is a strange phenomenon.
A déjà vu just unfolded in front of me,
a slow motion wormhole of a moment
collapsing in on itself before my eyes, implosion.

As soon as I said to myself,
“I’m having a déjà vu,” it started to dematerialize,
deconstruct itself into another moment,
release its hold of illusion on time and space
and fold itself back into this seeming reality in which I
wake up and write poems into the white space of *cyberia*.

The scattered objects on my desk,
dog-eared poetry books,
a blinking light,
more poetry books,
envelopes holding letters,
uncapped pens,
a wilting orchid plant,
my eye movement on computer screen,
the cold of morning radiating off the window next to me,
frozen hands pounding out keys, joining words,
as I start another poem,
and there it was,
a déjà vu,
a split second of life on repeat,
the intersection of short-term and long-term memory,
a moment that I have had before,
or a moment that I have dreamed of having.

Déjà vu is a vacuum,
it is time and space trying to catch up with itself,
it is circular truth trapped in linear enforcement,
it is prophecy and permission unveiled,
it is glimpsing deeper in unraveling,
it is peering from out of body, seeing as Soul,
it is consciousness that remains nameless,
but we have all felt it, haven’t we?

When a moment unfolds and shakes you from the numbness,
and you know you have been here before,

you know, for a moment, you are where you should be.

How to be Fat and Beautiful

Kai Coggin

Don't look in the mirror,
unless you are looking with love.

Hug yourself,
pull in all the skin and flesh
so that a mountain forms
across your chest
from which a sun can rise.

Eat what you want to eat,
but also make yourself up into
a delectable meal,
a feast for the eyes
with colors and textures
and fragrances that captivate
all who see you.

Take selfies that make you feel sexy,
and share them on Facebook.

Wear clothes that show off your curves,
that highlight the swoop of your breasts,
the indentations of your body
where hands could go,
the invitation of flesh and bone,
and moving light swaying.

Sleep naked.

Find a lover who sees your beauty,
and listen to her when
she names you after volcanoes
and the summits of mountains.

Make love, be love, give love, take love.

Look people in the eyes
when they talk to you,
let them see down to your essence,
your spark, your ever glowing light.

Dance, even when you are embarrassed,

even when your body is not as fluid as your soul,
become water,
become a moving river,
dance until the ocean swells through you.

Touch yourself.
Take your own body into your own hands and
thank
every
glorious
cell,
hold every weighted ounce
until the gratitude you have
for your own body
makes you weightless,
names you flight.

Look in the mirror.
Smile, look into your own eyes without looking away,
love your reflection,
press your hand to the window of self,
kiss the glass.

Give yourself flowers.

When people say,
“you have such a beautiful face”
shout
“you should see me naked, I’m *gorgeous*!”

Cultivate your heart,
be kind, listen to people’s problems,
help a neighbor, be compassionate.
Compassion is beautiful.

Break boundaries,
crush the ideals and standards of beauty
that society feeds us and eat from the wide banquet
of your own being.

Know that you are beautiful.
Order dessert. Enjoy every bite.

Once in a Blue Moon

Kai Coggin

Once in a Blue Moon
take your clothes off outside
and meet the rising night,
remember how the air feels as
your only garment,
how your nipples
kiss the sky like a long lost lover,
dress yourself in only blue moon blue.

Once in a Blue Moon
run into someone's arms,
let them make you into a bird,
whirl you weightless into the circles
that make up every atom,
every cell,
every revolving planet that
revolves around your heart and her heart,
and fly, fly, fly.

Once in a Blue Moon,
look in the mirror
and ink the glass with fingerprints,
smudge your reflecting window
with how many parts you love about
your body, your glowing, glowing body,
point out the curves that sing,
the lines and folds that bless the body as shrine,
cursive script the word Beauty
over the glass echo of your face
and trace your shape in love, just LOVE.

Once in a Blue Moon,
look up at that glowing pale world,
that constant follower,
that moon silver wolf mouth,
and hear every poem of unrequited desire
that has been written under that
spectral waning waxing balloon,
and take all the words into your heart
like you are the YOU that every poem was written to.
Once in a Blue Moon.

Blue Moon in July

Jennifer Kidney

It's a gray January afternoon
and I'm visiting my friend
in the nursing home. She has
a new calendar for the coming year
which another friend has annotated
with birthdays and other events
to help her remember. She's lost track
of minute to minute, let alone
day to day, and keeps asking
who brought the cookies? I did,
and patiently remind her again
and again. Paging through the months
she notes each full moon, and when
she comes to July, she cites two of them.
Let me see, I say, and note that July
will have two full moons this year.
The second one, I tell her, is a blue moon,
so called because they're rare.
She dutifully writes "blue moon"
beneath the circle in the square
for July 31, then continues tracking
full moons to the end of the year.

Now half the calendar is torn away
and the days are as long and hot
and bright as January's were brief, chill,
and drab, and the blue moon,
that metaphor for a rare occurrence,
is about to bloom on the horizon.
I imagine my friend finding
those words penciled on the last day
of July and hope she remembers
why she wrote them there.

A Shade of Gray

Jennifer Kidney

I love the Catbird.
I can't quite say why.
Perhaps it's his ineffable
shade of gray
verging on purple
or the velvety look
of his tail and the secret
red patch beneath it.
Perhaps it's his jaunty beret
and sharp dark eye.
He sings like a coloratura
in a Benjamin Britten opera,
then mews like his namesake
begging for treats or pats.
Most of all he's polite
and shy, waiting
his turn at the jelly,
eluding my binoculars.
But whenever I catch
a glimpse of him
I feel a surge of affection.

Okemah, Oklahoma in July

Quinn Carver Johnson

Okemah is a Kickapoo word for
"Things higher up,"
and I'm walking down the sidewalk,
freshly waxed in sunlight
and paved with the ancient dust that
swirled around to create this
God forsaken place,
past the bones
of buildings made of
blood red bricks
and dust gray cement
given no proper burial
only decay —
and perhaps "decayings"
are a more fitting title
for their ghostless bodies.

Half of the houses are not homes,
and the half with people in them
have six houses worth of shit on the lawn.
The sun hates everything
and the toilets steam it is so damn hot.
And the water towers,
each rusted and begging for demolition,
are painted with pointless titles:
"Cold" which is to say "Empty,"
"Hot" which is to say "Water,"
and "Home of Woody Guthrie"
which is to say "Everywhere, Even Here,"
and the backsides don't say anything.

And that last one is the only reason
these monuments of hardship
have not been laid to rest,
though it begs the question
as to why every town in America
doesn't claim to be the
Home of Woody Guthrie,
it would be closer to the truth.

And the Hen House is only open for lunch,
and they give you too much food

for not enough money,
and you still don't say no to dessert.
And the Okemah Coffee Company
is "Damn Good" and I have
the t-shirt to prove it.

But none of that matters because
I'm on my way to
Lou's Rocky Road Tavern
and I'm thinking
Maybe we don't understand
Kickapoo as well
as we think we do
and Okemah very well might mean
"Things hotter up,"

and I'm regretting
these dark, denim jeans
and I'm regretting this black t-shirt
that I thought would
make me look cool,
because no one is cool
in Okemah, Oklahoma in July,

but I'm going to Lou's
because I want to write something,
but have nothing to say
and there isn't anywhere
with enough light
close enough to a seat
anywhere else but the portapot,

and I want the heatstroke
to take its sweet time
as it boils my blood,
so I avoid plastic coffins
and I curse the parents
of Woody Guthrie
for creating this idea
of him in October,
knowing full and well
he would be born
in Okemah, Oklahoma in July.

Cycle

Sherri C. Perry

When she stepped out of the police car
Her mother trembling behind her
They paused on the shelter's doorstep.
It was a heavy night. They rang the bell.
The cops drove away, the door opened.
Here, thought the child, I can see tragedy
And it is stuck to the walls.
The dead sit in the rocking chairs, she was told.
The child moved away, sideways-glancing
Around her
Nothing to hold on to, paint dripping smooth with no handholds
Meals in a fluorescent kitchen, industrial soulless
Strangers passing the salt.
Sixth day in a row the child locked herself in the bathroom
Laid flat on the floor so she could catch a ray of sun through a barred slot
Angel angel angel you have to go to school
Voices pleading angry hopeless. I am a child,
I have the power here she hoped but watched closely, unsure.
Couldn't anyone else see the tragedy sticking to the walls?
After two weeks mommy said: we are leaving here, We Are Going Back.
The child climbed aboard the rocking chair
Where the dead sit
And she waited.

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Cats of Our Lives

Terry Gresham

"The only escape from the miseries of life are music and cats."

– Albert Schweitzer

The cats not contained by the inside
of our house are not
all together wild.
They just don't like the inside cats.
Reason: Unspecified.
"Hold a group meeting?" No. Unwise.
All the cats have scratched ears
and rubbed bellies.
All have snacks, water, and toys.
All have doors opened and doors closed
for them all the time.
And all but one has a tail.

The outside cats on the lawn are lazy dreamers
enough of them know how to sing.
But when it comes to marathon paw-licking

the inside cats really know their stuff.

Woman

Terry Gresham

Woman, your borough is sure though you toss
acorns from its spire at me.
Are not your kisses all here in Memphis?
Please, prep them for inspection. I'll wait
in the street and dance. I am a love target.
Sweetness, for the dulcet song I sing at you
I get a simper and an apian response I find confusing.
Perhaps yodeling it again will help with this?
And this time, Bob on kazoo will accompany.
Oh là là, this is the music my heart makes for thee.

Lady, for the mess you say my boots have made
upon your rhododendrons, please, commit me
to the prison of your love garden – your slammer of bliss.
From there I will send garlands sure to exonerate me.
I am green in your courtroom. This should account for something.

Honey pie, I had only one fig in my pocket to share with you tonight,
but the heat in this city has not been too kind.
Here it is, though, like love – a disorienting mush.
So come down here. Bring your hunger. We shall feast.
Also, hurling things at me would be easier here in the street.

Mistress of love that I am keen on, you as well as I know
the daylight from the day and the nighttime from the night.
Yet, ah this knowledge – together we share – must for now
suffice since morning has brought with it

a rain cloud,
a paperboy,
and a garbage truck.

And I wonder if they worship you as I.

Trains in Marlow, Oklahoma

Donald Levering

Study Links Oklahoma Earthquakes to Fracking
– MSNBC headline

Several times an hour day and night
they rumble through, calling.

Their blow-organ horns wheeze
deranged voicings

of engines conscripted to haul
loads of sand for fracking.

These prolonged and woeful calls
portend poisoned wells

and blowout conflagrations,
as hopper after hopper

of Wisconsin silica
is pumped in slurry

deep under Oklahoma's
shaking foundations.

Turntable

Josh Wann

The DJ had filed a restraining order on Satan's daughter. Would you believe me if I told you her name was actually Lucy? The DJ had fallen for her the way most DJs fall for women during a gig. He had seen her through laser lights, fog, and the stop-motion-vision induced by just enough alcohol, endorphins, and downtempo trip-hop. To think, it was just a Thursday night at the club too.

She caught him after the club closed and they went to an all-night waffle joint downtown. He opened the door for her. She paid for him. They talked for hours. Him being well versed in music, her being well traveled, they found their individual knowledge, when put together, forged a rather neat Venn diagram. He would bring up the sound of the balalaika and she would talk of the barren landscape of Siberia. Or he would mention the Zurna and she would speak on the oral tradition of nomadic peoples in the Middle East.

The DJ was used to slurred speech from the women he spoke with after hours; this was exhilarating. It made falling into Lucy's bed a moment of clarity for him. He fell for the dimples on her lower back and the way her laughter sounded like it had centuries of history in it. She fell for the way his eyes got a mischievous glint when talking about molding new music from cutting and splicing old music and how it was a kind of surgery. Their love was another sort of diagram but nothing from a math book and certainly nothing he had charted before. Though it was a kind of music and therefore he was just able to navigate. A delicate touch on a record, needle on wax to summon sound. A sweep of the fade to something new.

With the first night so good, he knew it had to be something. So when she told him she was Satan's daughter he took it in surprising stride. She explained how she wasn't like her father and when she first realized it: that day in the dessert, thousands of years ago, when her dad had taken some young Jewish man into the dessert and teased him with terrible questions. He mumbled something about choice and, "we aren't always our environment or genetics." She didn't understand what he was justifying but she kissed his forehead and held his hand.

Every Thursday she was there dancing and he was there spinning records. The place seemed to feel their vibration and the club increased in patrons every week. The club owner noticed, raised door prices, and grew fond of his Thursday night DJ. Others were starting to pay attention to this infatuated DJ too; important and wealthy people.

The DJ attributed his growing success to love. Lucy said something about her dad. He didn't know what she was explaining but he kissed her hand and tucked them on a plane to Paris. A few months later, he complained about the quality of champagne on a first class flight. That's when Lucy knew it had started. It always did. When he moved on from taking pills to crushing and snorting them, Lucy was scared. She tried to say something to the DJ to remind him about ancient instruments and waffles. He only ignored her and complained about the car service that had picked them up for his 25th show that month. Lucy knew what to do.

Lucy broke his heart by using his anger. She even used a little of her own that she had stored up for her father. When it was all said and done he hated her and felt fearful of her. That's when the restraining order came about. She wondered if his demons came from her or if they were always there.

People always seemed to be at one volume until they mixed around with other people. She had been another record of the DJ. Simple vinyl could be spun into fresh melody, but it could always be cacophony as well. In that way, she wasn't Satan's daughter, she was just another child of someone.

The One That Got Away – Delia and Charlie, A Short Story

Megan Goff

I heard the coffee table turn over and immediately regretted not wearing socks to bed. Glass was breaking somewhere – the kitchen probably. How we still had glassware after all these years was beyond me. My father always broke glass when he was drunk. And my father was always drunk. Clatters and curses rang through the house.

“Pieces of shit!”

Under the sheets, a little hand darted out and grabbed mine. Next to me, Leah recoiled from the sound, inching her body toward mine. I squeezed her hand and pulled her closer. “We’ve got to go,” I whispered, elbowing Wendy.

“Maybe we should stay,” she said. I should have known that she would be awake.

Another glass was thrown. “Bitch! Bitch!”

I shook my head and started to get up, dragging both girls with me. “He’s calling for Mom. We’ve got to go.”

They were both up in an instant and pulling on shoes. I slipped on a pair of boots over my naked feet. Dad was still downstairs, breaking things and yelling for my mother. My mother was somewhere in the house, either high or hiding. It wouldn’t be long before he got bored with searching for her and came upstairs to find one of us.

“Hurry up!” I hissed, thrusting jackets against their tiny forms. They were just babies – nine and twelve. They didn’t own a scrap of clothing that fit. Their shoes were the wrong sizes. I could see Leah’s knees shaking through the thin material of her pink stretch pants. Wendy was wearing jeans. She never wore anything comfortable, always functional, just in case she might have to run. We were making for the door when it flung open. I closed my eyes and braced for a blow, but nothing came.

“Charlie,” Leah cried. I opened my eyes to see my baby sister running for my big brother. Everybody felt safe when Charlie was around – even me.

Charlie looked at me and then Wendy. “Good you’re already ready. Let’s go.” He rushed us into the hallway where Peter was waiting, back against the wall, rubbing the sleep from his tired, six-year-old eyes. I grabbed his hand and pulled him to me.

“Please don’t let him be smoking,” I said, softly, remembering the holes in the furniture, the carpet being on fire, and the round burn on Wendy’s arm.

“He won’t be,” Charlie said, patting the side of his left boot. “I took his cancer sticks from the table before we went to bed.”

I breathed a sigh of relief as we went downstairs. At least he wouldn’t be able to burn the house down. We were careful not to make a sound as our feet hit the first floor, but he found us anyway. I didn’t even have to look. My father was leaning against the doorway between the kitchen and the living room.

We stood frozen until Charlie yelled. “Scatter. Run!” He grabbed a fist-full of Wendy’s jacket and tugged on Leah’s hand, pulling them toward the back of the house. Running on fear-fueled adrenaline, I pushed Peter in front of me and ran. I was directing us toward the back door but when we got there it was boarded up.

“What do we do now?” Peter asked, tugging on my sleeve. The fear in his voice was chilling and I was sick with myself for forgetting something so important. The door had been this way for days. My father had broken it during another drunken rampage and then had crudely tried to fix the resulting draft. Footsteps were approaching, slowly, laboriously.

"Bathroom," I said, finally, shoving Peter. When we were in, I slammed the door and locked it behind us. It was a miracle that this door even still had a lock. All the others in the house were broken. The flimsy door wouldn't hold for long, even with the lock.

"Window, Peter." He scrambled into the bathtub and I jumped in after him, groping for the window.

I had to beat it open as my father beat on the door, "Dammit, open this door!"

Picking Peter up wasn't hard. He was so thin. I had little trouble putting him through the window.

"Run for the safe place," I told him. "I'll be right behind you."

I was halfway through when I heard the door break. Peter ran. I was preparing to throw myself onto the grass. But hands were in my pockets, pulling me back. With a strong yank, my father pulled me back through the window and over the bathtub. My head connected with the toilet and my vision hazed. I tried to run past him and out the door, but he hit me, knocking me back.

"Stupid bitch! Good for nothing bitch!" He was screaming.

I was afraid. Afraid that Peter would stop running and come back for me. "Don't stop," I screamed, trying to be heard over my father. "Don't stop."

Over and over I repeated the mantra, until a kick in the ribs knocked the wind and words out of me. My father stood over me, booze breath rolling over me and turning my stomach.

"You're weak and pathetic." He spit, spraying me with tobacco stained saliva. "Don't. Stop. Don't. Stop. Suck it up and shut the hell up." He punched me in the face and I heard my nose splinter. I threw my hands up to protect my head and face. "Forget that," he said, pulling at my arms. "You can't get any uglier or stupider."

Blood was steaming from my nose and collecting in my mouth. I was sputtering, choking on my own blood. He picked me up by my forearms and tossed me. I landed against the wall, sliding down, leaving a grotesque trail as my fingers dug into the peeling wallpaper. He stumbled toward me as I pulled myself up. He grabbed my mother's curling iron from the counter. He held it by the barrel and snapped the cord like a whip. I put my arms up and caught the blow across my forearm. The pain seared up and down. He raised his weapon again and I braced for impact. I heard the contact but never felt the pain.

"Get out of here!" It was Charlie's voice calling to me.

Even being drunk, my father managed to shrug off my brother. Charlie landed against the bathtub and struggled to get up.

"Nancy-ass pansy little shit. Get up!" My father's attention was successfully diverted. He moved away from me and toward Charlie. He grabbed Charlie by the shirt collar and drug him up. I used all the force I could muster and punched him in the ear. My father laughed when he covered his ear.

"Pathetic. Even your sister has bigger balls than you." He spit on the floor and stepped over Charlie. He was coming at me again. He reached out to slap me, but stopped suddenly with a cry of pain. I looked to Charlie who was hanging from my father's leg, teeth embedded in his skin. My father kicked him. One, Two, Three times until Charlie let go.

Charlie sputtered. "Just be safe. They need you to be safe." His eyes pleaded with me to leave and go to our sisters and brother.

I saw my father kick my brother again before I ran. I kept running, out the door and into the woods behind the house. It was forty yards through the snow and brush until I would get to the door to the safe place. Charlie and I had found it years ago while we were playing in the woods. It was where we went to escape our father's rampages and our mother's tirades.

I ran the whole way, like someone was chasing me. But they weren't. My father would be satisfied to wait on Charlie until he was burnt out. Then he'd sleep everything off until late tomorrow.

Wendy flinched when I opened the door, but never moved. Leah and Peter rushed to me as I descended the stairs.

"You're hurt," Peter said, pointing at my nose. Leah grabbed my hand, but dropped it when she saw the blood. I opened my mouth to say anything, but nothing would come out.

"Where's Charlie?" Wendy asked.

"He saved me." It was all I could think to say.

We slept in the safe place that night. When the sun shone through the air vents Wendy and Peter wanted to go back to the house. Leah never wanted to go back again. I told them we would wait. We had to be sure that Dad was out or we would be walking back into danger. Evening was encroaching before I gave us all permission to leave. I slipped into the house through the side door. Everything was quiet.

"Wait here," I said, keeping Wendy, Leah, and Peter outside.

I crossed the living room and eased open the door of my parent's bedroom. Inside, they were both sleeping, passed out on the bed. My mother on her stomach and my father on his back with his arm around her neck. I shut the door and waved the others inside.

"Take Peter to our room," I said. "And be quiet."

"Where are you going?" Wendy asked.

I didn't answer, but she seemed to understand. I needed to find Charlie. I opened the door, hoping to find my brother asleep in his bed, nursing a few bruises and a black eye. But something in me knew that this time was different. My fear rose when I found the room empty. I took the stairs down two at a time. The bathroom door was hanging off the top hinge. Charlie was lying on the floor, his face buried in the threadbare bath mat.

"Charlie!" I kneeled next to him. My hand on his back stirred him. I jerked it away when he hissed with pain. My hand came back bloody.

Throwing open a vanity drawer, I dug inside and found my mother's pruning shears. The scissors she used to style her own hair. I cut open the back of his shirt to find where the blood was coming from.

"Oh God," my hands flew to my face, mixing my brother's blood with mine.

He found the cigarettes.

Telephone

Heather Levy

My first day of second grade—a new school in a new city, a new teacher, and all the language I learned my first seven years still at home, secure in bed. As if beds could ever be safe.

My new teacher collected the children for a sitting circle that quickly transformed into a deformed egg. We were going to play a game: Telephone. I knew the game or I thought I did. I didn't want to play it, so I stood, breaking the yoke and running to my desk. My teacher, her beaky nose level with my face, prodded me back to the cracked oval, into a crisscross applesauce, hands to yourself.

And I waited for the screaming to begin.

Telephones, I knew, did not protect. Not as well as pillows and blankets with yellow ducklings. In first grade, they taught us to use telephones for emergencies only. 9-1-1. I learned the digits, held them in my heart. Someday, I would be a hero. This is what I whispered to my blanket each night so someone else would know too.

My family had one telephone, in my parents' bedroom, right side of the bed where my father slept. It was clunky plastic the color of my father's khakis, and the cord always twisted so tight, so coiled it became a knot. My mom would untwist it, scolding me to stop touching it. When she left the room, I would go back and twist it again into a knot. I liked seeing something so tight and small it could break, but it never did.

There were no cell phones then, no laptops or personal computers; just that one telephone.

If my older brother would've had a cell phone then, he would have used it I'm sure. Maybe my older sister would've called someone. When there's blood, you're supposed to call someone. They told us so in school.

They said nothing about a dog getting on the kitchen table and eating taco meat when he's not supposed to. They said nothing about watching the dog thud against the wall with a startled yelp, unmoving on the floor. They said nothing about screams snaking down the hallway into every room or of my brother jumping onto my father's back. Both down and splayed on the kitchen tile, paring knife on the floor within reach. A quick swipe, ear cut and dangling raw and red, my brother holding the meat to his face, holding in tears, the rest of us struck dumb.

They didn't teach us this in school, but I knew. The telephone. I'm a hero. Running and reaching it, holding its weight in shaky hands, dialing with the tight knot at my chin. I won't break.

Then Mom came.

Mom grabbed the telephone receiver and pulled, harder and harder toward the doorframe; me, tugging the base, harder and harder against the bed. The knotted cord stretched out into a beige line, from me to her, thinning across the room.

I couldn't let go.

My mom's face, worse than my brother's ear, his favorite AC/DC T-shirt blood-drenched, worse than my father, eyes still wild, hovering over our dog's quiet whimpering mass. Her face said she would never, ever let go. Her face said this was the most important thing, holding this telephone, keeping it from me.

I held on. I would be the hero.

She rushed past me, yanked the telephone cord from the wall; pulled it so hard we had to

replace the entire wall jack.

I ran to my bed, hid under my blanket, pillow shielding my head, and waited for the sun. When it rose, blood-orange painted walls, I counted every duckling on my blanket twice. If I didn't mess up, second grade would never come and I would never have to leave my bed.

I counted fifty the first pass, forty-eight the second.

When my teacher sat me down in the circle again and told me to play Telephone, I yelled, "No." She said all the kids were playing and I had to play too, and I cried. I cried so loud my teacher said she would call my mom and dad.

So I stopped.

Mythology of My Father: a mini-memoir

Dorothy Alexander

Here I am playing the mythology game of my father. Again. His life as a cowpuncher, his witchcraft, his dowsing for water, his neutering chickens, his great fist fights, his dazzlement of the neighbors in the tumbledown place where we lived before the war. He'd say to us, "Try to amount to something," knowing full well we would never do that. But he taught us to be quick especially in thorny places. He never wore a coat even on the coldest days and we marveled at his audacity. Like the time he set the frying pan on fire. With flames leaping up he grasped the red-hot handle, ran out the back door before he dropped the glowing metal. To prove he amounted to something. Once he fought three men at a street dance while we all sat on top of a Chevy and shouted. One man's eye was punched out. Three days later the sheriff came with some other men and took Dad away in a black car. I wanted to rescue him but couldn't come up with a plan. Later we formed a posse, or maybe it was just our family: grandpa, two uncles, mother and me. We went to the jail behind the courthouse and found him. The sheriff told us to take him (he was drunk as a lord) so we put him in the car. He slammed the door on my fingers, then cried while he kissed the broken places smearing pale little-girl blood on his lips, crying and crying. My mother was angry and shushed him, while he crooned, "I've hurt my poor little kid."

But, here is the best part:

It's the 1940's. I am a child. We are country people. Country people still raise, grow or gather almost everything they eat. Fruits, vegetables, berries, nuts, grain. And beef, pork, mutton and fowl. Chickens, turkeys, guineas, but mostly chicken. They won't settle for any old chicken. They want big meaty, tender, roasting chickens. That means capons. That means chickens must be caponized: the counterpart to what is done to calves and piglets. In plain English, it means neutering, castrating. The males. Makes them extremely fat, their flesh soft and tender.

Dad can do that. He can caponize. He is the neighborhood chicken "neuterer." I am his helper. It's spring and we are going up and down the dirt roads, from farm to farm, removing the gonads of hundreds of young roosters.

The chickens' owners sequester the surgical candidates from food and water the night before. I'm guessing this is to keep the patient from vomiting while on the operating table. Anyways, I never see a chicken vomit when we caponize him, so it must be the right thing to do.

For an operating theatre, my father likes to have a 55-gallon barrel turned upside down in the chicken yard. He says, "Go get one," and I catch a little rooster, carry it to the operating barrel. Dad ties a looped cord with a weight on one end around both the rooster's feet, and another looped cord around his left wing. He hangs the weights down opposite sides of the barrel. This holds the chicken rigidly in the center of the barrel with the skin over his ribs taut. Dad shaves off the soft downy feathers under the rooster's wing with his scalpel. I daub the bare skin with a cotton ball dipped in alcohol. (We always observe the proper surgical protocol.)

Dad cuts a half-inch incision between two ribs, I hand him the hemostat. He spreads the tiny ribs apart. There, among other fleshy things, I see two small yellow objects about the size of a

grain of corn. Dad calls for the forceps. I hand them over like a good nurse. He extracts the wee testicles.

Dad pinches the incision together with his thumbs and fingers. I make a one-stitch suture and daub the incision with mercurochrome. We remove the weighted cords and release our "patient." He promptly runs off for breakfast. He gets fat. He becomes Christmas dinner.

Dad's "surgical" tools are ordered from the Sears & Roebuck catalog. There are two little scalpels, a set of forceps, a hemostat, a surgical needle and a skein of catgut, each one in its own recessed niche in a little velvet lined case. On the lid it says "Easy Out." I tell Dad that this must offend the chickens. Dad says, "Don't worry, Sis, the chickens can't read."

A Fire Poet Hidden Within

Rayshell Clapper

"I challenge you to a heat-lit contest. Each of you has to write a poem about the heat and email it out to the rest of us. Maybe this will make it more bearable?"

I reread the email. Heat-lit poem? What the hell is that? I can't write poetry. I suck at it. I mean suck at it. I lean back in my computer chair and cross my arms in front of my chest. How am I ever going to do this? I look out the window just beyond my computer screen and can actually see the Oklahoma heat dancing in front of glass, knocking to come in. It is enticing the way the heat laces just in front of our vision, making the roads look like a funhouse mirror. But once entranced by that hypnotist, the heat swallows you whole. Or at least it does me. And the Earth. Right now, Oklahoma looks sunburned. The trees are already dropping leaves, but not because it's time. They are dropping leaves because they don't have enough water. Nothing has enough water. Entire towns are going dry. It's so sad to see our beloved Oklahoma this way. Scorched. The earth is scorched, burned to a crisp.

"Hey, I can use that. Scorched," I think aloud to my cat and myself. So, I open a word document and start typing:

Scorch
Scorched, sunburned,
cracking, peeling Earth.

Maybe I can play on the spelling. Do one of those third-grade poems where each line starts with the letter from some word or name. That'd be fun. I can do that. If I have to participate in this activity, I'll do it my way.

Our Mother begs for prayers.
Rain. Oh, please rain!
Cleanse us; cool us.
Hoping for new rebirth,

All right. Here's a start. It's not great, but it's something. Now what? I can't just stop here. It's not a full story, not even a partial story. If I have to write this poem, I'm incorporating some of my fiction writing abilities into this. It's going to tell a story, not just focus on an image or idea. So, who's my main character? Heat? No, that can't be right. Earth? Yeah, that's good. I stare at the six lines in front of me, the cursor blinking at me, begging for me. I feel pretty good about this start and my bad poem. I know it's bad, so that's something. I glance back up at the window to watch the heat play in front of me some more. I feel less hostile toward the spirit in descendant on our state right now. After all, I am born of the fire spirit. A summer baby. I can channel its power and write this damn poem. My eyes reluctantly slide back down to the screen in front of me. I read what I have so far.

"Okay," I say to myself. My cat scrambles out of the room. She knows the crazy writer is coming out. "Focus on the sunburn. What happens then?" I try to coax my memory for images of past sunburns. "It bubbles and then peels." I realize if anyone ever sees my writing process, they'll try to have me committed. Whatever. Here go the final lines.

for the skin revealed after
our bodies shed
the cracking, bubbling burn.
The Mother wants this relief.

We all want it.
The heat dances in front of us,
taunting, licking our souls.
But we have hope, for soon,
Earth will prevail.

There. I did it. I even like it a little. Now to copy and paste into the reply all email and hit send. Again, I lean back, only this time I cross my arms behind my head.

"Thank you, Fire. Today, I accept you."

I close my eyes to send the prayer out. I hope the spirits accept it for what it is. After a deep breath, I open my eyes again and click on a new document. I have a story to write now.

AUTHOR & ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Dorothy Alexander, author of four poetry collections and one memoir, is a founding member of the Oklahoma Woody Guthrie Poetry Readers. Her work is deeply rooted in Oklahoma and she embraces a form that she calls “narcissistic narrative.” She often indulges in “selfie” poetry. Dorothy received the 2013 Carlile Distinguished Service Award from the Oklahoma Center for the Book. In an alternate universe she is a lawyer and a municipal judge in rural western Oklahoma.

Sly Alley is a writer of fiction and poetry. His works have been published in *The Muse*, *Dragon Poet Review*, and presented at the Howlers and Yawpers Creativity Symposium at Seminole State College and the 2015 Woody Guthrie Festival in Okemah. He works out of a fortified shack in Tecumseh, Oklahoma.

Tina Baker is retired from Speech/Language Pathology having worked in Kansas, Hawaii and Oklahoma public schools. Her published poems can be found online through USAO *Crosstimbers*, *Sugar Mule Oklahoma Anthology*, and *Red Truck Review*. She is a great fan of Oklahoma Poets and was a reader with Woody Guthrie Poets 2015.

Bryce Barfield is a father, photographer, published children’s author, writer, poet, worshiper, spiritual, world traveler, furniture maker, artist, actor, and currently a construction company vice president. He has lived in Arkansas, Kentucky, California, Oklahoma, Kansas, Colorado, Texas, Louisiana, West Virginia, New Mexico, Missouri, and Iraq.

Robert Herman Broyles is a biomedical scientist by day and poet by night. He owes his interest in writing to Thelma Ryan Conley, his senior high school English teacher who introduced him to Chaucer, John Donne, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and Will Shakespeare. Robert’s poems have appeared in *Blood and Thunder*, *Dragon Poet Review*, *Wicked Banshee Press’ “Death and Rebirth” Issue* (under the pseudonym Tumbleweed), and *A Capella*. Robert and his alter-ego **Tumbleweed** - a female blue healer dog whose pedigree is part coyote - are likely to turn up at The Paramount, the Benedict Street Market, the Full Circle Bookstore, and other venues where Oklahoma poets gather.

Kai Coggin is a poet and author living on the side of a small mountain in Hot Springs, AR. She holds a BA in Poetry and Creative Writing from Texas A & M University. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Blue Heron Review*, *Lavender Review*, *Broad!*, *The Tattooed Buddha*, *Split This Rock*, *Yellow Chair Review*, *ANIMA*, *Elephant Journal*, and many other literary journals, as well as anthologized in several international collections. Kai is the author of *PERISCOPE HEART* (Swimming with Elephants Publications, 2014). Her poetry has recently been nominated for The Pushcart Prize and Bettering American Poetry 2015. She is also a Teaching Artist with the Arkansas Arts Council. www.kaicoggin.com

Terri Cummings is a 2015 Woody Guthrie Poet and hosts the monthly Poetry @ the Paramount OKC reading and open mic in Oklahoma City. She is published in *Dragon Poet Review*, *Illya’s Honey*, *Red River Review*, *Melancholy Hyperbole*, *Ancient Paths Online*, *Still Crazy*, and elsewhere. She published her first book, *Tales to the Wind* in March of 2016 (Village Books Press). Terri placed first in Inspirational and second in Poetry in the 2015 Oklahoma City Writers, Inc. Creative Writing Contest and was a finalist in the 2016 Songs of Eretz Poetry Contest. This year,

Terri presented her writing at the Southwest Popular/ American Culture Association Conference, Howlers & Yawpers Creativity Symposium, and Scissortail Creative Writing Festival. She has studied poetry, fiction, and non-fiction at Creative Writing Institute and holds a B.S. Sociology/ Anthropology from Oklahoma State University. Terri continues to explore social and cultural humanity, while she and her husband travel the world.

Richard Dixon is a retired high school Special Education teacher and tennis coach living in Oklahoma City. He has had poems and essays published in *Crosstimbers*, *Westview*, *Walt's Corner of the Long Islander*, *Texas Poetry Calendar*, *Cybersoleil*, and *Dragon Poet Review* as well as numerous anthologies including the Woody Guthrie compilations in 2011 and 2012 and *Clash by Night*, an anthology of poems related to the 1979 breakthrough album by the Clash, *London Calling*. He has been a featured reader at Full Circle Bookstore in Oklahoma City, Benedict Street Marketplace in Shawnee, and Norman Depot as well as the Scissortail Creative Writing Festival in Ada and the Woody Guthrie poetry readings in Okemah.

Robert Ferrier is a retired university research administrator living in Norman. He received a BA in Journalism and MBA from the University of Oklahoma. He has published two novels as e-books at amazon.com. He has won the Norman Tree Photo contest twice. His poems have appeared in *Oklahoma Today*, *Blood & Thunder*, *Crosstimbers*, *Westview*, *Mid-America Poetry Review*, *The Exhibitionist*, *Walt's Corner of the Long Islander*, and *Red River Review*. In 2007 the Norman Galaxy of Writers nominated him for Poet Laureate of Oklahoma.

Todd Fuller's most recent book, *To the Disappearance*, was published by Mongrel Empire Press (2015). His first book, *60 Feet Six Inches and Other Distances from Home: the (Baseball) Life of Mose YellowHorse*, (Holy Cow! Press, 2002) has been optioned for a full-length feature screenplay, which he is co-writing with his wife, Randi LeClair. His poems and essays have appeared in a number of journals across the country, including: *American Literary Review*, *Apalachee Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Hawai'i Review*, *New York Quarterly*, *Poet Lore*, *Puerto del Sol*, *Quarterly West*, *Red Earth Review*, *South Dakota Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Third Coast*, *Weber Studies*, *Wiczo Sa Review*, and *William and Mary Review*. In 2004, he helped co-found Pawnee Nation College and served as the school's first president until 2011. He currently works as an associate director for research development at the University of Oklahoma.

Megan Goff is an alchemist of the written word. Her creative works have been, and continue to be, published in various print and online anthologies. Megan is establishing herself as a writer of novels, plays, graphic novels, and screenplays. Currently, she has several projects in progress: four novels, a graphic novel, an animated television pilot, and a musical based on the music of '80s pop/rock sensation Rick Springfield. Her ultimate goal is to become a writer and developer of cartoons for all ages and use her creativity to promote equality, tolerance, acceptance, and love through words and the worlds they create.

Terry M. Gresham can be found in Oklahoma—a state located within the Milky Way Galaxy which is part of a larger grouping of galaxies called the Virgo Super Cluster. He has published one book of poetry: *Under a Toenail Moon* and has another soon to be released, *Dark Sandwiches*. His works have been published in *Cybersoleil Literary Journal*. Terry holds a Bachelor's of Science from Cameron University in Lawton, Oklahoma and is the creator and administrator of the *Okie Progressive*.

Quinn Carver Johnson does not live in a cozy lake house in Upstate New York with his wife and three daughters, but instead lives in Kansas where he attends Arkansas (pronounced R-Kansas for whatever foolish reason) City High School. He has been called "The John Fullbright of Poetry," and at only 17 has already won multiple awards for creative writing, both for his poetry and prose. He was a 2015 Woody Guthrie Poet and recently attended the inaugural session of the Smokewood Institute for Young Writers at Oklahoma City University.

Jennifer Kidney is a freelance scholar and adjunct assistant professor for the College of Liberal Studies at the University of Oklahoma. She is the author of six books of poetry; her most recent collection, *Road Work Ahead*, was published by Village Books Press in 2012.

Donald Levering's latest book, *Coltrane's God*, published by Red Mountain Press, won the New Mexico Press Women Poetry Book Contest in 2016. His previous book, *The Water Leveling with Us*, placed 2nd in the 2015 National Federation of Press Women Creative Verse Book Competition. Levering won the 2014 Literal Latté Award and was 1st Runner-Up for the Mark Fischer Prize in 2015 and a Runner-Up for the 2016 Ruth Stone Poetry Prize. He lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Heather Levy, a native Oklahoman, is a novelist, poet, short fiction writer and current graduate student at Oklahoma City University's Red Earth MFA program. Readers can view her work at such sites as *The Lake* and *Literati Press*, a subculture literary site, among others. She enjoys writing about raw, human experience, especially human sexuality. When she's not going crazy caring for two kids, two cats, and a husband, she loves a good vodka soda, quirky films that dig under the skin, reading until her eyes bleed, and singing karaoke (depending on the amount of vodka soda).

J. C. Mahan is really the alias for Johnie Catfish, the poet. He disguises himself as a hair stylist and owner of the Funky Hair Ranch Salon in Edmond, OK where he lives with his wife as a mild-mannered, easy-going chicken farmer. Johnie Catfish has published eight collections of poetry in book and cd form. *Living Posthumorously* is the latest book, and his poems have been published in *Dragon Poet Review*, *Blood and Thunder*, and many of the Woody Guthrie and Oklahoma Poets' Anthologies. Catfish has been the featured poet at the Norman Train Depot, Shawnee St Benedict Poetry Reading, as well as Full Circle Books, and he has presented poetry at eight of the Scissortail Creative Writing Festivals at ECU in Ada, OK. He has also participated in many of the readings and slams of the Wayward Poets at Sauced on the Paseo. J.C. enjoys his grandkids, painting, pottery, photography, and travel. His motto is "Life is all about doing, participating, and being a part of what's going on around you."

Sharon Edge Martin is the daughter of two Pentecostal ministers; she had no choice but to become a writer. She has published stories and articles in such venues as *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, *Outside*, and *Oklahoma Today*. Her poetry is included in *The Art and Craft of Poetry* by Michael Bugeja and in literary and small press magazines and collections. Sharon has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and her chapbook, *No Sanctuary*, won the Cicada Award and was published by Amelia Press. She writes essays and poems for *Oklahoma Observer*, teaches school, and loves being part of the Oklahoma poetry community. She lives on a small farm near Oilton with her husband, artist Dale Martin.

Benjamin Myers is the 2015-2016 Poet Laureate of the State of Oklahoma and the author of two books of poetry: *Lapse Americana* (New York Quarterly Books, 2013) and *Elegy for Trains* (Village Books Press, 2010). His poems may be read in *The Yale Review*, *The New York Quarterly*, *32 Poems*, *The Christian Century*, *Nimrod*, *Tupelo Quarterly*, *Image* and other journals. He has been honored with an Oklahoma Book Award from the Oklahoma Center for the Book and with a Tennessee Williams Scholarship from the Sewanee Writers' Conference. His prose appears in *World Literature Today*, *Books and Culture*, *First Things*, and other magazines. Myers teaches poetry writing and literature at Oklahoma Baptist University, where he is the Crouch-Mathis Professor of Literature.

Sherri C. Perry's collection of short stories and poetry *Venn* was published in 2014 by Mockingbird Lane Press, and she has been a featured writer in the *Bayou City Review*. She has been awarded numerous residences at writers' colonies in Arkansas and California. She lives in Texas with her husband, dog, and perpetually grumpy cat, Bob.

Michelle Skinner is a library assistant, piano teacher, artist, and flutist. She graduated from the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma and loves all things creative and intellectual.

Alisa Velaj was born in the southern port town of Vlora, Albania in 1982. She has been shortlisted for the annual international Erbacce-Press Poetry Award in June 2014. She was also shortlisted for the Aquillrelle Publishing Contest 3 in January 2015 and was the first runner up in this contest. Velaj's full length book of poetry *A Gospel of Light* was published by Aquillrelle in June 2015. Her works have appeared in a number of print and online international magazines, including *Blue Lyra Review*, (USA), *The Cannon's Mouth* (UK), *The missing slate* (UK), *The Midnight Diner* (USA), *Poetica* (USA), and many more. She also has poems to publish in the forthcoming issues of *Off/with Journal*, *The Seventh Quarry* and *Ink Sweat & Tears*.

Cecilia Villalobos is a visual artist and poet from Skiatook, Oklahoma. After graduating from Rogers State University in 2014, she left Oklahoma to travel, seeing many of Europe's renowned museums, churches, and historical sites. Strongly affected by her studies of art, history, literature, and architecture in Paris and Barcelona, Cecilia is influenced by early 20th century European writers and artists. She works to capture the energy of her subject with her own unique view.

Anca Vlasopolos published the award-winning novel *The New Bedford Samurai*, the award-winning memoir *No Return Address: A Memoir of Displacement*; three collections of poems, *Cartographies of Scale (and Wing)*, *Walking Toward Solstice* and *Penguins in a Warming World*; three poetry chapbooks; a detective novel, *Missing Members*; and over two hundred poems and short stories. She was nominated several times for the Pushcart Award in poetry and fiction.

Ron Wallace is an adjunct professor of English at Southeastern Oklahoma State University and an Oklahoma Native of Choctaw, Cherokee and Osage ancestry. He is the author of seven volumes of poetry published by TJMF Publishing of Clarksville, Indiana and a three-time finalist in the Oklahoma Book Awards. He is also a three-time winner of The Oklahoma Writer's Federation Best Book of Poetry Award. His work has been recently featured in *Oklahoma Today*, *The Long Islander*, *Concho River Review*, *Cybersoleil*, *Cobalt*, *Red Earth Review*, *Dragon Poet Review*, *Songs of Eretz Review*, *Gris-Gris*, *Oklahoma Poems and Their Poets* and a

number of other magazines and anthologies. Copies of his books may be purchased at www.RonWallacePoetry.com.

Josh Wann lives and teaches in Tulsa, Oklahoma. His work includes poetry and short fiction and has appeared in *Concis* and *Dialogual*, among others. As a public educator, he is trying to introduce a literary culture to his school by sponsoring poetry slam teams, arranging author visits, and providing an after school club to encourage student writing. When he's not in a classroom or writing trance, he can be found with his two children or among his pepper plants.

Bertha Wise is a retired Professor of English at Oklahoma City Community College. Originally from central New York State, she found her way to Oklahoma over thirty years ago through a circuitous route, having also lived in such diverse locations as Arizona, New Hampshire, California, and South Carolina in the U.S. and Tachikawa, Japan. Several of her poems have been published in various college and university literary journals including *Baraza* (at UCO), *Redbud* (at OSU-OKC), *Pegasus* (at Rose State College) and *Absolute* (at OCCC).

Dragon Poet Review's

EDITORS



RAYSHELL E. CLAPPER is a prose writer and Associate Professor of English at Seminole State College in Oklahoma where she teaches Creative Writing, Literature, and Composition classes. She has presented her original fiction and non-fiction at several conferences and events and published her works in myriad journals and magazines. The written word is her passion, and all she experiences inspires that passion. She knows that *Dragon Poet Review* will be yet another way to promote creativity and inspire all writers. She lives her life through three passions: family (including her beloved pets), writing, and teaching. As a Metal Monkey and Virgo, she balances her worlds of creativity and independence with organization and humanity. She stays in Oklahoma with her passions and words, but ever does the world call to her for travel and experience and life.

JESSICA B. ISAACS received the 2015 Oklahoma Book Award for Poetry for her first full-length book of poems, *Deep August* (Village Books Press, 2014). She has presented her writing at several regional and national conferences, and her poems may be found in *Oklahoma Today*, *One-Sentence Poems*, *My Life with a Funeral Director*, *Short Order Poems* (September 2014 Issue), *Cybersoleil Literary Journal*, *All Roads Lead Home Poetry Blog*, *Sugar Mule's Women Writing Nature*, *The Muse*, and *Elegant Rage*. She is a member of the coordinating committee for the Woody Guthrie Poets, and is an English Professor at Seminole State College in Oklahoma where she serves as the director of their annual Howlers & Yawpers Creativity Symposium. According to her zodiac signs, she is both a Taurus and a Fire Dragon, which makes for interesting dinner conversations. She feathers her nest and keeps her home fires burning in Oklahoma with her husband, kids, dogs, and cats.



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